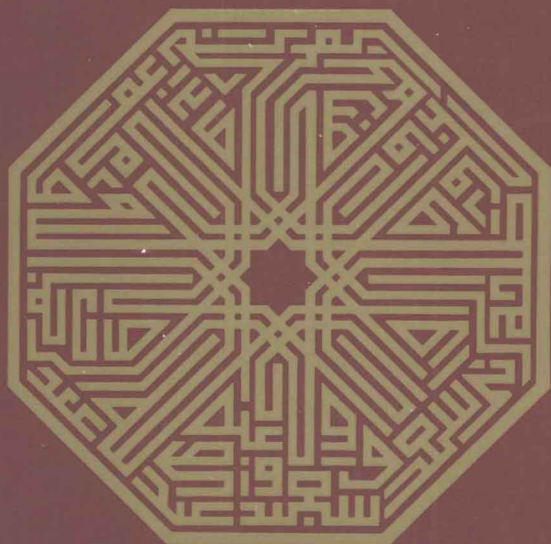


AL-GHAZĀLĪ

Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship

Translated by Muhtar Holland



The Islamic Foundation

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of
Islamic Worship

Translated from the *Iḥyā'* by
Muhtar Holland

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Foreword

‘Except he who comes to God with a heart, pure and whole’, says the Quran, no one shall receive the Inheritance of the Garden of Bliss, of the everlasting Life of happiness, near Allah, ‘on the day when they are raised up, the day when neither riches nor children shall avail.’ (al-Shu‘arā, 26: 85-9); the goal and the promise is not far, but only for him ‘who turns often unto God and keeps Him always in heart; who fears, without seeing, the most Merciful, and comes with a penitent heart.’ (Qāf, 50: 27-8) On the other hand, only those that ‘in their hearts is disease’ (al-Baqarah, 2: 10) shall be denied this Inheritance; they have eyes which can see as far as the farthest galaxies and as deep as the heart of an atom, but they are unable to peep inside themselves for ‘it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts within the breasts.’ (al-Hajj, 22: 46) Who shall, therefore, not care to nurture the life in the heart – his inner world – as he lives his life in the world, in responding to his God?

Life has many dimensions, many layers, many phases. On the one hand, all of them should exist fused together, in continuing dynamic interaction with each other. For life is an integrated whole. It would be folly to so atomise and analyse life as to end up looking at it as through a microscope – seeing only one *dimension* at a time, magnified disproportionately; or with a telescope, resulting in simplistic reductionism. To employ tunnel vision is to live with an unbalanced concern for one aspect and a disregard of others. In all ages men have committed this folly, but perhaps never on the same scale as today. The consequences of this disproportion and imbalance are disastrous: disintegration of person and society, as one lives in one dimension alone, or in disregard of the wholeness of life.

On the other hand, in concern for the wholeness of life, it

would be unwise not to recognise each dimension separately and ensure that it has its proper place in the pursuits of life, is looked after and nurtured properly and plays its proportionate role in the development of a person. Only by guarding against both errors can one ensure freedom from anxiety and sorrow and happiness and prosperity, here and in the Hereafter.

Al-Ghazālī, in his characteristically powerful, penetrating and inspiring way, leads us in this book into the world of the inner dimensions of worship in Islam. Do not be misled by the title; such is the poverty of human language that we could not choose any better. Worship in Islam is not only observance of the prescribed worship rites – Prayer, Almsgiving, Fasting, Pilgrimage – but living one's entire life in obedience to God, doing His will and seeking His pleasure, exactly in the way He has laid down. But the worship rites are the essential, and the only, key to that full life of worship. And it is with their inner dimensions that this book is primarily concerned. Also, do not let the word 'inner' make us think that al-Ghazālī is embarking upon any venture to effect a split between the 'inner' and the 'outer', or is going to suggest any esoteric meanings behind the exoteric forms of worship as found in the *Shari'ah*. He is not. His 'inner' dimensions include things like praying at the proper time, congregational Prayers, balance and proportion in the outward movements in Prayer, finding the right type of persons to give Alms to, journeying for Pilgrimage with legitimately earned money and caring for animals on the way, etc., etc.

