BASIC PRINCIPLES OF AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S METHOD OF EXEGESIS

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Abstract

The allusive (*ishārī*) method of exegesis is the name given to the process of interpreting the Qurʾān depending on the particular type of knowledge called *maʿrifah*, which is accepted to be based on spiritual experience. In the *ishārī* exegesis, the meanings of the verses of the Qurʾān are revealed to the Sufi's mind, and then, the Sufi expresses those senses through symbols and signs by employing an implicit style. Comprehensive and advanced works have been written over time in the field of *ishārī* exegesis, whose first examples were encountered in the early eras of Sufism. Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) wrote works in various fields such as *fiqh* (Islamic law), theology, philosophy, and Sufism. Although he did not have any complete book in the field of *ishārī* exegesis, his vast corpus is overflowing with his *ishārī* interpretations of verses of the Qurʾān. For this reason, he is recognized as one of the most influential figures in the field of *ishārī* exegesis. This article aims to determine the basic principles on which al-Ghazālī's *ishārī*

interpretations of the Qurʾān in his various works are built in the context of the basic principles of his understanding of the Qurʾān. The article firstly gives al-Ghazālī's approach to the Qurʾān and then attempts to determine the basic principles of the method of his *ishārī* exegesis. It also analyzes some *ishārī* interpretations of al-Ghazālī in his various works to better understand these principles.

Key Words: Qurʾān, al-Ghazālī, the allusive (*ishārī*) method of exegesis, explicit (*ẓāhir*), implicit (*bāṭin*)

Introduction

Numerous scientific works have been published in Türkiye and abroad on al-Ghazālī, whose transformative interventions in different disciplines have shaped the course of the history of Islamic thought. Since these studies generally focus on al-Ghazālī's philosophical and Sufistic thought, al-Ghazālī's contribution to the field of *ishārī* exegesis has been relatively neglected. Among the most important reasons for this situation are that al-Ghazālī did not publish an exclusive work in this field, and his *ishārī* interpretations are scattered in his extensive and vast corpus. Nevertheless, the studies aimed at determining al-Ghazālī's understanding of the Qurʾān and especially his *ishārī* interpretations of various verses and the principles on which they are based would fill the severe gap in revealing al-Ghazālī's intellectual world with all its dimensions accurately. In light of this reality, al-Ghazālī is recognized as one of the crucial actors in this field. However, he did not publish an exclusive work on *ishārī* exegesis among his dozens of writings in various fields.[1] In many of his works, especially those analyzed in this article, al-Ghazālī extensively used the Qurʾān and provided evidence from the verses to support his ideas on various topics.[2] In

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[1]   Süleyman Ateş, *İşârî Tefsir Okulu* (Istanbul: Yeni Ufuklar Neşriyat, 1998), 110; Yunus Emre Gördük, *Tarihsel ve Metodolojik Açıdan İşârî Tefsir* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2013), 141. Additionally, Mesut Okumuş's meticulously written work on al-Ghazālī's understanding of exegesis and interpretation of the Qurʾān, which fills an essential gap in the literature, explains al-Ghazālī's understanding of *ishārī* exegesis in detail. See Mesut Okumuş, *Kur'ân'ın Çok Boyutlu Okunuşu: İmam Gazzâlî Örneği* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2006), 170-209.

[2]   Kenneth Garden criticized the method of al-Ghazālī's use of verses in his works by giving examples from *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*. Garden indicates that all 40 books

this regard, he attempted to interpret the relevant verses by applying different methods based on the circumstances.[3]

In his book, *al-Ghazālī and the Qurʾān: One Book, Many Meanings*, which is the first and only independent book published on al-Ghazālī's understanding of the Qurʾān, Martin Whittingham divides hermeneutical interpretations into two different categories based on the question of how the Qurʾān should be interpreted: "the reading in which the intention and purpose of the author of the text take precedence" and "the reading in which the text, its interpreter and the action of interpretation are at the core." Before expressing his opinion about which group al-Ghazālī belongs to, Whittingham points to a style of reading in which the interpreter and the interpretation itself are more important than the author of the text in terms of understanding the Qurʾān. Some scholars such as Farid Esack, Mohammad Arkoun, and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd have recently accepted this approach, although it is not used much in hermeneutic approaches to the Qurʾān.[4] Whittingham argues that even if al-Ghazālī is thought to have adopted the first conception

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of the *Iḥyāʾ* begin with relevant verses and ḥadīths and that such an introduction gives the impression that al-Ghazālī will deal with the matter by the guidance of the Qurʾān and ḥadīths. Often, however, al-Ghazālī proceeds with his independent evaluation of the matter without resorting to the guidance of these scriptures. According to Garden, al-Ghazālī utilizes the authority of these scriptures, not their content. "In this case, al-Ghazālī is interested in the Qurʾān as a source of legitimacy for his project, but not as a source of inspiration for it, though he implies that [the following] exposition is a seamless extension of scripture." Kenneth Garden, "Rhetorics of Revival: al-Ghazālī and His Modern Heirs," in *The Heritage of Arabo-Islamic Learning: Studies Presented to Wadad Kadi*, ed. Maurice Pomerantz and Aram Shahin (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 364-365.

[3]   Alexander D. Knysh, the author of the article titled "Sufism and the Qurʾān" in the Brill *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* and one of the most authoritative scholars in the field, notes that al-Ghazālī's vision of the Qurʾān was entirely distinctive after he has given the history of *ishārī* exegesis up to the time of al-Ghazālī. He explains al-Ghazālī's understanding of the Qurʾān and exegesis in detail through his work *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*. However, it is a deficiency that Knysh, while analyzing al-Ghazālī's interpretation of the Qurʾān, does not refer to almost any other work of al-Ghazālī except *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān* and does not mention *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* at all. Al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ* is a source that must be consulted not only for his understanding of the Qurʾān but also for all ideas of al-Ghazālī. See Alexander D. Knysh, "Sūfism and the Qurʾān," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2006), V, 148-151.

[4]   Martin Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qurʾān: One Book, Many Meanings* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 3-4.

mentioned above, his work supports the opposite view and that al-Ghazālī constitutes one of the prime examples of a meaning-producing interpreter. On the other hand, he also notes that whether such a sharp distinction can be established for some works of al-Ghazālī is a challenging question.[5] Within this context, Ulrika Mårtensson likens the method of al-Ghazālī's interpretation to the hermeneutic approach of the contemporary literary critic Eric Donald Hirsch Jr. Hirsch is a strong advocate of the view that the author's intention and purpose are essential in opposition to all other literary theories, especially the approach of Hans-Georg Gadamer and various other postmodern theories in this context, which seek the meaning of a text either in the subjective interpretation of the reader, in the language of the text independent from the author, or in the tradition of the reader.[6] In addition to Mårtensson and Whittingham, Muhammad Kamal draws attention to the similarity between the hermeneutical position of al-Ghazālī and the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. Husserl attempts to comprehend human consciousness through the phenomenological approach to establish a new basis for knowledge. "He employed phenomenology as a method for reaching the 'essences' of phenomena intended by consciousness intuitively and before any presuppositions and prejudgments."[7] At this point, Kamal takes the similarity between al-Ghazālī and Husserl even further. He recognizes al-Ghazālī as the person founding phenomenology centuries before Husserl, for al-Ghazālī claimed that to understand the Qurʾān, one must be free from all presuppositions.[8]

Al-Ghazālī's inclusive approach, which analyses both explicit and implicit interpretations together, is based on his view that the aim of all kinds of interpretation activities, whether based on explicit or *ishārī*, is the correct understanding of the intention of

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[5]   *Ibid.*, 128.

[6]   Ulrika Mårtensson, "Through the Lens of Modern Hermeneutics: Authorial Intention in al-Ṭabarī's and al-Ghazālī's Interpretations of Q. 24:35," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 11, no. 2 (2009), 25, 41.

[7]   Muhammad Kamal, "Al-Ghazali's Hermeneutics and Phenomenology," *Religion East & West* 4 (2004), 81.

[8]   Ibid. However, in this article, Kamal has difficulties establishing other similarities between al-Ghazālī and Husserl. Therefore, it must be expressed that the comparison Kamal makes between al-Ghazālī's hermeneutics and modern approaches is considerably weaker than that of Mårtensson and Whittingham.

God. Nonetheless, even if the text to be understood is the Qurʾān, it would not be expected that any interpreter could interpret the text in a way entirely independent of its context.

"Instead, profoundly influenced by his or her context, including social, political, and intellectual factors, the interpreter inevitably constructs or adds to meaning in the very act of interpretation, whether consciously or not."[9] That is why it is not easy to make definitive determinations, as Mårtensson or Whittingham did, about the method of a scholar like al-Ghazālī, who is regarded as an authority in various religious disciplines. The nature of the interpretation of the Qurʾān itself is not appropriate for such a distinction to be made.[10] Despite analyzing the same works to determine which of the aforementioned hermeneutical methods al-Ghazālī adopted in his interpretation of the Qurʾān, different authors have reached different conclusions. It is not because al-Ghazālī was inconsistent or because the scholars who analyzed his works were incompetent. Ahmad Dallal wrote one of the most persuasive arguments about the contradictions in al-Ghazālī's thought. According to Dallal, "the ambivalence or possible ambiguity in al-Ghazali's writings results from his systematic attempt to reconcile intertwined and sometimes conflicting epistemologies and knowledge systems."[11] Ibn Taymiyyah, quoted by Dallal,

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[9] Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qurʾān*, 4.

[10] About al-Ghazālī's hermeneutic understanding, see Gerald L. Bruns, *Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 124-136. Bruns' book analyzes the concept of hermeneutics in two sections under ancient and modern periods. The hermeneutical understanding of al-Ghazālī is explored in the last part of the former section under the title of "Sufiyya: The Mystical Hermeneutics of al-Ghazali." Also see Hakan Gündoğdu, "Gazali'nin Teolojik Hermenötiğine Yorumlayıcı Bir Bakış," *İslâmî Araştırmalar Dergisi Gazâlî Özel Sayısı* 13, no. 3-4 (2000), 410-419; Burhanettin Tatar, "Gazali'de Metin-Yorum İlişkisi," *İslâmî Araştırmalar Dergisi Gazâlî Özel Sayısı* 13, no. 3-4 (2000), 429-440.

[11] Ahmad Dallal, "Ghazālī and the Perils of Interpretation," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, no. 4 (2002), 773. In this article, Dallal analyzes Richard M. Frank's book: *Al-Ghazali and the Asharite School*. According to Frank, al-Ghazālī criticized the traditional Ashʿarī school. Although other philosophers largely influenced his theological thoughts, he attempted to conceal this fact by employing various methods in his works. See Richard M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994). Al-Ghazālī was also influenced by the philosophers and Ismāʿīlīs, against whom he wrote refutations and fiercely criticized their opinions. There have been significant studies in the

attributes this to his overwhelming enthusiasm for learning; otherwise, he could have used the tools he needed to appear coherent or follow a systematic process.[12]

This study aims to determine al-Ghazālī's perception of the Qurʾān and to identify the fundamental principles on which his *ishārī* interpretations of the verses in his different works are built. In this regard, the study is divided into three separate sections: al-Ghazālī's Understanding of the Qurʾān, *Ishārī* Exegesis of al-Ghazālī, and Examples of Exegesis of al-Ghazālī. It is relatively easy to determine the principles and methodology adopted by an author who has produced works in the field of *ishārī* exegesis. On the other hand, it is very challenging to reach conclusive judgments on the principles and methods of the *ishārī* interpretations of a scholar like al-Ghazālī, who has been active in different fields and has a wide range of works. This stems from his dispersed way to expresses his ideas in his works and his highly implicit style of expression in matters based on findings. Moreover, a complete elucidation of al-Ghazālī's method of *ishārī* exegesis necessitates an expenditure of time and effort far beyond what can be expected from a study of this kind. With this in mind, this text should be seen as one of the first steps in a more comprehensive research process.

1. Al-Ghazālī's Understanding of the Qurʾān

Al-Ghazālī likens the Qurʾān to an ocean, and his understanding of the Qurʾān is shaped entirely by this analogy.[13] According to him,

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academic world about the influence of these different ideas on al-Ghazālī. For instance, Richard M. Frank, Frank Griffel, and Alexander Treiger have remarkable studies concerning the strong influence of Avicenna on the metaphysical and cosmological thoughts of al-Ghazālī. See Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazâlî & Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1992); Frank Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundations* (London: Routledge, 2012). Furthermore, the works of Khalil Andani and Farouk Mitha can also be cited as examples of studies on the influence of Ismāʿīlī thought on al-Ghazālī. See Khalil Andani, "The Merits of the Bāṭiniyya: Al-Ghazālī's Appropriation of Ismaʿīlī Cosmology," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 29, no: 2 (2018), 181-229; Farouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001).

[12]   Dallal, "Ghazālī and the Perils of Interpretation," 787.

just as the ocean contains many precious metals, the Qurʾān is equipped with unique aspects that will lead people to bliss in both realms. Hence, al-Ghazālī urges people to dive into the depths of this ocean instead of idling on the shore and emphasizes that depriving oneself of these precious minerals is a preference that deserves condemnation. Based on this opinion of his, it would be possible to frame al-Ghazālī's method of addressing the Qurʾān through three principles:

(a) Just as the oceans harbor precious jewels in their depths, the Qurʾān, like these jewels, contains a wide variety of valuable topics. (b) Just as the oceans harbor precious jewels in their depths, the Qurʾān, like these jewels, contains various valuable subjects. Just as the jewels vary in value, the subjects addressed in the Qurʾān also have various degrees. (c) As rivers and creeks eventually merge into the sea, all disciplines ultimately come together in the Qurʾān.

Al-Ghazālī systematizes his understanding of the Qurʾān based on these three themes in his work *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*.[14]

1.1. Main Topics Involved in the Qurʾān

Al-Ghazālī categorized the subjects in the Qurʾān according to his point of view. Accordingly, the Qurʾān deals with nine main issues.[15] Thus, every verse contained in the Qurʾān falls within the

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[13] Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muhammad Rashīd Riḍā (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-ʿUlūm, 1990), 21-22.

[14] *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, one of al-Ghazālī's late works, has been accused by Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī of employing the chemical and religious concepts of Hermeticism and analyzing the Qurʾān from a Hermetic perspective. See Muḥammad ʿĀbid al-Jābirī, *Takwīn al-ʿAql al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-ʿArabīyah, 2009), 288. Dücane Cündioğlu responds to such allegations by stating that the primary purpose of such analogies is to demonstrate the significance of the verses in question. However, the opponents of al-Ghazālī interpret them from their intended context by using their literal meaning rather than metaphorical senses. See Dücane Cündioğlu, *Keşf-i Kadim: İmam Gazâlî'ye Dâir* (Istanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2013), 72.

