

Introduction to "Ihya Ulum al-Din" and an Academic Review of the Methodology and style of the Author

مقدمة حول كتاب "إحياء علوم الدين" ومراجعة علمية لمنهج المؤلف وأسلوبه

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مقدمة حول كتاب "إحياء علوم الدين" ومراجعة علمية لمنهج المؤلف وأسلوبه

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Abstract

In Islam, purification of the soul and spiritual excellence—known as Tazkiyah and Ihsan—are considered the highest levels of faith. These are often referred to the technical term Tasawwuf or Sufism. Islamic scholars have made great contributions in this field through their writings and research. Among these, Imam Al-Ghazali's book *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) has gained exceptional fame and popularity across the Muslim world. It is a masterpiece on Sufism that, even after many centuries, remains relevant and respected because of its deep insight and unique style. The book is not only about spirituality but also discusses many important issues of Islamic law (Fiqh). This book, *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, is like a shining lamp for anyone seeking knowledge and guidance, especially for those walking the path of Sufism, and more generally for every Muslim searching for truth. Imam Al-Ghazali's work has played a powerful role in reviving both religion and knowledge. It earned respect from both supporters and critics alike—scholars and ordinary people were drawn to it, and it left a strong impression on everyone who read it. Islamic scholars have praised it highly, saying that even if all other knowledge disappeared from the world, this one book would be enough. In fact, Imam Al-Ghazali first wrote a smaller book called *Kimiya-e-Sa'adat* (The Alchemy of Happiness), and later expanded it into what became *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. This great book includes both outward religious knowledge and inner spiritual insights. It focuses on self-purification and is a valuable source of truth and wisdom. This current research aims to introduce this book and analyze Imam Al-Ghazali's method and writing style. Since many people still benefit from this book, it can also serve as a helpful guide for the younger generation and educated readers.

Keywords: *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Imām al-Ghazālī, Methodology, Fiqh, Taṣawwuf

1. Introduction

Imam Al-Ghazālī rendered numerous invaluable services to the Islamic sciences. He authored works on a wide range of subjects, each addressing significant religious, philosophical, and ethical issues of his time. *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* was written during a period when the Muslim ummah was suffering from intellectual confusion, excessive formalism, and academic stagnation. Imam al-Ghazālī not only identified the core problems of the era but also offered profound solutions, which are clearly reflected in every chapter of this remarkable work. One

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of the distinctive features of this book is that it is not confined to mere jurisprudential discussions or mystical theories; rather, it presents Islamic sciences in a balanced manner by integrating rational, spiritual, and practical dimensions. In the present research, an overview of Imam al-Ghazālī's life, including his early background and scholarly contributions to Islamic sciences, has been undertaken. This paper also aims to provide a comprehensive introduction to *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* and a detailed analysis of Imam al-Ghazālī's methodology and style of expression.

The objective of this study is to examine how Imam al-Ghazālī addressed the intellectual and moral challenges of his time with deep insight, and how his literary and scholarly approach revived the essence of religious sciences and provided meaningful guidance to the people.

2. Biography of Imam Ghazali رحمه الله عليه

2.1. Name, Lineage, and Birth

His full name was Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Ahmad Al-Tusi Al-Ghazali Al-Shafi'i (رحمه الله). His title was Zain-ud-Din, and he was famously known as Hujjat-ul-Islam.

He was born in the year 450 AH in the district of Tus, in the province of Khorasan. His father used to spin and sell thread for a living, and because of this occupation, their family was called "Ghazali", as the word "ghazal" means spinning yarn¹.

2.2. Early Life

Taj-ud-Din Subki (رحمه الله) wrote that Imam Ghazali's father was a very pious and righteous man. He had great love and respect for scholars and jurists and would spend on them as much as he could. He regularly attended religious gatherings and sermons, where he would often weep out of the fear of Allah.

He constantly prayed for righteous children — and Allah accepted his prayers by blessing him with a son like Imam Ghazali.²

When Imam Ghazali was around 15 years old, his father passed away in the year 465 AH. Before his death, his father made a will to his close friend, Abu Hamid Ahmad bin Muhammad Radhkani, asking him to spend all his wealth on the education and upbringing of his two sons. The friend fulfilled this responsibility with sincerity and spent the entire inheritance on the education and care of Imam Ghazali and his brother.³

2.3. Scholarly Life

Imam Ghazali began his early education in his hometown of Tus. He studied books of Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence) under his father's old Sufi friend, Ahmad bin Muhammad Radhkani (رحمه الله). After the death of Imam al-Haramayn in 478 AH, Imam Al-Ghazali succeeded him and took over his position. Before the age of 20, he traveled to Jurjan, a city in Iran, where he studied under Imam Abu Nasr Ismaili (رحمه الله) for some time.