Al-Ghazālī is a towering figure in Islam; his influence is enormous. He is also controversial; perhaps no great man can escape controversy. Many have written criticising him. Echoing some of their concerns, though very exaggeratedly, a former European Sufi, in examining the split of inward and outward, castigates al-Ghazālī thus: 'yet this split – between dhahir and batin – this license to make half-men – outward legalists *or* [emphasis mine] inward experience-ists – had come from al-Ghazali and his notorious *Ihya*. Indeed his reputation [that he 'brought together the Sufis and the legalists'] rests on the very opposite of his accomplishment . . . he surgically separated the body from its life support' (Shaykh Abdal Qadir al-Murabit, *Root Islamic Education*, Norwich, p.135). How-

ever, the dominant view is quite succinctly summarised by Annemarie Schimmel: 'All that Ghazālī teaches . . . is only to help man to live a life in accordance with the sacred law, not by clinging *exclusively* [emphasis mine] to its letter, but by an understanding of its deeper meaning, by sanctification of the whole life, so that he is ready for the meeting with his Lord at any moment . . . This teaching – a marriage between mysticism and law – has made Ghazālī the most influential theologian of medieval Islam' (*Historical Outlines of Classical Sufism*, Chapel Hill, p.95).

Where lies the truth? And, in that context, what has this book to contribute? This is not the place to examine the whole issue in detail, but it can be said without much hesitation, without implying that all of al-Ghazālī's teachings are in the same vein, that what is presented here indeed invites us to live a life in accordance with the Shari'ah, with heart fully alive and present, so that it remains whole and healthy, pure and free from evil, worthy of going to its Lord, without any shame or disgrace upon it. It helps us interiorise the externals. More specifically, it enables us to breathe life into the dry bones of rites and rituals which have lost much of their meaning and purpose as they are performed by hearts which have hardened due to the passage of time. (al-Ḥadīd, 57: 16) However, to look briefly at some aspects of the much larger issues at the heart of the controversy may be worthwhile.

That our personality and life have many dimensions can hardly be disputed. We have an external dimension; and an inner one, too. The crux of the issue is what they are, where they should be placed, how they should be related to each other. Must they stand apart, or in conflict? Must there always be a split, leading to friction and antagonism or seclusiveness, between the inner and the outer, the body and spirit, the surface and depth, the form and meaning, the law and love, the Shari'ah and the *Ṭarīqah*? Are they totally unrelated? Or, are they not two sides of the same coin, two strands of the same existence, the warp and the weft of the fabric of life? Do they not overlap or interact mutually? Can they not reinforce each other? Should the internal not necessarily manifest as the external, and the exterior not become interiorised? These are crucial questions.

Unless these questions are answered properly and right answers found in the light of the Quran and the *Sunnah*, the dangers are real: error may set in and the real objectives of Islam may be in jeopardy. One may eclipse, displace, begin denigrating the other. It is only when one becomes solely concerned with either aspect or extolls one at the cost of the other that extremist reaction takes place.

On the one hand, there have been people whose exclusive concern with the outward details of the law, their love of things worldly, their relations with the corrupt wielders of power, their total identification with the established structures, their fossilisation of the Divine guidance under the crust of legal formalism, their waywardness and decadence drove many to split the inward and outward and stress the inner dimension to the point of decrying the outward forms laid down by the Shari'ah. It is such people about whom al-Ghazālī says: 'those who are so learned about rare forms of divorce can tell you nothing about the simpler things about the spiritual life, such as the meaning of sincerity towards God or trust in Him' (Watt: *Muslim Intellectuals*, p.113). But there have not been many like them, especially in the era in which the issue is regarded to have been most acute. Mālik, Abū Ḥanīfa, Shāfi'ī, Aḥmad, Ja'far Ṣādiq – the jurists *par excellence* – find pride of place in Farīduddīn 'Attār's classical *Tadhkirah al-Awliyā'*. And there is no limit to such names.