[15] Al-Ghazālī, in the second and third chapters of *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, mentions the essential subjects contained in the Qurʾān, and despite stating at the end of the third chapter that there are ten essential subjects, he lists only nine of them. See al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 34. In both Turkish (See *Kur'an'ın Cevherleri,* trans. Ömer Türker [Istanbul: Hayy Kitap, 2014]*, 40) and English (See *The Jewels of the Qurʾān*, trans. Muhammad Abul Quasem [Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1977], 33) translations of the book, this figure is quoted verbatim without providing any explanation. Martin Whittingham, likewise, lists only nine

scope of one of these topics. The first five of these topics constitute the antecedents and essential core topics:[16] Information about the essence, attributes, and deeds of Allah, to whom the divine invitation is addressed, the description of "the straight path" (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) to be followed in the process of acceptance of the invitation and the introduction of the point where the invitation has achieved its purpose, i.e., the conditions of the afterlife. The other four topics addressed by the Qurʾān are the complementary issues that follow these fundamental topics:[17] Introducing the status of the friends of God (*awliyāʾ Allāh*) who have appropriately responded to the divine invitation and the favors that God has bestowed upon them, the explanation of the punishment of those who did not respond to this divine invitation and turned away, i.e., the enemies of God, identifying the methodology to be adopted to expose the wrongdoings of the infidels and to fight against them and finally, the explanation of the rulings and limits, which means the construction of the main stops on the path that leads to Allah and the acquisition of the appropriate equipment for this purpose.

While classifying the topics in the Qurʾān, al-Ghazālī indicated their degrees of importance and tried to make this rating effective and permanent in people's minds by likening each issue to one of the precious substances.[18] This identification between the issues contained in the Qurʾān and the related precious substances originates from al-Ghazālī's analogy of the Qurʾān to the ocean. The ocean contains a great variety of substances, and the value of each of these substances differs from the others. Some of these substances are rare and priceless. Others are abundant and thus less valuable than rare minerals. The value of these substances is often not appreciated in the first instance. Nevertheless, these substances are not only important but also have many benefits. In this regard, the meaning of the invocation of God's essence is the red ruby, the invocation of God's attributes is the blue ruby, the invocation of God's deeds is the yellow ruby (*topaz*), the invocation of the

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subjects, although he states that there are ten. See Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qurʾān*, 71.

[16]   Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 25-30.

[17]   *Ibid.*, 31-34.

[18]   *Ibid.*, 23-34.

afterlife is the green emerald, the invocation of the straight path is shining pearl, the invocation of the conditions of the friends of God is amber, the invocation of the conditions of the enemies of God is incense, the invocation of the fight against infidels is the most potent antidote. Finally, the substance of the invocation of rulings and limits is musk.

	Subject Matter Mentioned	Substance
1	the essence of God	red ruby
2	attributes of God	blue ruby
3	deeds of God	yellow ruby (topaz)
4	afterlife	green emerald
5	the straight path	shining pearl
6	conditions of friends of God	amber
7	conditions of enemies of God	incense
8	fight against infidels	strongest antidote
9	rulings and limits	musk

Table 1. The List of the Subjects Addressed by the Qurʾān and the List of Substances to which the Subjects are Likened

1.2. Differences in Degrees between the Verses of the Qurʾān

Al-Ghazālī argues that there are differences among the verses of the Qurʾān in terms of superiority just as the materials in the ocean have various degrees in their values. He attempted to justify this view with ḥadīths such as "*Āyat al-kursī* is the superior of the verses of the Qurʾān,"[19] "Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ is equivalent to one-third of the Qurʾān"[20] and "Sūrat al-Fātiḥah is the highest ranked verse of the Qurʾān."[21] In the light of the relevant narrations, al-Ghazālī tended to explain the statements mentioned in the ḥadīths about the superiority of sūrahs and verses by establishing a connection

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[19] Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 73.
[20] *Ibid.*, 77.
[21] *Ibid.*, 80.

between their content and the subjects contained in the Qurʾān.[22] The essential purpose of the disciplines of the Qurʾān is to know the essence and attributes of God. Al-Ghazālī underlines that *Āyat al-kursī* does not contain any other subject besides the mention of the essence, attributes, and deeds of God. Thus, this is why *Āyat al-kursī*, he believes, is described as "the superior of the verses of Qurʾān."[23]

1.3. Qurʾān as the Source of All Disciplines

Al-Ghazālī classifies religious disciplines based on the Qurʾān by using the ocean analogy. Accordingly, al-Ghazālī, who perceives the Qurʾān as the source of all disciplines, expresses that the Qurʾān is the ultimate unification point of all fields, in the same manner as all rivers and streams flow into the ocean and then merge there. In this respect, al-Ghazālī employs the oyster analogy by adding a new one to his metaphors when classifying the religious disciplines. In this context, al-Ghazālī first categorizes the fields into mother of pearl (shell) and pearl (essence) disciplines and then divides them into sections within themselves and states that there are also disciplines beyond these disciplines. Furthermore, in addition to saying that his primary purpose was to point out the religious fields, he also remarks that since the reformation both in this world and in the afterlife does not depend on the other disciplines, there was no need to explain these disciplines in detail.[24]

Al-Ghazālī categorizes and analyzes the sciences he calls "mother of pearl (shell) disciplines" under five headings:[25] a) The discipline of explicit exegesis; b) The discipline of recitation (*al-qirāʾāt*); c) The discipline of syntax (*al-naḥw*); d) The discipline of dictionary; e) The discipline of articulation points (*al-makhārij*). Similarly, "pearl (essence) disciplines" are generally classified into two categories:[26] The lower-level pearl disciplines and upper-level pearl disciplines. The lower-level pearl disciplines are divided into three

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[22] From this point of view, al-Ghazālī explains in detail the superiority of Āyat al-kursī, Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, Sūrat Yā-sīn, and Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ. See al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 62-81.

[23] *Ibid.*, 75-76.

[24] *Ibid.*, 35-43.

[25] *Ibid.*, 35-38.

[26] *Ibid.*, 38-43.

categories: a) the knowledge of the parables of the Qurʾān, i.e., the stories of the prophets, the disbelievers, and the enemies of God, b) the discipline of discussion and struggle against the infidels and c) the discipline of rulings and ḥadīths.[27] Likewise, the upper-level pearl disciplines are also divided into three categories: a) the discipline of gnosis (*maʿrifat Allāh*), b) the discipline of the afterlife, and c) the discipline of the straight path. Al-Ghazālī also stated that there are disciplines such as astronomy, medicine, anatomy, anatomy, and the discipline of the human soul in addition to these sciences. However, he excluded these disciplines from the category since the subject he dealt with was religious disciplines. Al-Ghazālī claims that the Qurʾān contains the principles of all disciplines, including these other sciences, which had existed in the past but have been forgotten in the present and are likely to arise in the future but are not yet known. According to al-Ghazālī, all these sciences fall within the scope of the deeds of God.[28]

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[27] Al-Ghazālī explains the low ratio of these two disciplines to the path to God and the goal to be achieved despite the need for these disciplines as follows: "The relevance of the scholars of *fiqh* (to the path to God and the goal to be achieved) is like the relevance of the construction of the inns and the public utilities on the road to Mecca to the pilgrimage. The relevance of the theologians to this goal is like the relevance of the guardians of the pilgrimage route to the pilgrims. If they supplement their art with overcoming the desires of the human soul (*nafs*) and following the path that leads to God by turning away from the world and towards Allah, their relevance to others will be like the relevance of the sun to the moon. However, their rank is truly low if they are content with their arts." Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 41.

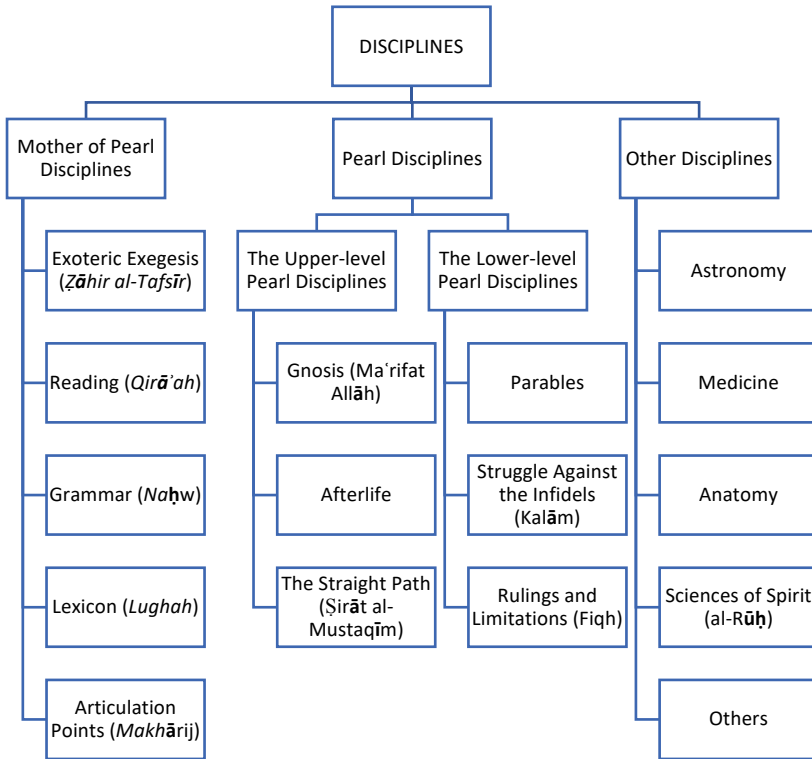[28] Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 45.

Table 2. Al-Ghazālī's Classification of Disciplines Based on the Qurʾān

2. Allusive (*Ishārī*) Method of Exegesis in al-Ghazālī

2.1. Basic Concepts

Before going into the details of al-Ghazālī's method of *ishārī* exegesis, it would be appropriate for a more accurate understanding of the issue to focus on *ishārī* (allusive) method of interpretation and the key concepts of *ẓāhir* (explicit), *bāṭin* (implicit), and *ishārah* (sign). In terms of word meanings, *ẓāhir* means to be explicit, evident, clear, and obvious,[29] whereas *bāṭin* means to be hidden, to know, to be acquainted with the inner side of something and the secrets of a particular person.[30] *Ishārah* means to point to an

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[29]   Muḥammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), IV, 37 (art. "ẓ-h-r").

[30]   *Ibid*., XIII, 52-55 (art. "b-ṭ-n").

object, to express and implicitly imply a meaning.[31] What is meant by the expression of the clarity (*ẓāhir*) of the verse is the meaning understood from the wording of the words that make up the expression in terms of Arabic language and grammatical structure. On the other hand, the implicitness (*bāṭin*) of the verse refers to the hidden, deep, and essential sense behind the literal meaning of the words formed in the intellect in the first place. Following this, *ishārī* exegesis constitutes the name of the activity of revealing and interpreting the hidden meanings of the verses in the light of the knowledge that Sufis have acquired through spiritual experiences such as inspiration, appearance, and manifestation, which they call *maʿrifah*. The meanings of the verses of the Qurʾān are revealed to the Sufi's mind, and then, the Sufi expresses those senses using symbols and signs by employing an implicit style. The meanings to which the verses point are revealed to the Sufi's mind, and the Sufi attempts to express these meanings through symbols and signs by employing an implicit style.[32] Various verses, ḥadīths, and the words of the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad are cited as evidence to support the assertion that the Qurʾān has a structure that is suitable for explanation and *ishārī* interpretations in many aspects.[33]

According to specialists in this field, the most crucial point in the activity of *ishārī* exegesis is that the implicit interpretation of a verse by no means contradicts the explicit meaning of the verse. Because according to these scholars, the primary purpose of *ishārī* exegesis is not to eliminate the explicit meaning but to complement it. Furthermore, *ishārī* interpretation, as one of the many possible meanings of the verse, is the personal and subjective interpretation

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[31] *Ibid.*, IV, 437 (art "sh-w-r").

[32] For different descriptions for *ishārī* exegesis see for instance: Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm al-Zurqānī, *Manāhil al-ʿirfān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2001), II, 78; Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa-l-mufassirūn* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1976), II, 352. For evaluations on the definition of *ishārī* exegesis, see Ateş, *İşârî Tefsir Okulu*, 19-21; Gördük, *Tarihsel ve Metodolojik Açıdan İşârî Tefsir*, 38-42; Muhsin Demirci, *Tefsir Tarihi* (Istanbul: İFAV Yayınları, 2016), 210-213; İsmail Cerrahoğlu, *Tefsir Tarihi* (Ankara: Fecr Yayınevi, 1996), II, 9-14; Muhammed Çelik, "İşarî Tefsirin Sınırları ve Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır'da İşârî Tefsîr," *Dicle Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* IV, no. 2 (2002), 3-4.

[33] For the verses, ḥadīths, and reports of the Companions that are cited as evidence for the legitimacy of *ishārī* exegesis, see Ateş, *İşârî Tefsir Okulu*, 27-38; Gördük, *Tarihsel ve Metodolojik Açıdan İşârî Tefsir*, 70-128.

of the meaning apart from its explicit meaning. However, it can only be understood through signs revealed to the mind of the Sufi because of its implicitness in terms of wording, in a personal and subjective way that binds only the interpreter. Since a verse can reveal itself with different expansions according to the level of wisdom possessed by the scholar, the meaning revealed to the mind can only be binding for the owner of that mind. In this respect, what is essential in terms of the Qurʾān is the explicit meaning, and the *sharīʿah* constitutes binding force only based on these explicit meanings, that is, the meanings that everyone can easily perceive.

On the other hand, it must be kept in mind that the attempt to derive original meanings from the explicit meaning of a verse through the etymological features of words, polysemy, grammatical structures, and other linguistic means and logical inferences and the generation of new meanings through manifestation and inspiration are entirely two different activities, both in terms of their methods and objectives. Ultimately, the former activity indicates an effort to concentrate on explicit meanings and make explicit inferences. On the other hand, the latter reveals the hidden meanings of verses only through divine favors and signs, with no scholarly or intellectual prejudice whatsoever.

2.2. Basic Principles

Al-Ghazālī's adoption of the approach that existence has two different dimensions, explicit and implicit, naturally necessitated him to adopt the opinion that the disciplines, in general, and the Qurʾān, in particular, have both an explicit and an implicit structure. His adoption of such an approach is the basis for accepting the Qurʾān as an interpretable text and for understanding the *ishārī* exegesis method that he has put into practice in this direction.

The first aspect that forms the basis for al-Ghazālī's understanding of *ishārī* exegesis is his division of existence, and in a narrower sense, the world, into two as explicit and implicit. He asserts that what exists in the implicit world also has a reflection in the explicit world.[34] Al-Ghazālī, who has determined the foundation of his

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[34] Al-Ghazālī says that different names are used for the spiritual realm, such as mental, divine, immaterial, and angelic, and for the physical realm, such as sensible, lower, worldly, and tangible. These differences in nomenclature result from looking at the same entity from different perspectives. In fact, there is no

thought in this direction, asserts that the representations and reflections in the implicit (*mutashābih*) verses have their corresponding equivalents in the physical world and also have meanings for the sublime realm. According to him, all the representations used in this context have a close relationship with the spiritual human souls that signify the level of knowledge acquisition by humans. Al-Ghazālī argues that all acceptable disciplines are divided into two categories, just like the realms: explicit and implicit.