Afterward, he returned to Tus. In 473 AHS, he traveled again to Iran, but this time he stayed in Nishapur, where he studied under the famous scholar Imam al-Haramayn Abdul Malik bin Abdullah Al-Juwayni (رحمه الله). There, he mastered subjects such as Theology (Usul al-Deen),

¹ .As-Subkī, *Tāj al-Dīn, Tabaqāt ash-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā* (Cairo: Hajr lil-Ṭibā'a wa an-Nashr wa at-Tawzī', 1413 AH), 6: 194.

² . Ibn Kathīr, Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar al-Qurashī ad-Dimashqī, *Tabaqāt ash-Shāfi'iyyīn*, ed. Aḥmad 'Umar Hāshim and Muḥammad Zaynhum Muḥammad 'Azab (Cairo: Maktabat ath-Thaqāfa ad-Dīmiyya, 1413 AH), 533

³ . Az-Zabīdī, Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, *Ithāf as-Sāda al-Muttaqīn bi-Sharḥ Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 1: 9.

Debate, Fiqh, Logic, and Philosophy (Hikmah). After the death of Imam al-Haramayn in 478 AH, Imam Al-Ghazali succeeded him and took over his position.

In the year 484 AH, Imam Ghazali went to Baghdad and was appointed as the Vice Chancellor of Madrasa Nizamiyya in Baghdad. The great scholar Allama Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 595 AH) mentions that many prominent scholars attended his lectures in Baghdad. Among them, two especially notable names were Abu al-Khattab Mahfuz bin Ahmad al-Hanbali (d. 510 AH) and Ali bin Aqil al-Hanbali. These scholars would gain knowledge from Imam Ghazali and were often amazed by the depth of his teachings. They admired his speech so much that they would include his words in their own books. After serving in this role for four years, Imam Ghazali set out for Makkah with the intention of performing Hajj, which he successfully completed.⁴

In 489 AH, Imam Ghazali went to Damascus and stayed there for a while. After that, he travelled to Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem) and spent some time there as well. Later, he returned to Damascus, where he devoted himself to remembrance of Allah (dhikr), deep thinking, and spiritual reflection (muraqabah). While in Damascus, he spent most of his time in the Khanqah (spiritual retreat center) of Shaykh Nasr al-Muqaddami (رحمه الله). He remained in the region of Sham (Greater Syria) for ten years, and during this period, he wrote many of his most famous books, including: *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (Revival of the Religious Sciences – 4 volumes), *Tafsir Yaqut al-Ta'wil* (40 volumes), *Jawahir al-Qur'an*, *Mishkat al-Anwar* and several others.

After this, he resumed his travels for the sake of teaching and spreading knowledge, moving between Baghdad, Nishapur, and Hijaz. Eventually, he returned to his hometown of Tus, where he spent the rest of his life engaged in worship, spiritual teaching, and giving advice and guidance to others.⁵

2.4. Pledge to a Perfect Spiritual Guide:

During his student life, at the age of 27, Imam Ghazali (رحمه الله) pledged spiritual allegiance (bay'ah) to Shaykh Abu Ali Fadl bin Muhammad bin Ali Faridhi al-Tusi (d. 477 AH), who was a well-known teacher of Tasawwuf (Islamic spirituality). Shaykh Abu Ali was a man of high spiritual rank, a scholar of the Shafi'i school of law, and deeply knowledgeable about the beliefs and practices of the early generations (Salaf). He was also one of the most distinguished students of Imam Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 417 AH).⁶

2.5. The search for hidden (spiritual) knowledge

As mentioned earlier, Imam Ghazali (رحمه الله) held the position of senior teacher at the Nizamiyya Madrasa in Nishapur under Imam al-Haramayn, and later at the Nizamiyya Madrasa in Baghdad. The top scholars and rulers of that time were impressed by his deep and vast knowledge. One of his most devoted admirers was Nizam al-Mulk al-Tusi, the Prime Minister of the Seljuk Empire. He often came personally to consult Imam Ghazali on important state matters. Despite holding such prestigious positions, Imam Ghazali was in search of spiritual and inner peace. At that time in Baghdad, debates and arguments between various sects and religious groups were creating a climate of confusion and unrest. This situation led Imam Ghazali to start studying the beliefs and teachings of these different sects.

⁴ . Ibn al-Jawzī, Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Faraj, *Al-Muntaẓam fī Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa al-Umam* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1412 AH), 17: 124–127.

