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Your Al Ghazali: Alchemy of Happiness Al Ghazali is considered to be one of the most important figures in Islam as he is considered the authority in Islamic jurisprudence and Theology (after Muhammad). Born in Tus, Persia (Iran) in the year 1058, he goes by the name “ Proof of Islam” because of the way he lived his life. He was a professor of Islam in his young life, mainly teaching jurisprudence. By the age of 33, he was appointed as a professor of theology in the University of Baghdad. But then he was gripped with spiritual crisis and abandoned his teaching post and left Baghdad. He decided that there was no way he could rationalize faith, and discovered another way to figure out the “ truth” which was that of immediate experience which is based on imagination and intuition, not rationality. This is what is taught in the Sufi faith. Ghazali went to Syria to rediscover Islam, and went to live with the Sufi monks. Then he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca. It was during this pilgrimage that he was convinced that he was appointed to be a great reformer of the faith of Islam and his task was to inspire people. He went on to live in seclusion after this part of his life. He died in December 1111.

Al Ghazali’s Alchemy of Happiness is one of the many books he wrote during his lifetime. This book shares what he thought of the significance of spirituality and religion in mankind’s quest for happiness. The book itself starts with the words, “ He who knows himself is truly happy”. For Al Ghazali, everyone is perfect but that perfection is covered with the accumulation of worldly passions and animalistic desires. Thus, for him, mankind only requires “ polishing” to achieve that perfection; to be polished is to “ purify the heart from passion and resentment until, like a clear mirror, reflects the light of God”.

For him, music and dance are perfect ways of achieving happiness. This is

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exemplified in the Sufi dervishes. Sufi dervishes are basically spinning, and spinning basically presents the idea that everything revolves around God and He is the center of every activity, as well as he surrounds every activity. As he said, “ music and dance do not put into the heart what is not there already, but only fan into a flame of dormant emotions”. Also, his views on love and marriage proved to be philosophical as well. For him, marriage is an important part in our lives, mainly for the “ worshippers to increase in number”. Although Al Ghazali may be chauvinistic at some point, stating that marriage is convenient because there will be someone to clean the house, the main point that marriage as an important social bond is well-presented in the book.

The Alchemy of Happiness is similar to Buddhism and Confucianism in a sense that they all adhere to basic simplicity in life. They also tend to preach against all the worldly desires and aim for asceticism. For these religions, true happiness is simply acknowledging the pleasures of the world but living is defined by appreciating yourself and your relationship with the world around, not necessarily having the world.

References:

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