




The Interpretation of Personal Religious Experience in al-Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh min ad-Dalāl*

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Research Article

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Abstract: Hujjat al-Islam Imam al-Ghazali is a thinker, mystic, jurist, and theologian who has still influenced today since his time. In his *al-Munqidh min ad-Dalal*, he writes about how he survived the crisis that his inquiries about life had driven him to depression. Due to the distress caused by the crisis in him, he left the place where he lived and moved away from people. During this abandonment, he confesses his experiences, inquiries, introspection, and ways of getting to know himself in *al-Munqidh*. In this article, I will try to understand how he reached guidance from this crisis, what his method was, and how he gained personal religious experience. I will examine the differences and similarities of the way of Sufism from the clergy, where the concept of rational theosophy corresponds in al-Ghazali's thought. He shows us the limits of reason on the way to reach precise information. He talks about realities that cannot be explained within these limits, what he has learned in the uzlat (escaping from community life and living alone), and why the love for the world is dangerous. The reason why al-Ghazali returned to social life is explained with the idea of 'fiqh of priorities' in Islam. Al-Ghazali attributes the "nour" (light) that descends to his heart to the will of God in explaining his salvation from the turning point in his life.

Keywords: Al-Ghazali, personal religious experience, clergy, theosophy, knowledge of God, light, mystical theology.

Your look at the subject you are discussing should be directed at God, for God and with God. Because if you do not investigate and examine to God, He will leave you with yourself or with what you turn to other than Him. (al-Ghazali, *al-Munqidh*)

Introduction

Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ghazali al-Tusi (d. 505/1111) is an Islamic thinker known for his philosophical criticism of Ash'ari theology, Shafii jurists, Sufism and philosophers. He was born in 450 in Tabaran, Tus in the Khorasan region of Iran.¹ He has nicknames like Hujjat al-Islam² and Zayn al-Din³. According to an information in al-Dhahabi, al-Ghazali said that people called his name with a double "z" but he was from a village called Ghazal. A similar rumor belongs to Sheikh Mohammed, but despite this, according to the vast majority of ancient history writers, he was referred to as Ghazzâlî because of his father's profession. His father was gazzal wool spinner. Likewise, Ibn Khallikan sees the reading of al-Ghazali as opposed to common usage. He states that commemorating a person according to his own profession is a tradition in the Khwarazm region where al-Ghazali lives. Finally, a reading in the form of Ghazali has been deemed appropriate for recent writers.⁴

As a result of his life-long work on philosophy, theology, Batiniyya and Sufism, al-Ghazali's conclusion is that he has led to a depression, depression in the world of mind and soul, in his own words. The depression in al-Ghazali's inner world was getting bigger and bigger as he would admit in *al-Munqidh*, it was

¹ Tus region is the famous city of Iran at that time known for its scholars and statesmen.

² "Hujjat al-Islam" means the proof of Islam and the person competent in religious matters.

³ Zayn means ornament. Zayn al-Din means the ornament of religion.

⁴ Mustafa Çağrıç, "Gazzâlî," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1996), XIII, 489.

becoming inextricable. This skepticism, as al-Ghazali said, was present in his own creation. Because his effort and curiosity to seek the truth was a state that started in his youth. With the magic of his fame and reputation, his studies and achievements, this state of depression was postponed for a while, but at the end of his teaching for four years, the effect of Sufism, which had influenced him since his youth, emerged again and strongly. His suspicion arises not only in knowledge problems or metaphysics but also in the field of morality, he said that the world was almost drowned in this situation. Even in the content of his education as an educator, he said that he was dealing with sciences that were useless for the hereafter and devoid of God's approval, and he admitted that his desire for fame and fame came to the fore in this. Even if he wanted to leave Baghdad for this reason and get rid of this fame's eyes and heart.⁵ He said that the struggle of the soul with its reputation and position lasted six months. These crisis situations started in al-Ghazali like Rajab 488 (July 1095) and caused psychological and even physiological problems in him. Doctors who were unable to diagnose their difficulty in lecturing, lack of appetite, indigestion, and weakness because of drug treatment were convinced that the situation was psychological. Finally, al-Ghazali, who won the struggle of his soul, cut off all his relations with Baghdad, gave the remainder of his family's property to the needy, left his madrasa duty to his brother Ahmed al-Ghazali and left Baghdad in Dhul Qadah 488 (November 1095). In the background of his departure from Baghdad, there are also thoughts that the political events of that period were caused by the political events of that period, and there were also those who went further and in fact made their departure from Baghdad a completely political decision. But the reasons for the depression in *al-Munqidh* and the way out, and even the fact that *al-Munqidh* was written during this crisis will clarify us on this issue.

