



DELPHI
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Al-Ghazali

Collected Works



EASTERN  TREASURES

The Collected Works of

AL-GHAZALI

(c. 1058-1111)



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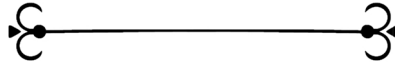
AL-GHAZALI



By Delphi Classics, 2026

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Collected Works of Al-Ghazali



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The Translations



Ancient ruins at Tabran, in the district of Tus, Khorasan, modern-day Iran — al-Ghazali's birthplace

The Alchemy of Happiness



Translated by Claud Field, 1909

Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazali (c. 1058-1111) was a Persian theologian and philosopher, often regarded as one of the greatest systematic thinkers and mystics of Islam. He is considered to be the eleventh century's *mujaddid*, a renewer of the faith, who, according to the prophetic *hadith*, appears once every 100 years to restore the faith of the Islamic community. Al-Ghazali's works were so highly acclaimed by his contemporaries that he was awarded the honorific title 'Proof of Islam'. Much of his work stemmed around his spiritual crises following his appointment as the head of the Nizamiyya University in Baghdad — the most prestigious academic position in the Muslim world at the time. This led to his eventual disappearance from the Muslim world for over ten years, after he realised he had followed a path of status and ego over God. It was during this period that many of his greatest works were written. He believed that the Islamic spiritual tradition had become moribund and that the spiritual sciences taught by the first generation of Muslims had been forgotten.

One of the earliest masterpieces of Sufism (the mystical, spiritual and ascetic dimension of Islam), *The Alchemy of Happiness* was composed towards the end of al-Ghazali's life in c. 1105, when the Muslim world was in a state of political and intellectual unrest, plagued by constant disputes about the role of philosophy and scholastic theology. The Sufis were criticised for their neglect of the ritual obligations of Islam, so this work was written to address these attacks, seeking to allay the tensions between the scholars and mystics. The text emphasises the importance of observing the ritual requirements of Islam; namely, the actions that would lead to salvation and avoidance of sin. What sets *The Alchemy of Happiness* apart from other theological works of the time is its mystical emphasis on self-discipline and asceticism.



Cover of a 1308 Persian copy held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France

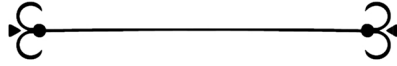
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An early twentieth century depiction of al-Ghazali

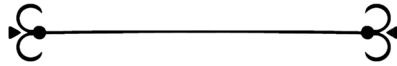
EDITORIAL NOTE



THE OBJECT OF the Editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West — the old world of Thought and the new of Action. In this endeavour, and in their own sphere, they are but followers of the highest example in the land. They are confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour. Finally, in thanking press and public for the very cordial reception given to the “Wisdom of the East” Series, they wish to, state that no pains have been spared to secure the best specialists for the treatment of the various subjects at hand.

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PREFACE



RENAN, WHOSE EASY-GOING mind was the exact antithesis to the intense earnestness of Ghazzali, calls him “the most original mind among Arabian philosophers.” Notwithstanding this, his fame as a philosopher has been greatly overshadowed by Avicenna, his predecessor, and Averroes, his successor and opponent. It is a significant fact that the *Encyclopædia Britannica* devotes five columns to each of the others and only a column and a half to Ghazzali. Yet it is doubtful whether it is as a philosopher that he would have wished to be chiefly remembered. Several of his works, it is true, are polemics against the philosophers, especially his *Tehafot-al-falasifa*, or “Destruction of the philosophers,” and, as Solomon Munk says in his *Melanges de philosophie Juive et Arabe*, Ghazzali dealt “a fatal blow” to Arabian philosophy in the East, from which it never recovered, though it revived for a while in Spain and culminated in Averroes. Philosopher and sceptic as he was by nature, Ghazzali’s chief work was that of a theologian, moralist, and mystic, though his mysticism was strongly balanced by common sense. He had, as he tells us in his *Confessions*, experienced “conversion”; God had arrested him “on the edge of the fire,” and thenceforth what Browning says of the French poet, Rene Gentilhomme, was true of him:

Human praises scare
Rather than soothe ears all a-tingle yet
With tones few hear and live, and none forget.

