

# CIVILIZATION SEQUENCE 202

## Introduction/*Al-Ghazālī* (d. 1111)

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### 1. ISLAM as an Abrahamic Paradigm

- 1.1. *Qur'ān* (القرآن كلمة الله): the Word of God and *Hadith*, the Prophetic tradition.
- 1.2. *Tawhīd* (التوحيد والشهادتان): the testimony of the Oneness of God, pure monotheism.
- 1.3. *Taklīf* (تكليف): covenant between God and the human being.
- 1.4. Islam is a religion of **ethics and law**. The *Qur'ān* is concerned with ethical imperatives for human society based on البر (righteousness), العدل (justice), and الخير (goodness).
- 1.5. Continuous **striving towards righteousness**, justice, and goodness build the central structural elements of Islam, which is meant to embrace the totality of human life.
- 1.6. Works (العمل) are of great importance.
- 1.7. Intention (النية) focused only on God needs to be rightly directed and firmly maintained by continual, inward striving, and self-examination.
- 1.8. *The Imām*: Political and spiritual leader. In Shī'ī Islam, the charismatic line of the infallible Imāms (figures of Guidance par excellence, primordial Light, knowledge of sacred science) as the source of salvation.

### 2. The Seljuks

- Turkish dynasty (Oghuz of Central Asia). Converted to Islam in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and established themselves in the Iranian province of Khorāsān in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century.
- Between 1040 and 1055, their chief, Tughril Beg, made himself protector of the caliph of Baghdād, spiritual leader of the Sunni Muslims.
- Ruling from their capital at Isfahan in Iran, the Seljuk sultans used the Persian language in their administration and were patrons of Persian literature. They founded *madrasahs* (colleges) to train future administrators.
- 1072, Nizām al-Mulk appointed Wazīr. Secures the power of the Seljuks and establishes a sophisticated governing system.

### 3. *Al-Ghazālī* (1058-1111)

- A great Islamic Jurist (فقيه), theologian (مُتَكَلِّم), and mystic (متصوّف).
- Born in Tūs (Northern Iran). Studies in Tūs, Jurjān, and Nīshapūr.
- 1091, appointed for the Chair of Law at the Nizāmiyya *madrasa* of Baghdād.
- 1095-1100, somber spiritual crisis; leaves Baghdad, giving up his position and renouncing the world.
- Two years Syria and Palestine, wandering and meditating. Pilgrimage to Mecca.
- 1100, back to Tūs where he lived in seclusion, sūfī practices and writing. Founded a sūfī *khāngāh* (retreat centre and *madrasa*) and taught a number of select novices.
- 1105 he resumed his position at the Nizāmiyyah College at Nishapur.
- 1111 he dies in Tūs. *Al-Ghazālī* is the author of some 84 books.

#### 4. **Deliverance from Error** (المقصدُ من الضلال), an intellectual autobiography (written after 1105)

- Skeptics of later antiquity: sense experience as the criterion of truth about external realities. Senses sometimes deceive us.
- al-Ghazālī: Things are not always what they seem to be. Illusions and hallucinations occur in our perception.
- Is there any reason at all to trust the senses?
- al-Ghazālī denies any necessary connection between cause and effect. Divine omnipotence "God is able to produce any effect without any intermediate cause at all."
- There is a state beyond reason - spiritual experience (ذوق); it is the effect of a light which God cast into the breast, it is the key to most knowledge.
- "Beyond the stage of intellect there is another stage, where in an eye is opened, by which man sees the hidden."
- "Perhaps, this life is only a state of dream."

### QUESTIONS

*What is a spiritual crisis?*

*Why does such a prominent scholar go through a spiritual crisis? Think of St Augustine!*

*Are there limits for scientific knowledge?*

*Are the material and dimensional features of the bodies separable from the bodies?*

*What is skeptic epistemology? Can we gain data beyond the world of experience? Can we discover the causes of phenomena? Compare with Descartes in CVSP 203.*

*How can we define faith? And reason? Compare with St. Augustine's ideas on the subject.*

*Compare the idea of light with St. Augustine's.*

#### 4.1. **Zuhd or Asceticism**

##### The Carnal Soul

النفس

- Seat of the vital drives and is therefore the real enemy. It is the very place where egotistical impulses and vital drives find their satisfaction.
- Man has animal drives in common with the beasts. *Carnal soul* is compared with a lustful, dirty dog. It needs to be locked up, otherwise it causes damage.
- *Zuhhād* or *ascetics* attempt to train the *carnal soul* systematically by means of control and self-examination.
- Zuhd is an act of renunciation (rejection; abandonment) of the world and its goods.
- It entails a gradual and at the same time severe training of the body and the *carnal soul*. Through mortification (إماتة); the soul is disciplined and chastised - above animal drives.