Al-Ghazali, who left Baghdad, went to Damascus and stayed

⁵ Çağrıci, "Gazzâlî," 491-492.

in Damascus for two years. During his stay in Damascus, he retreated to the Umayyad Mosque⁶ to purify, cleanse, cultivate his soul, deep thoughts about his moral and epistemological doubts, and gave his time to *riyadat*.⁷ Then he went to Jerusalem and retreated. During this private period, which al-Ghazali says lasted eleven years, he conveyed many enlightenment and exploration possibilities for him, but the details of this period are not clear. al-Ghazali, who returned to Nishapur again after this inward journey, started teaching again, but after his guidance (in his own words), he described his teaching again: “At that time, I was teaching the science that gave position, now I call on the science that has lost the position”. We understand from these words how vital this change in himself is.⁸

According to al-Ghazali, doubt is the only way to reach the truth. Because those who do not doubt cannot think, the truth cannot be seen without thinking, and those who cannot see the truth remain in heresy. His systematic skepticism first begins with the issue of what existence is. Thus, he entered the philosophy for the first time by questioning the existence and the nature of the object. Exact knowledge should be cleared of suspicion. According to him, mathematical knowledge is precise knowledge. Thus, he first questioned the sources of knowledge, doubted his sense perceptions. It was the reason that brought the wrong knowledge, so how true could the propositions of reason be? al-Ghazali did not see any certainty about the reliability of the a priori and axiomatic knowledge he was questioning during this crisis period. Because evidence is based on evidence, and evidence is knowledge whose accuracy is previously accepted. Therefore, his skepticism, which he constructed with the inference that there is no reliable knowledge, led him to psychological

⁶ “The Umayyad Mosque is the first magnificent example of Islamic religious architecture in Damascus that has survived to this day.” Talip Yazıcı, “Emeviyeye Camii,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1995), XI, 108.

⁷ Notion with the concept of “disciplining the soul” (*riyadat nı-nafs*).

⁸ Çağrı, “Gazzâlî,” 493.

depression. The doubts about knowledge and existence explained in a few sentences here are essentially the result of al-Ghazali's reading and understanding of almost all philosophical sources of his age and the thoughts of the philosophers of the past. This crisis is not an ordinary thinking crisis. It is the whole thought system hitting the wall of philosophy. As he would later say in *al-Munqidh*, he survived thanks to “a thrown light in his heart by God”. Otherwise, the well where he fell is dark, his explanations are insufficient, and his evidence is without any source. After this healing, he accepts the necessary knowledge of the mind with all certainty. In his work *Tahafut al-Falasifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), he criticizes philosophers on the basis of their own evidence.⁹ While understanding this work written by al-Ghazali against philosophers and those who dealt with philosophy, we cannot read this situation apart from the effects of the age al-Ghazali lived. Because there were some groups that were in the period of al-Ghazali and whose purpose used philosophy to attract people to their goals. Although these groups could exist in any age, the philosophy they used in line with their intentions had to be used in the period of al-Ghazali and it had to be shown for what purpose. With their knowledge, al-Ghazali undertook the task of destroying the basic issues of this destructive effect.¹⁰ He showed us what kind of purpose philosophical thinking can be used on this subject, again in his own expressions. There are philosophical methods and logical implications in these narratives.

Al-Ghazali accepts the principles of logic and mathematics, the competence of natural sciences in the experimental field. What he means is that the human mind is incompetent in the metaphysical field and that we need the support of revelation for this field beyond physics. In al-Ghazali, mind indicates four meanings:

⁹ Çağrı, “Gazzâlî,” 493-495.

¹⁰ Hasan Hüseyin Bircan, *İslam Felsefesine Giriş* (İstanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2008), 78-79.

- 1) The ability to acquire theoretical knowledge acquired from birth,
- 2) This ability has reached the level of comprehending the basic principles of logic in the age of appeal,
- 3) All of knowledge from experience,
- 4) The form of this knowledge ability to predict and judge various situations that will arise in the future.

According to him, the source of rational information can work in a way like active mind. It treats the word “nour” in verse 35 of Surah an-Nour¹¹ as a type of knowledge. Here, he connected the intuitive knowledge he handles as “nour” to mind. The first and true “nour”, which is the source of all “nour”, is God.¹²

Al-Mustasfa min Ilm al-Usul (proofs and interpretation methodology in Islamic law), which he devotes entirely to the subject of logic, is an example of this. He seriously criticized the method of theologians and based on Aristotle's logic. He said on this subject: “The accuracy of a knowledge is measured not by its reputation but by its obviousness.” According to him, the science of a person who does not know logic is not trusted. al-Ghazali's most striking criticism is his critique of determinism. The view that creation is renewed every moment and that every created thing is independent from each other did not agree with the determinist view. Indeterminism for morality does not stipulate human will. He argues that his free will is not bound by the law of reason.¹³ Al-Ghazali is the thinker who put the Greek-origin criticism of determinism into its place in the history of Islamic thought. Islamic philosophers accepted determinism by tying the

¹¹ “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. God guides to His light whom He wills. And God presents examples for the people, and God is Knowing of all things.” Surah an-Nour, 35.

¹² Çağrı, “Gazzâli,” 493-495.

