

Ghazali's Theory of Mystical Exercises

—with Reference to *Dhikr* and *Du'a'*—

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We analyse, in this present essay, the structure of the thought of Ghazali (1058-1111), with a major emphasis on his theory of mystical exercises of *dhikr* and *du'a'* in a comparative perspective. The *Ihya' 'ulam al-din*, his *magnum opus*, which admits of no doubt of his authorship, is used as the principal source in an attempt to attain the minimum essential understanding of his thought as the basis for our further extended study.

First, we describe Ghazali's general idea of mystical exercises. The goal of the Sufi is, according to him, to have a foretaste in the ecstatic state of mystical experience (*fanā'*) of the bliss of seeing God (*ru'yat Allāh, liqā' Allāh*) in the Hereafter. This *fanā'* is the consummation of man's complete denial of ego-consciousness in his love of God, as well as another "wound with love" for Him. Thus the Sufi attains by degrees to the highest state of the absolute single-heartedness (*al-ikhlas al-muṭlaq*) in which he is solely concerned with God, freed from all else but Him. The method to reach this state, or the preparation on the part of man for this divine grace (*fanā'*), is mystical exercises, and *dhikr* and *du'a'* are the most important of them.

Ghazali's usages of *dhikr* are widely ranged from the Qur'anic to the specifically Sufi one. We may group them into five. First, it is an effort (*takalluf*) to turn man's whole orientation from worldly things toward God by remembering Him constantly. Secondly, it is a kind of meditation on one's own death, his perilous position before God, the Last Judgment, the happiness in Paradise, and others with a view to producing a particular mood in the heart which will be a stimulus to further effort. Thirdly, it is a vocal repetition of God's name or a

certain sacred formula to praise and glorify Him. This *dhikr* can be regarded as an auxiliary method to the previous types of mental *dhikr*. Thus a mere repetition of a formula is of no use unless it is accompanied by the presence of mind in the object of *dhikr*. Fourthly, it is the inner state of the Sufi in which he no longer needs any effort to turn his thought to God, since his sole concern is now centered on God alone. And he is ready for the next *dhikr*. Last, it is an intensive method to concentrate the mind upon a single object (God) without being disturbed by any thought by repeating uninterruptedly a simple formula like “*Allāh*” or “*Subhāna ’llāh*” as the final leap up to *fanā’*. In Ghazali’s thought, *dhikr* goes along with the whole process of the Sufi practices.

As for *du‘ā’*, it does not show such a variety of usages. It is mainly used in the traditional sense of petition or humble request to God. As such, it is an expression of man’s essential relationship to God—man’s utter impotence and God’s omnipotence. There still remains in *du‘ā’* man’s *will* to petition, but even this disappears in the Sufi state of complete trust in God (*tawakkul*). Ghazali is not concerned much about the type of *du‘ā’* as “loving talk” (*munājāt*) between man and God in this higher state. Instead he is more interested in the effect of *du‘ā’* as a mystical exercise—the educational effect of cultivating the sense of man’s utter dependence upon God and constant reminding (*dhikr*) of Him.

On some later occasion, we will discuss the characteristics of these usages of *dhikr* and *du‘ā’* in the general framework of “prayer,” and describe how they are effectively put into practice in daily life.