

# *Mystics Magazine*

*Islamic Mystical Theology*

Conversations with Imam Ghazzali

Compiled by Marilyn Hughes

*The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation!*

**[www.outofbodytravel.org](http://www.outofbodytravel.org)**



Imam Ghazzali



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# *Mystics Magazine*

*Islamic Mystical Theology*  
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 By Marilyn Hughes

*Mystics Magazine ventures to take on the issues of Mystical Theology in Different Faiths and World Religions in a new and unique way. It is the purpose of each issue of the magazine to embrace the personal dialogue and teachings of a great Master of the Mystical Path within that religion and allow them to speak of their personal experience and conclusions based on their years of inquiry into the supersensual world.*

*We've utilized many texts which involve actual dialogue between the Great Mystics and others wherein they explain important aspects and understanding of the mystical theology (and sometimes moral theology) of their own unique religious path.*

*The Author does not necessarily agree with all views presented, but wishes to present the similarities and differences between some of the Great Mystics the world over. In doing so, we can see better where we agree and where we disagree. We can also pick up points from other paths that may enhance our own.*

*Look upon this journey into Mystics Magazine as an opportunity to discern for yourself as to how these things may be able to help you in your own spiritual journey.*

*This is an opportunity to have a conversation with some of the greatest mystical minds in history. So consider listening in . . .*

# Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory

*By Duncan B. MacDonald, 1903*

## CHAPTER IV

Al-Ghazzali, his life, times, and work; Sufiism formally accepted into Islam.

WITH the time came the man. He was al-Ghazzali, the greatest, certainly the most sympathetic figure in the history of Islam, and the only teacher of the after generations ever put by a Muslim on a level with the four great Imams. The equal of Augustine in philosophical and theological importance, by his side the Aristotelian philosophers of Islam, Ibn Rushd and all the rest, seem beggarly compilers and scholiasts. Only al-Farabi, and that in virtue of his mysticism, approaches him. In his own person he took up the life of his time on all its sides and with it all its problems. He lived through them all and drew his theology from his experience. Systems and classifications, words and arguments about words, he swept away; the facts of life as he had known them in his own soul he grasped. When his work was done the revelation of the mystic (*kashf*) was not only a full part but the basal part in the structure of Muslim theology. That basis, in spite, or rather on account of the work of the

mutakallims had previously been lacking. Such a scepticism as their atomic system had practically amounted to, could disprove much but could prove little. If all the categories but substance and quality are mere subjectivities, existing in the mind only, what can we know of things? An ultra-rational basis had to be found and it was found in the ecstasy of the Sufis. But al-Ghazzali brought another element into fuller and more effective working. With him passes away the old-fashioned kalam, a thing of shreds and patches, scraps of metaphysics and logic snatched up for a moment of need, without grasp of the full sweep of philosophy, and incapable, in the long run, of meeting it. Even its atomic system is a philosophy of amateurs, with all their fantastic one-sidedness, their vigor and rigor. But al-Ghazzali was no amateur. His knowledge and grasp of the problems and objects of philosophy were truer and more vital than in any other Muslim up to his time--perhaps after it, too. Islam has not fully understood him any more than Christendom fully understood Augustine, but until long after him the horizon of Muslims was wider and their air clearer for his work. Then came a new scholasticism, reigning to this day.

So much by way of preface. We must now give some account of the life and experiences, the ideas and sensations, of this great leader and reformer. For his life and his work were one. Everything that he thought and wrote came with the weight and reality of personal experience. He recognized this connection himself, and has left us a book--the *Munqidh min ad-*

*dalal*, "Rescuer from Error"--almost unique in Islam, which, in the form of an apology for the faith, is really an *Apologia pro vita sua*. This book is our main source for what follows.

Al-Ghazzali was born at Tus in 450. He lost his father when young and was educated and brought up by a trusted Sufi friend. He early turned to the study of theology and canon law, but, as he himself confesses, it was only because they promised wealth and reputation. Very early he broke away from *taqlid*, simple acceptance of religious truth on authority, and he began to investigate theological differences before he was twenty. His studies were of the broadest, embracing canon law, theology, dialectic, science, philosophy, logic and the doctrines and practices of the Sufis. It was a Sufi atmosphere in which he moved, but their religious fervors do not seem to have laid hold of him. Pride in his own intellectual powers, ambition and contempt for others of less ability mastered him. The latter part of his life as a student was spent at Naysabur as pupil and assistant of the Imam al-Haramayn. Through the Imam he stood in the apostolic succession of Ash'arite teachers, being the fourth from al-Ash'ari himself. There he remained till the death of the Imam in 478, when he went out to seek his fortune and found it with the great wazir, Nizam al-Mulk. By him al-Ghazzali was appointed, in 484, to teach in the Nizamite Academy at Baghdad. There he had the greatest success as a teacher and consulting lawyer, and his worldly hopes seemed safe. But suddenly he was struck down by

mysterious disease. His speech became hampered; his appetite and digestion failed. His physicians gave him up; his malady, they said, was mental and could only be mentally treated. His only hope lay in peace of mind. Then he suddenly quitted Baghdad, in 488, ostensibly on pilgrimage to Mecca. This flight, for it was so in effect, of al-Ghazzali was unintelligible to the theologians of the time; since that time it has marked the greatest epoch in the church of Islam after the return of al-Ash'ari.

That it should be unintelligible was natural. No cause could be seen on the surface, except some possible political complications; the cause in reality lay in al-Ghazzali's mind and conscience. He was wandering in the labyrinth of his time. From his youth he had been a sceptical, ambitious student, playing with religious influences yet unaffected by them. But the hollowness of his life was ever present with him and pressing upon him. Like some with us, he sought to be converted and could not bring it to pass. His religious beliefs gradually gave way and fell from him, piece by piece.