⁵ . Az-Zabīdī, Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, *Ithāf as-Sāda al-Muttaqīn bi-Sharḥ Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn*, 1: 9–11. Ithaf

⁶ . Az-Zabīdī, Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, *Ithāf as-Sāda al-Muttaqīn bi-Sharḥ Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn*, 1: 26

His curiosity and restlessness kept growing. Eventually, when he began reading books on Sufism, he came to a life-changing realization — that knowledge alone is not enough, what truly matters is practice. He mentioned this deeply in his famous book "**Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal**" (**The Deliverer from Error**). He wrote that these events encouraged him to cut off all connections and leave Baghdad, but he was struggling to make a firm decision. In this mental confusion and internal conflict, he fell seriously ill. Finally, he made the decision to leave. The rulers, state officials, and many scholars tried to stop him, but he didn't listen to anyone and migrated to Syria in search of peace.⁷

2.6. His teachers

Imam Ghazali traveled to various countries and cities in pursuit of knowledge. He learned from capable and renowned scholars and studied different subjects under different teachers.

Teachers in Hadith (Prophetic Traditions)

His teachers in Hadith included: Abdullah Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Khawari, Qazi Abu al-Fath al-Hakimi al-Tusi, Muhammad bin Yahya Suja'i Zawzani, Hafiz Abu Futyan Umar bin Abu al-Hasan Rawasi Dehstani, Nasr bin Ibrahim Maqdisi — may Allah have mercy on them all.⁸ He studied the famous Hadith collection Sahih al-Bukhari from Abu Sahl Muhammad bin Ubaidullah al-Hafsi.

Teachers in Fiqh (Islamic Law)

In Fiqh, his teachers included: Allama Ahmad bin Muhammad Radhkani, Imam Abu Nasr Isma'ili, Imam al-Haramayn Abu al-Ma'ali Juwayni (رحمه الله)

Teachers of Sufism

In the field of Sufism, Imam Ghazali had two well-known teachers: one was **Abu Ali Fazl bin Muhammad bin Ali Fareezi Toosi**, and the other was **Yusuf Sajjah**.

Regarding his teachers in **theology (Ilm al-Kalam)** and **debate (Jadal)**, no clear information is found. As for **philosophy**, Imam Ghazali himself admitted in his famous book "*Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*" that he had no teacher in this subject.⁹

2.7. Students of Imam Ghazali

Imam Ghazali had a large number of students who learned religious knowledge from him. Many of them became well-known scholars, jurists (fuqaha), hadith experts (muhaddithin), Quran commentators (mufassirin), and writers. Some of his most famous students are listed below:

- * Qazi Abu Nasr Ahmad bin Abdullah Hamqari (d. 554 AH)
- * Abu al-Fath Ahmad bin Ali Hanbali (d. 518 AH) – He taught multiple subjects at Madrasa Nizamiyya
- * Abu Mansur Muhammad bin Ismail Attari Toosi (d. 486 AH)
- * Abu Saeed Muhammad bin Saad Nuqani (d. 554 AH)
- * Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Tumart – He founded a great empire in Spain
- * Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Abdul Malik Juzqani Isfarayini
- * Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Ali Iraqi Baghdadi (d. 540 AH)

⁷ . Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, trans. Faiz Aḥmad Owaisi (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), 1: 20; see also *Ta'rif al-Iḥyā' bi-Faḍā'il al-Iḥyā'*, in the margin of *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), 5: 365–368.

⁸ . Ibn Kathīr, Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar, *Tabaqāt ash-Shāfi'iyyīn* (Cairo: Maktabat ath-Thaqāfa ad-Dīniyya, 1413 AH), 535.

⁹ .Az-Zabīdī, Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, *Iṭḥāf as-Sāda al-Muttaqīn bi-Sharḥ Iḥyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, 1: 26.

- * Abu Saeed Muhammad bin Ali Jawani Kurdi
- * Imam Abu Saeed Muhammad bin Yahya Nishapuri (d. 548 AH)
- * Abu Tahir Ibrahim bin Mutahhar Shaybani (d. 513 AH) – Imam Ghazali once wrote in a letter that this student was the most distinguished among all
- * Abu al-Fath Nasr bin Muhammad Maraghi Sufi
- * Abu Abdullah Hussain bin Nasr Mosuli (d. 552 AH)
- * Abu al-Hasan Saad al-Khair bin Muhammad Ansari (d. 541 AH) – He was the teacher of famous scholars like Ibn al-Jawzi and Imam al-Sam'ani
- * Abu Abdullah Shafi bin Abdul Rasheed Jeeli (d. 541 AH) – He was also a teacher of Imam al-Sam'ani
- * Abu Aamir Dughsh bin Ali Naeemi (d. 542 AH)
- * Abu Talib Abdul Karim bin Ali Razi (d. 527 AH) – It is said that he memorized the entire Ihya Ulum al-Din
- * Abu Mansur Saeed bin Muhammad Razzaz (d. 503 AH), Abu al-Hasan Ali bin Muhammad Juwaini (Sufi), Abu Muhammad Salih bin Muhammad, Abu al-Hasan Ali bin Mazhar Dinawari (d. 533 AH), Marwan bin Ali Tanzi (d. after 540 AH), and Jamal al-Islam Abu al-Hasan Ali bin Muslim Salami — the last three were teachers of Imam Ibn Asakir. Ibn Asakir was the great author of the renowned book Tarikh Damascus (History of Damashq), which comprises 80 volumes.¹⁰