In the same work he tells us that one of his besetting weaknesses had been the craving for applause, and in his *Ihya-ul-ulum* (“Revival of the Religious Sciences”) he devotes a long chapter to the dangers involved in a love of notoriety and the cure for it.

After his conversion he retired into religious seclusion for eleven years at Damascus (a corner of the mosque there still bears his name— “The Ghazzali Corner”) and Jerusalem, where he gave himself up to intense and prolonged meditation. But he was too noble a character to concentrate himself entirely on his own soul and its eternal prospects. The requests of his children — and other family affairs of which we have no exact information — caused him to return home. Besides this, the continued progress of the Ismailians (connected with the famous Assassins), the spread of irreligious doctrines and the increasing religious indifference of the masses not only filled Ghazzali and his Sufi friends with profound grief, but determined them to stem the evil with the whole force of their philosophy, the ardour of vital conviction, and the authority of noble example.

In his autobiography referred to above Ghazzali tells us that, after emerging from a state of Pyrrhonic scepticism, he had finally arrived at the conclusion that the mystics were on the right path and true “Arifin,” or Knowers of God. But in saying this he meant those Sufis whose mysticism did not carry them into, extravagant utterances like that of Mansur Hallaj, who was crucified at Bagdad (A.D. 922) for exclaiming “I am the Truth, or God.” In his *Ihya-ul-ulum* Ghazzali says: “The matter went so far that certain persons boasted of a union with the Deity, and that in His unveiled presence they beheld Him, and enjoyed familiar converse with Him, saying, “Thus it

was spoken unto us and thus we speak.” Bayazid Bistami (*ob.* A. D. 875) is reported to have exclaimed, “Glory be to me!” This style of discourse exerts a very pernicious influence on the common people. Some husbandmen indeed, letting their farms run to waste, set up similar pretensions for themselves; for human nature is pleased with maxims like these, which permit one to neglect useful labour with the idea of acquiring spiritual purity through the attainment of certain mysterious degrees and qualities. This notion is productive of great injury, so that the death of one of these foolish babblers would be a greater benefit to the cause of true religion than the saving alive of ten of them.”

For himself Ghazzali was a practical mystic. His aim was to make men better by leading them from a merely notional acquiescence in the stereotyped creed of Islam to a real knowledge of God. The first four chapters of *The Alchemy of Happiness* are a commentary on the famous verse in the *Hadis* (traditional sayings of, Muhammad), “He who knows himself knows God.” He is especially scornful of the parrotlike repetition of orthodox phrases. Thus alluding to the almost hourly use by Muhammadans of the phrase, “I take refuge in God” (*Na’udhib’illah!*), Ghazzali says, in the *Ihya-ul-ulum*: “Satan laughs at such pious ejaculations. Those who utter them are like a man who should meet a lion in a desert, while there is a fort at no great distance, and, when he sees the evil beast, should stand exclaiming, ‘I take refuge in that fortress,’ without moving a step towards it. What will such an ejaculation profit him? In the same way the mere exclamation, ‘I take refuge in God,’ will not protect thee from the terrors of His judgment unless thou really take refuge in Him.” It is related of some unknown Sufi that when, asked for a definition of religious sincerity he drew a red-hot piece of iron out of a blacksmith’s forge, and said, “Behold it!” This “red-hot” sincerity is certainly characteristic of Ghazzali, and there is no wonder that he did not admire his contemporary, Omar Khayyam.