At last, the strain became too great and at the court of Nizam al-Mulk he touched for two months the depths of absolute scepticism. He doubted the evidence of the senses; he could see plainly that they often deceived. No eye could perceive the movement of a shadow, but still the shadow moved; a gold piece would cover any star, but a star was a world larger than the earth. He doubted even the primary ideas of

the mind. Is ten more than three? Can a thing be and not be? Perhaps; he could not tell. His senses deceived him, why not his mind? May there not be something behind the mind and transcending it, which would show the falsity of its convictions even as the mind showed the falsity of the information given by the senses? May not the dreams of the Sufis be true, and their revelations in ecstasy the only real guides? When we awake in death, may it not be into a true but different existence? All this--perhaps. And so he wandered for two months. He saw clearly that no reasoning could help him here; he had no ideas on which he could depend, from which he could begin. But the mercy of God is great; He sends His light to whom He wills, a light that flows in, and is given by no reasoning. By it al-Ghazzali was saved; he regained the power to think, and the task which he now set before him was to use this power to guide himself to truth.

When he looked around, he saw that those who gave themselves to the search for truth might be divided into four groups. There were the scholastic theologians, who were much like the theologians of all times and faiths. Second, there were the Ta'limites, who held that to reach truth one must have an infallible living teacher, and that there was such a teacher. Third, there were the followers of philosophy, basing on logical and rational proofs. Fourth, there were the Sufis, who held that they, the chosen of God, could reach knowledge of Him directly in ecstasy. With all these he had, of course,

been acquainted to a greater or less degree; but now he settled down to examine them one by one, and find which would lead him to a certainty to which he could hold, whatever might come. He felt that he could not go back to the unconscious faith of his childhood; *that* nothing could restore. All his mental being must be made over before he could find rest. He began with scholastic theology, but found no help there. Grant the theologians their premises and they could argue; deny them and there was no common ground on which to meet. Their science had been founded by al-Ash'ari to meet the Mu'tazilites; it had done that victoriously, but could do no more. They could hold the faith against heretics, expose their inconsistencies; against the sceptic they availed nothing. It is true that they had attempted to go further back and meet the students of philosophy on their own ground; to deal with substances and attributes and first principles generally; but their efforts had been fruitless. They lacked the necessary knowledge of the subject, had no scientific basis, and were constrained eventually to fall back on authority. After study of them and their methods it became clear to al-Ghazzali that the remedy for his ailment was not in scholastic theology.

Then he turned to philosophy. He had seen already that the weakness of the theologians lay in their not having made a sufficient study of primary ideas and the laws of thought. Three years he gave up to this. He was at Baghdad at the time, teaching law and writing legal treatises, and probably the three years



extended from the beginning of 484 to the beginning of 487. Two years he gave, without a teacher, to the study of the writings of the different schools of philosophy, and almost another to meditating and working over his results. He felt that he was the first Muslim doctor to do this with the requisite thoroughness. And it is noteworthy that at this stage he seems to have again felt himself to be a Muslim, and in an enemy's country when he was studying philosophy. He speaks of the necessity of understanding what is to be refuted; but this may be only a confusion between his attitude when writing after 500, and his attitude when investigating and seeking truth, fifteen years earlier. He divides the followers of philosophy in his time into three: Materialists, Deists (*Tabi'is*, i.e. Naturalists), and Theists. The materialists reject a creator; the world exists from all eternity; the animal comes from the egg and the egg from the animal. The wonder of creation compels the deists to admit a creator, but the creature is a machine, has a certain poise (*i'tidal*) in itself which keeps it running; its thought is a part of its nature and ends with death. They thus reject a future life, though admitting God and His attributes.

He deals at much greater length with the teachings of those whom he calls theists, but through all his statements of their views his tone is not that of a seeker but that of a partisan; he turns his own experiences into a warning to others, and makes of their record a little guide to apologetics. Aristotle he regards as the final master of the Greek school; his

doctrines are best represented for Arabic readers in the books of Ibn Sina and al-Farabi; the works of their predecessors on this subject are a mass of confusion. Part of these doctrines must be stamped as unbelief, part as heresy, and part as theologically indifferent. He then divides the philosophical sciences into six, mathematics, logic, physics, metaphysics, political economy, ethics; and discusses these in detail, showing what must be rejected, what is indifferent, what dangers arise from each to him who studies or to him who rejects without study.

Throughout, he is very cautious to mark nothing as unbelief that is not really so; to admit always those truths of mathematics, logic, and physics that cannot intellectually be rejected; and only to warn against an attitude of intellectualism and a belief that mathematicians, with their success in their own department, are to be followed in other departments, or that all subjects are susceptible of the exactness and certainty of a syllogism in logic. The damnable errors of the theists are almost entirely in their metaphysical views. Three of their propositions mark them as unbelievers. *First*, they reject the resurrection of the body and physical punishment hereafter; the punishments of the next world will be spiritual only. That there will be spiritual punishments, al-Ghazzali admits, but there will be physical as well. *Second*, they hold that God knows universals only, not particulars. *Third*, they hold that the world exists from all eternity and to all eternity. When they reject the attributes of God and hold that He knows by His essence and not

by something added to His essence, they are only heretics and not unbelievers. In physics he accepts the constitution of the world as developed and explained by them; only all is to be regarded as entirely submitted to God, incapable of self-movement, a tool of which the Creator makes use. Finally, he considers that their system of ethics is derived from the Sufis. At all times there have been such saints, retired from the world--God has never left himself without a witness; and from their ecstasies and revelations our knowledge of the human heart, for good and for evil, is derived.

Thus in philosophy he found little light. It did not correspond entirely to his needs, for reason cannot answer all questions nor unveil all the enigmas of life. He would probably have admitted that he had learned much in his philosophical studies--so at least we may gather from his tone; he never speaks disrespectfully of philosophy and science in their sphere; his continual exhortation is that he who would understand them and refute them must first study them; that to do otherwise, to abuse what we do not know, brings only contempt on ourselves and on the cause which we champion. But with his temperament he could not found his religion on intellect. As a lawyer he could split hairs and define issues; but once the religious instinct was aroused, nothing could satisfy him but what he eventually found. And so, two possibilities and two only were before him, though one was hardly a real possibility, if we consider his training and mental powers. He

might fall back on authority. It could not be the authority of his childish faith, "Our fathers have told us," he himself confesses, could never again have weight with him. But it might be some claimer of authority in a new form, some infallible teacher with a doctrine which he could accept for the authority behind it. As the Church of Rome from time to time gathers into its fold men of keen intellect who seek rest in submission, and the world marvels, so it might have been with him. Or again, he might turn directly to God and to personal intercourse with Him; he might seek to know Him and to be taught of Him without any intermediary, in a word to enter on the path of the mystic.