¹³ Süleyman Hayri Bolay, *Felsefî Doktrinler Sözlüğü* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1990), 73.

knowledge of God instead of God's free will in nature. However, al-Ghazali accepted this causal link, but denied that it was the result of an inherent necessity of nature. According to him, God is in a state of creation at all times¹⁴ and the causal link formed by this creation is in the hands of God.¹⁵ Malebranche's occasionalism has been the theory that best explains al-Ghazali's causality. Malebranche rejects determinism (necessary causality) and says that God created the cause-effect link in the universe (the view of occasionalism).¹⁶

Although al-Ghazali said in *Tahafut al-Falasifa* that we cannot base theological issues on a rational ground, he criticized Islamic philosophers for strictly adhering to the proving methods such as logic and mathematics and giving judgment on theology with conjecture and guesswork. Because philosophers have been lax in this matter. Concerning the inclusion of metaphysical issues in the Qur'an, al-Ghazali distinguishes between being irrational and being above the ration. The importance of this distinction stems from the fact that when dealing with metaphysical issues, we resort to our minds again. A rational reading of the Quran is quite possible for al-Ghazali. The rationality here is not necessity but admissibility. Because of these thoughts of al-Ghazali, it is said that although he was interested in Sufism, he never broke with philosophy and even built his Sufism on a philosophical ground.¹⁷ Reynold A. Nicholson emphasizes the great importance of al-Ghazali in the development of Sufi thought in his book titled *The Sufis of Islam*. Because he blended theosophy as rationally.¹⁸

Al-Ghazali combined traditionalist morality based on law

¹⁴ Surah ar-Rahman, 29: (كل يوم هو في شأن) "Every day He is at some task."

¹⁵ Çağrı, "Gazzâlî," 498.

¹⁶ Muharrem Şahiner, "Gâzzâlî'nin Nedensellik Anlayışı İle Malebranche'in Okazyonalizminin Karşılaştırılması," *Kilis 7 Aralık Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 7 (2014), 25.

¹⁷ Çağrı, "Gazzâlî," 498-500.

¹⁸ Reynold D. Nicholson, *İslam Sufileri*, Tr. trans. Mehmet Dağ and Kemal Işık (İstanbul: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1978), 25.

with sufistic morality. He gave importance to the problems of human value and nature. The ultimate goal of knowledge and the ultimate is knowledge of God. al-Ghazali attributes the honor and virtue of man to knowing God, which distinguishes himself from other creatures. In order to reach knowledge of God, a person must first know himself, get to know himself and constantly purify himself.¹⁹ al-Ghazali in *Ihya'i 'Ulum ad-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) stated that these four concepts will have the same psychological, moral and epistemological meanings in the part of his work "Acaibu'l Kalb", where he describes the nature of human, the meaning of the soul, and the relationship between heart, soul and mind. We can say that he is a dualist, considering that he treats the body together with the soul as a part of being and in a realm specific to humanity, and that the body must be valued in life.²⁰

In the essence of al-Ghazali's idea of *Ma'rifatullah* (knowledge of God) we see that the limits of the human mind become clear. Accordingly, reaching an unlimited God from a limited mind cannot be within the limits of rational mind. *Ma'rifatullah* is the highest ideal, and every heart can be gifted within its own capacity.²¹

Personal Religious Experience in *al-Munqidh min ad-Dalal* (From Heretics to Guidance)

Al-Ghazali's *al-Munqidh min ad-Dalal* consists of six chapters. In this study, "inner struggle", "Mysticism is Known by Living" and "What I Learned in Seclusion" under the heading "Sufism Way", which are four chapters where he gives information about his personal religious experience, are the sections where the article focuses.

At the entrance of *al-Munqidh* begins with praise to God,

¹⁹ Bolay, *Aristo Metafiziği ile Gazzâli Metafiziğinin Karşılaştırılması* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 2005), 208.

²⁰ Çağrı, "Gazzâli," 500-501.

²¹ Bedriye Reis, "Gazzâlî'ye Göre Bir Bilgi Kaynağı Olarak Marifet," *Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 9 (2017), 36-37.

blessings and supporting to our Prophet and especially to all his family and friends who have been guided by error. The point of interest here is that he emphasized that all of his family and friends, including the our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon Him), were in error before and that he was guided later. We must understand this issue in the light of the seventh verse of Surah of ad-Duha. The verse says: “Did He not find you unguided then guided you?”²² pass in the form. The dedication here, “Did not he find you in error and guide you?” It is a valid message for Muhammad and all humanity afterwards. Therefore, the fact that a prophet is in error can be read as not knowing what the absolute right or the absolute wrong is. Just as al-Ghazali cannot get out of error when he searches for the absolute right and the absolute wrong under kalam, philosophy and Batiniyya.²³ Because any force that can show us absolute truth must be the source of absolute truth. He is God.²⁴

Al-Ghazali tells him the stages he has gone through to those who want him to find the al-Haqq (God) and reveal it and tell him about his troubles and troubles and how he reached a solid belief from these troubles. First of all, he made use of the science of theology, followed by his studies in Batiniyya, then philosophy and finally explains that he likes the Sufism way. While making these explanations, he mentions that every person will think that his own way is right, but as in the Surah of al-Mu'minun,²⁵ the ways of others except for a few are not correct. While making these explanations, he mentions that every person will think that his own way is right, but as in the Surah of the Believer, the ways of others except for a few are not correct. He then attempts to question his own questioning, including whether all the information that came to him from his parents since his childhood is

²² Surah ad-Duha, 7.

²³ Gazālī, *El-Münkız Mine'd-Dalal (Dalaletten Hidayete)*, Tr. trans. Onur Şenyurt (İstanbul: Ehil Yayınları, 2017), 22.

²⁴ Gazālī, *El-Münkız Mine'd-Dalal*, 24.

²⁵ “But the people divided their religion among them into sects - each faction, in what it has, rejoicing.” Surah al-Mu'minun, 53.

correct. This is, “Every child who is born is born with a sound nature;[1] it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian.” He does it based on his hadith²⁶.