Regarding the Qurʾān as the source of all disciplines, al-Ghazālī concludes that the verses of the Qurʾān also have explicit and implicit aspects as a natural result of this. Contemplating the verses of the Qurʾān, which resembles a vast ocean, and interpreting their meanings, according to al-Ghazālī, are indispensable for comprehending what the Qurʾān means on the condition that such activities comply with certain conditions, such as not contradicting with the explicit meaning of the verse. This way, the Qurʾān is a text that is too rich and inclusive to be limited only by its explicit meanings and the interpretations produced by the early scholars within the framework of these meanings. Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī felt obliged to remind this situation, which he was well aware of thanks to his knowledge and experience. al-Ghazālī takes a position between the groups who reject any implicit meaning in the Qurʾān and the Bāṭiniyyah, who says that all the verses in the Qurʾān consist of implicit meanings and its explicit statements should be ignored. He argues that the Qurʾān has both literal (exoteric) and implicit (esoteric) meanings, and none of these can be excluded. From his point of view, both of these interpretations are significant and should be known to perceive God's intention in the verses of the Qurʾān. Therefore, al-Ghazālī wants the reader of the Qurʾān to know that this type of esoteric interpretation is part of the tradition of tafsīr. As emphasized by some circles occasionally, he warns them not to rely solely on the narrations about the meaning of the verses and accept them unquestioningly.[35]

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difference between them in terms of their meaning. See al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, ed. Abū l-ʿAlā ʿAfīfī (Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyyah, 1964), 65.

[35] Caner Dağlı, "Metaphor, Symbol, and Parable in the Qur'an," in *The Routledge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. George Archer, Maria M. Dakake and Daniel A. Madigan (New York: Routledge, 2021), 198.

Based on the considerations mentioned above, it would not be erroneous to say that al-Ghazālī's method of *ishārī* exegesis is built on three basic principles:

(a) The separation of existence in the form of explicit and the implicit, (b) Explicit-implicit structure of disciplines and the Qurʾān in connection with the previous item, (c) The Qurʾān has an interpretable structure as a natural outcome of the first two items.

Therefore, to understand the basic principles of al-Ghazālī's *ishārī* exegesis, the nature of representation and the levels of the luminous human souls, the distinction between the explicit and the implicit in the disciplines, and the interpretability of the verses of the Qurʾān need to be explained in detail.[36]

2.2.1. Representation (*Tamthīl*)

Representation, literally "to resemble, to liken" in the dictionary, means "to explain an idea in the language of symbols by providing examples" in eloquence."[37] In rhetoric, the concept of metaphor is mainly used for the likening of two different things to each other. This concept is divided into two as "likening one thing to another in such an obvious way that it does not need any interpretation" and "likening one thing to another thing by employing some kind of interpretation."[38] ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078-79) refers to the first of these types of metaphor as original and genuine metaphor and the second as representation and deems representation as a branch of the original metaphor.[39]

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[36] Muhammad Kamal has based al-Ghazālī's understanding of Qurʾānic hermeneutics on four foundations: (1) to understand the Qurʾān, it is first necessary to move away from and get rid of all presuppositions and norms and to cleanse and purify the mind from such prejudices, (2) the explicit and implicit meanings of revelation constitute an integrity, (3) understanding the content of the text is possible through manifestation and inspiration, (4) the reader needs to establish an emotional connection with the text. When these three principles identified in this article are read in conjunction with the first part of the article, namely al-Ghazālī's understanding of the Qurʾān, these three principles conform to the findings of Kamal. However, because the article by Kamal was not devoted explicitly to al-Ghazālī's method of interpreting the Qurʾān, he barely touched on this topic. See Kamal, "Al-Ghazali's hermeneutics and phenomenology," 80.

[37] İsmail Durmuş, "Temsil," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XL, 434.

[38] ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Asrār al-balāgha*, ed. by Helmut Ritter (Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat Wizārat al-Maʿārif, 1954), 81.

[39] Ibid., 89.

Considering these definitions, al-Ghazālī suggests that the nature of the representation must first be known to understand the representations used in the verses. Having stated that everything in the spiritual realm has a corresponding counterpart in the physical realm, al-Ghazālī argues that the essence and truth of everything in this realm in the form of a representation also exist in the spiritual realm. Since representations resemble their originals, it is possible to understand the originals in the sublime world to some extent through their examples present in this physical world. Since counting such similarities would mean counting every single entity in the world, al-Ghazālī endeavors to explain the nature of representation by using some of his unique examples.[40] Al-Ghazālī cites angels as the first example of representations and notes that the counterparts of these spiritual beings in the physical realm are the sun, moon, and stars.[41] According to him, one instance that introduces us to the methods of exemplification is the discipline of dream interpretation. Stating that various objects seen in dreams have different meanings, al-Ghazālī argues, for example, that the sun in a dream refers to sovereignty and the moon to the vizier. al-Ghazālī concludes that what is seen in dreams represents objects, phenomena, and other similar situations in real life and claims that dream interpretations are informative about the very nature of representation.[42]

Among the spiritual beings, al-Ghazālī mentions beings such as angels, whose representations in this world are the sun, moon, and stars. Also, other beings have different representations when their characteristics other than light are considered. Al-Ghazālī claims that many religious concepts, mostly mentioned in the Qurʾān, such as *Ṭūr, Wādī, al-Wādī l-muqaddas, Lawḥ, Jazwah, Qabas*, and *Qalam* represent a spiritual being. His examples are as follows:[43] *Ṭūr* means the source from which the waters of knowledge flow into the valleys of the mortal hearts. *Wādī* is the example of the hearts to which the breezes of *mukāshafah* from the *Ṭūr* flow. These hearts, represented as valleys, can transfer the waters of wisdom and the breezes of *mukāshafah* received from the *Ṭūr* from one source to the other. *Al-*

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[40] Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 65-72.
[41] *Ibid.*, 67.
[42] *Ibid.*, 69.
[43] *Ibid.*, 69-70.

Wādī l-aymān exemplifies the most blessed and supreme hearts which belong to prophets. All other valleys receive their water from this valley. *Al-Sirāj al-munīr* is the soul of Prophet Muḥammad. *Al-Wādī l-muqaddas* illustrates the first range in the ascent of the Prophets from the blur of the realm of sensation and imagination to the sacred realm.

In the verse 12 of Sūrat Ṭā-Hā, it is narrated that the Prophet Moses encountered the Divine Light and was granted the prophetic office in *al-Wādī Ṭuwān*.[44] Al-Ghazālī argues that the explicitness of the phrase mentioned above, "take off your sandals (*fa-khlaʿ naʿlayka*)" is rejected by the Bāṭiniyyah and treated by them only in its esoteric sense, and thus, accuses the Bāṭiniyyah of being ignorant of the equilibrium between the two worlds.[45] According to al-Ghazālī, taking off the shoes, with its explicit meaning, is used as a representation of throwing off both worlds. "Prophet Moses perceived the command to take off his sandals as throwing off both realms at once. He obeyed the divine command by taking off his sandals literally and throwing off both realms implicitly."[46]

On the other hand, some authors have drawn attention to the similarity between the view on representations expressed by al-Ghazālī, who harshly criticized the interpretation theory of the Bāṭiniyyah, and the analogical symbol-symbolized (*mathal-mamthūl*) theory, which constituted the basis for almost all of the interpretations of the Ismāʿīlīs, Bāṭiniyyah, and the Ḥurūfīs:

> Al-Ghazālī, in this epistle [*Mishkāt al-anwār*], just like the Ismāʿīlīs, divides the world into two as spiritual (divine-immaterial-sublime-spiritual) and physical (lower-material-sensible) and argues that everything in the physical world is

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[44] "*Has the story of Moses reached you? When he saw a fire, he said to his family, 'Wait here, for I have spotted a fire. Perhaps I can bring you a torch from it or find some guidance at the fire.' But when he approached it, he was called, 'O Moses! It is truly I. I am your Lord! So, take off your sandals, for you are in the sacred valley of Ṭuwá. I have chosen you (as my prophet), so listen to what is revealed.*" (Q 20:9-13). The verse in question is cited together with the preceding and succeeding verses for a better understanding.

[45] Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 73.

[46] *Ibid.*, 73.

simply a symbol and reflection of the true essences in the spiritual realm.[47]

The author of the above argument ignores the statements made by al-Ghazālī in *Fayṣal al-tafriqah* regarding such interpretations applied to this and other similar verses. This approach causes al-Ghazālī's view on the matter to be incompletely understood. To reach a correct opinion on the subject, one must be familiar with the methodology to be followed in interpreting a *mutashābih* wording in the words of God and the prophets, as mentioned by al-Ghazālī in *Fayṣal al-tafriqah*. According to al-Ghazālī, the *mutashābih* wordings are found either in matters related to the doctrine of *ʿaqīdah* (faith in God, the Prophet, and the afterlife) or in matters that fall outside of it and are called "the branches/substantive issues." In faith-related (*ʿaqīdah*) matters, interpretation requires conclusive evidence. Any interpretation based on a strong assumption (*al-ẓann al-ghālib*) other than conclusive evidence is either refuted and declared heretical or deemed a condemnable innovation (*bidʿah*), depending on the extent of the damage it inflicts. Nevertheless, in matters unrelated to faith, if there is no conclusive evidence, a strong assumption can be valid instead of "the conclusive evidence" (*al-burhān*) of the fundamental issues of the *ʿaqīdah*. Within this context, al-Ghazālī indicates that the Sufis have interpreted the statements in the parable of Abraham in Sūrat al-Anʿām.[48] The concepts of "the scepter" and "the sandal" in the commands addressed to Moses in Sūrat Ṭā-Hā as "take off your sandals" and "put down what is in your right hand," and that such considerations were not based on conclusive evidence, but instead on supposed implications. He accordingly emphasizes that these interpretations can be applied as a substitute for the conclusive evidence in the fundamental issues of the *ʿaqīdah* and argues that Sufis should not be deemed infidels or reformists (*ahl al-bidʿah*) in the wake of these interpretations.[49] Nonetheless, al-Ghazālī still errs on the side of caution. The harm possibly incurred by interpretation based on a

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[47] Mustafa Öztürk, *Tefsirde Bâtınilik ve Bâtıni Te'vil Geleneği* (Istanbul: Düşün Yayıncılık, 2011), 226.

[48] See Q 6:75-79.

[49] Al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafriqah bayna l-Islām wa-l-zandaqah,* ed. Maḥmūd Bījū (Damascus:Dār al-Bayrūtī, 1993), 55.

strong assumption in matters unrelated to the *'aqīdah* should be kept in mind. If such an interpretation leads to apparent confusion in the minds of the ordinary people, its expositors will be regarded as heretics (*ahl al-bid'ah*).[50]

2.2.2. Luminous Human Souls (*al-Arwāḥ al-bashariyyah al-nūrāniyyah*)

In general, al-Ghazālī states that to understand all representations, the degrees of knowledge that humans possess must be known, and he refers to these degrees as the "luminous human souls." Al-Ghazālī states that all of them are entirely made of light and divides these souls, through which the beings become visible, into five categories:[51]

1) The sensual soul (*al-rūḥ al-ḥissī*) receives what the senses transmit.

2) The imaginary soul (*al-rūḥ al-khayālī*) records what the senses transmit and stores the data to present to the intellectual soul in a higher rank.

3) The mental soul (*al-rūḥ al-'aqlī*) perceives and cognizes the essential and universal knowledge and is unique to human beings and not present in children and animals.

4) The intellectual soul (*al-rūḥ al-fikrī*), through which the intellectual disciplines are received and through which valuable knowledge is attained by making interpretations and compositions between them.

5) The divine prophetic soul (*al-rūḥ al-qudsī al-nabawī*) is a spirit unique to the Prophet and some of the saints.

2.2.3. The Distinction between Explicit and Implicit in Disciplines

Al-Ghazālī argues that the disciplines have explicit and implicit aspects, but those who cannot comprehend this tacit dimension in the fields reject such a duality.[52] Al-Ghazālī, who demonstrates the existence of some issues as a ground for the existence of this dual structure, lists these issues, which he characterizes as subtle and profound, as follows:[53]

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[50] *Ibid.*

[51] Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 66-69.

[52] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Cairo: Sharikat al-Quds, 2012), I, 168.

[53] *Ibid.*, 169-175.

a) Profound and subtle matters such as the soul (*al-rūḥ*) that only the elites (*khawāṣṣ*) can comprehend and the ordinary people cannot perceive.[54]

b) Comprehensible matters such as fate (*qadar*) which the Prophet and the Companions of the Prophet abstained from talking about because it would harm many people if it were made public.[55]

c) Matters that are immediately understandable when explained clearly and do not harm anyone to be explained, but for which signs, metaphors, and similes are used to make them more effective for those who listen to them. The aim is to ensure that such topics are fully embedded in the listeners' minds. Accordingly, it is not intellectually possible to comprehend the explicit meaning of the verse: "*If We ever will something to exist, all We say is: 'Be!' And it is!*" (Q 16:40). "Be" cannot be addressed as something non-existent. Because something that "does not exist" cannot understand this address and command and thus cannot respond. If this thing "exists," one cannot say "be" to something that already exists because it has already happened. Hence, al-Ghazālī notes that the allegory is employed in the verse to describe the infinity of God's power and thus to create a more profound influence on the human mind.[56]

According to al-Ghazālī, the expressions used in the following verse, such as water, valley, and earth, are allegories intended to have particular meanings: "*Allah sends down rain from the sky, causing the valleys to flow, each according to its capacity. The currents then carry along rising foam, similar to the slag produced from metal that people melt in the fire for ornaments or tools. This is how Allah compares truth to falsehood. The worthless residue is then cast away, but what benefits people remains on the earth. This is how Allah sets forth parables.*" (Q 13:17). Here "water" means the Qurʾān, and "valleys" means the hearts of people. Just as valleys get their share of rain, some hearts receive more from the Qurʾān, and some very little. Some even do not have any share from the Qurʾān at all. The meaning of "foam" is disbelief and discord. Even if this foam rises to the surface of the water, it is temporary and fades away very quickly. What is stable and lasting is the right way to benefit people.