He came next to examine the doctrine of the Ta'limites. They, a somewhat outlying wing of the Fatimid propaganda, had come at this time into alarming prominence. In 483 Hasan ibn as-Sabbah had seized Alamut and entered on open rebellion. The sect of the Assassins was applying its principles. But the poison of their teaching was also spreading among the people. The principle of authority in religion, that only by an infallible teacher could truth be reached and that such an infallible teacher existed if he could only be found, was in the air. For himself, al-Ghazzali found the Ta'limites and their teaching eminently unsatisfactory: They had a lesson which they went over parrot-fashion, but beyond it they were in dense ignorance. The trained theologian and scholar had no patience with their slackness and shallowness of thought. He labored long, as ash-

Shahrastani later confesses that he, too, did, to penetrate their mystery and learn something from them; but beyond the accustomed formulæ there was nothing to be found. He even admitted their contention of the necessity of a living, infallible teacher, to see what would follow--but nothing followed. "You admit the necessity of an Imam," they would say. "It is your business now to seek him; we have nothing to do with it." But though neither al-Ghazzali nor ash-Shahrastani, who died 43 (lunar) years after him, could be satisfied with the Ta'limites, many others were. The conflict was hot, and al-Ghazzali himself wrote several books against them.

The other possibility, the path of the mystic, now lay straight before him. In the *Munqidh* he tells us how, when he had made an end of the Ta'limites, he began to study the books of the Sufis, without any suggestion that he had had a previous acquaintance with them and their practices. But probably this means nothing more than it does when he speaks in a similar way of studying the scholastic theologians; namely, that he now took up the study in earnest and with a new and definite purpose. He therefore read carefully the works of al-Harith al-Muhasibi, the fragments of al-Junayd, ash-Shibli, and Abu Yazid al-Bistami. He had also the benefit of oral teaching; but it became plain to him that only through ecstasy and the complete transformation of the moral being could he really understand Sufiism. He saw that it consisted in feelings more than in knowledge, that he must be

initiated as a Sufi himself; live their life and practise their exercises, to attain his goal.

On the way upon which he had gone up to this time, he had gained three fixed points of faith. He now believed firmly in God, in prophecy, and in the last judgment. He had also gained the belief that only by detaching himself from this world, its life, enjoyments, honors, and turning to God could he be saved in the world to come. He looked on his present life, his writing and his teaching, and saw of how little value it was in the face of the great fact of heaven and hell. All he did now was for the sake of vainglory and had in it no consecration to the service of God. He felt on the edge of an abyss. The world held him back; his fears urged him away. He was in the throes of a conversion wrought by terror; his religion, now and always, in common with ail Islam, was other-worldly. So he remained in conflict with himself for six months from the middle of 488. Finally, his health broke down under the strain. In his feebleness and overthrow he took refuge with God, as a man at the end of his resources. God heard him and enabled him to make the needed sacrifices. He abandoned all and wandered forth from Baghdad as a Sufi. He had put his brilliant present and brilliant future absolutely behind him; had given up everything for the peace of his soul. This date, the end of 488, was the great era in his life; but it marked an era, too, in the history of Islam. Since al-Ash'ari went back to the faith of his fathers in 300, and cursed the Mu'tazilites and all their works, there had been no

such epoch as this flight of al-Ghazzali. It meant that the reign of mere scholasticism was over; that another element was to work openly in the future Church of Islam, the element of the mystical life in God, of the attainment of truth by the soul in direct vision.

He went to Syria and gave himself up for two years to the religious exercises of the Sufis. Then he went on pilgrimage, first to Jerusalem; then to the tomb of Abraham at Hebron; finally to Mecca and al-Madina. With this religious duty his life of strict retirement ended. It is evident that he now felt that he was again within the fold of Islam. In spite of his former resolution to retire from the world, he was drawn back. The prayers of his children and his own aspirations broke in upon him, and though he resolved again and again to return to the contemplative life, and did often actually do so, yet events, family affairs, and the anxieties of life, kept continually disturbing him.

This went on, he tells us, for almost ten years, and in that time there were revealed to him things that could not be reckoned and the discussion of which could not be exhausted. He learned that the Sufis were on the true and only path to the knowledge of God; that neither intelligence nor wisdom nor science could change or improve their doctrine or their ethics. The light in which they walk is essentially the same as the light of prophecy; Muhammad was a Sufi when on his way to be a prophet. There is none other light to light any man in this world. A complete purifying of

the heart from all but God is their Path; a seeking to plunge the heart completely in the thought of God, is its beginning, and its end is complete passing away in God. This last is only its end in relation to what can be entered upon and grasped by a voluntary effort; in truth, it is only the first step in the Path, the vestibule to the contemplative life. Revelations (*mukashafas*, unveilings) came to the disciples from the very beginning; while awake they see angels and souls of prophets, hear their voices and gain from them guidance. Then their State (*hal*, a Sufi technicality for a state of ecstasy) passes from the beholding of forms to stages where language fails and any attempt to express what is experienced must involve some error. They reach a nearness to God which some have fancied to be a *hulul*, fusion of being, others an *ittihad*, identification, and others a *wusul*, union; but these are all erroneous ways of indicating the thing. Al-Ghazzali notes one of his books in which he has explained wherein the error lies. But the thing itself is the true basis of all faith and the beginning of prophecy; the *karamat* of the saints lead to the miracles of the prophets. By this means the possibility and the existence of prophecy can be proved, and then the life itself of Muhammad proves that he was a prophet. Al-Ghazzali goes on to deal with the nature of prophecy, and how the life of Muhammad shows the truth of his mission; but enough has been given to indicate his attitude and the stage at which he had himself arrived.