On the other hand, there have been some tendencies, gleefully picked up and blown out of all proportion by some Western observers, to belittle or discard the outward forms – the creed, the rites, the code; but they also have been few and exceptional. Those who claimed 'spiritual sovereignty over the logical and ritual forms of religion' (Cragg: *The Mind of the Qur'ān*, p.180), or who could 'repudiate pilgrimage as an unnecessary rite, when he was to himself a better *Ka'bah*. Or . . . could readily identify the meticulous worshipper in his *Salāt* as no better than an idolator clinging to the invisible and imprisoned in the tangible' (Cragg, p.168), were never part of the mainstream. They and those who, like Abu Sa'īd ibn Abī al-Khayr, could say:

‘Not until every mosque beneath the sun
Lies ruined, will our holy work be done;
And never will true Musalmān appear
Till faith and infidelity are one.’

(R. A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, p.90.)

did not echo the voice of an overwhelming majority of Sufis. Indeed almost all the leading Sufis – like ‘Abdul Qādir Jilānī, Shahābuddīn Suhrawardī, Abū Ahmad Chishtī, Ahmad Sirhindī – emphatically stressed the absolute need of observing the ‘outward’: without obedience one cannot get near to Allah.

Just as *fuqahā*, were Sufis, the leading Sufis were pillars of *fiqh*. To mention a few names: Hasan Baṣrī, Sufyān Thūri, Da‘ūd Ṭā‘ī, ‘Abdullāh ibn Mubārak.

“‘The Law without the Truth’, says Hujwīrī, ‘is ostentation and the Truth without the Law is hypocrisy. Their mutual relation may be compared to that of body and spirit: when the spirit departs from the body, the living body becomes a corpse, and the spirit vanishes like wind. The Moslem profession of faith includes both: the words, ‘there is no god but Allah’ are the Truth, and the words, ‘Mohammed is the apostle of Allah’, are the Law; anyone who denies the truth is an infidel, and anyone who rejects the law is a heretic’”. (Nicholson, pp. 92-3). No other words can so succinctly sum up the mutual relation of the ‘inward’ and ‘outward’. Ibn Taimīya, whose image is that of a great anti-Sufi, wrote in the same vein.

That ‘It is the life of the heart that matters’ is true; but only partly. Firstly, as al-Hujwīrī so beautifully explains, the heart without life is as good as dead, but life cannot exist unless it has a heart and the heart needs a body. So they are inter-dependent; one cannot be affirmed and asserted to the negation of the other. Secondly, they interact. The ‘outer’ always has a deep impact on the ‘inner’ and penetrates into the inward depths. One can always see how certain words and deeds cause inner anguish or happiness. Similarly, the ‘inner’ must pour out through the ‘outer’.

Jalāluddīn Rūmī, the famous Sufi poet, in his *Mathnawī* brings his peculiar wisdom to illuminate these very aspects.

Let us remain aware that Rūmī's thought shows varying, even contradictory, strands of thought. (Are we not all at some time or other, totally engrossed in one aspect or the other or in a part-truth. But we, perhaps, take enough care not to show our contradictions, whereas a poet, like Rūmī, gives vent to all his emotions and thoughts, whatever they may be.) Dwelling upon the relationship between the acts and words and the inner states of heart and soul, he says:

‘Act and word are witnesses to the hidden mind; from these twain infer the inward state.

Know that the probity of the witnesses must be established; the means of establishing it is a (great) sincerity; Thou art dependent on that.

In the case of the word-witness, 'tis keeping thy word (that is the test); in the case of the act-witness, 'tis keeping thy covenant (to perform these acts).

The word-witness is rejected if it speaks falsely, and the act-witness is rejected if it does not run straight.