The little picture of the lion and the fort in the above passage is a small instance of another conspicuous trait in Ghazzali’s mind — his turn for allegory. Emerson says, “Whoever thinks, intently will find an image more or less luminous rise in his mind.” In Ghazzali’s writings many such images arise, some grotesque and some beautiful. His allegory of the soul as a fortress beleaguered by the “armies of Satan” is a striking anticipation of the *Holy War* of Bunyan. The greatest of all the Sufi poets, Jalaluddin Rumi, born a century after Ghazzali’s death (A.D. 1207), has paid him the compliment of incorporating several of these allegories which occur in the *Ihya* into his own *Masnavi*. Such is the famous one of the Chinese and Greek artists, which runs as follows:

“Once upon a time the Chinese having challenged the Greeks to a trial of skill in painting, the Sultan summoned them both into edifices built for the purpose directly facing each other, and commanded them to show proof of their art. The painters of the two nations immediately applied themselves with diligence to their work. The Chinese sought and obtained of the king every day a great quantity of colours, but the Greeks not the least particle. Both worked in profound silence, until the with a clangor of cymbals and of trumpets, announced the end of their labours. Immediately the king, with his courtiers, hastened to their temple, and there stood amazed at the wonderful splendour of the Chinese painting and the exquisite beauty of the colours. But meanwhile the Greeks, who had not sought to adorn the walls with paints, but laboured rather to erase every colour, drew aside the veil which concealed their work. Then, wonderful to tell, the manifold variety of the Chinese colours was seen still more delicately and beautifully reflected from the walls of the Grecian temple, as it stood illuminated by the rays of the midday sun.”

This parable, of course, illustrates the favourite Sufi tenet that the heart must be kept pure and calm as an unspotted mirror. Similarly, the epilogue of the elephant in the dark (vide chap. II.) has been borrowed by Jalaluddin Rumi from Ghazzali.

Another characteristic of Ghazzali which appeals to the modern mind is the way in which he expounds the religious argument from probability much as Bishop Butler and Browning do (vide the end of Chapter IV. in the present book). Ghazzali might have said, with Blougram:

With me faith means perpetual unbelief
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot,
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.

This combination of ecstatic assurance and scepticism is one of those antinomies of the human mind which annoy the rationalist and rejoice the mystic. Those in whom they coexist, like Ghazzali in the eleventh century and Cardinal Newman in the nineteenth, are a perpetual problem to understand and therefore perennially interesting:

He may believe, and yet, and yet,
How can he?

Another point in which Ghazzali anticipates Bishop Butler is his representation of punishment as the natural working out of consequences, and not an arbitrary infliction imposed *ab extra*. He tries to rationalise the lurid threatenings of the Koran.

In his own day Ghazzali was accused of having one doctrine for the multitude and one for himself and his intimate friends. Professor D. B. Macdonald, of Hartford, after going thoroughly into the matter, says, "If the charge of a secret doctrine is to be proved against Ghazzali it must be on other and better evidence than that which is now before us."

At any rate, Ghazzali has been accepted as an orthodox authority by the Muhammadans, among whom his title is Hujjat-el-Islam "The Proof of Islam," and it has been said, "If all the books of Islam were destroyed it would be, but a slight loss if only the *Ihya* of Ghazzali were preserved." The great modern reformer of Islam in India, the late Sir Syud Ahmed, has had some portions of this enormous work printed separately for the purpose of familiarising the young Moslems at Aligarh with Ghazzali.

The *Ihya* was written in Arabic, and Ghazzali himself wrote an abridgment of it in Persian for popular use which he entitled *Kimiya'e Saadat* ("The Alchemy of Happiness"). This little book contains eight sections of that abridgment.

Theologians are the best judges of theologians, and in conclusion we may quote Dr. August Tholuck's opinion of Ghazzali: "This man, if ever any have deserved the name, was truly a 'divine,' and he may be justly placed on a level with Origen, so remarkable was he for learning and ingenuity, and gifted with such a rare faculty for the skilful and worthy exposition of doctrine. All that is good, noble, and sublime that his great soul had compassed he bestowed upon Muhammadanism, and he adorned the doctrines of the Koran with so much piety and learning that, in the form given them by him, they seem, in my opinion, worthy the assent of Christians. Whatsoever was most excellent in the philosophy of Aristotle or in the Sufi mysticism he discreetly adapted to the Muhammadan theology; from every school he sought the means of shedding light and honour upon religion; while his sincere piety and lofty

conscientiousness imparted to all his writings a sacred majesty. He was the first of Muhammadan divines.”

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