The truth of knowledge is to know *ilm al-yaqin* (exact knowledge). *ilm al-yaqin* is knowledge that is clear enough to leave no doubt about it. However, al-Ghazali saw that there was no knowledge he could be so sure of, after his reviews in theology, *Batiniyya* and philosophy literature. As a result, we have not come across any knowledge that can be obtained from other sources other than the exact knowledge obtained through the sense organs of knowledge and through the principles of compulsory reason. Later, when he was confronted with the opposite evidence in his query about the reliability of this knowledge, they also lost their reliability. He has not survived this crisis of suspicion by his inquiries and reading, nor by his logical and consistent answers. Just in his own words, “I was saved thanks to a “*nour*” (light) that God almighty poured into my heart.” As a source of knowledge, “*nour*” is the key to many knowledge gates. Whoever thinks that the knowledge to be reached about the truth can only be reached by means of reason, logic, science and other independent knowledge, he will narrow and limit the vast mercy of God.²⁷

As M. Hamdi Yazır says in the preface of *Metâlib ve Mezâhib* (translation of *Histoire de la Philosophie: Les Problèmes et les Écoles*): “If you had not brought this apparent separation to the inner reunion, I would not see me, I would not perceive you”.²⁸ Just like M. Hamdi Yazır's words, al-Ghazali attributes the “*nour*” (light) that descends to his heart to the will of God in explaining his salvation from the turning point in his life.

In response to the question of what kind of light is this light

²⁶ Buhari, “Cenaiz,” 80, 93; Müslim, “Kader,” 22, (2658); Muvatta, “Cenaiz,” 52, (1, 241); Tirmizi, “Kader,” 5, (2139); Ebu Davud, “Sünnet,” 18, (4714).

²⁷ Gazâlî, *El-Münkız Mine'd-Dalal*, 26-31.

²⁸ M. Hamdi Yazır, “Dibâce (Önsöz),” Paul Janet and Gabriel Séailles, *Metâlib ve Mezâhib: Metafizik ve İlahiyât*, Tr. trans. M. Hamdi Yazır (İstanbul: Eser Neşriyat, 1978), xxiii.

mentioned by al-Ghazali, Surah al-An'am, 125 is similar to the act of opening his heart: "God will open the hearts of whomever He wants to guide to Islam". In addition, al-Ghazali discussed the meaning of opening one's heart mentioned in this verse; He explains with the hadith, "It is a light that God Almighty poured into the heart." In response to the question of what kind of light is this light mentioned by al-Ghazali, Surah al-An'am, 125 is similar to the act of opening his heart: "God opens his heart to Islam whoever he wants to guide". In addition, al-Ghazali discussed the meaning of opening one's heart mentioned in this verse; He explains with the hadith, "It is a light that God Almighty poured into the heart." In the continuation of the hadith, when the Companions asked about the sign of this light, he said the hadith "to turn to the eternal home (the hereafter) by avoiding the land of deception (the world)". This "nour" is where the discovery of the truth is revealed for al-Ghazali.²⁹

Until the *Way of Sufism*, the fourth chapter of *al-Munqidh*, al-Ghazali answered those who called him skeptical and those who left him under suspicion that he denied the sciences. He classified those who seek the truth as theologians, Batiniyya, philosophers and Sufis. The aims pursued by these classes put forward their thesis. He explained in detail and with examples that some of these theses are correct, some lead to wrong and some are wrong.³⁰ Moreover, he evaluated this criticism with modesty, for example, about the science of Kalam, although he was not satisfied with this knowledge, it does not mean that others would not be satisfied either.³¹ He says that it is only possible to deny or approve a thought by understanding it, to grasp its essence and to know its essence, otherwise it is no different than throwing stones in the dark.³²

There are arguments of Swinburne (1979), Alston (1991) and

²⁹ Gazālī, *El-Münkız Mine'd-Dalal*, 32.

³⁰ Gazālī, *El-Münkız Mine'd-Dalal*, 32-37.

³¹ Gazālī, *El-Münkız Mine'd-Dalal*, 38.

³² Gazālī, *El-Münkız Mine'd-Dalal*, 40.

Plantinga (1981, 2000) regarding the epistemological possibility of personal religious experience.³³ However, the aim of the article is not to prove or criticize, but to examine the personal dimension of religious experience in al-Ghazali.

Spiritual Awareness

In the introduction of al-Ghazali's *Kimya-i Saadat* (Alchemy of Eternal Bliss), the 53rd verse of Surah al-Fussilat³⁴, under the title "Knowing Your Own Truth": "We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness? " He points out that knowing God is through knowing yourself. There is nothing closer to man in this world than his own soul.³⁵ With their own pain, joy, sadness and enthusiasm, they only affect and activate the person in their own soul. A person who does not feel pain does not take his hand from fire. People who believe they are happy always try to continue living in that state. It is the testimony of one's own soul but that deeply affects man. Hearing from others will never be the same as your own experience. Who could be happier and higher than the man who experiences his Creator in a state in his soul?

According to al-Ghazali, the real happiness (happiness in the hereafter) is achieved by saving from the will of piety and taqwa.³⁶ These are realized by moving away from the life of the

³³ Mark Webb, "Religious Experience," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2017 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/religious-experience>.