2.8. The Scholarly Contributions of Imam Al-Ghazali

Imam al-Ghazali began writing around the age of twenty. He passed away at the age of 54 or 55, yet in this relatively short period, he authored many books. According to Eastern scholars, the number of his works is 99, while Western researchers count 78. Some sources even mention as many as 136 books.¹¹

2.9. Below are the names of some of his most famous books

Ihya Ulum al-Din (Revival of the Religious Sciences), Al-Imla' 'ala Mushkil al-Ihya', Al-Arba'in, Al-Asma' al-Husna, Al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad (Moderation in Belief), Iljam al-'Awam 'an 'Ilm al-Kalam (Restraint of the Commoners from Theology), Asrar al-Anwar al-Ilahiyya bi al-Ayat al-Matlowa, Akhlaq al-Abrar wa al-Najat min al-Ashrar, Asrar Ittiba' al-Sunnah, Asrar al-Huruf wa al-Kalimat, Ayyuha al-Walad (O My Son), Bidayat al-Hidayah (The Beginning of Guidance), Al-Basit fi Furu' al-Madhab, Bayan al-Qawlayn li al-Shafi'I, Bayan Fada'ih al-Ibahiyyah, Bada'i' al-Sani', Tanbih al-Ghafilin, Talbis Iblis (The Devil's Deception), Tahafut al-Falasifah (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), Al-Ta'liqa fi Furu' al-Madhab, Tahsin al-Ma'khadh, Tahsin al-Adillah, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, Al-Mankhul fi Usul al-Fiqh, Al-Wajiz, Kimiya-yi Sa'adat (The Alchemy of Happiness)¹²

Some people believe that a few of these books may not have been authored by Imam Ghazali himself but were mistakenly attributed to him. For instance, there is a view that Al-Mankhul fi Usul al-Fiqh is not his work. Similarly, some claim that the book Yaqut al-Ta'wil does not

¹⁰. Az-Zabīdī, Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, *Ithāf as-Sāda al-Muttaqīn bi-Sharḥ Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, 1: 60–62

¹¹. Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, trans. Madani Scholars (Karachi: Maktaba al-Madina al-'Ilmiyya, Dawat-e-Islami, 1433 AH), 1: 82

¹². Ibn Kathīr, Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar, *Tabaqāt ash-Shāfi'iyyīn*, 536–553.

exist at all.¹³ However, the book that mentions this claim provides no reference, making the statement doubtful.

On the other hand, the historical book *Al-Muntazam fi Tarikh al-Muluk wa al-Umam* mentions that when Imam Ghazali presented *Al-Mankhul* to his teacher, Imam al-Juwayni, the latter said:

"You have buried me alive! Could you not wait until I had passed away?"
— meaning the book was so excellent that it surpassed his own writings. Also, in *Ithaf al-Sadah al-Muttaqin*, it is written that Imam Ghazali authored *Yaquut al-Ta'wil* during his stay in the Levant (Sham).¹⁴

2.10. Death

Imam al-Ghazali spent his entire life in the service of Allah, but in his final days, he dedicated most of his time to worship. He spent his days and nights in devotion and asceticism, yet he continued to write and compose books. *Al-Mustasfa*, his highest-ranking work on the principles of jurisprudence, was written a year before his death in 504 AHS. The following year, on Monday, 14th Jumadi al-Thani, 505 AHS, he passed away in the town of Tabaran, located in the region of Tus. He left behind enough wealth for his family, but he only had daughters, who were left to mourn his passing.

3. Introduction to *Ihya Ulum al-Din*

Ihya Ulum al-Din (The Revival of Religious Sciences) is regarded as one of the most significant books in Islamic studies, equally revered by both scholars and mystics. Despite the vastness of Islamic libraries, no other book has matched its stature. This book explores the secrets of Sharia and Tariqa (spiritual path), ethics and mysticism, religious philosophy, wisdom and exhortation, as well as the reform of outward and inward aspects of life. It is an unparalleled work that addresses the purification of the soul. This book is comprehensive and serves as guidance for all social classes, providing valuable advice for every segment of society.