During this ten years he had returned to his native country and to his children, but had not undertaken public duty as a teacher. Now that was forced upon him. The century was drawing to a close. Everywhere there was evident a slackening of religious fervor and faith. A mere external compliance with the rules of Islam was observed, men even openly defended such a course. He adduces as an example of this the *Wasiya* of Ibn Sina. The students of philosophy went their way, and their conduct shook the minds of the people; false Sufis abounded, who taught antinomianism; the lives of many theologians excited scandal; the Ta'limites were still spreading. A religious leader to turn the current was absolutely needed, and his friends looked to al-Ghazzali to take up that duty; some distinguished saints had dreams of his success; God had promised a reformer every hundred years and the time was up. Finally, the Sultan laid a command upon him to go and teach in the academy at Naysabur, and he was forced to consent. His departure for Naysabur fell at the end of 499, exactly eleven years after his flight from Baghdad. But he did not teach there long. Before the end of his life we find him back at Tus, his native place, living in retirement among his disciples, in a Madrasa or academy for students and a Khanqah or monastery for Sufis.

There he settled down to study and contemplation. We have already seen what theological position he had reached. Philosophy had been tried and found wanting. In a book of his called *Tahafut*, or

"Destruction," he had smitten the philosophers hip and thigh; he had turned, as in earlier times al-Ash'ari, their own weapons against them, and had shown that with their premises and methods no certainty could be reached. In that book he goes to the extreme of intellectual scepticism, and, seven hundred years before Hume, he cuts the bond of causality with the edge of his dialectic and proclaims that we can know nothing of cause or effect, but simply that one thing follows another. He combats their proof of the eternity of the world, and exposes their assertion that God is its creator. He demonstrates that they cannot prove the existence of the creator or that that Creator is one; that they cannot prove that He is incorporeal, or that the world has any creator or cause at all; that they cannot prove the nature of God or that the human soul is a spiritual essence. When he has finished there is no intellectual basis left for life; he stands beside the Greek sceptics and beside Hume. We are thrown back on revelation, that given immediately by God to the individual soul or that given through prophets. All our real knowledge is derived from these sources. So it was natural that in the latter part of his life he should turn to the traditions of the Prophet. The science of tradition must certainly have formed part of his early studies, as of those of all Muslim theologians, but he had not specialized in it; his bent had lain in quite other directions. His master, the Imam al-Haramayn, had been no student of tradition; among his many works is not one dealing with that subject. Now he saw that the truth and the knowledge of the truth lay

there, and he gave himself, with all the energy of his nature, to the new pursuit.

The end of his wanderings came at Tus, in 505. There he died while seeking truth in the traditions of Muhammad, as al-Ash'ari, his predecessor, had done. The stamp of his personality is ineffaceably impressed on Islam. The people of his time revered him as a saint and wonder-worker. He himself never claimed to work *karamat* and always spoke modestly of the light which he had reached in ecstasy. After his death legends early began to gather round him, and the current biographies of him are untrustworthy to a degree. It says much for the solidity of his work that he did not pass into a misty figure of popular superstition. But that work remained and remains among his disciples and in his books. We must now attempt to estimate its bearing and scope.

For him, as for the mutakallims in general, the fundamental thing in the world and the starting-point of all speculation is will. The philosophers in their intellectualism might picture God as thought--thought thinking itself and evolving all things thereby. Their source was Plotinus; that of the Muslims was the terrific "Be!" of creation. But how can we know this will of God if we are simply part of what it has produced? In answering this, al-Ghazzali and his followers have diverged from the rest of Islam, but not into heresy. Their view is admitted to be a possible interpretation of Qur'anic passages, if not that commonly held. The soul of man, al-Ghazzali

taught, is essentially different from the rest of the created things. We read in the Qur'an (xv, 29; xxxviii, 72) that God breathed into man of His spirit (*ruh*). This is compared with the rays of the sun reaching a thing on the earth and warming it. In virtue of this, the soul of man is different from everything else in the world. It is a spiritual substance (*jawhar ruhani*), has no corporeality, and is not subject to dimension, position or locality. It is not in the body or outside of the body; to apply such categories to it is as absurd as to speak of the knowledge or ignorance of a stone. Though created, it is not shaped; it belongs to the spiritual world and not to this world of sensible things. It contains some spark of the divine and it is restless till it rests again in that primal fire; but, again, it is recorded in tradition that the Prophet said, "God Most High created Adam in His own form (*sura*)." Al-Ghazzali takes that to mean that there is a likeness between the spirit of man and God in essence, quality, and actions. Further, the spirit of man rules the body as God rules the world. Man's body is a microcosm beside the macrocosm of this world, and they correspond, part by part. Is, then, God simply the *anima mundi*? No, because He is the creator of all by His will, the sustainer and destroyer by His will. Al-Ghazzali comes to this by a study of himself. His primary conception is, *volo ergo sum*. It is not thought which impresses him, but volition. From thought he can develop nothing; from will can come the whole round universe. But if God, the Creator, is a Willer, so, too, is the soul of man. They are kin, and, therefore, man can know and recognize God. "He

who knows his own soul, knows his Lord," said another tradition.

This view of the nature of the soul is essential to the Sufi position and is probably borrowed from it. But there are in it two possibilities of heresy, if the view be pushed any further. It tends (1) to destroy the important Muslim dogma of God's Difference (*mukhalafa*) from all created things, and (2) to maintain that the souls of men are partakers of the divine nature and will return to it at death. Al-Ghazzali labored to safeguard both dangers, but they were there and showed themselves in time. Just as the Aristotelian plus neo-Platonic philosophers reached the position that the universe with all its spheres was God, so, later, Sufis came to the other pantheistic position that God was the world. Before the atomic scholastics the same danger also lay. It is part of the irony of the history of Muslim theology that the very emphasis on the transcendental unity should lead thus to pantheism. Al-Ghazzali's endeavor was to strike the *via media*. The Hegelian Trinity might have appealed to him.

To return, his views on science, as we have already seen, were the same as those of the contemporary students of natural philosophy. Their teachings he accepted, and, so far, he can be compared to a theologian of the present day, who accepts evolution and explains it to suit himself. His world was framed on what is commonly called the Ptolemaic system. He was no fiat-earth man like the present Ulama of Islam;

God had "spread out the earth like a carpet," but that did not hinder him from regarding it as a globe. Around it revolve the spheres of the seven planets and that of the fixed stars; Alphonso the Wise had not yet added the crystalline sphere and the *primum mobile*. All that astronomers and mathematicians teach us of the laws under which these bodies move is to be accepted. Their theory of eclipses and of other phenomena of the heavens is true, whatever the ignorant and superstitious may clamor. Yet it is to be remembered that the most important facts and laws have been divinely revealed. As the weightiest truths of medicine are to be traced back to the teaching of the prophets, so there are conjunctions in the heavens which occur only once in a thousand years and which man can yet calculate because God has taught him their laws. And all this structure of the heavens and the earth is the direct work of God, produced out of nothing by His will, guided by His will, ever dependent for existence on His will, and one day to pass away at His command. So al-Ghazzali joins science and revelation. Behind the order of nature lies the personal, omnipotent God who says; "Be!" and it is. The things of existence do not proceed from Him by any emanation or evolution, but are produced directly by Him.