³⁴ Surah al-Fussilat, 53 (Muhammed Esed).

³⁵ Gazâlî, *Kimya-i Saadet*, Tr. trans. Ali Arslan (İstanbul: Merve Yayınları, 2000), 14.

³⁶ Taqwa is God-consciousness or God-fearing piety. Also rendered as "God-fearing," "right conduct," "virtue," "wariness." Taqwa and its derivatives appear more than 250 times in the Quran; Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi (d. 1979) identified taqwa as the basic Islamic principle of God-consciousness, together with brotherhood, equality, fairness, and justice, on which the true Islamic society is established. Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) systematically elaborated the significance of taqwa in his Quranic commentary, which is characterized by an emphasis

world, which he calls the land of pride, connecting to the life of the hereafter, and turning to God with all his existence. The heart must cut itself off from the world. The heart should avoid the world, but the authority, the property, and the efforts that will keep man from high degrees. After these definitions, al-Ghazali explains his situation. When he looks at his own situation, he says that the occupations of the worldly life surround him from all sides. He explains that the best thing in his life accounting is to teach, and that he is full of information that is not useful for the hereafter. He thinks even more clearly about his confession and begins to question his own intentions. He says that his intention is not only for the consent of God, but that he has a sense of authority and fame, and that if he does not improve his situation, he is about to fall into the fire. In this case, al-Ghazali, who struggled with his soul, thought about leaving Baghdad to get rid of this situation, and his soul kept him and gave up his decision.

As a result of this struggle, the voice of his faith asks him, if you do not free him from these bonds that bind him to the world today, when will you save him? On the other hand, his soul was suggesting that this state of mind was temporary and that he would never find it again if he left this position and regular life and returned. This mood continues for six months in al-Ghazali. So much so that he cannot teach. Sorrow falls in his heart because of not being able to teach. It cannot digest food and has stomach problems. Physicians cannot get results from medication. He is told that “medicines will not make a profit unless this sadness in his heart is eliminated.” al-Ghazali, who falls into such a desperate situation, takes refuge in God. He prays. God makes it easy for him to want to move away from worldly things.³⁷ He separates the alimony of his family and leaves Baghdad. Then, in his two years of Damascus life, he was interested in cleansing his

on political activism. Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988) identified it as “perhaps the most important single concept in the Quran,” an inner vision that helps humans overcome their weaknesses. *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2340>.

³⁷ Gazālī, *El-Mūnkız Mine'd Dalal*, 97-101.

heart with dhikrullah, correcting his morality, cleansing his soul from bad habits.³⁸ He does these as he learned from Sufism books. As a requirement of what he learned, he preferred to live separately from people and to be obedient. He prefers to be alone and to cleanse his heart with dhikr. He prefers to be separated from people for about ten years and to cleanse his heart with the help of God and to contemplate. During this ten-year period, a lot of knowledge is opened to him. In this process, he understands that Sufis are the ones who find the way to God. Even if the sciences of the scholars are brought together, they cannot comprehend these situations and experience this knowledge. Sufism is a process that begins by cleansing the heart with the dhikr and then extends to *Fana Fillah* (annihilation in God), but the maqam *Fana Fillah* is not the end of the road, but the courtyard between the main door and the outer door of the house.³⁹

Al-Ghazali wrote his work *Ihya'i 'Ulum ad-Din* as a product of his efforts to reconcile traditional Islamic beliefs with Sufism. *Fana Fillah* thought has tended to be interpreted as “closeness” (qurb) in order to make it more acceptable to the traditional Islamic belief that the self-destruction of Sufis in God.⁴⁰

Those who get closer to God and enter different moods may witness some errors such as hulul, ittihad and wusul. Not trying to explain what happened by a person in this state only tells that they do not remember, they should be thought well and should not be asked anything. The situations of our Prophet (pbuh) were similar. He would go to Hira, contemplate and worship like that.

³⁸ Some other mysticism issues such as tawhid, waḥdat al-wujud, prophethood, guardianship, ma'rifah, muhabbah, love, repentance, dhikr, zuhd, taqwa, nafs, soul, heart, sayr wa suluk, patience, thank, qurb, yaqin. Hüseyin Kurt, “Elmalı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır'ın Tasavvuf Anlayışı,” *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, vol. 51, no. 3 (2015), 199.

³⁹ Gazâlî, *El-Münkız Mine'd Dalal*, 101-105.

⁴⁰ Michael E. Marmura, “Ghazâlî,” Tr. trans. M. Cüneyt Kaya, *İslam Felsefesine Giriş*, eds. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (İstanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2008), 154.

Whoever wants to know this state must live.⁴¹ Saying that this state gave him a lot of knowledge about understanding the institution of prophethood, al-Ghazali then gave information about prophethood. In the last chapter of *al-Munqidh*, he tells about what he lived in the seclusion when he returned to teaching again. During this period when he lives in seclusion away from people, he becomes aware that human beings are composed of body and heart (soul). The heart is the place of Ma'rifatullah.⁴² He feels his knowledge only in his heart (soul). He becomes acquainted with this knowledge when he is sometimes in a state of submission, sometimes as a rational evidence, and sometimes from strong faith. The soul, which he calls the human heart, can get sick, delusional, and drag people to wrong places just like a sick body. The antidote to these heart diseases is to know God. Just as we are looking for instant remedies and medicines for our body ailments, we should obtain treatment methods for our soul, and we should take care of this discomfort.