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54 *Ibid.*, 170.
55 *Ibid.*, 171.
56 *Ibid.*

d) Matters that cannot be understood unless the necessary inquiry is made and the details are obtained. One reaches the details of a subject that one has learned in summary and general terms through inquiry, enjoyment, and evidence. Thus, "the knowledge in summary" (*al-ʿilm al-ijmālī*) at the shell level and "the knowledge in detail" (*al-ʿilm al- tafṣīlī*) at the core level of a subject are distinguished from each other. Al-Ghazālī refers to the first as explicit and the second as implicit. He explains it with the following examples: "There is a difference between the way a person sees a distant object or an object in the dark and the way he sees it when it is illuminated or when he is close to it. Despite this difference, the second sight is not something other than the first, but perhaps a more sophisticated version."[57] According to al-Ghazālī, religious disciplines are similar to this. "The knowledge that has matured into a state of enjoyment is like the *bāṭin* (essence) compared to the knowledge acquired without inquiry and enjoyment."[58]

e) Matters that are the expression of "the language of the state" (*lisān al-ḥāl*) of things through "the language of words and phrases" (*lisān al-qāl*), and where the narrow-minded fail to understand this subtlety and get caught up in the explicit meaning and consider the explicit meaning of the speech as truth. Al-Ghazālī argues that words here use metaphors and allusions in expressing the states of things so that those who look at only the explicit meaning fail to understand what these allusions mean. "*Then Allah turned towards the heaven when it was still like smoke, saying to it and the earth, 'Submit, willingly or unwillingly.' They both responded, 'We submit willingly.*'" (Q 41:11). According to al-Ghazālī, to understand the above verse, foolish people attribute to the heavens and the earth life, intelligence, and the ability to understand what is addressed. Furthermore, they believe that the heavens and the earth can hear the address and that they respond to it with letters and sounds. The wise person, on the other hand, is aware that the sky and the earth are obligated to execute this command and that this is simply a regular expression of language.[59] The same situation also applies to the verse: "*There is not a single thing that does not glorify His praises.*" According to al-

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[57]   *Ibid.*, 173.
[58]   *Ibid.*
[59]   *Ibid.*

Ghazālī, the ignorant person attributes sounds and letters to non-living things and thinks that they do this glorification like human beings. In contrast, the wise person is well aware that this glorification is not with the tongue but with the state and that in this way, everything praises God and testifies to the unity of Him. Hence, the continuation of the verse, "*But you simply cannot comprehend their glorification,*" indicates that the narrow-minded cannot understand the nature of this glorification. Even the believers close to God and the learned scholars are incapable of fully grasping its essence.[60]

2.2.4. Justifications for the Interpretability of the Qurʾān

Al-Ghazālī regards the effort to reflect upon the verses of the Qurʾān and develop interpretations of their meanings by presenting evidence from verses, ḥadīths, and the sayings of the Companions of the Prophet as crucial for achieving the true meanings. In this regard, al-Ghazālī points out that some Exoteric Ecole scholars have concluded that it is prohibited to ponder on the Qurʾān and interpret its meanings. They cite, as a piece of evidence, the ḥadīth from Ibn ʿAbbās that claims, "Whoever interprets the Qurʾān according to his intellect, may he/she be prepared for his place in Hell."[61] Moreover, "on this basis, the *ẓāhirī* commentators objected to some Sufi commentators interpreting certain words in the Qurʾān contrary to what was reported from Ibn ʿAbbās and other commentators and considered it blasphemy."[62] Al-Ghazālī opposes the view of the exegetes of Exoteric Ecole since this would imply that the only way to understand the Qurʾān is to memorize the earlier exegesis of the Qurʾān. In his opinion, the effort to interpret the Qurʾān does not fall within the scope of the prohibited act specified in the ḥadīth.[63] According to al-Ghazālī, who argues that interpreting verses in such a way as to support one's views, ideas, and causes would fall into the category of exegesis by reasoning, this practice constitutes an arbitrary interpretation of verses to create a basis for one's thoughts.

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[60] *Ibid.*, 174.
[61] *Ibid.*, 479. For a study on the various narrations attributed to the Prophet regarding the exegesis of the Qurʾān by means of reasoning see Kadir Gürler, "Kurʾânʾın Reʾy ile Tefsirini Yasaklayan Rivâyetlere Eleştirel Bir Yaklaşım," *Gazi Üniversitesi Çorum İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 3, no. 5 (2004), 17-46.
[62] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, I, 479.
[63] *Ibid.*, 482-483.

This interpretation includes a void (*fāsid*) reasoning that is not based on authentic jurisprudence (*ijtihād*). Al-Ghazālī gives against them the example of the verse that reads, "*Go to Pharaoh, for he has truly transgressed all bounds.*" (Q 20:24). He points out that the "Pharaoh" here refers to the ego (*nafs*). However, the verse refers to a historical incident between Prophet Moses and Pharaoh.

Furthermore, al-Ghazālī also argues that sometimes the verses are interpreted in this way with good intentions. However, regardless of whether such an interpretation is based on malicious or benevolent intentions, it still constitutes the exegesis by reasoning, reported by the ḥadīth in question. Because "the reasoning applied in the exegesis of this ḥadīth refers to the void reasoning, which is not based on authentic jurisprudence and which is in favor of the ego."[64]

Al-Ghazālī demonstrates that the ḥadīth above does not condemn the activity of reflecting upon the Qurʾān, studying it in depth, or interpreting and drawing conclusions from it, as the exegetes of Exoteric Ecole claim, on the following grounds:[65]

a) Al-Ghazālī states that many ḥadīths, sayings, and writings of the Companions of the Prophet demonstrate that the meanings of the Qurʾān are comprehensive. Thus the Qurʾān can be interpreted in a broad sense. In this respect, al-Ghazālī notes the sayings of the Companions of the Prophet, such as "If I had wished, I would have written seventy camel-loads of books from the exegesis of the Sūrat al-Fātiḥah alone,"[66] as cited from ʿAlī, and "Let those who desire the knowledge of the past and the future study the Qurʾān"[67] as quoted by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd. In addition, the following ḥadīths demonstrate that the meanings of the Qurʾān are comprehensive and, therefore, can be interpreted in a broader sense:[68] "The Qurʾān has an explicit, an implicit meaning, and a *ḥadd* (boundary) and a *maṭlaʿ* (place of witnessing its truth)" and "Read the Qurʾān and investigate its subtle meanings."[69]

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64   *Ibid.*, 482.
65   *Ibid.*, 479-482.
66   *Ibid.*, 479.
67   *Ibid*.
68   *Ibid.*, 479-480
69   There are different versions of the ḥadīth narrated from Ibn Masʿūd. In the version of the commentary of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), the phrase "of each verse" is used instead of "of the Qurʾān."

b) According to al-Ghazālī, all disciplines are included in the deeds and attributes of God. There is a reference to all fields in the Qurʾān, and it is impossible to understand them through an explicit exoteric interpretation. Therefore, it would only be possible to penetrate the Qurʾān in a deep and encompassing manner by interpreting the subtle meanings of the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān touches upon many issues, especially those on which people have disputes, in one way or another, and contains references and indications regarding such issues and their solutions. Such subtleties can only be grasped through an in-depth study of the Qurʾān.[70]

c) According to al-Ghazālī, the Qurʾān, in addition to the issues on which people have disputes, also touches upon theoretical and rational matters that researchers, theoreticians, and intellectuals have been unable to resolve, and it contains references and signs regarding the solutions of such problematic issues. The exoteric exegesis would not be sufficient to understand and notice these signs and references. Such subtleties can only be grasped by those who can study the Qurʾān thoroughly and comprehend its truth.[71]

d) "*So, We made Solomon understand it (the judgment that contains the solution of the matter), and to each one (David and Solomon) We gave Wisdom and Knowledge.*" (Q 21:79) Concerning the above verse, al-Ghazālī drew attention to the significance and the superiority before God in comprehending the subtle aspects of events. He emphasized that although God granted judgment and knowledge to both David and Solomon, the intelligence that God solely gave to Solomon was only called *fahm* (the ability to

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Furthermore, this ḥadīth was included in the works of ḥadīth scholars such as Abū Yaʻlá al-Mawṣilī (d. 307/919), Abū ʻAlī al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Haytham (d. 807/1405), and Jalāl al-Dīn al- Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) with different statements. See Dilaver Selvi, "'Her Âyetin Bir Zâhiri Bir Bâtını Vardır' Hadisindeki Zâhir ve Bâtın Kavramları Üzerine Değerlendirmeler," *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırmalar Dergisi* 11, no. 2 (2011), 13. The ḥadīth above has been cited as evidence for the idea that the Qurʾān is open to a multidimensional interpretation by both pre-Ghazālī Sufis such as Sahl ibn ʻAbd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) and post-Ghazālī Sufis such as Abū Muḥammad Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209) and Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī (d. 730/1329). See Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qurʾān in Classical Islam* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 8-12.

[70] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʻulūm al-dīn*, I, 479.

[71] *Ibid.*, 479.

understand and perceive) and that God prioritized intelligence over judgment and knowledge.[72]

e) Al-Ghazālī opposes the claim of Exoteric Ecole, saying if the Qurʾān had no other meaning apart from the reported apparent exegesis of the Qurʾān, and if the view that people should only be content with this reported knowledge were adopted, no opinion about the interpretation of the verses of the Qurʾān not heard from the Prophet would be regarded as accurate. "Whereas some of the verses of the Qurʾān have been heard from the Prophet and some have not."[73] After the era of the Prophet, some Companions and followers of the Companions interpreted the verses from their perspectives, which had not been heard from the Prophet. As a result, different interpretations of the same verses emerged. Since it is impossible for them to have listened to all of these different interpretations from the Prophet, they interpreted the verses according to their perspective and understanding. This indicates that each exegete attempted to interpret the Qurʾān according to his endeavors and abilities.[74]

f) Al-Ghazālī interpreted the expression "search out" in the verse "*those among them who can search out the news would have known it (the truth).*" (Q 4:83) as "to deduce judgments and meanings, to derive new meanings other than what has been heard." He argued that this verse constitutes evidence against the fallacy that "exegesis through reasoning means to understand the Qurʾān in a way other than the narration of what is heard."[75]

g) Al-Ghazālī also addresses the issue of the interpretability of the Qurʾān through the fact that a word in the Qurʾān has multiple meanings. The terms *al-ṣalāh* (praying, prayer), *al-ummah* (nation), and *al-ḥamīm* (close, hat) can be given as examples of polysemous words. Accordingly, these words are used in different verses of the Qurʾān with very different meanings. Al-Ghazālī uses the term "ambiguous" for the polysemy, which the methodists of Islamic jurisprudence express with the term "the collective wording" (*al-*

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[72] *Ibid.*, 481.
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] *Ibid.*, 482.

ishtirāk al-lafẓī) and by the methodists of exegesis with *wujūh*.[76] Within this context, al-Ghazālī points out that words such as *al-shayʾ* (thing), *al-qarīn* (abdomen), *al-ummah*, and *al-rūḥ* (soul) and letters such as *bi-hī* have a polysemous structure by citing examples of their varying uses in verses and ḥadīths.[77] It is crucial in understanding such expressions to know where and in what context the word is used. By doing so, the intention of the relevant verse of the Qurʾān will become comprehensible. Therefore, the research in question is a work of interpretation, and it is inevitable for those engaged in exegesis, let alone being forbidden. What is prohibited is, on the contrary, trying to give the same meaning to such polysemous words in every verse they are used:

> For instance, someone will understand from the word "ummah" the popular meaning of "those who follow a prophet," and his mind will incline to that meaning alone, and he will interpret it in that manner. When he sees the same word somewhere else, he will deduce the same meaning and will not search for other meanings that have been reported in this regard. It is what has been condemned. Comprehending the mysteries of the Qurʾān, on the other hand, is never blamed.[78]

3. Examples of Allusive Method of Exegesis in al-Ghazālī

For a better understanding of the basic principles of al-Ghazālī's allusive (*ishārī*) method of exegesis, his *ishārī* interpretations in his different works need to be examined. One of al-Ghazālī's most distinctive features is that he attempts to consolidate his theory using examples and analogies after almost every theoretical topic dealt with in his works. In the following chapter, examples of al-Ghazālī's *ishārī* exegesis in his various works will be discussed to clarify further his method of *ishārī* interpretation.

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[76] The field of *wujūh* is a sub-discipline of Qurʾān-based disciplines that deals with polysemous words. The first known work in this field is the *Kitāb al-Wujūh wa-l-naẓāʾir* written by Abū l-Ḥasan Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī (d. 150/767). Subsequently, many works were written on this subject. See Şahin Güven, *Kur'ân'ın Anlaşılması ve Yorumlanmasında Çokanlamlılık Sorunu* (Istanbul: Denge Yayınları, 2005), 190.

[77] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, I, 484-485.

[78] *Ibid.*, 486.

Within this context, this chapter will present the *ishārī* interpretations of al-Ghazālī regarding the 35th and 40th verses of Sūrat al-Nūr, the 75th to 79th verses of Sūrat al-Anʿām, and Sūrat al-Fātiḥah. In *Mishkāt al-anwār*, most of which is devoted to the explanation of the 35th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr, al-Ghazālī provides an *ishārī* interpretation of this verse as well as the 40th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr and the 75th to 79th verses of Sūrat al-Anʿām. Al-Ghazālī felt obliged to explain in his book above to prevent these intensive ishārī interpretations from giving the reader an impression contrary to his insistence on prioritizing the explicit meanings in his exegesis of the Qurʾān:

> Beware! Do not think that these examples given about the parables are a license from me to remove the apparent meanings of the verses and to cancel those meanings as though, for instance, I asserted that Moses had not had two sandals and not heard a word from God saying, "*Take off your sandals.*" [Q 20:12] God forbid! I exonerate Allah. Rejecting the existing secrets is the opinion of the Ḥashawiyyah sect, and denying the explicit meanings of the verses is the opinion of the Bāṭiniyyah, who looks entirely at one of the two realms through their google eyes. Both were grossly ignorant of the equilibrium between the two realms and failed to understand from which angle they needed to look. In this case, the one who only looks at the explicit meaning is Ḥashawiyyah, and the one who only looks at the implicit meaning is Bāṭiniyyah. While the one who joins the two together is the perfect human being (…), I argue, on the contrary, that Moses understood from the command "Take off your shoes" to throw off the two realms and obeyed the command explicitly by taking off his sandals, and implicitly by throwing off the two realms. It is the crossing over (*iʿtibār*) from one to the other, from explicit to the implicit meaning."[79]

Before moving on to examples of *ishārī* exegesis, it would be worth mentioning briefly the similarity between al-Ghazālī's method of transition from the explicit to the implicit, which he calls (*iʿtibār*/crossing over) and the method utilized by the Bāṭiniyyah in

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[79] Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 73.

the exegesis. Mustafa Öztürk argues that al-Ghazālī's method of crossing over, which he defines as a means of transition from the explicit to the implicit and which corresponds to syllogism and deduction in the jargon of Islamic jurisprudent and theologians, is similar to the Bāṭiniyyah analogy of the symbol-symbolized. Öztürk considers this method as a syllogism independent from the linguistic presumption. He argues that this method, employed by al-Ghazālī in particular and by all Sufis in general, is nothing but the expression of the same method in different words and terms with the transfer of the verbal form of verses and ḥadīths from explicit to implicit based on the of the Ismāʿīlīs' analogy of the symbol-symbolized.[80]

3.1. Exegesis of the 35th Verse of Sūrat al-Nūr

Al-Ghazālī composed a separate work titled *Mishkāt al-anwār* to interpret this verse.[81] In his exegesis of the verse, al-Ghazālī first explained the true nature of the concept of the light (*nūr*) mentioned in the verse and then explained the representations utilized in the verse.