Thou must have words and acts that are not self-contradictory, in order that thou mayest meet with immediate acceptance.’

(*The Mathnawī*, Vol. VI, R. A. Nicholson (tr.), pp.17-18.)

External beauties are of no avail without internal depths:

‘The body that hath defect in its spirit will never become sweet (even) if you smear it with honey.’ (Ibid., p. 38.)

But if there is beauty inside, the ‘outer’ is sure to reflect it:

‘If my heart had a modest disposition, my handsome face would produce naught but purity (goodness).’ (Ibid., p. 42.)

To traverse the Way, deeds are essential:

‘Therefore the Prophet said, “For the purpose of (traversing) this Way there is no comrade more faithful than works. If they be good they will be thy friends for

ever, and if they be evil they will be (as) a snake in thy tomb.” (Ibid., p. 65.)

Rūmī does no more than express what the Quran, in many places, has made abundantly clear, that the ‘inward’ and the ‘outward’ are essential to each other. Prayer and humbleness go together: ‘Successful are the believers who *in* their Prayers are humble.’ (al-Mu’minūn, 23: 1) One who ‘spends his wealth to purify himself – not as payment for favours received, only longing to seek the face of his Lord the Most High’ (al-Layl, 92: 18-20) will receive the pleasure of his Lord. Fasting has been enjoined ‘that you may become God-fearing.’ (al-Baqarah, 2: 183) Whosoever performs Pilgrimage and ‘honours God’s sacred symbols, that is of the godliness in his heart.’ (al-Ḥajj, 22: 32) Sacrificing animals is an act of worship, but ‘the flesh of them shall not reach God, neither their blood, but godliness from you shall reach Him.’ (al-Ḥajj, 22: 3)

There can be little doubt that the Inheritance of the Garden of Bliss is for those who come with a heart, pure and whole; but equally important is to meticulously follow the footsteps of the Prophet, upon him be peace. Says the Quran: ‘If you love God, follow me and God will love you and forgive you your sins.’ (Āl ‘Imrān, 3: 31)

The observance of the *Ḥudūd* is no less important: ‘Those [laws of inheritance] are God’s bounds. Whoso obeys God, and His Messenger, him will He bring into gardens through which rivers flow, therein to abide forever; that is a triumph supreme. But whoso disobeys God, and His Messenger, and transgresses His bounds [*Ḥudūd*] him He will commit unto fire, therein to abide forever; and for him there awaits a shameful suffering’. (al-Nisā’, 4: 13-14)

In conclusion, let me say, I find that nothing illuminates this crucial problem – its diverse aspects, the need and importance of giving due care to both the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, the dependence and interaction of each upon the other; how hearts can be moved by words and actions, how words and actions must be transformed as light shines in hearts which have been overtaken by the love of God – than the following verse of the Quran:

‘Is he whose breast God had opened wide unto total self-surrender unto Him, so he walks in a light from his Lord (like the hard of heart)?

Woe, then, unto those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of God!

They are lost in manifest error!

God has sent down the best teaching as a Book, consistent within itself, repeating in manifold forms – whereat shiver the skins of those who fear their Lord; then their skins and their hearts soften to the remembrance of God.

That is God’s guidance, whereby He guides whomsoever He will; and whomsoever God leads astray, no guide has he.’ (al-Zumar, 39: 22-3)

I hope the above reflections will put these selections from al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’* in their proper perspective. So beautifully translated by my brother Muhtar Holland, they will surely help countless young men and women of our times. They are now making afresh their acquaintance with Islam, rapidly growing in their commitment to Allah and His Messenger, striving harder and harder to bring themselves – their hearts, minds and lives, both private and public – under the sovereignty of one God, as well as the human society and mankind. It will help them perform their worship rites, prescribed by Islam, in a way, and with such inner states of heart, that they will find great enrichment and receive those immense inner resources without which their *Jihād* – both personal and social – can neither find acceptance in the sight of God, nor yield the results in this world. Such books do not require a critical evaluation of the validity and authenticity of each and every statement and anecdote. What is important is the inspiration and guidance that remain with the reader. And to that end, I trust this book will be extremely useful and merit acceptance in the eyes of Allah.