Further, there is another side of al-Ghazzali's attitude toward the physical universe that deserves attention, but which is very difficult to grasp or express. Perhaps it may be stated thus: Existence has three modes; there is existence in the *alam al-mulk*, in the

*alam al-jabarut*, and in the *alam al-malakut*. The first is this world of ours which is apparent to the senses; it exists by the power (*qudra*) of God, one part proceeding from another in constant change. The *alam al-malakut* exists by God's eternal decree, without development, remaining in one state without addition or diminution. The *alam al-jabarut* comes between these two; it seems externally to belong to the first, but in respect of the power of God which is from all eternity (*al-qudra al-azaliya*) it is included in the second. The soul (*nafs*) belongs to the *alam al-malakut*, is taken from it and returns to it. In sleep and in ecstasy, even in this world, it can come into contact with the world from which it is derived. This is what happens in dreams--"sleep is the brother of death," says al-Ghazzali; and thus, too, the saints and the prophets attain divine knowledge. Some angels belong to the world of *malakut*; some to that of *jabarut*, apparently those who have shown themselves here as messengers of God. The things in the heavens, the preserved tablet, the pen, the balance, etc., belong to the world of *malakut*. On the one hand, these are not sensible, corporeal things, and, on the other, these terms for them are not metaphors. Thus al-Ghazzali avoids the difficulty of Muslim eschatology with its bizarre concreteness. He rejects the right to allegorize--these things are real, actual; but he relegates them to this world of *malakut*. Again, the Qur'an, Islam, and Friday (the day of public worship) are personalities in the world of *malakut* and *jabarut*. So, too, the world of *mulk* must appear as a personality at the bar of these other worlds at the last day. It will come as an ugly

old woman, but Friday as a beautiful young bride. This personal Qur'an belongs to the world of *jabarut*, but Islam to that of *malakut*.

But just as those three worlds are not thought of as separate in time, so they are not separate in space. They are not like the seven heavens and seven earths of Muslim literalists, which stand, story-fashion, one above the other. Rather they are, as expressed above, modes of existence, and might be compared to the speculations on another life in space of  $n$  dimensions, framed, from a very different starting-point and on a basis of pure physics, by Balfour Stewart and Tait in their "Unseen Universe." On another side they stand in close kinship to the Platonic world of ideas, whether through neo-Platonism or more immediately. Sufism at its best, and when stripped of the trap-pings of Muslim tradition and Qur'anic exegesis, has no reason to shrink from the investigation either of the physicist or of the metaphysician. And so it is not strange to find that all Muslim thinkers have been tinged with mysticism to a greater or less degree, though they may not all have embraced formal Sufiism and accepted its vocabulary and system. This is true of al-Farabi, who was avowedly a Sufi; true also of Ibn Sina, who, though nominally an Aristotelian, was essentially a neo-Platonist, and admitted the possibility of intercourse with superior beings and with the Active Intellect, of miracles and revelations; true even of Ibn Rushd, who does not venture to deny the immediate knowledge of the Sufi saints, but only argues that experience of it is not



sufficiently general to be made a basis for theological science.

In ethics, as we have already seen, the position of al-Ghazzali is a simple one. All our laws and theories upon the subject, the analysis of the qualities of the mind, good and bad, the tracing of hidden defects to their causes--all these things we owe to the saints of God to whom God Himself has revealed them. Of these there have been many at all times and in all countries, and without them and their labors and the light which God has vouchsafed to them, we could never know ourselves. Here, as everywhere, comes out al-Ghazzali's fundamental position that the ultimate source of all knowledge is revelation from God. It may be major revelation, through accredited prophets who come forward as teachers, divinely sent and supported by miracles and by the evident truth of their message appealing to the human heart, or it may be minor revelation--subsidiary and explanatory -- through the vast body of saints of different grades, to whom God has granted immediate knowledge of Himself. Where the saints leave off, the prophets begin; and, apart from such teaching, man, even in physical science, would be groping in the dark.

This position becomes still more prominent in his philosophical system. His agnostic attitude toward the results of pure thought has been already sketched. It is essentially the same as that taken up by Mansell in his Bampton lectures on "The Limits of Religious Thought." Mansell, a pupil and continuator of

Hamilton, developed and emphasized Hamilton's doctrine of the relativity of knowledge, and applied it to theology, maintaining that we cannot know or think of the absolute and infinite, but only of the relative and finite. Hence, he went on to argue, we can have no positive knowledge of the attributes of God. This, though disguised by the methods and language of scholastic philosophy, is al-Ghazzali's attitude in the *Tahafut*. Mansell's opponents said that the was like a man sitting on the branch of a tree and sawing off his seat. Al-Ghazzali, for the support of his seat, went back to revelation, either major, in the books sent down to the prophets, or minor, in the personal revelations of God's saints. Further, it was not only in the Muslim schools that this attitude toward philosophy prevailed. Yehuda Halevi (d. A.D. 1145; al-Ghazzali, d. 1111) also maintains in his *Kusari* the insufficiency of philosophy in the highest questions of life, and bases religious truth on the incontrovertible historical facts of revelation. And Maimonides (d. A.D. 1204) in his *Moreh Nebuchim* takes essentially the same position.

