

The Psychology of al-Ghazzali

Concept of Normality

By: Dr. Hassan Amer

According to Al-Ghazzali, the spiritual entity or true self of humanity is the *Qalb* (heart) which abides in the physical body and controls his organic and physical functions . He describes personality as the integration of bodily and spiritual forces . His search for the psychological nature of human beings focused on discovering the nature of the self, its ultimate purpose, and causes of its misery and happiness.

Every human being is born to aspire to know God, according to Qur'anic teachings. The human individual is born in this world as a complex multifaceted personality, consisting of a diversity of attributes of life, matter, intelligence, and divinity. Both positive and negative forces comprise the individual; positive forces lead the individual toward God, negative leads away. Nearness to God is equivalent to "normality", whereas distance from God, leads to "abnormality".

Following the Islamic tradition, Al-Ghazzali starts his discussion from normality, unlike many other western scholars who start from abnormality. In Islamic terminology, the child is born in a

"natural" state, which means it is innocent at the time of birth, which means it is in a state of balance and harmony. The child becomes a Christian or a Muslim, etc., only through the influence of the parents. In Islam *the* concept of sin develops in the life of the child at a later stage, but in many other western religions, the individual is born in `sin".

Self concept

The concept of the self is expressed by four terms in Arabic [as conceived by the Qur'an] , according to Al – Ghazzali. These terms are: *Qalb* (heart) , *Ruh* (soul) , *Nafs* (*desire-nature*), and *Aql* (intellect, reason). Each of these terms signifies a spiritual entity. Al-Ghazzali prefers to use the term *Qalb* for the self in his work. One essentially required to know this *Qalb* in order to discover ultimate reality.

Qalb is one of the most important technical terms of Sufism. It is no other than what has been referred to as the spiritual core of the Human of Light, as an integral whole of the subtle, esoteric organs for perceiving the esoteric aspects of things. The *qalb* is a supersensory organ of cognition

through the activation of which is realized what is usually known as mystical experience. According to the Sufi theory of the 'soul', the *qalb* which is the third stratum, is the threshold of the divine dimension of Beings, it is essentially of a luminous nature, and the world which is disclosed by the activity of the *qalb* constitutes ontologically the middle domain between the world of pure light of God, and the world of material darkness under the dominion of Satan.)

The body has certain needs that need to be satisfied. Al-Ghazzali describes these needs as the motor (*Muharrika*) motives. The motor motive consists of propensities (*baitha bil-haraka*) and impulses (*Mubashira bil-haraka* or *qudra*). The first type of special propensity is appetite (*al -Quwwat-ash-shahwaniyya*). This tendency urges the desire and obtain what it feels is good for it.

It includes hunger, thirst, sexual cravings, etc. The second propensity is anger (*al-Quwwat -al Ghadabiyya*). This urges the body to avoid or repel what is harmful to it. Anger takes various forms like rage, indignation, revenge, etc. Impulse is the power resident in muscles, nerves and other tissues that move the organs at the behest of appetite and anger.

The power of comprehension is the sensory motive (*Mudrika*) which perceives what is harmful and what is good for the body. Without it, one would flounder blindly.

Comprehension includes external as well as inner senses. The inner senses are designated as Common Sense (*Mushtarak*), Imagination (*Takhayyul*), Reflection (*Tafakkur*), Recollection (*Tadhakkur*) and Memory (*Hafiza*). The external senses consist of hearing, taste, sight, smell, and touch with their associated sense organs.

Al-Ghazzali treats the internal senses slightly differently in *Mizan al-Amal* (The Touchstone of Logical Thinking) and *Kimya-i-Sa'adat* (knowledge of the self). These are treated differently from *Quwwat al Khayal* (the power of imagination). Another sense is mentioned, which he calls *Quwwat-ul - Wahm* (the power of inspiration). This function is to comprehend the intangible meanings of a perceivable object. Once it has been experienced *Takhayyul* enables a being to retain the image of any perceivable object. For example, the image of the object seen remains in the mind after the eye has been closed.

The power which brings together relevant thoughts and associations

is *Tafakkur*, which can also disassociate from them as it considers fit. It cannot create anything new which is not already present in the mind. Memory (*Hafza*) stores the impressions which are received through the senses. *Tafakkur* recollects the meaning which is intangible, unlike the tangible objects of memory. A special faculty which synthesizes the sensory impressions is *Hiss-e- Mushtarak* (common sense) which carries them to the brain and gives them meaning. (Al-Ghazzali, 1988).

Al-Ghazzali believes in the localization of function in the brain, similar to some modern psychologists, where mental faculties have corresponding regions in the brain. For example, he says the power of imagination is located in what is now called the frontal lobe of the brain. Memory is located in what is now called the occipital lobe of the brain, and the power of reflection is located in what he calls the brain's "middle folds," or parietal lobe of the brain. The human is equipped to act in the present situation by means of the five outer senses, while the five inner senses help it to learn from past experiences and foresee future situations. The *Qalb* controls and rules over all these powers that direct and regulate the body . Thus

Al-Ghazzali claims that mind is the dynamic force which fashions matter according to its own needs. It has supremacy over matter and is the source of all activity. The inward yearning of the soul affects even the growth of the organs of the body. The *Qalb* controls and rules over all the powers that control and regulate the body.

