

Munkidh min al-dalal (confessions, or deliverance from error) literature review e...

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Al-Ghazali is a twelfth century theologian cum philosopher from Persia, and is considered by many as the most powerful Islamic personality of all times, next only to Prophet Mohammed himself. Deliverance from Error is his autobiography and through this work he recounts how he encountered spiritual crisis in his life and how it was resolved by the light God cast on him. To quote his words –

**“ God give you good guidance and gently lead you to truth”
(Al-Ghazali, Pg. 2)**

According to Al-Ghazali, the quest for truth involves a relentless act of soul searching and does not come to an end, until the seeker reaches certainty. It is quite common in some point of one’s life, to question inherited wisdoms and truths, which they unquestioningly adhered to during their entire existence. Such points in life, urge one to embark on a quest to find out the truth himself, rather than depend on hearsay or written scriptures. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, undertook one such journey, which he elucidates in detail in “ Deliverance from Error”.

As a first step to this quest he erases all beliefs (both sensory and necessary beliefs) he had in his mind till then and seeks the light from God. He then undertakes a journey, to learn everything afresh and studies the teachings of various scholars, philosophers and theologians. Al-Ghazali through his life experience, finds out that to determine the certainty of truth, one should question and doubt everything, be it inherited traditions or imaginations. He

argues that there is a vast difference between knowing a truth and experiencing it yourself. He says though you know the meaning of health and satiety, it is not the same as being healthy and satiated. To quote his words –

“ And how great a difference there is between your knowing the definition of drunkenness and you being drunk”. (Al-Ghazali, Page 17)

He believes that truth can only be found out with certitude by an intuitive soul search by the individual and by trusting on the preaching of the holy Quran.

Al-Ghazali was aware of the fact that to denounce a particular teaching or belief, without understanding it and acquainting with it completely, is improper. Irrespective of the field he chose to study, Al-Ghazali always took steps to completely understand the knowledge shared by the authorities of that field, both during the stage of rejection of beliefs and reconstructing them. Thus his claims are authoritative as they germinate out of a complete understanding of the other philosophers' thoughts and their irrelevance to Islam.

He decided to dwell into the teachings about truth by four different groups namely the theologians, philosophers, Batiniyah and the Sufis. He even handedly analyzes the points made by these groups and quotes prophet Mohammed and the Holy Quran extensively in his arguments. After a thorough analysis, he concludes that the theologians did not have enough justifications for their definition of truth, because they did not deal with the primary objective thoroughly. He conveys that the Batniyah had many

doubts on the facts given by their Imams and refutes the beliefs expressed by the philosophers comprehensively through his book 'The incoherence of the Philosophers'. In his analysis of Sufism he focuses on cleansing its excesses and maintaining its orthodoxy. He chooses to quote Abu Talib to drive home his point which is as follows -

" Do not seek for the truth by means of men; find first the truth and then you will recognize those who follow it". (Al-Ghazali, Page 12)

Al-Ghazali can authoritatively present his claims because all the facts declared by him, are fruits of his own self searching and meditation.

Furthermore, these facts are supported by solid facts and are in line with the teachings of the Holy Quran and traditional Islamic values. He gives the reader a befitting conclusion by stating that a person may sometimes be misled into a path of sin, but a true Moslem will ultimately realize his error and denounce that path. And true knowledge will aid him in creating this barrier between him and sin.

Reference:

Al-Ghazali. Munkidh min al-Dalal (Deliverance from Error). 1100 CE.

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