Al-Ghazali tells us that the cure for various worldly ailments that bore our souls and overwhelm us can be healed by embracing the Sunnah of the Prophet. Thus, the remedy for heart diseases is worship.⁴³ Human mind may not be able to reach the essence of the information brought by the prophethood and may not be able to see the wisdom in it. The things the prophets commanded are themselves beautiful. They provide us with benefits in the world and the hereafter. The orders of the Prophet are aimed at protecting the life, property, and health of a person. They strengthen the ties that connect the human heart to God.⁴⁴

Al-Ghazali's experiences in reaching belief can be analyzed in three parts. The knowledge he learned from the books and the traces left by that knowledge. The other is that the dreams and

⁴¹ Gazālī, *El-Münkız Mine'd Dalal*, 101-108.

⁴² Gazālī, *El-Münkız Mine'd Dalal*, 121-122.

⁴³ Gazālī, *El-Münkız Mine'd Dalal*, 123.

⁴⁴ Muhammed Abduh, *Tevhid Risalesi*, Tr. trans. Sabri Hizmetli (Ankara: Fecr Yayınları, 1986), 131.

dreams he saw sometimes overlap with events, and finally, the effects of dhikr and worship on his life. For example, eating away from animal foods or fasting can cause the mind to work in different dimensions.⁴⁵

Religion is not just a doctrine of going towards good in the face of evil or escaping from wrong to right. Religion should not be perceived as such a moral problem-solving authority. This would be to belittle the place and meaning of man in religion. The divine consciousness of man reveals eternal beauty. This beauty leads people to divine flavors that man has never tasted before. It returns to human roots by means of a state of consciousness directed towards Him with a will focused on God. Spiritual transformation is perfection with love.⁴⁶ This transformation is progressed by talking to God without intermediaries (prayer) and dhikr (remembrance).

Al-Ghazali thinks that it would not be right to withdraw to seclusion all his life. Because people have questions and doubts about their faith. It sees itself obliged to dispel these doubts. This is a debt and al-Ghazali must fulfill this debt. He thinks that a life away from people for life will not save him. Now hearts are sick, even doctors are sick. The people are being driven wrong and al-Ghazali thinks that seclusion cannot cope with this job, despite seeing so much turmoil.⁴⁷ He goes back to teaching again. But this return does not mean going back to the past, with a stronger faith and being more aware of what and why you are telling, it is for a purpose.

The issue of fiqh of priorities correctly explains the return of al-Ghazali to a purpose he regards as more sacred. Fiqh of priorities is that there is a priority and a later order among the principles of our religion. Consistent choices on “amr bi al-ma'ruf wa

⁴⁵ İbrahim Ağâh Çubukçu, *Gazâlî ve Şüphecilik* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1964), 86.

⁴⁶ Rabia Christine Brodbeck, *Hazreti İnsan*, Tr. trans. Ömer Mansur Çolakoğlu (İstanbul: Sufi Kitap, 2007), 195-207.

⁴⁷ Gazâlî, *El-Münkız Mine'd Dalal*, 130.

nahy an al-munkar (commanding good, and prohibiting evil) are vitally important.⁴⁸ Today, what Muslim nations need most is to be armed with the knowledge of the age and not to remain unaware of this situation. God requires the message of Islam, to which he completes his blessing, not to be dependent on anyone about the tools of the age. The weapon of this age may be technology or science.⁴⁹ The philosophy of al-Ghazali's life could be explained to the public only by learning their weapons and directing them to them, the thought of making weapons for himself and attracting people to his view. al-Ghazali, who attaches importance to the fiqh of priorities, criticized the Muslim community for being negligent in this regard.⁵⁰

This negligence is astonished in al-Ghazali, the subject of those who both have willpower and do not take the necessary knowledge. He explains his astonishment and rebellion on this issue with the following couplets:

If man does not know his Creator
 How he carries the genus name, wonder
 Waiting a change in nature is impossible
 Lion roars, dog barks, very natural⁵¹

There is the testament of al-Ghazali in his *Ihya' Ulum ad-Din*. The words in the introduction of the testament guide and determine the direction for all researchers on what they need to research. The philosopher, who does not set a purpose for his research, subject, or examination, is on his way to a place where the fate of a planet that has lost its satellite is not clear, but whose position is not visible at all. al-Ghazali states the following on the subject: "Your look at the subject you are discussing should be directed at God, for God and with God. Because if you

⁴⁸ Yusuf Karadâvî, *Öncelikler Fıkhı*, Tr. trans. Abdullah Kahraman (İstanbul: Nida Yayınları, 2017), 13.

⁴⁹ Karadâvî, *Öncelikler Fıkhı*, 138.

⁵⁰ Karadâvî, *Öncelikler Fıkhı*, 286.