3.1. Theme of the Book

Although *Ihya Ulum al-Din* covers many aspects, including mysticism and legal issues, its primary focus is on ethics and moral philosophy. The book delves into the depths of religious secrets, philosophical concepts, and the importance of ethics in both the spiritual and social life of a Muslim.

3.2 Etymology of the Title

The term *Ihya* (revival) has a broad meaning. It signifies the act of giving new life to a dead body, revitalizing or rejuvenating something, breathing new life into an idea, belief, or feeling, or even giving new vigor or strength to something that has lost its vitality. In this sense, the title *Ihya Ulum al-Din* means the revival or rejuvenation of religious sciences. The name reflects the essence of the book, which aims to bring the religious sciences back to life, revitalize them, and breathe new energy into them.

As Imam al-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) mentions, the *Ihya* is comparable to the Quran in its importance. Sheikh Abu Muhammad al-Zarouni claimed that if all the

¹³ . Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid Muḥammad, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, trans. Maulana Nadeem al-Wajdi (Karachi: Dār al-Ishā'at, 2015), 1: 34.

¹⁴ . Az-Zabīdī, Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, *Ithāf as-Sāda al-Muttaqīn bi-Sharḥ Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, 1: 9–11

knowledge in the world were to disappear, he would revive it through the teachings of Ihya Ulum al-Din.¹⁵

3.3 Imam Ghazali's Jurisprudential School

Imam Ghazali followed the Shafi'i school of thought. Therefore, in the book Ihya Ulum al-Din, the jurisprudential rulings presented are in accordance with the Shafi'i madhhab. However, at times, he also supported the opinions of other scholars. The book contains numerous references to Quranic verses as evidence, and likewise, it includes thousands of hadiths. The virtues and merits of Ihya Ulum al-Din are so abundant that they cannot be fully encompassed. In fact, the author has presented truths and knowledge in this book that were previously unknown to people.

3.4. Reason for Writing

Imam Ghazali mentions that the reason he wrote this book was that most people fail to understand the greatness of the afterlife. They are unaware that matters of the afterlife are very serious. The provisions accumulated for the afterlife are very few, and time is short because death is near. Achieving success and salvation in the afterlife requires a guide, and the scholars, who are the heirs of the prophets, should lead this way. However, in the current era, such scholars are almost nonexistent. Religious knowledge, particularly the knowledge practiced by the righteous predecessors, is disappearing. This is a significant issue for the religion, as the absence of this knowledge is a cause of corruption and adversity. For this reason, Imam Ghazali decided to write this book in order to revive religious knowledge and highlight the importance of the beneficial knowledge followed by the early scholars and prophets.¹⁶

3.5. Scholarly Opinions on Ihya Ulum al-Din

Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, in one of his writings, says:

"Ihya Ulum al-Din is not a critical book. It is a comprehensive and detailed book of reform and education. The author of this book has tried to compile a work that can be sufficient for the self-reformation and education of a seeker of truth, as well as for the guidance and teaching of others. To a large extent, it can serve as a substitute for an entire vast Islamic library and can become a manual for religious life. Therefore, this book encompasses three important aspects: Aqidah (beliefs), Fiqh (jurisprudence), and Tazkiyah (purification of the soul). One of the notable qualities of this book is its impact. Sometimes, readers experience such an effect from it that their hearts become completely detached from worldly affairs. A strong inclination toward asceticism and austerity emerges, which can sometimes be excessive. A sense of fear and awe can develop, which at times affects one's health and daily activities. This is a result of the fact that during the time of writing this book, the author was deeply influenced by awe and fear. As a result, many spiritual guides advise beginners not to study this book."¹⁷

¹⁵ . Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, trans. Maktaba al-Madina al-'Ilmiyya Translation Department (Karachi: Maktaba al-Madina al-'Ilmiyya, n.d.), 1: 84.

¹⁶ . Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), 1: 2

¹⁷ . Nadwī, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī, *Tārīkh-e-Da'wat-o-'Azīmat* (Lucknow: Kakoozi Offset Press, 1427 AH), 1: 167.

