

CIVILIZATION SEQUENCE 205
AL-GHAZALI
(450-505 A.H. = 1058-1111 A.D)

A.U.B.
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**From the “plain” of Conformism to the “peak” of
“direct vision”: Destination = Certitude**

I. INTRODUCTION:

- Islam.
- The prevailing political & socio-economic conditions in the fifth century A.H. (11th. cent. A.D.)
- The Cultural/Intellectual Scene.
- Al-Ghazali's testimony:
- * “The different religious communities of the human race and likewise the different theological systems of the religious leaders with all the multiplicity of sects and variety of practices” and “the laxity of men’s belief in the principle of prophecy”... and the weakness of their faith... “was widespread among the people”, to the extent that “the sickness has become general, the doctors are sick, and mankind has reached the verge of destruction”... it is an “age of slackness, an era of futility”...

II. A. AL-GHAZALI: The Ornament of Religion and the Proof of Islam... Censorship and burning of his books.

B. The Text: Title; Style/method; Aim.

III. “From the plain of naive & second-hand belief to the peak of direct vision”

A. Awareness of the Problem of Truth

1. **Observation:**
 - Diversity of Religions and Multiplicity of Sects.
 - “Each group thinks that it alone is saved”; and “Each party is rejoicing in what they have”. But these are uncritical beliefs...“derived from the authority of parents and teachers”.
2. “Consequently... the bonds of taqlid ceased to hold me, and inherited beliefs lost their grip on me”.
3. “My inmost being was moved to discover...this original nature (fitra) ...”

- B.** *Epistemological crisis*
1. Despair/Hope.
 2. Sense Data/Rational Data Dialogue.
- “perhaps behind intellectual apprehension, there is another judge”. “*It may be*” the Sufi state, “or *it may be ... death*”... *But*: “it was *impossible*” to *construct a proof* “to make the demonstration” .
 3. “*The disease was baffling*”, for two months, “I was a *skeptic in fact, though not in theory nor in outward expression*”.
 4. The *Cure* was the effect of “a *light* which God Most High cast into my breast”, and “once again *I accepted the necessary truths of the intellect...* with safety and certainty”.
 5. “that Light is the key to the greater part of knowledge”.
- C.** *The Categories of those who seek the Truth*
- The speculative theologians = The Mutakallimun.
 - The Batinites.
 - The Philosophers.
 - The Sufis.
1. Critical attitude towards all four categories, *But*:
 2. “Do not know the truth by men, but rather, know the truth and you will know who are truthful”.
 3. “a clumsy and stupid person must be kept away from the sea-shore not the proficient swimmer”.
- And**
- D.** *Existential/Religious Crisis*
1. This life versus the afterlife.
 2. Another dialogue: “*Chains*” of “*worldly desires*”/“*voice of faith*”..
 3. Another sickness for six months... “a lock upon my tongue”.. “produced grief in my heart”... “there is no way to treat it unless *his heart be eased of the anxiety which has visited it*”.
 4. “Powerlessness”... Then “*He* made it easy for *my heart* to turn away from position and wealth” and to travel to Damascus where “my only occupation was retirement and solitude with religious and ascetic exercises”.
- E.** *SUFISM = Closeness to God*
1. Theory and Practice.
 2. Fruitional Experience... “the Sufis are masters of states not purveyors of words”.
 3. The Tariq (Way) (compare: The Shari'a)
 4. “Hard to describe in language”
 5. “Beyond the stage of intellect... *another eye* is opened”...
 6. The individual/community level:
“*Faith in the principle of prophecy*”

IV. *Emergence from Religious Retirement*

1. Knowledge and Action.
2. Diagnosis of the general Disease
3. Remedies.
4. Third dialogue. Critical self-examination.
- "...even if I went back to teaching, yet I did not go back".
- "It is my earnest longing that I may make myself and others better"

V. *Issues for further discussion*

1. Al-Fitra = The original human condition.
2. Doubt/Skepticism: "Doubts lead to the Truth... For he who does not doubt does not look and he who does not look does not see, and he who does not see remains in blindness and error".
3. The Various eyes - The heart. Light. Dreams.
4. Reason and Revelation: - "Rational Sciences are like food and Religious sciences like medicine".
5. Fanaticism/Tolerance. The true scholar.
6. Pre-destination/Free Will (complementarity).
 - Man is free by Acquisition (=Al-Kasb).
7. God/Man Relationship: Transcendence/Immanence.
 - Shari'a/Reason/Sufism: Synthesis and integration.
 - "We indeed created man: and we know what his soul whispers within him, and we are nearer to him than his jugular vein". (Quran, Sura 50 - al-Qaf-verse 15)

VI. *CONCLUSION*

A. *Al-Ghazali as symptom and symbol*

1. His disillusionment, doubt and psychological breakdown = symptomatic of the crisis of the era. (The cure: "Revival of Religious Sciences").
2. His significance is not in his mystical experience, but in his genius achievement of interpreting and integrating Sufism into the main body of Traditional Sunni Islam.
3. Did he fossilize or renew and reform? (Symbol)
 - "Abou Hamed was all things to all men". (Ibn Rushd)

- B.** "He who seeks diligently and arrives at the truth earns two rewards, and he who seeks diligently and errs, earns one reward".