To know and love God is the purpose of the creation of human beings. This is the supreme value of life. The soul's completion in the next life is based on its vision of God in this life -- the direct consequence of knowing God. Morality and good conduct are not possible without it. Thus knowledge is one of the cornerstones of Al-Ghazzali's moral system.

There are two concepts of knowledge: existential and formal. Formal knowledge is awareness of the self-evident principles of form in which the various objects of experience and intuition are comprehended. This knowledge begins with experience, but is not based on experience; it is a priori.

Knowing the content of knowledge as distinct from its form is existential knowledge. This is the knowledge of objects and events attained through experience and intuition. As previously

described, existential knowledge is of two kinds: phenomenal and spiritual. Phenomenal is knowledge of the material world, while the spiritual is knowledge of spiritual truths, such as the soul or God. Spiritual knowledge is the highest form of awareness. It but comes differently to different people but basically – it depends on intuition (*Mukashafa*) . To a few it is revealed directly, but to most it comes slowly through a good deal of self-cultivation (*Mujahada*) (Al-Ghazzali, 1988).

The potential for the development of knowledge initially is intellect, which cannot be converted into actuality except under two conditions: 1) the growth of intellect is dependent upon the growth of the body, and 2) there must be some outer cause to excite it into action. Thus, Al-Ghazzali concludes that the foundation for all sciences is potentially in the intellect which comes from within; that which comes from without is the event that brings it into actuality (Kareem, 1995).

Through experience and intuition, the intellect leads to the growth of knowledge. Thus intellect and knowledge develop with age. Both formal and existential knowledge occur together, but formal knowledge is innate while existential knowledge is acquired.

Al-Ghazzali explained the nature of knowledge quite clearly. Knowledge serves a double purpose. It is both a comprehension of objects and their significance, and a guide to conduct as well.

The two aspects of the Intellect or reason are theoretical and Practical.

Practical reason (*al-Aql al-Amal*) is the cornerstone of theoretical reason-it is enabled by it. But the domain of human conduct is where its active function lies. The ethical nature of various classes of knowledge depends upon their use, and a science determines its value from its relation to the goal. There are two kinds of science: *Shar'iyah* (religious) and *aqliyya* (intellectual).

Transcendental or theoretical reason (*al-Aql and an-Nazar*) deals with the apprehension of the phenomenal and spiritual realities. This kind of reason goes from the concrete to abstract, from the particular to the general, from diversity to unity. It perceives, generalizes and forms concepts. It is the theoretical reason that looks towards the supernatural world and receives knowledge from it, the knowledge of God: His qualities, His angels, His actions. The mystery of the origin of life, etc. In other words, intuition is fundamentally theoretical reason

working at a higher plane. However, it uses a different mode of operation in the transcendental realm. Theoretical reason has given us various systems of knowledge called sciences (Kareem, 1995).

Six energies or powers exist in humans: impulse, appetite, anger, comprehension, will and intellect. The occurrence of impulse, apprehension, and will depend on the basic powers of the self - - the intellect, appetite, and anger.

Certain principles of human nature generate these basic powers. Humans can generalize and form concepts by means of intellect, which is the fundamental rational faculty. The beastly (*al-Bahimiyya*) generates appetite, anger comes from ferocity (*as-saliyya*), and Aql comes from intellect. Animals have only three powers: appetite, anger and comprehension, as opposed to these six human powers. The presence of intellect and will is what differentiates humans from other animals. The will is distinguished from that which rebels against the intellect, that is the satanic (*ash-shaytaniyya*). According to al-Ghazzali then, there are four elements in human nature: the sage, the pig, the dog, and the devil. The sage is the Aql,

dog is *al-Ghadab* (anger and ferocity), the pig is *ash-shaha* (lust and gluttony), the and devil is the brute which goads these two animals to rebel against *Aql*. People possess these powers in different proportions (al-Ghazzali, 1980).

The human soul can *attain* perfection, (al-Ghazzali, 1980), but to do so, it has to pass through many stages of development: sensual (*Mahsusat*), imaginative (*Mutakhayyalat*), instinctive (*Muhimat*), rational (*Ma'qulat*) and the divine. The first stage is without memory, just random activity. Then one resembles a lower animal, which when beaten, runs away when it sees a stick. In the third stage, a person is like a higher animal, that instinctively avoids danger and flees natural enemies but is not afraid of harmless creatures. In the fourth stage, a person comprehends objects which are beyond the scope of their senses and can form general concepts underlying a particular reality. In the fifth stage, they are able to comprehend the spiritual. Only prophets and saints reach this stage. The reality of the soul develops, and the significance of other spiritual things is revealed.

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