In another place, Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi writes about the book *Ihya Ulum al-Din*:

*"Ihya Ulum al-Din is also a significant work on the subject of Islamic ethics and the philosophy of ethics. What he has written about the diseases of the heart and the states of the soul is a reflection of his deep insight and sound thinking."*¹⁸

3.6. Maulana Shibli says:

"A distinctive feature of *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is that reading it has a profound effect on the heart. Every sentence pierces the heart like a sharp needle. Every statement has an enchanting impact, and every word brings a sense of spiritual ecstasy."¹⁹

In the same book, Allama Shibli writes that the greatest strength of *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is that it combines both wisdom and exhortation in one work.²⁰

Hafiz Abul Fadl Abdul Rahim Iraqi (d. 608 AH) states that *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is one of the highest Islamic books for distinguishing between what is halal and haram.²¹

Syed Kabir Ali bin Abu Bakr Saqaf (d. 895 AH) says, "If a non-Muslim reads *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, he will become a Muslim. It contains a hidden secret that draws hearts towards it like a magnet."²²

Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi (d. 638 AH) says, "I used to read *Ihya Ulum al-Din* while sitting in front of the Holy Kaaba in Mecca."²³

3.7. Subjects of *Ihya Ulum al-Din*

Ihya Ulum al-Din is a four-volume book. The author has given each volume a separate name, detailed as follows:

The first volume is titled Ruba' al-Ibadat (Quarter of Worship), The second volume is titled Ruba' al-Adaat (Quarter of Habits), The third volume is titled Ruba' al-Mahlakat (Quarter of Destructive Things), The fourth volume is titled Ruba' al-Munjiyat (Quarter of Salvation).

3.8. The Methodology and Style of the Author in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*

This book is a comprehensive collection of both worldly and otherworldly knowledge. It discusses matters related to life and death, as well as the conditions of Hell and Paradise and their related issues. The author has attempted to cover many sciences in this book, including the secrets of Sharia and Tariqa, wisdom and exhortation, philosophy and religion, the correction of outward and inward matters, and the purification of the soul. Before *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, the books written on this subject did not gain as much popularity. This was primarily because those books were written in a philosophical style that was not easily understood by the general public. As a result, they did not become widespread except among a limited group. Additionally, many of the religious issues were either not mentioned at all or were vaguely addressed. However, in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, Imam Ghazali combined philosophy and religion to compile this book.

3.9. Use of Qur'anic Verses and Hadiths

In this book, the author begins by explaining the virtues of each subject and then tries to prove these virtues through Qur'anic verses and Prophetic hadiths. For example, in the first volume, in *Kitab al-Azkar wa al-Du'a*, he mentions eight (8) different Qur'anic verses and

¹⁸ . Nadwī, Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī, *Tārīkh-e-Da‘wat-o-‘Azīmat*, 1: 168.

¹⁹ . Nu‘mānī, Shiblī, *Al-Ghazālī* (Lahore: Islami Kutub Khana, Urdu Bazaar, Raza Printers, n.d.), 81.

²⁰ . Nu‘mānī, Shiblī, *Al-Ghazālī*, 85.

²¹ . Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad, *Ta‘rīf al-Ihyā’ bi-Faḍā’il al-Ihyā’*, in the margin of *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifā, n.d.), 5: 358.

²² . Al-Ghazālī, *Ta‘rīf al-Ihyā’ bi-Faḍā’il al-Ihyā’*, in the margin of *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn*, 5: 361.

²³ . Az-Zabīdī, Muḥammad al-Ḥusaynī, *Ithāf as-Sāda al-Muttaqīn bi-Sharḥ Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn*, 1: 38.

eleven (11) hadiths. Additionally, many hadiths are cited on the virtues of gathering for dhikr.²⁴ However, some of the hadiths cited are weak or fabricated. For instance, in Kitab Asrar wa Taharat, the first hadith is "Bani al-Din ala al-Nazafa" (Religion is based on cleanliness), which is a weak or fabricated narration.²⁵

In his work, Imam Ghazali has mentioned some hadiths that are not authentic, either in terms of their chain of narration (isnad) or content (matn). Some of these hadiths are weak or fabricated. The hadiths in this book have been scrutinized by Hafiz Iraqi and Ibn Sabki, which has clarified which hadiths are fabricated and baseless. However, many hadiths criticized for being unauthentic are still meaningful and correct in terms of their meaning and understanding, as their concepts align with other authentic hadiths or Qur'anic verses.

Generally, hadith scholars have declared about 237 hadiths in *Ihya Ulum al-Din* to be unauthentic or fabricated. However, modern research shows that only 24 hadiths are unique to Imam Ghazali. Moreover, all the hadiths mentioned in *Ihya Ulum al-Din* are also found in *Qut al-Qulub* (The Nourishment of Hearts). Therefore, it is not accurate to say that this book contains an abundance of fabricated hadiths.²⁶

3.10. Philosophical Approach

Abu Hamid Ghazali, although a master in the fields of knowledge, jurisprudence, mysticism, theology, and principles of Islamic law, was also inclined towards philosophy. However, he shaped philosophy within the framework of Sufism and presented it in Islamic writings. This approach led to considerable criticism from Muslim scholars, including his own close disciple, Abu Bakr Ibn Arabi, who even criticized Ghazali by saying:

"Our teacher, Abu Hamid, delved deeply into philosophy, but when he tried to step out of it, he could not. Even some of the esoteric ideas are attributed to him, and these can be found in his books."²⁷ This is why topics related to theology and philosophy are also discussed here and there in his works. In certain sections, Ghazali engages in a philosophical and lengthy discourse, where deep explanation and thoughtful reflection are required to understand the subject matter. However, this style is not used uniformly throughout his work.