Of his views on dogmatic theology little need be said. Among modern theologians he stands nearest to Ritschl. Like Ritschl, he rejects metaphysics and opposes the influence of any philosophical system on his theology. The basis must be religious phenomena, simply accepted and correlated. Like Ritschl, too, he was emphatically ethical in his attitude; he lays stress on the *value for us* of a doctrine or a piece of knowledge. Our source of religious knowledge is

revelation, and beyond a certain point we must not inquire as to the how and why of that knowledge. To do so would be to enter metaphysics and the danger-zone where we lose touch with vital realities and begin to use mere words. On one point he goes beyond Ritschl, and, on another, Ritschl goes beyond him. In his devotion to the facts of the religious consciousness Ritschl did not go so far as to become a mystic, indeed rejected mysticism with a conscious indignation; al-Ghazzali did become a mystic. But, on the other hand, Ritschl refused absolutely to enter upon the nature of God or upon the divine attributes—all that was mere metaphysics and heathenism; al-Ghazzali did not so far emancipate himself, and his only advance was to keep the doctrine on a strictly Qur'anic basis. So it stands written; not, so man is compelled by the nature of things to think.

His work and influence in Islam may be summed up briefly as follows: *First*, he led men back from scholastic labors upon theological dogmas to living contact with, study and exegesis of, the Word and the traditions. What happened in Europe when the yoke of mediæval scholasticism was broken, what is happening with us now, happened in Islam under his leadership. He could be a scholastic with scholastics, but to state and develop theological doctrine on a Scriptural basis was emphatically his method. We should now call him a Biblical theologian.

*Second*, in his teaching and moral exhortations he reintroduced the element of fear. In the *Munqidh* and

elsewhere he lays stress on the need of such a striking of terror into the minds of the people. His was no time, he held, for smooth, hopeful preaching; no time for optimism either as to this world or the next. The horrors of hell must be kept before men; he had felt them himself. We have seen how other-worldly was his own attitude, and how the fear of the Fire had been the supreme motive in his conversion; and so he treated others.

*Third*, it was by his influence that Sufiism attained a firm and assured position in the Church of Islam.

*Fourth*, he brought philosophy and philosophical theology within the range of the ordinary mind. Before his time they had been surrounded, more or less, with mystery. The language used was strange; its vocabulary and terms of art had to be specially learned. No mere reader of the Arabic of the street or the mosque or the school could understand at once a philosophical tractate. Greek ideas and expressions, passing through a Syriac version into Arabic, had strained to the uttermost the resources of even that most flexible tongue. A long training had been thought necessary before the elaborate and formal method of argumentation could be followed. All this al-Ghazzali changed, or at least tried to change. His *Tahafut* is not addressed to scholars only; he seeks with it a wider circle of readers, and contends that the views, the arguments, and the fallacies of the philosophers should be perfectly intelligible to the general public.

Of these four phases of al-Ghazzali's work, the first and the third are undoubtedly the most important. He made his mark by leading Islam back to its fundamental and historical facts, and by giving a place in its system to the emotional religious life. But it will have been noticed that in none of the four phases was he a pioneer. He was not a scholar who struck out a new path, but a man of intense personality who entered on a path already blazed and made it the common highway. We have here his character. Other men may have been keener logicians, more learned theologians, more gifted saints; but he, through his personal experiences, had attained so overpowering a sense of the divine realities that the force of his character--once combative and restless, now narrowed and intense--swept all before it, and the Church of Islam entered on a new era of its existence.

So much space it has been necessary to give to this great man. Islam has never outgrown him, has never fully understood him. In the renaissance of Islam which is now rising to view his time will come and the new life will proceed from a renewed study of his works.

From this time on, the Ash'arites may be fairly regarded as the dominant school so far as the East is concerned. Saladin (d. 589) did much to aid in the establishment of this hegemony. He was a devout Muslim with the taste of an amateur for theological literature. Anecdotes tell how he had a special little

catechism composed, and used himself to instruct his children in it. He founded theological academies in Egypt at Alexandria and Cairo, the first there except the Fatimid Hall of Science. One of the few blots on his name is the execution of the pantheistic Sufi, Shihab ad-Din as-Suhrawardi, at Aleppo in 587. Meanwhile, in the farther East, Fakhr ad-Din ar-Razi (d. 606) was writing his great commentary on the Qur'an, the *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, "The Keys of the Unseen," and carrying on the work of al-Ghazzali. The title of his commentary itself shows the dash of mysticism in his teaching, and he was in correspondence with Ibn Arabi, the arch-Sufi of the time. He studied philosophy, too, commented on works of Ibn Sina, and fought the philosophers on their own ground as al-Ghazzali had done. Kalam and philosophy are now, in the eyes of the theologians, a true philosophy and a false. Philosophy has taken the place of Mu'tazilism and the other heresies. The enemies of the faith are outside its pale, and the scholasticizing of philosophy goes on steadily. According to some, a new stage was marked by al-Baydawi (d. 685), who confused inextricably philosophy and kalam, but the newness can have been comparative only. A century later al-Iji (d. 756) writes a book, *al-Mawagif*, on kalam, half of which is given to metaphysics and the other half to dogmatics. At-Taftazani is another name worthy of mention. He died in 791, after a laborious life as a controversialist and commentator. When we reach Ibn Khaldun (d. 808), the first philosophical historian and the greatest until the nineteenth century of our era, we find that

kalam has fallen again from its high estate. It has become a scholastic discipline, useful only to repel the attacks of heretics and unbelievers; and of heretics, says Ibn Khaldun, there are now none left. Reason, he goes on, cannot grasp the nature of God; cannot weigh His unity nor measure His qualities. God is unknowable and we must accept what we are told about Him by His prophets. Such was the result of the destruction of philosophy in Islam.

### **A SHORT CREED BY AL-GHAZZALI**

An exposition of the Creed of the People of the Sunna on the two Words of Witnessing (*kalimatan ash-shahada*) which form one of the Foundations of Islam.

[Intended to be committed to memory by children. It forms the first section of the second book of his *Ihya*, vol. ii, pp. 17-42 of edit. of Cairo with commentary of the Sayyid Murtaḍà.]

