

Al-Ghazālī's Introduction to the *Revival of the Religious Sciences*

The importance of Imam Ghazālī's Introduction to the Revival of the Religious Sciences cannot be overstated; it outlines the reasons and motives for the writing of the Revival and it explains the structure of the work as a whole. The Islamic Texts Society has decided to include this Introduction at the beginning of all its translations from the Revival, including in revised editions of earlier translations. In the list of the forty chapters below, the choice of translation for the titles of the not-yet-published chapters is not restrictive; the final translations will be left to the individual translators and the list below will be periodically updated with the latest chapter headings.

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

FIRSTLY, I PRAISE GOD with many continuous praises; though the praise of those who praise is meagre in front of what is due to His majesty.

Secondly, I invoke blessings and peace upon His Messenger—blessings that encompass along with the leader of mankind (*sayyid al-bashar*)^A all other prophets.

Thirdly, I ask for His guidance (Gloried and Exalted is He) as I resolve to write a book for the revival of the religious sciences.

Fourthly, I hasten to put a stop to your censure O critic who—among those who reject [what we say]—has gone to extremes in his criticism, and who—among those who deny [us] and are heedless—is immoderate in his chiding and rejection.^B

^A The Prophet Muḥammad.

^B It is not clear if Ghazālī had a particular person in mind when he penned

My tongue has been set loose, and the responsibility to speak out and to discourse have become incumbent on me due to your persistent blindness to the obvious truth, your obstinacy in backing falsehood and in embellishing ignorance, and your stirring up hostility against him who has given preference to stepping somewhat aside from social conventions and who has verged slightly from formality. [He does this] for the sake of acting according to the dictates of knowledge and in eagerness to gain what God (Great and Glorious is He) has commanded in purifying the soul and rectifying the heart, thus somewhat redeeming a life wasted and in the hope of escaping complete rack and ruin. Hence, he seeks to avoid the risk of being associated with those about whom the Law giver (may God bless him and grant him peace) has said, 'The one who will be most severely punished on the Day of Judgment is he who was granted knowledge (*‘ālim*)^A and whom God (glory be to Him) did not make him benefit from his knowledge.'^B

By my life, there is no reason for the persistence of your opposition except for the malady that has encompassed the vast majority—indeed the multitudes. [The malady of] the inability to discern the weight of the matter, the ignorance of how grave the situation is and how crucial the issue, that the Hereafter is approaching and that this life is departing, that the end of life is near and the journey still far, that the provision is scanty and the danger immense, that the way is blocked, that for the discerning critic the knowledge and the acts that are purely for God are what avail, and that to pursue the path of the Hereafter—with all its many dangers and without a guide or companion—is exhausting and arduous.

this very severe and direct criticism here and below. Its personal nature does suggest that he did have someone in mind, but he could equally have used this form as a general accusation against a specific group.

^A The term *‘ālim* (pl. *‘ulamā’*) has been translated both as 'he who has been granted or who possesses knowledge' and as 'scholar' according to the context.

^B Ṭabarānī, *al-Muḥjam al-ṣaghīr*, 1.182.

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The guides of the way are those who possess knowledge (*'ulamā'*) who are the heirs of the prophets.^A This age is devoid of them and those who remain are impersonators; most have been overpowered by the devil and been led astray by iniquity. Each one is engrossed with his earthly gain; he sees what is right objectionable and what is objectionable right; thus the banner of religion has been pulled down and the beacon of guidance all over the world is extinguished.

[These impersonators] deceive people into thinking that knowledge is only decrees of the state (*fatāwā hukūma*) that judges use in order to resolve disputes when there is disturbance by the rabble, or a form of debating which a person seeking to show off equips himself with in order to gain superiority and the upper hand, or ornate language which a preacher uses to lure in the common people. These three [means] are all they could find to snare illegal gain and to net the vanities [of the world].