⁵¹ Gazzâlî, "Gazzâlî'nin Vasiyeti," Tr. trans. Mahmut Kaya, *İslam Filozoflarından Felsefe Metinleri* (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2010), 412.

do not investigate and examine to God, He will leave you with yourself or with what you turn to other than Him.”⁵²

Relationship between Clergy and Sufism

The word “رهب” (r-h-b) is used in the Qur'an to mean awe, fear. The meaning of the word priest is like the word Muttaqi (who has taqwa). It means those who fear God and feel awe of Him. Throughout the historical process, the concept of clergy has experienced a shift in meaning and it has been perceived as a lifestyle that is completely distant from people and withdrawal. The Prophet (pbuh) exalted Muttaqi and encouraged his Companions to perform obligatory external other worship as much as they could. However, he said that subjects such as being completely isolated from society and living in a state of continuous seclusion and considering the foods that God regarded as halal for himself as haram are not in Islam.⁵³

In ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, Anatolia, Rome, India and China, priesthood and monasticism have always existed under different names. Topics in priesthood and monasticism are submission, humility, suffering, poverty, withdrawal, single life, chastity, conviction, contemplation, self-discipline, prayer, scripture reading.⁵⁴

According to al-Ghazali, the most valuable deed in Sufism is to take the soul, to keep it away from bad morals and to empty it from everything except God, to fill it with dhikrullah.⁵⁵ According to him, Sufism is known by living not by learning. Knowing the truth conditions and reasons of life can only be achieved by leaving the pleasure and joy of life and killing the self-pleasures and thus living the life of taqwa.⁵⁶ Along with this process, al-Ghazali

⁵² Gazâlî, “Gazzâlî'nin Vasiyeti,” 410.

⁵³ Ahmet Cahid Haksever, “‘Ruhbanlık’ Kavramındaki Anlam Kayması ve Tasavvufî İlişkilendirilmesi Üzerine Bazı Değerlendirmeler,” *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 23 (2013), 27-28.

⁵⁴ Süleyman Uludağ, “Ruhbanlık ve Tasavvuf,” *Tasavvuf İlmi ve Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 13 (2004), 19.

⁵⁵ Gazâlî, *El-Münkız Mine'd Dalal*, 95.

⁵⁶ Gazâlî, *El-Münkız Mine'd Dalal*, 96-97.

reconstructed the epistemological truth with a view that observes its limits in matters concerning the mind, and by explaining it within reason in matters beyond the limits of the mind.⁵⁷

Love for the world is inconvenient for al-Ghazali. The beauties of the hereafter should be preferred to the temporary pleasures of the world. The love of the world can go to the heart to associate with God. In terms of not affecting the heart deeply, he views the worldly life with good eyes, but this should not cause clergy. Since the criterion will be between ifrat and tafrit (excess) in all behaviors, balance is essential in this matter. al-Ghazali's idea of abandoning world affairs is like that of Hasan al-Basri:

Because in his thought of revival based on the hereafter, only the interest side of the world is denied. According to him, the dirty and sinful world is the world that has been transferred from the substance of things to the inner realm of the person. The world is the power that tries to dominate one's inner world as a tool of arrogance, pride and domination. It is okay to have an "outside" relationship with him. What Ghazali calls "the world" consists of the exuberance of all feelings, desires, aspirations and ambitions coming out of an abstract state in a place and "going out" into body and body.⁵⁸

Al-Ghazali's Rational Theosophy and the Relationship of Sufism

The concept of theosophy is a mystical, religious and philosophical concept that can be traced back to the Ancient Age. With this comprehensive definition of the concept of theosophy, it is possible to talk about Western theosophy, Indian theosophy and even Islamic theosophy. However, it can be said that the concept of theosophy gained a different understanding and dimension with the Theosophical Community of which Helena Petrovna

⁵⁷ Sobhi Rayan, "Gazzālī'nin Şüphe Metodu," Tr. trans. Fatmanur Ceran, *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 34 (2015), 237.

⁵⁸ Mehmet Zeki İşcan, "Gazzālī'nin İhyâ ve İslah Düşüncesine Genel Bir Bakış," *Diyanet İlmî Dergi* 47, no. 3 (2011), 122.

Blavatsky was the leader. The word theosophy consists of the Greek words “Theos” (God) and “sophia” (knowledge, wisdom). In this sense, divine knowledge can be used in the sense of divine wisdom and genius. From a religious point of view, the use of the term is experience, transcendent, mystical, and direct knowledge of God. It is the theosophist who grasps this divine transcendent, secret, and experiential knowledge.⁵⁹

The importance of the concept of theosophy stems from the fact that it integrates the knowledge from many religions, teachings and beliefs within the concept of “theosophy” and creates a mystical theology. In this sense, understanding its relationship with Sufism and examining the concept's place in its inclusiveness will expand our field of view on Sufism.

Rational theosophy means that the unclear knowledge of God can be grasped by reason. al-Ghazali does not take good care of a permanent asceticism in social life, a way of life that is completely distant from people. Just as in the Theosophical Community, the understanding of asceticism thinks that it is right for people to finally get involved in social life, just like al-Ghazali's understanding of Sufism. Bodily ordeals are absolutely useless for spiritual or theosophical progress.⁶⁰

The American diplomat Alexander Russell Webb (1846-1916), who first met Theosophy and then chose Islam, was a member of the Theosophical Community. After leaving Christianity and living as an atheist for ten years, he adopted the teachings of Buddhism. But he does not stop researching and thinking and chooses Islam. He does not cut his interest in theosophy after becoming a Muslim.⁶¹

For al-Ghazali, the essence of Sufism is to confess the one-

⁵⁹ Ali Gül, *Senkretik Bir Oluşum Olarak Teosofi Cemiyeti ve XX. Yüzyıl Kültürel Yapıları Üzerindeki Etkisi*, Doktora Tezi (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2015), 10-11.