We say--and in God is our trust--Praise belongeth unto God, the Beginner, the Bringer back, the Doer of what He willeth, the Lord of the Glorious Throne and of Mighty Grasp, the Guider of His chosen creatures to the right path and to the true way, the Granter of benefits to them after the witness to the Unity (*tawhid*) by guarding their articles of belief from obscurities of doubt and opposition, He that bringeth them to follow His Apostle, the Chosen one (*al-Mustafa*), and to imitate the traces of his Companions, the most honored, through His aid and right guidance revealed to them in His essence and His works by His

beautiful qualities which none perceives, save he who inclines his ear. He is the witness who maketh known to them that He in His essence is One without any partner (*sharik*). Single without any similar, Eternal without any opposite, Separate without any like. He is One, Prior (*qadim*) with nothing before Him, from eternity (*azali*) without any beginning, abiding in existence with none after Him, to eternity (*abadi*) without any end, subsisting without ending, abiding without termination. He hath not ceased and He will not cease to be described with glorious epithets; finishing and ending, through the cutting off of the ages and the terminating of allotted times, have no rule over Him, but He is the First and Last, the External and the Internal, and He knoweth everything.

We witness that He is not a body possessing form, nor a substance possessing bounds and limits: He does not resemble bodies, either in limitation or in accepting division. He is not a substance and substances do not exist in Him; and He is not an accident and accidents do not exist in Him, nay He does not resemble an entity, and no entity resembles Him; nothing is like Him and He is not like anything; measure does not bound Him and boundaries do not contain Him; the directions do not surround Him and neither the earth nor the heavens are on different sides of Him. Lo, He is seated firmly upon His Throne (*arsh*), after the manner which He has said, and in the sense in which He willed a being seated firmly (*istiwa*), which is far removed from contact and fixity



of location and being established and being enveloped and being removed. The Throne does not carry Him, but the Throne and those that carry it are carried by the grace of His power and mastered by His grasp. He is above the Throne and the Heavens and above everything unto the limit of the Pleiades, with an aboveness which does not bring Him nearer to the Throne and the Heavens, just as it does not make Him further from the earth and the Pleiades. Nay, He is exalted by degrees from the Throne and the Heavens, just as He is exalted by degrees from the earth and the Pleiades; and He, in spite of that, is near to every entity and is "nearer to a creature than the artery of his neck" (Qur. 50, 15), and He witnesseth everything, since His nearness does not resemble the nearness of bodies, just as His essence does not resemble the essence of bodies. He does not exist in anything, just as nothing exists in Him: He has exalted Himself far therefrom that a place should contain Him, just as He has sanctified Himself far therefrom that time should limit Him. Nay, He was before He had created Time and Place and He is now above that which He was above, and distinct from His creatures through His qualities. There is not in His essence His equal, nor in His equal His essence. He is far removed from change of state or of place. Events have no place in Him, and mishaps do not befall him. Nay, He does not cease, through His glorious epithets, to be far removed from changing, and through His perfect qualities to be independent of perfecting increase. The existence of His essence is known by reason; His essence is seen with the eyes, a

benefit from Him and a grace to the pious, in the Abiding Abode and a completion in beatitude from Him, through gazing upon His gracious face.

We witness that He is living, powerful, commanding, conquering; inadequacy and weakness befall Him not; slumber seizes Him not, nor sleep. Passing away does not happen to Him, nor death. He is Lord of the Worlds, the Visible and the Invisible, that of Force and that of Might; He possesses Rule and Conquest and Creation and Command; the heavens are rolled in His right hand and the created things are overcome in His grasp; He is separate in creating and inventing; He is one in bringing into existence and innovating; He created the creation and their works and decreed their sustenance and their terms of life; not a decreed thing escapes His grasp and the mutations of things are not distant from His power; the things which He hath decreed cannot be reckoned and the things which He knoweth have no end.

We witness that He knoweth all the things that can be known, comprehending that which happeneth from the bounds of the earths unto the topmost heavens; no grain in the earth or the heavens is distant from His knowledge. Yea, He knows the creeping of the black ant upon the rugged rock in a dark night, and He perceives the movement of the mote in the midst of the air; He knows the secret and the concealed and has knowledge of the suggestions of the minds and the movements of the thoughts and the concealed things of the inmost parts, by a knowledge which is

prior from eternity; He has not ceased to be describable by it, from the ages of the ages, not by a knowledge which renews itself and arises in His essence by arrival and removal.

We witness that He is a Willer of the things that are, a Director of the things that happen; there does not come about in the world, seen or unseen, little or much, small or great, good or evil, advantage or disadvantage, faith or unbelief, knowledge or ignorance, success or loss, increase or diminution, obedience or rebellion, except by His will. What He wills is, and what He wills not is not. Not a glance of one who looks, or a slip of one who thinks is outside of His will: He is the Creator, the Bringer back, the Doer of that which He wills. There is no opponent of His command and no repeater of His destiny and no refuge for a creature from disobeying Him, except by His help and His mercy, and no strength to a creature to obey Him except by His will. Even though mankind and the Jinn and the Angels and the Shaytans were to unite to remove a single grain in the world or to bring it to rest without His will, they would be too weak for that. His will subsists in His essence as one of His qualities; He hath not ceased to be described through it as a Willer, in His infinity, of the existence of things at their appointed times which He hath decreed. So they come into existence at their appointed times even as He has willed in His infinity without precedence or sequence. They happen according to the agreement of His knowledge and His will, without exchange or change in planning of

things, nor with arranging of thoughts or awaiting of time, and therefore one thing does not distract Him from another.

And we witness that He is a Hearer and a Seer. He hears and sees, and no audible thing is distant from His hearing, and no visible thing is far from His seeing, however fine it may be. Distance does not curtain off His hearing and darkness does not dull His seeing; He sees without eyeball or eyelid, and hears without earholes or ears, just as He knows without a brain and seizes without a limb and creates without an instrument, since His qualities do not resemble the qualities of created things, just as His essence does not resemble the essences of created things.

And we witness that He speaks, commanding, forbidding, praising, threatening, with a speech from all eternity, prior, subsisting in His essence not resembling the speech of created things. It is not a sound which originates through the slipping out of air, or striking of bodies; nor is it a letter which is separated off by closing down a lip or moving a tongue. And the Qur'an and the Tawrat [the Law of Moses] and the Injil [the Gospel] and the Zabbur [the Psalms] are His book revealed to His Apostles. And the Qur'an is repeated by tongues, written in copies, preserved in hearts: yet it, in spite of that, is prior, subsisting in the essence of God, not subject to division and separation through being transferred to hearts and leaves. And Musa heard the speech of God

without a sound and without a letter, just as the pious see the essence of God, in the other world, without a substance or an attribute.