3.1.1. True Nature of the Concept of Light

According to al-Ghazālī, the expression in the verse is not used metaphorically but literally because God consists of divine light. al-Ghazālī states that attributing the name "divine light" to beings other than God is metaphorical and that the true divine light is God. Following this point, al-Ghazālī attempts to explain different uses of "light" to arrive at the concept of "light" in reference to God. According to him, the concept of light has different meanings for ordinary people, the elite, and high-level scholars (*khawāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*). Therefore, there are various meanings of light.

According to the understanding of ordinary people, light refers to being visible (*ẓuhūr*). Things like the sun, moon, and lamps are both visible (*ẓāhir*) and, at the same time, indicate other things by

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[80] Öztürk, *Tefsirde Bâtınilik ve Bâtıni Te'vil Geleneği*, 230.

[81] "*Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. His light is like a niche in which there is a lamp. The lamp is in a crystal, and the crystal is like a shining star, lit from the oil of a blessed olive tree, located neither to the east nor the west, whose oil would almost glow, even without being touched by fire. Light upon light! Allah guides whoever He wills to His light. And Allah sets forth parables for humanity. For Allah has perfect knowledge of all things.*" Q 24:35.

illuminating them (*muẓhir*). Therefore, what ordinary people understand from the light are visible things that make others visible, such as those mentioned above. It is the material light.[82]

However, the existence of this material light alone is insufficient for perceiving light. This light needs to be seen. In other words, an observer is necessary to observe the light. The eye is this observer. If there is no eye, that is, no device to see this light, the reality of the light will not be comprehended. No matter how much the surrounding environment is illuminated by sunlight, it makes no sense to a blind person. Thus, despite the existence of light, the truth of light will not be revealed to the blind. Hence, "the seeing soul [i.e., the eye] is superior [to the material/seen light] because the perceiver and perception are actualized through it."[83] The eye is also called light because the light has to be perceived. Hence, the eye is more worthy of the name light than the material light. According to al-Ghazālī, this is the position of the elite in making sense of light.[84]

Humans are endowed with another eye that is different from this eye. The eye of the heart is sometimes called the mind, soul, or human soul. It is in a higher position than the eye on the head, which has many deficiencies and limitations. "The eye sees others but not itself. It cannot see what is too far away from it and what is too close to it. Also, it cannot see what is behind the curtain. It sees the apparent, not the subtle. It sees some of the things but not all of them. It sees finite but not infinite things, and what it sees is only a multitude of illusions. For example, it sees the big as small, the far as near, the stationary as moving, and the moving as still."[85] On the other hand, The eye of the heart, which al-Ghazālī prefers to call "mind," has none of these deficiencies. "The mind can perceive both itself and others, as well as its attributes. For the mind, the near and the far are the same. In addition to being able to conceive of the physical world it is in, the intellect is also able to conceive of the ninth heaven, the holy throne (*al-ʿarsh*), beyond the veils of the heavens, the supreme chamber of top-ranking angels (*al-malaʾ al-aʿlâ*), and the highest sublime realm. No truth can be veiled for the

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[82]   al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 41-42.
[83]   *Ibid.*, 42.
[84]   *Ibid., 43*
[85]   *Ibid.*

mind. The mind dives into the depths of things, that is, their secrets, and can comprehend their truth and essence. All beings are the field of action of the mind. The mind can perceive all beings, make conceptions about them, and arrive at definite and accurate judgments about them. The mind is endowed with the ability to comprehend all knowledge. Furthermore, the mind can perceive that the stars and the sun are many times bigger than the earth, that the child is growing, that the shadow is moving, and that the stars travel a great distance at any moment."[86] In other words, the mind is free from all eye illusions.

Despite these deficiencies in the eye and these perfections in mind, al-Ghazālī finds it strange that both are called light. According to al-Ghazālī, "the eye is light compared to things other than the mind. However, it is darkness compared to the mind."[87] Consequently, al-Ghazālī deems the eye more worthy of the title 'light' than the material light. Similarly, he also deems the mind more deserving of the title 'light' than the eye. Moreover, according to al-Ghazālī, "there are so many differences between the two that it is only the mind that is worthy of the title of 'light.'"[88]

At this point, al-Ghazālī establishes a connection between the Qurʾān and the mind in the context of the concept of light and refers to the Qurʾān as light. Al-Ghazālī argues that God refers to the Qurʾān as a light based on the verses: "*So believe in Allah and His Messenger and the Light*" (Q 64:8) and "*O humanity! There has come to you conclusive evidence from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a brilliant light.*" (Q 4:174). The Qurʾān is for the mind what sunlight is for the physical eye. "The example of the Qurʾān is the light of the sun, and the example of the mind is the light of the eye."[89] The Qurʾān acts as a stimulant for the mind and enables the potential power of the mind to be activated (actual).

Taking the ideas expressed by al-Ghazālī in his classification of the concept of light as 'material light-eye-mind' into account, one cannot infer that the light of the Qurʾān was considered superior to the light of the mind by al-Ghazālī. Since the truth of the visible

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86   *Ibid.*, 44-47.
87   *Ibid.*, 46.
88   *Ibid.*, 48.
89   *Ibid.*, 49.

light, such as the light of the sun, moon, and lamp, is perceived through the observing soul, i.e., the eye, al-Ghazālī deems the eye to be superior. Therefore, without the mind (the eye in the analogy), the Qurʾān (the sun in the analogy) alone will fail to reveal the truth. In the dichotomy of "the light of the eye and the light of the sun," both (the mind and the Qurʾān) are needed here, just as both are required for the truth. However, the mind is always one step ahead. Therefore, al-Ghazālī did not mean to say that the Qurʾān is more worthy of the title of light compared to the eye of the mind, as Mesut Okumuş states, but instead, he said the exact opposite. Okumuş arrives at this conclusion based on al-Ghazālī's statement that the sun is more worthy of the title of light than the physical eye. Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī repeatedly emphasized in several places that the physical eye deserves the title of light more than the sun.[90]

After this point, al-Ghazālī defines the higher light. "The thing that sees itself and others is more worthy of the title of light. Therefore, if something sees itself and others and simultaneously enables others to see, it is more worthy of the title of light than something that has no impact on others."[91] Al-Ghazālī deemed it appropriate to refer to the light that has such an effect as *al-sirāj al-munīr*, which means the lamp that radiates light. The light in question is the light contained in the divine-prophetic soul. This divine-prophetic soul is found in prophets and some of the saints. Noting that through the light of this soul, knowledge is spread to all creatures, al-Ghazālī suggests through this explanation that the true intention behind the referring to the Prophet as *al-sirāj al-munīr* in the 46th verse of Sūrat al-Aḥzāb[92] is also understood.[93]

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[90] "The scholar (al-Ghazālī) defines another higher level at this point with a new analogy. According to him, just as the sun deserves the title of light more than the physical eye, the Qurʾān deserves the title of light more than the eye of the mind. Just as the title of light is more appropriate for the sun, the title of light is more appropriate for the Qurʾan. Because the Qurʾān resembles the sun and the mind resembles the eye." Mesut Okumuş, *Kur'ân'ın Çok Boyutlu Okunuşu: İmam Gazzâlî Örneği* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2006), 195.

[91] Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 51.

[92] "*O Prophet! We have sent you as a witness a deliverer of good news, a warner, a caller to the Way of Allah by His command, and a beacon of light.*" Q 33:45-46.

[93] Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 52.

Up to this point, al-Ghazālī names four different things as the light: a. luminous substances, b. the eye, the instrument of the observer soul, c. the mind, which is not infected with any deficiency in perception, d. the divine-prophetic soul, which is contained in prophets and some saints and enables others to see the truth through them.

Al-Ghazālī classifies the realms as material and sublime and asserts that each has its lights. The lights that have been listed up to this point are the lights that belong to the lower realm, that is, the material realm.[94] From this point on, al-Ghazālī moves on to the sublime lights. The divine prophetic souls are the interface between the lower and the upper realms, or in other words, the means of transmitting the light of the upper realm to the lower realm. The divine-prophetic souls receive their light from the sublime lights, and since they are *al-sirāj al-munīr*, they radiate this light to all other creatures. Al-Ghazālī states that it is appropriate to denote this activity of receiving light (*nūr)* as receiving fire *(nār).*[95] As discussed in detail in the following chapters, al-Ghazālī analogizes this divine-prophetic soul to the olive oil mentioned in the verse, which emits light almost without being touched by fire. When fire touches it, it becomes "*nūr 'alā nūr* (the light upon light)."

These sublime souls, from which the lower souls receive fire, are angels. Thus, al-Ghazālī makes the transition to the sublime lights. There is a hierarchical order among the sublime lights, namely the angels. All angels have a certain rank. "In the sublime lights, from which the lower lights transfer light, there is an order in which the lights of the lower rank receive light from the higher ranks."[96] According to al-Ghazālī, this hierarchical order among the sublime lights has been revealed to those who understand the truth with their hearts. Al-Ghazālī cites the verse "*The angels respond, 'There is not one of us without an assigned station of worship"* (Q 37:164) as

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[94] Al-Ghazālī suggests that both realms may have different names as follows: "The material realm compared to the angelic realm is like the shell compared to the essence, the shape and mold compared to the soul, the darkness compared to the light, and the low compared to the high. Therefore, while the angelic realm is called 'the sublime, spiritual, and heavenly realm,' the material realm is called 'the lower, physical, and dark realm." Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 50.

[95] *Ibid.*, 52.

[96] *Ibid.*, 53.

evidence for this graded structure of spiritual souls. Each soul receives its light from the light in the higher rank. However, this receiving activity has to end at a certain point. Stating that this sequence cannot go on endlessly, al-Ghazālī argues that it has a primary source: "When you realize that there is a hierarchy within the lights, you also need to know that this hierarchy cannot go on and on forever. It must reach a primary source and end there. He is the Light itself. No light can come from any other source than Him. All lights receive light only from Him in order."[97]

Al-Ghazālī gradually explains the lower lights, starting with the material luminous substances. After mentioning the superiority of the light in the higher rank each time until he reaches the sublime lights, he makes a comparison with the light in the lower level. He asks a specific question with a clear answer: "Which of these is worthier of the title of light?" At this point, he finally asks the following question: "Is the title of Light more worthy and more appropriate for the one who receives its light from others, or for the one who has light in Himself and radiates light to others?"[98] Since the ultimate origin of the light of sublime souls is the source of light Himself, and since all beings that are called by the name "light" receive their light from Him in a hierarchical order, He is the only One who is truly worthy of the title "light." The title of light can only be given metaphorically to all other beings because the one who borrows something from another cannot be regarded as the owner of that thing. Thus, in a literal sense, the Light is the One who bestows that light on others and ensures the continuity of existence of that light in them. Al-Ghazālī endeavors to explain this metaphorical nomenclature with the metaphor of the enslaved person and the ruler: "In the essence of the name light and in being worthy of this title, there is no such thing as a partner to Him, except the nomenclature by that name. This is like a ruler granting property to his slave by grace and then calling him the owner. When this reality dawns on that enslaved person, he knows his master owns both him and his property. No ownership exists in that property by any partner other than the master."[99]

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[97] *Ibid.,* 54.
[98] *Ibid.*
[99] *Ibid.*

Having asserted that God literally consists of light and that those other than Him can only be metaphorically called light, al-Ghazālī then proceeds to clarify the concept of light based on the relationship between existence and non-existence. He likens existence to light, the opposite of darkness, by stating that "there is no darkness more severe than utter non-existence."[100] Al-Ghazālī, who divides existence into two by arguing that a thing either exists on its own or exists with something else, states that the second type of existence cannot be defined as existence in its true sense; it would only be a borrowed existence, and thus the true existence can only be existence without the need for another, and that the only one that exists is God and that the rest is not an actual existence. Consequently, "God is the only real Entity as He is the only true Light."[101] Within this context, al-Ghazālī addresses beings other than God as two-dimensional. Everything has an aspect facing itself and an aspect facing God. Entities do not exist in terms of their aspect, and they are just non-existence (*ʿadam*), yet they can only exist through the aspect that faces God. "Everything other than God is in a state of absolute non-existence. However, from the standpoint that God has endowed them with a body, they are perceived as existing."[102]

After having detailed the concept of light, al-Ghazālī summarizes what he has explained up to this point as follows to help the readers make up their minds:

You are probably eager to know about the transmission of the light of God to the sublime realm and the material realm, and even that God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. Once you know that God is the only true light and that there is no other light but Him, and that He is *kull al-anwār* (the Light of all lights) and *al-nūr al-kullī*' (the Infinite light), it is not appropriate for this to be kept a secret from you. Because the light consists of the thing through which things can come into existence. Its higher level is the one that exists by itself, for itself, and from itself. In addition, true light has no light beyond itself from which it can borrow and to which it can appeal for help. This light is in Him and by itself and not from

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[100]   *Ibid.*, 55.
[101]   *Ibid.*
[102]   *Ibid.*, 56.

anything else. Then you realize that only God, i.e., the "First light," is qualified with this attribute. Then you realize that the heavens and the earth are filled with two layers of light that pertain to eyesight and foresight, that is, the senses and the mind. The light that appeals to the eye is the stars, the sun, and the moon that you see in the heavens, and the light that you see in the earth is the glow that is spread over the things on the earth. In any case, and especially in the spring, the various colors of animals, minerals, and the various classes of beings are revealed through this glow. Without these glows, colors would not appear or even come into existence. (…) As for the spiritual-intellectual lights, the angelic ores in the highest realm (*al-ʿālam al-aʿlā*) and animal and human lives in the lowest realm (*al-ʿālam al-asfal*) are full of these lights. Just as the order of the higher realm becomes visible through the heavenly-angelic light, the order of the lower realm, the earth, becomes visible through the servile human light.