Henry Louis writes about this book.²⁸ that if *Ihya Ulum al-Din* had been translated into French during the era of René Descartes, people would have thought that Descartes had plagiarized it. Studying *Ihya Ulum al-Din* has a profound effect on the reader's heart; every word touches deeply, and a feeling of ecstasy is felt.

3.11. Imitation of the Method of the Ancients

Imam Ghazali wrote this book keeping in mind the works of the early scholars. Therefore, the book is quite similar to *Risala Qushayriya*, *Qut al-Qulub* by Abu Talib al-Makki, and *Zariyah ila Ilm al-Shari'ah* by al-Raghib al-Isfahani. In *Qut al-Qulub*, Abu Talib al-Makki begins each section by first presenting Qur'anic verses, then the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH), followed

²⁴ . Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid Muḥammad, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, 1: 294–296.

²⁵ . Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid Muḥammad, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), 1: 125, footnote. The ḥadīth mentioned here is not found in these exact words. However, a narration of 'Ā'isha (RA), cited by Ibn Ḥibbān in *Aḍ-Ḍu'afā'*, states: "Tanazzafū fa-inna al-Islāma nazīf" — but the ḥadīth scholars have also declared this narration as weak.

²⁶ . Mu'āwiyah, Muḥammad, *A Critical Study of the Ḥadīths in Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn in the Light of Riwayah bil-Ma'nā* (PhD diss., Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, 2018), 372.

²⁷ . Ibn Taymiyya, Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* (Medina: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 1416 AH), 4: 66.

²⁸ . Descartes, René. "French philosopher, scientist, and mathematician, widely considered a seminal figure in the emergence of modern philosophy and science, often credited as the 'Father of Modern Philosophy.'" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9_Descartes

by the words and actions of the companions and the Tabi'un. This same approach was adopted by Imam Ghazali in his book. There are numerous similarities in the themes and sections of *Ihya* and *Qut al-Qulub*, both attempting to encompass both outward and inward knowledge.

Some researchers claim that certain phrases in *Ihya* are almost identical to those in *Qut al-Qulub*, with only a few differences in wording, but the meaning remains nearly the same. If one were to compare both books, they might suspect plagiarism on Imam Ghazali's part.²⁹ However, Allama Shibli Nomani, in his book *Al-Ghazali*, has quoted certain excerpts from both books, demonstrating their similarities.

Imam Ghazali himself acknowledged in the preface of his book that he wrote *Ihya Ulum al-Din* while considering the works of the ancients. He elaborated on topics that were briefly discussed in earlier texts, providing more detailed explanations. He condensed long discussions, omitted certain points, and offered solutions to complex issues in his work. There is no doubt that this book is derived from *Qut al-Qulub*, *Risala Qushayriya*, and *Zariyah ila Ilm al-Shari'ah*. Many of the hadiths and narrations in this book are also found in *Qut al-Qulub*.

3.12. Sufistic Approach

Imam Ghazali, due to his deep attachment to Sufism and his complete mastery of the sciences of spiritual refinement, reflected his Sufistic approach in his book *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. In this work, he emphasizes both the outward and inward reform of the soul, and highlights the importance of avoiding vices, while also providing a detailed and refined method for doing so. The book discusses the sciences related to Sufism in great detail and presents Sufi issues in an excellent manner. Imam Ghazali addresses the causes of spiritual and inner diseases and offers remedies in line with the teachings of the Shari'ah. He has tried to present even the most complex issues of Sufism in a simplified, engaging, and impactful manner that is easy for the general reader to understand.

3.13. Juristic Approach

Imam Ghazali, being a renowned jurist and scholar, also reflects his juristic approach in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*. In this book, he discusses Islamic legal issues in detail, covering all related juristic rulings. Each subject is examined with an effort to derive legal judgments from it. Since Imam Ghazali followed the Shafi'i school of thought, he primarily used Shafi'i jurisprudence as the basis for his legal opinions. He also cites the views of Imam al-Shafi'i.³⁰ However, in some cases, he supports the opinions of other scholars as well. For example, in his detailed discussion on the issue of the purification of water, he examines Imam al-Shafi'i's views thoroughly, but also provides arguments in favor of Imam Malik's position.³¹

If a person masters the knowledge found in this book alone, it can almost make them independent of other books of Islamic jurisprudence. This is because it covers nearly every important topic related to Islamic rulings that a Muslim need in life.