Now the knowledge of the path to the Hereafter (*'ilm tariq al-ākhirā*)—which was followed by the pious predecessors and which was called by God (Glorified is He) in His Book: law (*fiqh*), wisdom (*hikma*), knowledge (*'ilm*), luminescence (*diyā'*), light (*nūr*), guidance (*hidāya*), right-direction (*rushd*)—has become among people a thing hidden and forgotten.

As this [situation] is a calamitous fissure in religion and as the times are dark, I concluded that it is crucial to undertake the composition of this book in order to revive the religious sciences, to seek out the methods of the previous leaders [of religion], and to clarify what the prophets and the pious predecessors considered beneficial knowledge (may God grant them all peace).

I divided it into four quarters: the Quarter of the Acts of Worship (*rub^c al-'ibādāt*), the Quarter of the Norms of Daily Life (*rub^c al-'ādāt*), the Quarter of the Moral Vices (*rub^c al-muhlikāt*) and the Quarter of the Saving Virtues (*rub^c al-munjiyāt*).

^A 'Irāqī, I.6 says this is in Abū Dā'ūd, Tirmidhī, Ibn Māja and in *Ṣaḥīḥ* Ibn Hibbān on the authority of Abū al-Dardā'.

I began the whole [of the work] with ‘The Book of Knowledge’^A (*Kitāb al-‘ilm*) because [knowledge] is of the utmost importance. Firstly, I reveal the knowledge that God (Great and Glorious is He) ordered the elite (*a‘yān*) to seek in the words of His Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace) when he said, ‘Seeking knowledge is a legal obligation (*farīda*) for every Muslim’;^B then, I differentiate [in the book] between knowledge that is beneficial and [knowledge] that is harmful, for may God bless him and grant him peace said, ‘We seek refuge in You from knowledge that does not benefit’;^C and I illustrate how far the people of this age have departed from right conduct, and how deceived they are by glossy illusions^D and by their contentment with the husk rather than the kernel of knowledge.

The Quarter of the Acts of Worship is made up of ten Books:

- 1 The Book of Knowledge
- 2 The Book of the Foundations of the Articles of Faith
- 3 The Book of the Mysteries of Purity
- 4 The Book of the Mysteries of the Prayer
- 5 The Book of the Mysteries of Almsgiving
- 6 The Book of the Mysteries of Fasting
- 7 The Book of the Mysteries of the Pilgrimage
- 8 The Book of Ways of Reciting of the Qur’ān
- 9 The Book of Invocations and Supplications
- 10 The Book of Classification of Litanies and the Division of the Night Vigil

The Quarter of the Norms of Daily Life is made up of ten Books:

- 11 The Book of the Manners Related to Eating
- 12 The Book of Conduct in Marriage
- 13 The Book of Ways of Earning and Making a Living

^A We have retained Book for the titles of the chapters of the *Revival*.

^B Ibn Mājā 224.

^C Muslim 2722.

^D Lit. ‘mirage’ (*sarāb*).

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- 14 The Book of the Lawful and the Unlawful
- 15 The Book of Ways of Friendship, Brotherhood and Companionship
- 16 The Book of Conduct in Seclusion
- 17 The Book of Conduct in Travel
- 18 The Book of Conduct in Audition and Ecstasy
- 19 The Book of Enjoining the Good and Prohibiting Evil
- 20 The Book of Conduct of Living and the Qualities of Prophethood

The Quarter of the Moral Vices is made up of ten Books:

- 21 The Book of Expounding the Wonders of the Heart
- 22 The Book of Disciplining the Soul
- 23 The Book of Breaking the Two Desires
- 24 The Book of the Vices of the Tongue
- 25 The Book of Condemnation of Anger, Rancour and Envy
- 26 The Book of Condemnation of the World
- 27 The Book of Condemnation of Avarice and Love of Wealth
- 28 The Book of Condemnation of Status and Ostentation
- 29 The Book of Condemnation of Pride and Conceit
- 30 The Book of Condemnation of Self-delusion

The Quarter of the Saving Virtues is made up of ten Books:

- 31 The Book of Repentance
- 32 The Book of Patience and Thankfulness
- 33 The Book of Fear and Hope
- 34 The Book of Poverty and Abstinence
- 35 The Book of Unity of God and Reliance upon Him
- 36 The Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment
- 37 The Book of Intention, Truthfulness and Sincerity
- 38 The Book of Vigilance and Self-examination
- 39 The Book of Reflection
- 40 The Book of the Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife

As to the Quarter of the Acts of Worship, I mention in it the mysteries of their conduct, the subtleties of their ways, the secrets of their meanings, and what the practicing scholar (*al-‘ālim al-‘āmil*) cannot do without; he would not be among the scholars of the Hereafter if he were not versed in these. Much of this has been neglected in the studies of jurisprudence.

In the Quarter of the Norms of Daily Life, I discuss the secrets of the [various] relations that take place between people (*mu‘āmalāt*),^A their deeper meanings, the subtleties of their ways, and the mysteries of the piety (*wara‘*) that should run through them. [All] these are what no religious person (*mutadayyin*) can do without.

In the Quarter of the Moral Vices, I list every reprehensible character trait (*khuluq madhmūm*) that the Qur’ān commanded to be uprooted, and the soul to be cleansed and the heart to be purified thereof. I include for each of these character traits its definition (*ḥadd*) and its reality (*ḥaqīqa*), then the cause from which it derives, the evils that result from it, the signs by which it can be recognised, and the different remedies that can be used to eliminate it.

Accompanying all this are proofs from Qur’ānic verses, Prophetic reports (*akhbār*) and narratives (*āthār*).

As to the Quarter of the Saving Virtues, I mention every laudable character trait and every desirable quality of those near [to God] (*muqarrabūn*) and of the righteous (*ṣiddīqūn*) through which the servant can gain proximity to the Lord of the worlds. For every quality I give its definition and its reality, the means by which it can be attained, the fruits that are derived from it, the signs by which it can be recognised, the merits which make it desirable, and the ways that it has been affirmed by the Law (*shar‘*) and by the intellect (*‘aql*).

^A The plural *mu‘āmalāt* (sing. *mu‘āmala*) does not have the same meaning as *‘ilm al-mu‘āmala* below and therefore they have been translated differently according to Ghazālī’s intention for each.

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Other titles have been written about some of these topics,^A but this [present] work is distinguished from them in five ways:

Firstly, it clarifies what is complicated in them and elucidates what they have mentioned in passing.

Secondly, it organises what is scattered in them and systematises what is disparate in them.

Thirdly, it summarises what they have overly discussed and gives precision to what they have affirmed.

Fourthly, it deletes what they have repeated and corroborates what they have formulated.

Fifthly, it clarifies ambiguous matters that are difficult to understand and that have never even been the subject of books. For though all [who write] may follow a single method, this does not preclude each one who pursues [this method] from paying special attention to a matter that concerns him and which his colleagues may not know about, or may be aware of it but overlooked it in writing, or may not have overlooked it but something caused them to turn away from it.

While it includes all the [above mentioned] sciences, these are the [five] specific attributes of this work.

Two things prompted me to compose this book in four quarters. The first and primary motive is that this arrangement is indispensable when researching and elaborating [on a subject], given that the knowledge by which we approach the Hereafter is divided into 'the knowledge of contingent actions' (*'ilm al-mu'āmalā*)^B and 'direct knowledge' (*'ilm al-mukāshafa*).^C

^A In writing the *Revival*, Ghazālī was fully aware of the religious literature of his time and, in the *Revival*, he both draws on a number of titles (for example, Makkī's *Qūt al-qulūb*) and takes this literature a step further.

^B *Mu'āmalā* (pl. *mu'āmalāt*) is usually translated as 'transaction', 'procedure', 'treatment'. But for Ghazālī, there is a return to the root of the term in *'amala*, 'to act'. In translating *'ilm al-mu'āmalā* as 'the knowledge of contingent actions', we have taken both Ghazālī's own definition and the root of the term into consideration.