When you understand this, you will also know that the entire universe is full of light that appeals to the eye and light that appeals to the mind. You will also perceive that the lower levels receive light from the ones at the higher levels, just like the light emanates from the lamp. The lamp is the divine-prophetic soul. The divine-prophetic souls transfer light from the sublime souls in the same way that the lamp transfers luminosity from the light, and those in the lower levels transfer light from each other. Their order is by the rank of their positions. Then, all of them ascend to *Nūr al-anwār*, that is, to God, who is the source and origin of all lights. He is one and in no way has a partner. Other lights are all borrowed from Him. Only His light is the true one. All light consists of Him. In fact, for others, light exists only metaphorically. Therefore, there is no light other than His light. The other lights are not original, but they are lights from the angle that faces Him. Every soul holder is oriented towards Him and has turned his face towards Him. As the verse stipulates: "*To Allah belong the east and the west, so wherever you turn you are facing towards Allah. Surely Allah is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing.*" [Q 2:115][103]

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[103]   *Ibid.*, 59-60.

The true light			Allah		Upper Realm
			Angels		

Hierarchy diagram:

- **The true light** → Allah → Upper Realm
- Angels
- **The Interface Between the Realms/Means of Transmission** → The Divine-Prophetic Soul → Lower Realms
- Mind
- Eye
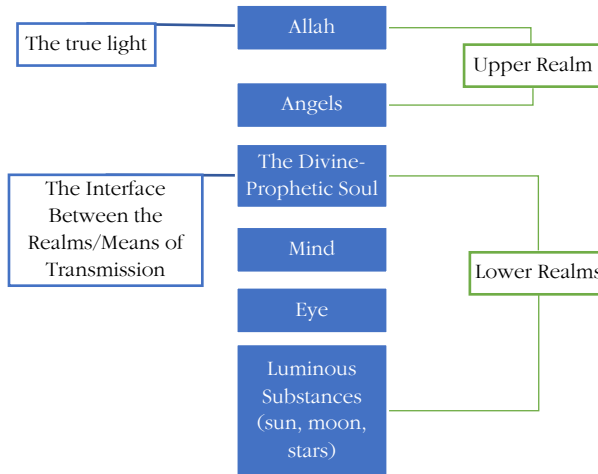- Luminous Substances (sun, moon, stars)

Table 3. Al-Ghazālī's Hierarchy of Lights

As can be understood from the explanations provided, al-Ghazālī interpreted the first part of the verse al-Nūr, "*Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth,*" in its literal sense. He endeavored to explain in detail that God is the light in the strictest sense of the word and that God is the only light in a real sense and that the term of light for lights of other beings who have been endowed with light is only used in a metaphorical sense. In trying to clarify this, al-Ghazālī defined the heavenly and earthly lights, explained the hierarchical relationship between them, and stated that God had granted the other beings their lights and thus their existence. For this reason, God is the source of light and the light itself. Nonetheless, al-Ghazālī assumes that some readers may not have grasped the narrative, saying, "Maybe your understanding can not reach its peak."[104] So, he uses the concept of "intensity of revelation" to explain that God is the light of heaven and earth. The explanations from this point onwards constitute an answer to the question, "If God is the light of the heavens and the earth, why cannot the nature of this light be understood, and why cannot we perceive this light?" What al-Ghazālī explains from this point onwards is based on the premise that God is the true light, which he

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[104] *Ibid.,* 62.

has already described in detail. Here, al-Ghazālī further materializes his theory and introduces it to his readers.

When a visible light, such as sunlight, shines and its light casts on an object, and through this light, the object becomes visible, and its colors are revealed, people say that they see the colors, not the light and that they do not see anything else along with what they see. In al-Ghazālī's words, the human being says, "I did not see anything else besides the greenness."[105] People acknowledge that "light is something beyond colors and can just be perceived in conjunction with colors" only after the visible light disappears, for example, when the sun goes down, or the lamp is turned off, and the colors become invisible."[106] According to al-Ghazālī, if humans cannot see the light despite its apparent nature, this results from the excess and severity of that light. The light is so dense that it has become invisible. "Sometimes the intensity of the revelation is the reason for its secrecy. When something exceeds its limit, it is reversed."[107]

Al-Ghazālī argues that this property of the visible light also applies to the light of God and that the fact that the light of God (and therefore God Himself, since He is the light Himself) accompanies every being is an obstacle to seeing His light. "God is hidden from His creatures because of the intensity of revelation of His light and veiled from the eyes of His creatures because of the luminosity of His light."[108] Since God has granted every being a part of His being, His light accompanies everything. However, the people who possess foresight can only fully realize this state of accompaniment. In fact, "they see God with everything they look at."[109] Al-Ghazālī asserts that the faithful subjects of God and the wise scholars can only see this light. The first part of the 53rd verse of Sūrat Fuṣṣilat, "*Is it not enough that your Lord is a Witness over all things?*" points to the position of the faithful subjects who can observe. The second part, "*We will show them Our signs on all the horizons as well as within themselves,*" points to the position of the rational scholars who can deduce. According to al-Ghazālī, those

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[105]   *Ibid.*
[106]   *Ibid.*
[107]   *Ibid.*
[108]   *Ibid.*
[109]   *Ibid.*, 63.

other than the ones mentioned above are only those who are screened and blinded from seeing this reality. Al-Ghazālī has previously made this categorization based on people who have realized that God is the only being. According to him, some people have reached this position through "intellectual knowledge" while others have achieved it "arbitrarily."[110] Shortly and precisely, "in the same manner, as everything becomes visible to the eye through the visible light, so with God, everything becomes visible to the mind. As the light is with all things and everything is revealed through it, Allah is inseparable with all things and is the One that reveals everything."[111]

After drawing a similarity between the visible light and the divine light in terms of their invisibility due to their intensity, al-Ghazālī declares the significant difference between them: The visible light disappears, but the divine light never disappears. "As for the divine light, through which everything becomes visible, its disappearance is unimaginable, and its change is impossible. It is always together with all things"[112] because the disappearance of the divine light would mean the end of existence. "If one could imagine its absence, both the heavens and the earth would be demolished."[113]

3.1.2. Meaning of the Representations in the Verse

Al-Ghazālī argues that the representation in the verse al-Nūr is used to explain luminous human souls. It is necessary to comprehend the representations in this verse to understand them fully. Detailed explanations about the levels of human knowledge, to which al-Gahazali referred as the luminous human souls, have been provided in previous chapters to understand the nature of representation and all the representations used in verses and hadiths in general, and the ones in Sūrat al-Nūr in particular. In this regard, al-Ghazālī explains the meanings of the expressions *mishkāt, zujājah, miṣbāḥ, zayt*, and *shajarah* used in the verse as follows:[114]

a) *Mishkāt* (Cavity) represents the sensual soul in the physical realm. Al-Ghazālī claims that there is also a similarity between the two in terms of their form because the lights of the sensual soul emanate

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[110]   *Ibid.*, 57.

[111]   *Ibid.*, 63.

[112]   *Ibid.*

[113]   *Ibid.*

[114]   *Ibid.*, 79-81.

from holes in the body, such as the ears, nose, and eyes. The structure of the *mishkāt* is also like a hole, a cavity, and the lamp is placed inside it, from which it emits its glow.

b) *Zujājah* (Glassware) represents the imaginary soul in the physical realm. Glass has a transparency that protects the lamp inside against unfavorable conditions outside so that it does not extinguish but also does not prevent the light of the lamp from emanating outside. In the same way, the imaginary soul protects the mental soul so that the mental knowledge is recorded and that this knowledge is not lost and can ultimately emit its light. If this glass is too thick and lacks sufficient transparency for various reasons, it prevents the lamp's light from fully radiating out. In the same way, if the imaginary soul is adorned with spiritual training and recorded, it becomes parallel to the intellectual meanings and does not interfere with their light.

c) *Miṣbāḥ* (Lamp) represents the mental soul in the physical world. The representation of the mental soul by the lamp is similar to the likening of the prophets to lamps that emit light (*al-sirāj al-munīr*). Just as the lamp is the source of light, the divine and heavenly knowledge can be perceived through the mental soul, and in the same way, the prophets spread the light of wisdom to all other creatures.[115]

d) *Shajarah* (Olive Tree) represents the intellectual soul in the physical world. A significant similarity exists between the tree having branches (and each branch divides into branches within itself) and the access of the intellectual soul to new knowledge through different compositions from the rational sciences and then comparing this new knowledge with its old knowledge and arriving at different pieces of knowledge. The answer to the question, "Why is the olive tree rather than any other tree?" lies in the oil produced by this tree. According to al-Ghazālī, olive oil has a privilege over other oils in terms of its quality arising from the scarcity of smoke and the abundance of light. The olive tree is called a blessed tree because it is fertile and produces many fruits. The reason for the expression "*lā sharq wa-lā gharb*" is that the ideas of the pure mind are not comparable with the aspects and connections such as proximity and distance.

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[115] *Ibid.*, 52.

e) *Zayt* (Oil) represents the divine-prophetic soul in the physical realm. According to al-Ghazālī, intellectual souls are divided into several parts. While some need external influence, instruction, advice, and help to acquire knowledge, others are in such a pure state that they come to their senses without any external help. Oils are like this. While some oils require the presence of a solid external igniter to catch on fire, the oil of the olive tree is so pure and radiant that it would almost catch on fire even if it were not touched by fire. This divine-prophetic soul, devoted to some of the saints and all the prophets, is such a pure light that it would almost shine without taking a share from the light at the higher rank. "Among the saints, there are those whose light shines almost without the help of the prophets, and among the prophets, there are those whose light shines almost without needing the help of the angels."[116]

According to al-Ghazālī, these lights have a sequential order. "The first thing that comes into play is the senses. They are like a preparatory stage for the imagination because something that belongs to the imagination can only come into being after the senses. The mental and intellectual ones get materialized after those two. Therefore, it is appropriate that the glassware is like a place for the lamp, and the cavity is like a place for the glassware. Thus, the lamp is in the glassware, and the glassware is in the cavity."[117] The expression '*nūr 'alá nūr* (the light upon light)' is intended to describe the superposition of all these lights.

Representations in the Verse of al-Nūr	Luminous Human Souls
Mishkāt (cavity)	the sensual soul (*al-rūḥ al-ḥissī*)
Zujājah (glassware)	the Imaginary soul (*al-rūḥ al-khayālī*)
Miṣbāḥ (lamp)	the Mental soul (*al-rūḥ al-'aqlī*)
Shajarah (Olive Tree)	the intellectual soul (*al-rūḥ al-fikrī*)
Zayt (oil)	the divine prophetic soul (*al-rūḥ al-qudsī al-nabawī*)

Table 4. Representations in the Verse of al-Nūr and Their Correspondences in the Luminous Human Souls

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[116] *Ibid.*, 81.
[117] *Ibid.*

The 35th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr has been subject to various interpretations since the early periods of Sufism. Many Sufis, notably Sahl al-Tustarī, Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī (d. 295/908), and al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932), attributed different *ishārī* meanings to the concept of light in the context of this verse in a way that profoundly influenced subsequent Sufis.[118] As Salih Çift points out, al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, in particular, made extensive use of the concept of light as one of the basic concepts on which he built his Sufistic understanding.[119] Notwithstanding the lack of exclusive studies on this subject, al-Ghazālī likely used this earlier scholarship. Furthermore, it has been noted that al-Ghazālī was heavily influenced by the work of Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, in his interpretation of the verse of al-Nūr.[120] Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī did not simply adopt the interpretations of Ibn Sīnā as they were but instead made significant modifications to them and introduced his unique point of view. For example, Ibn Sīnā considers the verse's five representations (cavity, glassware, lamp, olive tree, oil) elements of the mind that only humans can possess. On the other hand, al-Ghazālī argues that the concepts to which the representations of the cavity and the glassware correspond are the sensual soul and the imaginary soul, which are also present in animals.[121] Moreover, it is claimed that there are similarities between the concept of light of al-Ghazālī and the writings of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ.[122] Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ often uses the concept of emanation/flow (*fayḍ*) because it is one of the cornerstones of their philosophy. It finds its meaning in their epistles: "generosity and virtue radiate/flow from God, as light and splendor radiate/flow from the sun," meaning "radiate, flow, overflow." This idea appears in the introduction to *Mishkāt al-anwār*[123] and elsewhere, for example, in

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[118] Salih Çift, "İlk Dönem Tasavvuf Düşüncesinde Nûr Kavramı," *Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13, no: 1 (2004), 140-150.

[119] Ibid., 147.

[120] Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qurʾan in Classical Islâm*, 126; Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qurʾān*, 101.

[121] Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qurʾan in Classical Islâm*, 126.

[122] Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qurʾān*, 116.

[123] "All praise is only to God, who emanates (flows) light, opens the eyes, uncovers the secrets and eliminates the veils." al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 39.

the section where angels are mentioned,[124] which leads to such an idea.[125]

3.2. Exegesis of the 40th Verse of Sūrat al-Nūr

Al-Ghazālī's explanation of the examples in this verse[126] continues his explanation of verse 35 of Sūrat al-Nūr. Al-Ghazālī did not directly quote this verse in his work but used part of it to continue his sentence. He expressed that the examples mentioned in the 35th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr apply only to the hearts of the believers or the saints and prophets and not to the hearts of the infidels. Then, he clarified that the light mentioned in the verse leads people to righteousness and that turning away from righteousness is *ẓulmah* (darkness). However, darkness cannot lead people anywhere, either right or wrong. On the contrary, the darkness helps to misguide the infidels by reversing their minds and perceptions. After this point, al-Ghazālī expresses the statements of the verse as a continuation of his sentence by saying that "infidels are like a man in the middle of a dark sea."[127]

Al-Ghazālī demonstrates the meaning of the representations of the vast sea (*baḥr lujjī*), the first wave (*mawj*), the second wave (*fawqihī mawj*) and the cloud (*saḥāb*) in the verse through an *ishārī* method:[128]

 1. The vast sea represents this world with its destructive hazards, degrading preoccupations, and blinding turbidity.

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[124] "In the realm of angels, there are honorable and sublime ores made of light. These are called 'angels.' The lights emanate from them to the luminous human souls." al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 67.

[125] Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qur'ān*, 116.

[126] "*Or their (infidels') deeds are like the darkness in a deep sea, covered by waves upon waves, topped by dark clouds. Darkness upon darkness! If one stretches out their hand, they can hardly see it. And whoever Allah does not bless with light will have no light!*" Q 24:40.

[127] The statement of al-Ghazālī is as follows:

هذا المثال إنما يتضح لقلوب المؤمنين أو لقلوب الأنبياء والأولياء لا لقلوب الكفار: فإن النور يراد للهداية. فالمصروف عن طريق الهدى باطل وظلمة، بل أشد من الظلمة: لأن الظلمة لا تهدي إلى الباطل كما لا تهدي إلى الحق. وعقول الكفار انتكست، وكذلك سائر إدراكاتهم وتعاونت على الإضلال في حقهم. فمثالهم كرجل في (بَحرٍ لُجِّيٍّ يَغْشَاهُ مَوجٌ مِّن فَوقِهِ مَوجٌ مِّن فَوقِهِ سَحابٌ ظُلُماتٌ بَعضُها فَوقَ بَعضٍ).

Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 82. In the above statement, the part where the verse is quoted has been bolded and accentuated (adding vowel points) by us. However, al-Ghazālī did not mention it in his work in a separate and accentuated form.

[128] Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 82-83.

2. The first wave represents the lust that leads to instinctual desires, preoccupation with sensual pleasures, and the provision of worldly needs. According to al-Ghazālī, those caught in this wave "eat and live just as animals live. Their ultimate destination is fire. Surely, this wave will be dark. Because desiring something makes a person blind and deaf."[129]

3. The second wave represents the seven malicious deeds: Wrath, hostility, enmity, hatred, jealousy, boasting, and pride with having many possessions.

4. The cloud is the evil beliefs, false assumptions, and perverted imaginations that stand like a curtain between the infidels and faith, knowledge of the truth, and enlightenment by the light of the Qurʾān and mind. The feature of the cloud is that it blocks the light of the sun.

When all these types of darkness (the vast sea, the waves, the clouds) are combined, the expression "layers and layers of darkness" is an appropriate description. This darkness is so intense and powerful that it obscures distant and nearby objects. The expression "If one stretches out their hand, they can hardly see it" describes this situation. This darkness prevents the infidels from comprehending and being aware of the astonishing conditions of the Prophet, which they could have understood even with a little thinking and pondering, even though they had occurred right in front of them. Eventually, since God is the source of all lights, the first light, "There is no light for those to whom God has not bestowed light."[130]

3.3. Exegesis of Verses 75 to 79 of Sūrat al-Anʿām

Al-Ghazālī provided an *ishārī* exegesis of these verses, in which the story of Prophet Abraham is mentioned[131] both in *Mishkāt al-*

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[129] *Ibid.*, 82.

[130] *Ibid.*, 83.

[131] "*We also showed Abraham the wonders of the heavens and the earth, so that he would be sure in faith. When the night grew dark upon him, he saw a star and said, 'This is my Lord!' But when it set, he said, 'I do not love things that set.' Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This one is my Lord!' But when it disappeared, he said, 'If my Lord does not guide me, I will certainly be one of the misguided people.' Then when he saw the sun shining, he said, 'This must be my Lord—it is the greatest!' But again, when it set, he declared, 'O my people! I totally*

anwār[132] and *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*[133], which are partially different from each other. In his work *Fayṣal al-tafriqah bayna l-Islām wa-l-zandaqah*[134], he presents his interpretations of the verses in the works mentioned above as the interpretations of the Sufis who interpreted implicit expressions based on a prevailing assumption and not based on conclusive evidence. While in *Iḥyāʾ*, al-Ghazālī identifies the stars, the moon, and the sun in the verses as the light veils that the traveler must overcome on the way to reaching the ultimate union (*wuṣlah*), in *Mishkāt al-anwār*, he regards them as a representation of the angels, which are the luminous sublime entities. Nevertheless, the basic idea in both interpretations is that the verses in question describe the circumstances to arrive at the truth.

3.3.1. Exegesis of the Verses in *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*

Al-Ghazālī mentions four classes of arrogant people and their factions in the *Kitāb dhamm al-ghurūr* section of the *Iḥyāʾ* and counts the Sufis in the third place among them. When talking about the deluded factions within this class, he mentions the faction that continues on the path and gets closer to Allah without paying attention to the brightness and offerings on the way during the journey. However, this faction assumes that this point is the place of ultimate union and gets confused by stopping at this point. At this point, al-Ghazālī states that God has seventy thousand veils of light and that the traveler errs by believing that he has reached the right place of the union when he ascends only to one of these veils and then proceeds to the interpretation of the relevant verses.[135] Al-Ghazālī grounded this interpretation on the ḥadīth purported by the Prophet, "God has seventy thousand veils of light." Al-Ghazālī devoted the third and final chapter of *Mishkāt al-anwār* to explain a different version of the same ḥadīth: "Verily for Allah, there are seventy veils made of light and darkness. If He were to open those curtains, the brightness of His face would burn everything that

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reject whatever you associate with Allah in worship. I have turned my face towards the One Who originated the heavens and the earth—being upright—and I am not one of the polytheists'." Q 6:75-79.

[132] Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 67-68.
[133] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, III, 628-629.
[134] Al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafriqah,* 53-55.
[135] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-*dīn, III, 628-629.

perceives it."[136] Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī does not mention these verses in the last chapter of *Mishkāt al-anwār*, which he devotes to explaining this ḥadīth. Furthermore, the veils mentioned in the context of this verse are only veils of light, whereas the veils mentioned in the ḥadīth are veils made of light and darkness.

According to al-Ghazālī, the stars, the moon, and the sun, about which Abraham said, "This is my Lord," are not the shiny objects in the sky. "For Abraham had also seen them in his childhood and knew that they were not gods. At the same time, these objects are not the only ones that shine in the sky. Even an ignorant Bedouin knows that the stars are not gods, but would Abraham, with his lofty position and dignity, have accepted any star as his God?"[137] According to al-Ghazālī, each of these objects is one of the veils of Allah's light on the path of the traveler. Unless these are overcome, the ultimate union cannot be achieved. These veils vary in size, and the smallest of them are called *el-kawkab* (the star), the largest is called *al-shams* (the sun), and the others in between are called *al-qamar* (the moon). Al-Ghazālī argues that the names of stars, moon, and sun are given to them only metaphorically.

In this way, the sublime realm of the heavens was continuously revealed to Abraham. That is why God has decreed the following: "*We also showed Abraham the wonders of the heavens and the earth so that he would be sure in faith.*" (Q 6:75). Abraham "continued to ascend, moving from one to another. In each dimension, he thought he had reached his destination where the ultimate union with God would take place. Then, when he saw a larger dimension ahead, he immediately proceeded to it, thinking that he would arrive at the destination where he would meet God. Then, when he saw another curtain further ahead, he went to that curtain. Furthermore, finally, when he reached the last curtain, which was the closest, he thought he had reached his destination, thinking that this dimension was the bigger. Then, when he realized this was also lacking in perfection, he said: '*I do not love things that set... I have turned my face towards the One who originated the*

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[136] Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 84.
[137] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, III, 628.

heavens and the earth, being upright, and I am not one of the polytheists' [Q 6:76, 79]."[138]

Al-Ghazālī believes that the first veil to deceive one is his/her own person (*dhāt*) between himself/herself and his Lord. It is the heart's secret, a light among the lights of God, *al-amr al-Rabbānī* (the order of God), and the revelation of the complete truth. When the light of God is revealed in the heart, the veil over the heart is lifted, and as a result, when the traveler looks at his heart, he is astonished by the influence of those sparkles and begins to declare, "I am one with Allah" (*ana l-Ḥaqq*). According to al-Ghazālī, this is the point where the traveler's feet stumble, and unless the traveler is further enlightened, the traveler gets stuck here and perishes. Al-Ghazālī sees it as the point where a small star from the divine lights is revealed and argues that the one who is deceived here will not be able to reach the sun or even the moon. "This is where the traveler is deceived. Because here, the thing that shines and the place where it shines are confused. This is like the person who sees a color reflected in a mirror and thinks it is the color of the mirror itself, and the colors of the thing that is poured into the glass and the color of the glass are confused. In this regard, the poet says: The glass has become thinner, the wine has become thinner, they have begun to resemble each other, and things have become confused. It is as if there is wine but no glass, or glass but no wine."[139]

Al-Ghazālī criticizes the understanding of unification and integration and states that a tiny star deceives those in this state at the beginning of the path. He further equates this delusion with the delusion Christians fall into due to ascribing the deity to Jesus. Al-Ghazālī states that Christians looked at Jesus from this perspective and were surprised to see the divine light shining in him. Al-Ghazālī compares these people to those who see the star in a mirror or water. They stretched their hands to the water or the mirror to reach the star. However, since this was not possible, they were deluded.[140]

3.3.2. Exegesis of the Verses in *Mishkāt al-anwār*

Al-Ghazālī explains the nature of representation in his work *Mishkāt al-anwār* by stating that understanding the meanings of

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[138] *Ibid.*, 628.
[139] *Ibid.*, 629.
[140] *Ibid.*

concepts such as a cavity, lamp, glassware, olive tree, oil, and light that appear in the 35th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr requires first understanding the essence of representation. Al-Ghazālī states that there is a relationship between the sublime world and the physical world and that everything that happens in this realm has a counterpart/example in the sublime sphere, and he explains some of these counterparts.

al-Ghazālī states that the sun, moon, and stars are the counterparts of the physical world's luminous, honorable, and sublime angels. The light that human souls possess also emanates (*fayaḍān*) from the angels. Therefore, these beings are also called *arbāb* (competent beings). God is the *Rabb al-arbāb* in this regard.[141] Indicating that there are ranks among the perfection of these beings made of light, al-Ghazālī proceeds to explain the essence of the representational expressions in the above verses. He exegetes these verses by employing an *ishārī* method.[142] As in the 40th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr, al-Ghazālī does not directly quote the verse but combines the verses and passages from the verses with his sentences. Moreover, al-Ghazālī does not use the name Abraham in his interpretation of the verses but begins his commentary with "the one who is on the way" and interprets the parable of Abraham through this person.

The stages in these verses, which narrate Abraham's method for demonstrating how wrong his people's beliefs were and proving God's existence and unity through deduction based on observation, are considered by Al-Ghazālī to be the stages a traveler goes through to reach God and the heavenly states he encounters. Here, the traveler travels towards the sublime realm and gradually meets the luminosity of spiritual beings, namely angels, at different ranks. The traveler, who first ascends to the spiritual being at the level of the stars (*kawākib*), observes that the entire sublime realm is under its dominion and the glow of its light. Under the influence of the sublimity of this light, he says, "This is my Lord!" to what he observes. However, when the traveler continues his journey and reaches the next stage, he discovers that this stage is superior and higher than the previous one. The rank of this *al-qamar* (moon) is

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[141] Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 67.
[142] *Ibid.*, 67-68.

above the level of the *kawākib* (stars), and the intensity of its radiance is so great that the previous stage has sunk into the pit and disappeared. Thinking that he has reached the end under the influence of the luminosity of this new spiritual being, the traveler now proclaims, "This is my Lord!" to this spiritual being. However, when he continues his journey, the traveler encounters a new spiritual being whose analogy is the sun. When he realizes that the luminosity of this spiritual being is greater and more sublime, he exclaims to it, "This is my Lord! This is the greater." However, he observes that this level is also in a relationship with another level and finally realizes that the relationship with what is imperfect also becomes imperfect and perishable. Hence, in his ultimate conclusion, the traveler says, "*I have turned my face towards the One Who has originated the heavens and the earth.*" (Q 6:79). By recognizing that God is exempt from any relationship, the traveler attains a complete certainty that Allah is free from all that is created and bound by any relationship.

3.3.3. Exegesis of the Verses in *Fayṣal al-tafriqah*

In *Fayṣal al-tafriqah*, al-Ghazālī lists the pieces of evidence cited by the Sufis for the reason why the statements in the verses above need to be interpreted as follows:[143]

a. A Prophet like Abraham is too lofty to believe these objects are gods.

b. Abraham did not need to see these objects set (*ufūl*) to realize that they were not gods. Would he have believed these objects were gods if they had not sunk? Does not these objects' finite and limited nature indicate that they cannot be gods?

c. How could the first thing Abraham saw be a star? The sun is more luminous than a star, and the sun is seen first.

d. After God first says, "*We also showed Abraham the wonders of the heavens and the earth so that he would be sure in faith.*" (Q 6:75). Then it is narrated that Abraham kept saying to the stars, moon, and sun, "This is my God." How can it be acceptable that after Abraham

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[143] Al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafriqah*, 53-54.

> was clearly shown the heavenly realm, he was under the delusion that these objects were gods?

After noting that these arguments are based on assumption and not on any conclusive evidence, al-Ghazālī lists the opinions developed against the statements of the Sufis. Against the statement, "He is too great (a Messenger) to be an idolater," it was said: Abraham was still a small boy when this incident occurred. It is natural for a would-be prophet to have similar thoughts as a child and abandon them shortly afterward. According to Abraham, the indication of the act of setting might be a more obvious cosmological sign of God's existence than the sign of reckoning and materialization. To begin with, regarding his vision of the stars, he is said to have been trapped in a cave as a child and only been able to come out at night. About the Qurʾānic words, "*We also showed Abraham the wonders of the heavens and the earth so that he would be sure in faith,*" (Q 6:75) it is possible for God to mention the situation at the end initially and the situation at the beginning subsequently."[144]

The Sufis have interpreted the expressions of "the staff" (*ʿaṣā*) and "the sandals" mentioned in the verses of "*take off your sandals*" (Q 20:12) and "*put down what is in your right hand*" (Q 20:69) in this manner. Al-Ghazālī indicates that such considerations of Sufis were not based on conclusive evidence but rather on supposed implications. These assumptions are considered evidence by those who do not know the true nature and requirements of evidence. Then, he emphasizes that those who interpret the verses in this manner should not be deemed infidels or reformists (*ahl al-bidʿah*). He contends that the "presumption" (*ẓann*) can be used in matters unrelated to *ʿaqīdah* as a substitute for the "conclusive evidence" (*burhān*) in the fundamental *ʿaqīdah* issues.[145]

3.3.4. Exegesis of Sūrat al-Fātiḥah

Al-Ghazālī's exegesis of Sūrat al-Fātiḥah in his work *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān* is exoteric. However, his interpretation of the ḥadīth "Sūrat al-Fātiḥah is the key to Jannah"[146] has an esoteric context.

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[144] *Ibid.,* 54-55.
[145] *Ibid.,* 55.
[146] al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 71.

First of all, al-Ghazālī interprets each verse of the sūrah one by one and establishes a connection between these verses and the themes covered by the Qur'ān.[147] According to al-Ghazālī, Sūrat al-Fātiḥah addresses the themes of the essence, attributes, and deeds of God and the afterlife, the straight way, and the blessings of God upon the friends and the wrath of God upon the enemies. All these themes are covered throughout the Qur'ān. Apart from these, two other Qur'ānic themes are not mentioned in the Sūrat al-Fātiḥah: the fight against infidels and jurisprudence. Al-Ghazālī claims that these two themes, which constitute the source of theology and jurisprudence, are not covered in Sūrat al-Fātiḥah as they are at the bottom of the list in terms of significance compared to the other themes.