And since He has those qualities, He is Living, Knowing, Powerful, a Willer, a Hearer, a Seer, a Speaker, through Life, Power, Knowledge, Will, Hearing, Seeing, Speech, not by a thing separated from His essence.

We witness that there is no entity besides Him, except what is originated from His action and proceeds from His justice, after the most beautiful and perfect and complete and just of ways. He is wise in His actions, just in His determinations; there is no analogy between His justice and the justice of creatures, since tyranny is conceivable in the case of a creature, when he deals with the property of some other than himself, but tyranny is not conceivable in the case of God. For He never encounters any property in another besides Himself, so that His dealing with it might be tyranny. Everything besides Him, consisting of men and Jinn and Angels and Shaytans and the heavens and the earth and animals and plants and inanimate things and substance and attribute and things perceived and things felt, is an originated thing, which He created by His power, before any other had created it, after it had not existed, and which He invented after that it had not been a thing, since He in eternity was an entity by Him-self, and there was not along with Him any other than He. So He originated the creation thereafter, by way of manifestation of His power, and

verification of that which had preceded of His Will, and of that which existed in eternity of His Word; not because He had any lack of it or need of it. And He is gracious in creating and in making for the first times and in imposing of duty--not of necessity--and He is generous in benefiting; and well-doing and gracious helping belong to Him, since He is able to bring upon His creatures different kinds of punishment and to test them with different varieties of pains and ailments. And if He did that, it would be justice on His part, and would not be a vile action or tyranny in Him. He rewardeth His believing creatures for their acts of obedience by a decision which is of generosity and of promise and not of right and of obligation, since no particular action toward anyone is incumbent upon Him, and tyranny is inconceivable in Him, and no one possesses a right against Him. And His right to acts of obedience is binding upon the creatures because He has made it binding through the tongues of His prophets, not by reason alone. But He sent apostles and manifested their truth by plain miracles, and they brought His commands and forbiddings and promissings and threatenings. So, belief in them as to what they have brought is incumbent upon the creation.

THE SECOND WORD OF WITNESSING is witnessing that the apostolate belongs to the apostle, and that God sent the unlettered Qurayshite prophet, Muhammad, with his apostolate to the totality of Arabs and foreigners and Jinn and men. And He abrogated by his law the other laws, except so much

of them as He confirmed; and made him excellent over the rest of the prophets and made him the Lord of Mankind and declared incomplete the Faith that consists in witnessing the Unity, which is saying, "There is no god except God," so long as there is not joined to that a witnessing to the Apostle, which is saying, "Muhammad is the Apostle of God." And He made obligatory upon the creation belief in him, as to all which he narrated concerning the things of this world and the next. And that He would not accept the faith of a creature, so long as he did not believe in that which the Prophet narrated concerning things after death. The first of that is the question of Munkar and Nakir; these are two awful and terrible beings who will cause the creature to sit up in his grave, complete, both soul and body; and they will ask him, "Who is thy Lord, and what is thy religion (*din*), and who is thy Prophet?" They are the two testers in the grave and their questioning is the first testing after death. And that he should believe in the punishment of the grave--that it is a Verity and that its judgment upon the body and the soul is just, according to what God wills. And that he should believe in the Balance--it with the two scales and the tongue, the magnitude of which is like unto the stages of the heavens and the earth. In it, deeds are weighed by the power of God Most High; and its weights in that day will be of the weight of motes and mustard seeds, to show the exactitude of its justice. The leaves of the good deeds will be placed in a beautiful form in the scale of light; and then the Balance will be weighed down by them according to the measure of their degree with God, by

the grace of God. And the leaves of the deeds will be cast in a vile form into the scale of darkness, and the Balance will be light with them, through the justice of God. And that he should believe that the Bridge (*as-sirat*) is a Verity; it is a bridge stretched over the back of Hell (*jahannam*), sharper than a sword and finer than a hair. The feet of the unbelievers slip upon it, by the decree of God, and fall with them into the Fire. But the feet of believers stand firm upon it, by the grace of God, and so they pass into the Abiding Abode. And that he should believe in the Tank (*hawd*), to which the people shall go down, the Tank of Muhammad from which the believers shall drink before entering the Garden and after passing the Bridge. Whoever drinks of it a single draught will never thirst again thereafter. Its breadth is a journey of a month; its water is whiter than milk and sweeter than honey; around it are ewers in numbers like the stars of heaven; into it flow two canals from *al-Kawthar* (Qur. 108). And that he should believe in the Reckoning and in the distinctions between men in it, him with whom it will go hard in the Reckoning and him to whom compassion will be shown therein, and him who enters the Garden without any reckoning,--these are the honored (*muqarrab*). God Most High will ask whomsoever He will of the prophets, concerning the carrying of His message, and whomsoever He will of the unbelievers, concerning the rejection of the messengers; and He will ask the innovators (*mubtadi's*) concerning the Sunna; and the Muslims concerning works. And that he should believe that the attestors of God's Unity (*muwahhids*) will be brought



forth from the Fire, after vengeance has been taken on them, so that there will not remain in Hell an attestor of God's Unity. And that he should believe in the intercession (*shafa'a*) of the prophets, next of the learned (*ulama*), next of the martyrs, next of the rest of the believers--each according to his dignity and rank with God Most High. And he who remains of the believers, and has no intercessor, shall be brought forth of the grace of God, whose are Might and Majesty. So there shall not abide eternally in the Fire a single believer, but whoever has in his heart the weight of a single grain of faith shall be brought forth therefrom. And that he should confess the excellence of the Companions--May God be well pleased with them!--and their rank; and that the most excellent of mankind, after the Prophet, is Abu Bakr, next Umar, next Uthman, next Ali--May God be well pleased with them! And that he should think well of all the Companions and should praise them like as he praises God, whose are Might and Majesty, and His Apostles. All this is of that which has been handed down in traditions from the Prophet and in narratives from the followers. He who confesses all this, relying upon it, is of the People of the Truth and the Company of the Sunna, and hath separated himself from the band of error and the sect of innovation (*bid'a*). So we ask from God perfection of certainty and firm standing in the Faith (*din*) for us and for all Muslims through His compassion.--lo! He is the Most Compassionate!--and may the blessing of God be upon our Lord Muhammad and upon every chosen creature.



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