##### This is achieved through

- Detachment from earthly things.
- Continuous fasting and praying.
- *Dhikr* (ذِكْر): remembering God. Reading and reciting the Qur'ān and meditating its meanings.
- In face of the ephemeral and deceptive external world, a higher inner world is constructed which is oriented toward piety and righteousness.
- This plan cannot be achieved without a deep trust in God's providence, i.e., *tawakkul* (التوكل).

#### 4.1.1.

Al-Ghazālī was influenced, among others, by Hārith b. Asad al-Muhāsibī (d. 875), whose name is derived from his practice of frequent self-examination – حاسب نفسك قبل أن تُحاسب

**The Heart:** al-Muhāsibī regards the heart as the essence of the self, an immaterial principle which has the predominant control of the conscious life of the human being.

The heart is the abode of the hidden, inmost self, the *sirr* or secret, which being itself of Divine origin, can become conscious of the Divine.

Both al-Muhāsibī and al-Ghazālī in their auto-biographical communications, compare the heart to a mirror which should be polished and freed from defacement; for the hearts of men are veiled from God by hardness and rust.

#### 4.2. The Stations or abodes (المقامات)

##### 1. Penitence; repentance (مقام التوبة)

- A desire or an urge to repent accompanied by the insistence of bad habits that have already took hold of me (الرغبة في التوبة والحاح الطباع والعادات السيئة).
- Oscillation between daringness and restraint (الركض بين الإقدام والإحجام).
- Remorse from sin (تحقيق التوبة).

2. *Piety* (الورع): keeping away from dubious matters and situations.

3. *Fear and hope* (الرجاء والخوف) and Contemplative watchfulness; self-observation (المراقبة).

4. *Abstinence*; self-denial (الزهد): detachment from worldly occupations (قطع الرغبة في الدنيا). This world is corrupt and wicked it is perishable (دار فناء).

#### 4.3. Divine love. Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq (d. 762): love is "a divine fire that devours man completely."

**The different stages of *sūfi* love** (*sūfism* is involved in knowledge through the heart, trying to uncover a way or practice towards inner enlightenment and an inner nearness to God).

- Longing for God (الشوق).
- Integrity of the heart (المحبة).
- Proximity to God (القرب).
- Intimacy with God (الأنس).
- Apparition (المشاهدة): The soul's contemplation of God which reveals divine mysteries and a Gnostic *ma'rifa* of God. It is absolutely personal and the Mystic cannot disclose it. It is an experience of Divine presence.
- Mystical taste (الذوق): Mystical experience, or ecstasy and immediate tasting of the indescribable joy.
- Union (الفناء): A state of extinction of conscious thought and of bewilderment. In that state, the divine envelops all the human faculties of the Sūfī.

## 5. Predestination or Free Will? A major theme in all three Abrahamic religions

If it is God's favor and gift of **Grace** that humans reach the fullness of their spiritual life and are lead to salvation, what is the role of the human will, then? How does God's supremacy necessitate human responsibility?

What is the meaning of my willing, (of my VOLITION), within the unfathomable perfect structure of the universe that lies in the ultimate grip of God, the creator and the master?

- The *Mujbira* advocate predestination. They assert that human beings are incapable of any action, or free will, since they are fully determined in their actions, which are wholly created by God.
- The *Mu'tazilah* (rationalistic theology) affirmed capacity (*istitā'a*=free will) as a precondition of morality. "The human being is the creator of his/her deeds, good or bad, and is deserving of reward and punishment in the hereafter for what s/he does."
- al-Ghazālī defends the Ash'arī understanding of *Kasb* (كسب), acquisition of human acts.
- Their doctrine was that human acts take place, **a.** by the power of God Most High (= *occasionalism*: God causes bodily movements to occur), and **b.** by the acquisition (*kasb*) of the acts by man, in the sense that this happens when man is completely firm in his will and God Most High creates the act in him.

## 6. Al-Ghazālī's Attack against the philosophers (pagans & Muslims)

Most of their errors are found in the metaphysical sciences (الالهيّات) where they were opposed to the belief of all Muslims in three specific points in which they should be taxed with unbelief (يُجب تكفيرهم).

These are those who argue that:

- That human's bodies will not be assembled on the Day of Judgment, but only disembodied spirits will be rewarded and punished (إن الأُجساد لا تُحشَر وإنما الأرواح المجرّدة).
- That God, Most High, knows only the universals and not the particulars.
- Their maintaining the eternity of the world, past and future (قولهم بِقَدَمِ العالَمِ وأزليته), where as Muslims believe in the creation of the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) and that it will cease to be on the Day of Judgment.

What the philosophers are arguing is the fact that God's knowledge is universal, i.e. contrary to our human knowledge is not subject to the limitations of time and place. The particulars and accidental qualities which set the individual apart from other individuals are only objects of sense experience.

**QUESTION** Is theological language adequate for use in other fields of inquiry, such as sciences and philosophy for example?

Relying mainly on the following studies:

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