After exegeting the verses of al-Fātiḥah one by one from an exoteric point of view, al-Ghazālī claims that the eight verses of al-Fātiḥah are the keys to the eight gates of Paradise, based on the ḥadīth that "Sūrat al-Fātiḥah is the key to Jannah." Each verse corresponds to the key of a gate of paradise. In a sense, al-Ghazālī suggests that those who do not perceive the relationship between these two concepts should dismiss their minds' exoteric vision of paradise. If this explicit image is eliminated from the mind, it will become clear that each verse of the Sūrat al-Fātiḥah will open a gate to the garden of wisdom. The term "paradise" represents the paradise of knowledge. Al-Ghazālī argues that the tranquillity, relief, and bliss that the wise person experiences in the paradise of knowledge is no less than the relief obtained by entering paradise and satisfying the needs of eating, drinking, and sexual desire. In fact, the two cannot even be equal. "On the contrary, it cannot be denied that among the gnostics there may be one whose desire for opening the door of gnosis in order to behold the kingdom of the heavens and the earth the glory of their Creator and Disposer is more intense than his desire for women, food and clothing."[148] For al-Ghazālī, it is unreasonable to expect desires such as food, clothing, and women to prevail over the wise man whom the angels accompany in Paradise that does not find any pleasure in actions such as eating, drinking, marrying, and dressing. At this point, al-

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[147] *Ibid.*, 64-70.
[148] *Ibid.*, 71-72.

Ghazālī states that those who crave a paradise consisting only of the pleasure of eating, drinking, and mating, rather than the paradise that the wise believers wish to attain, commit a gross error, ignorance, and foolishness. According to al- Ghazālī, a person's worth is determined by his/her efforts. Craving for something less when there is something more demonstrates his/her folly. After the gates of the heaven of knowledge are open to the wise man, he would no longer be attracted by heaven for fools, for his place is *ʿIlliyyūn* (the highest rank in Jannah).[149]

After using these definitive statements, al-Ghazālī, as if wishing to conclude the subject with a softer ending, states that even if the gardens of knowledge may not be called paradise, they deserve at least to be the instruments through which paradise can be achieved. That is, they constitute the key to paradise. That is why it is reported in the Sūrat al-Fātiḥah that there is a key to all the gates of Jannah.[150] Al-Ghazālī had declared the Bāṭiniyyah as heretics for their belief that happiness and punishment in the afterlife consist of intangible pleasures and tortures by subjecting the explicit statements in the Qurʾān about heaven and hell to the interpretation. However, he was criticized for his depiction of heaven due to its similarity with the interpretations of the Bāṭiniyyah.[151] Furthermore, on account of his views of this kind, al-Ghazālī was alleged by the Bāṭiniyyah to have made esoteric interpretations just like themselves: "Accordingly, [Ismāʿīlī *dāʿī*] Ibn al-Walīd (d. 612/1215), in his refutation of *Faḍāʾiḥ al-Bāṭiniyyah*, listed esoteric interpretations made by al-Ghazālī's in his several works, one by one, and demonstrated the fact that he, just like them, engaged in esoteric interpretations."[152]

Conclusion

This study aims to identify the methodology that al-Ghazālī employed in the *ishārī* interpretation of the verses of the Qurʾān. In this regard, determining the method of research that al-Ghazālī followed in the field of *ishārī* exegesis is relatively challenging

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[149] *Ibid.*, 72.
[150] *Ibid.*
[151] Öztürk, *Tefsirde Bâtınilik ve Bâtıni Te'vil Geleneği,* 370-375.
[152] *Ibid.*, 374.

compared to the authors who had independent exegetical works. Since al-Ghazālī did not write a separate book of exegesis, it necessitates the examination of his various works to identify the methodology he adopted. Within the scope of this study, it has been attempted to determine the method adopted by al-Ghazālī in his *ishārī* exegesis by analyzing his different works.

To identify al-Ghazālī's understanding of *ishārī* exegesis, firstly, his perspective on the Qurʾān should be learned. Al-Ghazālī, like many Sufis, compares the Qurʾān to an ocean and bases his understanding of the Qurʾān on this analogy. Just as the ocean contains many precious minerals, the Qurʾān is endowed with unique features that will lead the human being to prosperity in both realms. Hence, al-Ghazālī urges people to dive into the depths of this ocean instead of idling on the shore and emphasizes that depriving oneself of these precious minerals is a preference that deserves condemnation. Furthermore, just as the jewels in the ocean vary in value, the subjects addressed in the Qurʾān also have various degrees. Al-Ghazālī not only introduced these valuable substances in the Qurʾān but also attempted to explain the means of reaching them in detail. Al-Ghazālī states that Qurʾān is the source of all disciplines, just as the way all rivers and creeks eventually merge into the sea.

After the general outlines of al-Ghazālī's perception of the Qurʾān are identified, the basic principles of his *ishārī* exegesis method can be determined. The *ishārī* exegesis style of al-Ghazālī is directly related to his conception of the realm. Accordingly, it is essential to know al-Ghazālī's conception of the realm to comprehend his method of *ishārī* exegesis. Al-Ghazālī classifies the realm as explicit and implicit and assigns different names to these two realms. A relationship exists between the implicit realm, also referred to as the divine, sublime or spiritual realms, and the explicit realm, also referred to as the lower, material, and sensible realm. Everything in the implicit realm has its corresponding equivalent in the physical world. The beings that exist in the sublime realm can be known only to the extent that God has revealed them to us, and we can only comprehend the nature of these beings through analogies. Al-Ghazālī argues that this division, which applies to the realms, also applies to all acceptable disciplines. Since the Qurʾān is

the source of all fields, intrinsically, the verses of the Qurʾān also have explicit and implicit aspects. God has used analogies, especially in the *mutashābih* verses, to enable us to comprehend them with our imperfect and defective minds in this physical world while explaining the circumstances related to the sublime realm.

Moreover, learning how human spirits obtain knowledge to comprehend the representations is essential. Through these luminous human souls we possess, we seek to grasp the representations of the sublime realm in this physical world. The nature of these representations/metaphors in the verses can only be comprehended by reflecting on the verses of the Qurʾān and endeavoring to comprehend what they imply. Hence, it would be inevitable to bring different interpretations of the verses. Each person attempts to interpret and understand these verses to the extent of his/her knowledge, capability, and skills. The explicit interpretation is not always enough to understand these subtleties contained in the verses. Therefore, through implicit interpretations of the verses, it becomes possible to switch from the shell to the core, and the deep and genuine meaning of the verses can be perceived. However, what al-Ghazālī emphasized insistently and should not be forgotten is that knowing explicit exegesis is a prerequisite for comprehending the secrets of the Qurʾān and the truth of the verses. Moreover, the implicit meaning never supersedes the explicit interpretation but only serves a complementary role in understanding the true sense.

Al-Ghazālī suggests that the nature of the representation must first be known to understand the representations used in the verses. Having stated that everything in the spiritual realm has a corresponding counterpart in the physical realm, al-Ghazālī argues that the essence and truth of everything in this realm in the form of a representation also exist in the spiritual realm. Since representations resemble their originals, it is possible to understand the originals in the sublime realm to some extent through their examples present in this physical realm. Al-Ghazālī states that to understand representations employed in the verses, the degrees of knowledge humans possess must be known. He refers to these degrees as the "luminous human souls." These souls, which al-Ghazālī classifies into five and states that each of them is entirely

made of light, are as follows: The sensual soul (*al-rūḥ al-ḥissī*), which is the soul that receives what the senses transmit, the imaginary soul (*al-rūḥ al-khayālī*), which is the soul that records what the senses transmit to it and stores the data transmitted in order to present it to the intellectual soul in a higher rank, the mental soul (*al-rūḥ al-ʿaqlī*), which perceives and cognizes the essential and universal knowledge and is unique to human beings and is not present in children and animals, the intellectual soul (*al-rūḥ al-fikrī*), through which the intellectual disciplines are received and through which valuable knowledge is attained by making interpretations and compositions between them and finally the divine prophetic soul (*al-rūḥ al-qudsī al-nabawī*), a spirit unique to the Prophet and some of the saints.

Al-Ghazālī argues that the disciplines have explicit and implicit aspects, but those who cannot comprehend this tacit dimension in the fields reject such a duality. Al-Ghazālī, who demonstrates the existence of some issues as a ground for the existence of this dual structure, lists these issues, which he characterizes as subtle and profound, as follows: matters such as the soul and attributes of God that only the elites (*al-khawāṣṣ*) can comprehend and the ordinary people cannot perceive, comprehensible matters such as fate, which the Prophet and the companions of the Prophet abstained from talking about because it would harm many people if it was made public, matters that are immediately comprehensible when explained clearly and do not harm anyone to be explained, but for which signs, metaphors and similes are used in order to make them more effective for those who listen to them and for which al-Ghazālī cited the characteristics mentioned in some verses and ḥadīths as examples, and finally the matters where the language of the state of things is expressed through the language of words and phrases and where words make use of allusions to describe the conditions of things.

Al-Ghazālī claims that the verses of the Qurʾān can be interpreted in different manners. In this respect, it is permissible for each individual to deduce meanings from the Qurʾān according to his/her intelligence, capability, and perception. Al-Ghazālī considers the effort to interpret the Qurʾān as essential for attaining true meanings. In this context, he states that explicit interpretation is

insufficient in understanding the teachings of the Qurʾān and must be surpassed to understand the secrets of the verses. An opinion has been established that the interpretation of the Qurʾān is forbidden primarily based on the ḥadīth, "whoever exegetes the Qurʾān through his intellect, may he/she be prepared for his place in Hell." Contrary to the claim of Exoteric Ecole, al-Ghazālī asserts that the ḥadīth in question does not condemn the reflection on the Qurʾān, the in-depth analysis of the Qurʾān, and the endeavor to interpret it and deduce judgments from it. In this context, al-Ghazālī first introduces much evidence concerning the interpretability of the Qurʾān and then explains which activities can constitute the scope of the act of interpreting the Qurʾān with one's intellect mentioned in the ḥadīth in question.

According to al-Ghazālī, all disciplines are included in the deeds and attributes of God. There is a reference to all fields in the Qurʾān, and it is impossible to understand them through an explicit exoteric interpretation. So, it would only be possible to understand all this by analyzing the Qurʾān in depth and detail and interpreting its subtle meanings. The Qurʾān touches upon many issues, especially those on which people have disputes, in one way or another, and contains references and indications regarding such issues and their solutions. Such subtleties can only be grasped through an in-depth study of the Qurʾān. According to al-Ghazālī, if the Qurʾān had no other meaning apart from the reported apparent exegesis of the Qurʾān, as the scholars of Exoteric Ecole claim, and if the view that people should only be content with this reported knowledge were adopted, then no opinion about the exegesis of the verses of the Qurʾān that had not been heard from the Prophet himself would be regarded as accurate. However, this has not happened, and after the era of the Prophet, some companions and followers of the Prophet interpreted the verses from their perspectives, which had not been heard from the Prophet. As a result, different interpretations of the same verses emerged. Since it is impossible for them to have listened to all these different interpretations from the Prophet, they interpreted the verses according to their perspective and understanding. This indicates that each exegete attempted to interpret the Qurʾān according to his endeavors and abilities.

The Qurʾān is interpretable, and this endeavor to interpret the Qurʾān is not included in the scope of the condemned practice mentioned in the ḥadīth, "whoever exegetes the Qurʾān through his intellect, may he/she be prepared for his place in the Hell." Al-Ghazālī clarifies which practices would fall into the category of exegesis by reasoning, reported by this ḥadīth. Whoever argues that interpreting verses in such a way as to support one's views, ideas, and causes would fall into the category of exegesis by reasoning. This practice constitutes an arbitrary interpretation of verses to create a basis for one's opinions. This interpretation includes void reasoning that is not based on authentic jurisprudence. As an example of such interpreters, al-Ghazālī cites those who claim that the term "Pharaoh" refers to the ego (*nafs*) in the verse "*Go to Pharaoh, for he has truly transgressed all bounds.*" However, the verse refers to a historical incident between Prophet Moses and Pharaoh. Furthermore, al-Ghazālī also argues that sometimes the verses are interpreted in this way with good intentions. However, regardless of whether such an interpretation is based on malicious or benevolent intentions, it still constitutes the exegesis by reasoning, reported by the ḥadīth in question. The ambiguous and bizarre wordings and usages such as *ikhtiṣār* (abbreviation), *iʿjāz* (miraculous), *ḥadhf* (subtraction), *iḍmār* (confidential), *taqdīm* (antecedent), and *taʾkhīr* (adjourning) are abundant in the Qurʾān. Their true meanings can only be learned through the reports and narrations that have been heard from the Prophet. Al-Ghazālī states that interpreting the Qurʾān solely with the knowledge of Arabic without acquiring competence in these matters falls within the scope of exegesis by reasoning, as mentioned in the ḥadīth. This competence can only be obtained through a discipline learned through the transfer of knowledge and hearing (*simāʿ*).

Although al-Ghazālī stipulates explicit exegetical knowledge as a condition to understand the meanings of the verses, he states that this knowledge is not enough to learn the truths and mysteries of the Qurʾān. Al-Ghazālī emphasizes that understanding certain verses particularly difficult to comprehend can only be possible by diving into the vast and profound depths of the field of *mukāshafah* (manifestation of the knowledge by Allah). He cites in this regard the following verses as examples of verses challenging to

understand: "*Nor was it you O Prophet who threw a handful of sand at the disbelievers, but it was Allah Who did so*" (Q 8:17) and "*Fight them so that Allah may punish them at your hands.*" (Q 9:14). Al-Ghazālī states that even if all the oceans turned into ink and all the trees turned into pens, it would still be impossible to fully apprehend the true meanings of such verses since the mysteries of the divine words are infinite. The pens and ink would be exhausted much before the secrets of the divine words are exhausted. Nonetheless, anyone can understand the secrets of the Qurʾān in proportion to his/her level of knowledge, purity of heart, ability to contemplate the Qurʾān and efforts.

Although al-Ghazālī did not have any specific book dedicated to *ishārī* exegesis, his *ishārī* interpretations of verses in his different writings offer a considerable amount of data for the comprehension of his *ishārī* exegesis. In this study, al-Ghazālī's interpretations of the 35th and 40th verses of Sūrat al-Nūr, the 75th to 79th verses of Sūrat al-Anʿām, and Sūrat al-Fātiḥah are cited as examples of his *ishārī* interpretations. In *Mishkāt al-anwār*, most of which is devoted to the explanation of the 35th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr, al-Ghazālī provides an *ishārī* interpretation of this verse as well as the 40th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr and the 75th to 79th verses of Sūrat al-Anʿām. Al-Ghazālī's interpretation of the 40th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr in *Mishkāt al-anwār*, constitutes a continuation of his explanation of the 35th verse of Sūrat al-Nūr. Al-Ghazālī presents the *ishārī* exegesis of the 75th to 79th verses of Sūrat al-Anʿām, which narrate the parable of Prophet Abraham, in three different works that are partially different from each other: *Mishkāt al-anwār*, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn,* and *Fayṣal al-tafriqah bayna l-Islām wa-l-zandaqah*. Al-Ghazālī's interpretation of the Sūrat al-Fātiḥah in *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān* is exoteric, but his interpretation of the ḥadīth "Sūrat al-Fātiḥah is the key to Jannah" has an esoteric context.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

FUNDING

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