^C In Sufism, *mukāshafa* is a technical term meaning 'unveiling' and 'direct

By direct knowledge, I mean [the knowledge] whose only requirement is to reveal the object of knowledge (*ma'lūm*) and nothing else.

By the knowledge of contingent actions, I mean [the knowledge] of the actions that necessarily accompany direct knowledge.^A

The aim of this book is exclusively the knowledge of contingent actions and not direct knowledge which—despite it being the goal of those who seek and the aspiration for the vision of the righteous—is beyond being documented in books. The knowledge of contingent actions is a means to it. The prophets (may God bless them and grant them peace) only spoke to people about the knowledge of the path (*'ilm al-ṭarīq*) and about guidance to it. As to direct knowledge, they only mentioned it through symbol and allusion, and by way of comparison and in a general fashion, knowing that people's understanding falls short of comprehending it. Now, those who possess knowledge are the heirs of the prophets and thus they cannot verge from the method of emulating and imitating [the prophets].

Knowledge of contingent actions is divided into outer knowledge (*'ilm zāhir*), by which I mean the knowledge of the actions for bodily parts; and inner knowledge (*'ilm bāṭin*), by which I mean the knowledge of the actions of the heart.

or experiential knowledge'; it is linked with *dhawq* 'tasting'. The term has been translated as 'revelation' (Nabih Amin Faris, *The Book of Knowledge*, p. xiv), but it is clear from Ghazālī's definition that it is not revelation as *wahy*, but is direct spiritual knowledge of immutable truths.

^A It should not be understood from this very concise definition that Ghazālī intends each individual to act exclusively on his or her own direct knowledge. The actions referred to here are those derived from the Qur'ān, the *Sunna* of the Prophet, and the example of the pious predecessors and the saints; thus actions based in revelation and in the direct knowledge of the Prophet and the saintly. Each of the chapters of the *Revival* invariably starts with reference to Qur'anic verses, the traditions of the Prophet and the narratives of the Companions and the saints, making them the example to be followed.

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What applies to the bodily parts is either worship (*‘ibāda*) or norms of daily life (*‘āda*).^A

What occurs in the heart—which by dint of being veiled from the senses is part of the heavenly realm (*malakūt*)—is either commendable (*maḥmūd*) or reprehensible (*madhmūm*).^B

Thus, this knowledge [of contingent actions] by necessity divides into two halves: outer and inner. The outer half, which is connected to the bodily parts, is itself divided into worship and norms of daily life; while the inner half, which is connected to the states of the heart and the attributes of the soul, is divided into either what is reprehensible or what is commendable. Therefore, the result is four parts and no examination of the knowledge of contingent actions can go beyond these divisions.

The secondary motive [for composing this book]: I have found that—[despite jurisprudence] being exploited by those who do not fear God to boast, and their making use of its prestige and standing in competing [with each other]—there is a genuine desire for knowledge on behalf of the students of jurisprudence. [Thus, in imitation of the works of jurisprudence,] it is divided into four quarters; for he who takes on the garb of the beloved becomes beloved. I believe that styling the book in the form of [books of] jurisprudence will gently lead hearts [to it]. This was the reason why one of those who wanted to draw the attention of persons in authority to [the science of] medicine structured it in the form of an astrological almanac, arranged it into tables and numbers, and called it ‘The Almanac of Health’, that their familiarity with this kind [of science] may draw them to reading [his title].

Gently leading hearts to the knowledge that benefits everlasting life is more important than leading them to medicine that

^A Elaborated in the Quarter of Acts of Worship and the Quarter of Norms of Daily Life.

^B Elaborated in the Quarter of the Moral Vices and the Quarter of the Saving Virtues.

only benefits the health of the body. The fruit of this knowledge is the health of hearts and souls and the arrival through it to life that never ends. How can the medicine that is used to heal bodies, necessarily destined before long to corruption, compare with this!

We ask God (glory be to Him) guidance to what is right and just, for He is the Generous, the Munificent.

The Islamic Texts Society
Rabi^c al-thani 1436/February 2015