⁶⁰ Gül, *Senkretik Bir Oluşum Olarak Teosofi Cemiyeti ve XX. Yüzyıl Kültürel Yapıları Üzerindeki Etkisi*, 122.

⁶¹ Gül, *Senkretik Bir Oluşum Olarak Teosofi Cemiyeti ve XX. Yüzyıl Kültürel Yapıları Üzerindeki Etkisi*, 263.

ness of God. The bond established with God at all stages and connecting directly to God by not interfering with them is just to show the unity of God through the state. An experience that a person can understand only means that God and the servant are together without intermediaries. The act of being alone with God and thinking only about Him, which is a pure form of worship in terms of tawhid⁶², is the act of Islam's "no god but God" has turned into worship.

Conclusion

The conclusion that al-Ghazali has reached as a result of his work on philosophy, theology, Batiniyya and Sufism throughout his life is that he created a crisis in the world of mind and spirit. al-Ghazali, who left the place where he lived after this crisis reached serious levels, thinks that he found the right way with Sufism. Because he got rid of this crisis only by a "nour" thrown into his heart at the will of God. He even described his recovery from the crisis and returning to the place where he lived again: "At that time, I was teaching the science that gave position, now I am calling on the science that lost the position".

According to al-Ghazali, doubt is the only way to reach the truth. Because those who do not doubt cannot think, the facts cannot be seen without thinking, and those who cannot see the truth remain in heresy. al-Ghazali did not see any certainty about the reliability of a prioric and axiomatic knowledge he was questioning during this crisis period. Evidence-based evidence is preconceived knowledge, so there is no reliable knowledge, which drove him into a crisis. After getting rid of the crisis, he again accepts the competence of logic, mathematics and natural principles, especially the accuracy of aprioric knowledge.

⁶² Tawhid is the defining doctrine of Islam. It declares absolute monotheism – the unity and uniqueness of God as creator and sustainer of the universe. Used by Islamic reformers and activists as an organizing principle for human society and the basis of religious knowledge, history, metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics, as well as social, economic, and world order. *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2356>.

Al-Ghazali combined Aristotelian logic and theological method and adapted Aristotle's logic to Islamic sciences for the first time. His work on this subject is *al-Mustasfa* (On Legal Theory of Muslim Jurisprudence), which contains all the principles of logic.

Al-Ghazali is an indeterminist; determinist Islamic philosophers relate the occurrences in nature to His knowledge instead of God's free will. al-Ghazali accepts this causal link but denies that it is the result of an inherent necessity of nature. According to him, God is always in a state of creation and the causal link formed by this creation is in the hands of God. In this direction, Malebranche's occasionalism and al-Ghazali's causality are similar.

When we compare the concept of theosophy, which is similar to the Ma'rifatullah concept but used in a more general sense, with the knowledge of al-Ghazali's Ma'rifatullah, which does not belong to a religion but originates from religion, we see that al-Ghazali unites theosophy within the rational field and within rational limits.

Al-Ghazali thinks that it would not be right to withdraw from seclusion all his life. It compares the benefit for humanity of being in the seclusion for a whole life and the benefit for humanity of being useful to people. Priorities in Islam leave the seclusion and return to the profession of teaching, as the more useful is preferred to the less useful, as per fiqh.

In al-Ghazali, the place where knowledge is opened to him and where the truth will be discovered is the "nour" where he gets rid of the crisis. It emphasizes the importance of personal religious experience here. This is not a topic or situation that can be explained to people. It is a situation that a person can achieve only by his own will, by wanting to live and feel. However, he emphasized that this is again in the hands of God and with His will. The happiness of man in this world is attaining this "nour", reaching the knowledge of God (Ma'rifatullah) and experiencing God in this way.

While examining the subject of clergy and mysticism, it has become difficult to clarify the subject thanks to the meanings of the concepts and the change of meaning that occurred in the historical process. If we understand the seclusion of the clergy as a life spent in a state of pain and suffering, by getting away from people, cutting without eating, drinking, this will not be a suitable state for Islam. Because, although there is a tendency towards obligatory external other worship to the extent that man can afford it in Islam, for example, this happens in limited days, such as the worship of faith, it has not turned into a lifestyle that encompasses a whole life. Because we do not witness such an example in the life of our Prophet (pbuh). In addition, it is not suitable for Islam to consider and ban foods that God regards as halal. When we look at the practice of Sufism in al-Ghazali's life, his consensus has made a rational progress with the fiqh of priorities and has been included in social life thinking that his profession will be more beneficial for people. But this seclusion is within the human being and only then should it be in social life, erasing the love of the world from his heart. According to him, just as we seek remedies for our bodily ailments, we should seek remedies for our soul before it is too late and purify it.

For al-Ghazali, the essence of Sufism is the bringing of the unity of God to life through a state. One can only question one's own heart and decide how much love of the world is taken. It is necessary to withdraw these heart movements from the world and its love, to cleanse them from all bad conditions and to fill them with God.

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