3.14. Writing Style

* **Clarity and Flow:** Imam Ghazali's writing style in this book is very clear, pleasant, and effective. It is simple yet powerful, which easily captures the reader's attention.

²⁹ . Nu'mānī, Shiblī, *Al-Ghazālī*, 83.

³⁰ . Adh-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad, *Siyar A'lām an-Nubalā'* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1427 AH), 14: 267.

³¹ . Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm ad-Dīn*, Kitāb Asrār aṭ-Ṭahāra (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, n.d.), 1: 129.

- * **Use of Evidence, Quotes, and Examples:** He supports his points with references from the Qur'an and Hadith, and further explains them using stories, examples, and sayings of the Companions and their followers. Sometimes, he even uses poetry to add depth.
- * **Scholarly and Reformative Approach:** Imam Ghazali doesn't just present academic knowledge; he also acts like a spiritual guide, advising and encouraging moral reform.
- * **Research and Analysis:** He doesn't just state religious rulings; he explores their roots, analyzes them deeply, and then offers practical solutions.
- * **Spiritual and Sufi Tone:** Throughout the text, there is a strong sense of spiritual insight and the gentle presence of Sufism. His words touch both the heart and the mind.
- * **Advising and Emotional Tone:** At many points, Imam Ghazali writes like a caring teacher speaking to his students, or like a compassionate reformer awakening his people.
- * **Structure and Organization:** *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is beautifully organized. Imam Ghazali has carefully arranged the chapters into four clear sections: worship, dealings, morals, and spiritual development — each with a natural flow and connection.

4. Summary

Imam Al-Ghazali was born in 450 AHS in Khorasan. He lost his father at a young age, and his father's friend, Abu Hamid Ahmad bin Muhammad Razkani, took responsibility for his upbringing and education. He received his early education in his hometown of Tus and later gained expertise in theology, debate, jurisprudence, logic, and philosophy. In 478 AHS, he was appointed to the position of Imam al-Haramayn. In 484 AHS, he moved to Baghdad and became the Chancellor of the famous Nizamiyya Madrasa.

In 489 AHS, he traveled to Damascus and continued scholarly journeys to various countries. He spent nearly ten years in the Levant (Sham), where he wrote many of his most famous works. Toward the end of his life, he returned to his hometown of Tus, dedicating his time to worship, spiritual teaching, and guiding others. Many renowned scholars and authors were among his students. Imam Ghazali authored dozens of books, though there is some disagreement about the exact number, and a few works were mistakenly attributed to him. He passed away in 505 AHS in the Tabaran region of Tus.

This is Imam Ghazali's most famous work. The book's main focus is on ethics and moral philosophy, but it also comprehensively covers nearly all branches of Islamic knowledge. As its title suggests, the purpose of the book is to revive the lost or neglected sciences of Islam.

The legal rulings in the book mostly reflect the Shafi'i school, as Imam Ghazali followed this madhhab. However, he also presents arguments in favor of other schools in certain matters. This work is a complete guide for personal reform, spiritual development, and ultimate success in the Hereafter. *Ihya Ulum al-Din* is divided into four volumes, each with its own title. One of the book's unique qualities is how it blends philosophy and religion, creating a deep emotional impact on the reader. It often detaches the reader from worldly distractions, sometimes even affecting their health or routine due to the intensity of spiritual reflection. For this reason, some Sufi masters do not recommend it for beginners. The book reflects Imam Ghazali's philosophical, Sufi, and jurisprudential approach. Your teachings promote unity among different schools of thought (masalik), which is why, in your mentioned book, you have, on several occasions, supported the views of other Imams besides your own school. He supports his points with strong evidence from the Qur'an and Hadith, and when necessary, also refers to the sayings and actions of the Companions and the Followers (Tabi'un). The methodology is similar to earlier works like *Risalah Qushayriyyah*, *Qut al-Qulub* by Abu Talib al-Makki, and *Dhari'ah ila 'Ulum al-Shari'ah* by Al-Raghib al-Isfahani.

Though some topics are complex and explained in great detail, causing length in certain sections, the book places great emphasis on righteous actions, worship, and their etiquettes.

While earlier Hadith scholars criticized *Ihya* for containing about 237 weak or fabricated narrations, recent research shows that only 24 Hadiths in the book are uniquely reported by Imam Ghazali without known supporting chain.



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