I pray to Allah *subḥānahū wa ta’ālā* to bless our humble efforts with His acceptance and grace and forgive our acts of omission and commission.

The Islamic Foundation, Leicester,
Jumāda al-Ūlā 1403
March 1983

Khurram Murad
Director General

Translator's Foreword

Even in its external forms alone, the Islamic mode of worship has held a profound fascination for outside observers down through the ages. Many an imagination has been captured by the haunting sound of the Call to Prayer: 'Allāhu Akbar! Allāhu Akbar! . . .', or by the stunning spectacle of row upon row of worshippers bowing and prostrating themselves in perfect unison during Friday Congregation in the concourse of some splendid yet at the same time starkly simple Mosque. The cafés and restaurants of a great Muslim city, almost completely deserted in the daylight hours of Ramaḍān, make an eerie impression on travellers who arrive in the Month of Fasting. But it is probably the Pilgrimage, with the aura of mystery and even danger surrounding the 'forbidden cities' of Makka and Madina, that has cast the greatest spell on the minds of those who look at Islam from without.

To Muslims, it is essentially unsurprising that outsiders should find the Islamic forms of worship so intriguing. For we believe Islam to be the 'natural religion' of mankind, as old as our first father Adam – peace be upon him – and as young as the latest infant born into this world. In our own day, the secret of this is revealing itself to growing numbers of men and women beyond the confines of what is regarded, historically and politically, as the World of Islam.

The call to worship none but Allah, the One Almighty God, and to follow the guidance of His noble and blessed Messenger, Muhammad, is being sounded unceasingly on many levels, on countless wavelengths. People hear and respond in very different ways. Sometimes there is a sudden flash of inspiration, sometimes a long and gradual maturing of knowledge and understanding, leading one day to certain conviction. An opening of the feelings may precede rational comprehension. Dreams and visions may play their part. These remarks are

based on the experience of many close friends and acquaintances who have come to embrace Islam, as well as on my own. In most cases I know of, an attraction to the Islamic forms of worship has been an important element, if not the principal factor, in the crucial decision to make a full commitment to the religion.

A French lady never forgot the sound of the Call to Prayer, which she had heard as a child in North Africa, and the day came when she knew she must answer it. My friend Robert was a medical student when we travelled together in Turkey many years ago; he could not resist joining the Muslim Congregation at Prayer in the Mosques. I know him now as Dr Abdarraḥman. I could fill the page with the names of Muslim brothers and sisters who observed the Fast during Ramaḍān even before they embraced Islam, not to mention the many non-Muslim friends who have recently begun to Fast (and who like to give Alms at the end of the fasting month). To speak of myself, I knew in my heart at least fifteen years before I embraced Islam that I must one day visit the Ka'ba in Makka as a Pilgrim. Throughout that time I performed the Islamic ablutions every morning and often at other times as well. Like others with whom I joined in exercises of a spiritual nature, 'receiving' from beyond the influence of heart and mind, I would sometimes feel the movements of the Islamic Prayer arising spontaneously in my body. These and a host of other experiences, culminating in a remarkable vision of the Prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace, together with his noble Companions, eventually convinced me that I *was* a Muslim – however imperfect – and that I ought to acknowledge the fact.

Genuine seekers of Truth can never be satisfied with outer forms alone, even if they believe those forms to have been established by Divine decree. In what is probably his most famous saying, the blessed Prophet himself declared: 'Actions are valued according to intentions.' Indeed, the Beautiful Names of Allah include both 'The Outer (*al-Zāhir*)' and 'The Inner (*al-Bāṭin*)'. The need for a greater understanding of the inner dimensions of Islamic worship is acutely felt, not only by a host of potential Muslims but also by many who have lived their whole lives as members of the Islamic community. Few