

# THE BOOK OF MINHAIJ AL-'ABIDIN: THE CONTRIBUTION OF AL-GHAZALI'S THOUGHT IN THE MORAL EDUCATION OF TODAY'S SOCIETY

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**Abstract:** Al-Ghazali is a thinker who greatly influenced Islamic thought and civilization. Minhaj al-'Abidin is one of his writings that is considered important and has always been the talk of traditional and contemporary scholars. This book focuses on the formation of human morality from the aspect of the development of Sufism. Minhaj al-Abidin not only encourages the formation of noble morals but also improves the practice of worship and can even bring society back to divine values. Therefore, this paper has three objectives, namely the first, to describe the importance of the study of Sufism in the formation of morality in today's society. Second, to do research on the book of Minhaj al-Abidin and third; to explain al-Ghazali's contribution in the Formation of the Moral Values of Society through the Book of Minhaj al-'Abidin. This literature study found that there are four things that are directly related to the construction and formation of community morals, namely understanding Islamic worship and inner worship. Second, the barrier factor of worship; and third, the difference between the crossing of the heart of satan, the crossing of the heart of lust and the crossing of the heart of Allah SWT. Writing will be able to make a great contribution to society to build morals that symbolize the purity of Islam as a way of life.

## Introduction

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d.505/1111) was a well-known scholar, his across the location of his residence and time. Al-Ghazali is considered a universal figure and Mujaddid who has made a name for himself in various fields, especially Sufism. A major change in him towards the appreciation of the teachings of Sufism occurred after he became famous as a scholar of fiqh and a scholar of kalam. (Osman Bakar, 2008) He is a prominent figure in the field of Sufism by producing various works such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, *Minhaj' Abidin*, *Bidayah al-Hidayah*, *Mizan al-'Amal*, *Mi'raj al-Salikin*, *Misykat al-Anwar* and many others. (Abdul Aziz Bin Muhammad, 2008).

With his vast and diverse knowledge, Imam al-Ghazali was able to read and comment on the damage of the Muslim community in his time as well as play a fairly effective role through the field of writing. The emergence of Sufism which was initially only famous in Kufah and Basrah in the 2nd century AH, and in the 3rd century, this science spread widely to the city of Baghdad at a time when people were faced with moral depravity, luxurious life became a measure of one's rank. Thus, the birth of Imam al-Ghazali in the 5th century by focusing on moral development to purify the heart and purity of the soul. (Engku Ali Engku Endut, 1999)

## **Research Methodology**

This paper uses a qualitative study that uses secondary data as reference and analysis. In more detail, this paper refers to the book of Minhaj al'Abidin as well as using other secondary sources such as journals, books, theses, articles and others to explain and support the main sources of this study.

## **The Phenomenon of Society and Its Impact Al-Ghazali's Thought**

To know the effect of al-Ghazali's thought, it is necessary to understand the thinking patterns of the community and Muslims in the 4th and 5th centuries AH (9-11M) from various aspects of life, especially about religion and social. This is because these factors are interrelated with each other which gives human beings a great impact on the influence of al-Ghazali's thought in Sufism and the formation of society's morals. The birth of a man named al-Ghazali in the midst of a chaotic and tumultuous society. Political phenomena at that time were better known as riots and unrest. The era of division among Muslims, and political backwardness especially the power of the Arabs in Baghdad during the Abbasid rule. He was born in the final stages of the reign of the Bani Abbas (132-656H). Muslims are currently facing the problem of split into several political and religious groups of different streams of thought between Sunnis and Shiites. The crisis of religious thought between sects, is now a crisis of political thought among Muslims. This period also gave birth to mystics such as al-Harith Ibn Asad al-Muhasibi, Abu Nas al-Sarraj and others. (Abdul Aziz Bin Muhammad, 2008).

Political phenomena in the time of Imam al-Ghazali are better known as riots and unrest, as well as in the field of religious social. Each cultivates a sense of bigotry towards their respective groups and sects. Every ruler tends to instill his ideology to the people in various ways until there is coercion and violence. The cultivation of sectarian fanaticism and trends in society involves many scholars. The government uses the ulama to be their protectors and justify their position in the eyes of Muslims. They get lucrative remuneration from the government. So these are cases of scholars facing to gain influence by being close with the authorities. (Mohd Noor Manuty, 2008)

Based on the state of society in the era of al-Ghazali, it can be described to us that in tracing the current of society's life at that time, al-Ghazali has focused on the field of Sufism after being involved in various fields of knowledge for so long. The emphasis on the question of personality can be seen in the method or methodology of knowledge by not attacking the philosophical thought of his time blindly. In fact he learned and mastered it first. This is acknowledged by him that a person will not know the damage of knowledge unless he has known the peak of knowledge (Abdul Aziz Bin Muhammad, 2008)

The emergence of al-Ghazali and this Sufi thought was born when the faith of the community was empty, far from obeying the law of Allah. It was the age of slander that destroys morals and ultimately distances people from the religion of Allah. Looking at the condition of the society around him, his illness is no longer successfully to be treated by doctors, his condition was very serious, so it is not surprising that Imam al-Ghazali felt obliged to revive the spirit of religion by writing books that talk about the heart (Sufism) , including the book of Minhaj al-'Abidin which will be discussed here. His sincerity in seeking the pleasure of Allah is the most important factor in determining the success of al-Ghazali, with the strength of the spiritual mujahadah he went through for 10 years (Abdul Aziz Bin Muhammad, 2008)

## **The Importance of the Study of Sufism in the Formation of the Morals of Today's Society**

Sufism is a science that talks about the cleansing and purification of the heart to reach the level of compassion in performing *ubudiyah* to Allah SWT. Sufism can cure human beings from various inner diseases and return human beings to the path of sincerity and achieve the original purity and perfection (*fitrah*). Therefore, the target of this knowledge is to educate people to have a noble personality and character or morals. (Mat Saman Kati Mokhtar Petah, 1997)

Many of us value the knowledge of Tawhid and Fiqh, but ignore the knowledge of Sufism. The importance of learning this knowledge has been described by Imam Malik who said: " a person who learns the science of Fiqh by ignoring Sufism, he becomes a *fasiq*, combining the two is successful in realizing the truth ". Imam Syafie explained: "I love three things from your world: abandon hypocrisy, soften the character with kindness, and follow the path taken by the mystics". (Zakarian Stapa, 1995) So in order to develop a community of believers who are faithful, pious and have noble morals, one must learn the three knowledge mentioned. The luxury of life and love and neglect of the world make Muslims forget Allah and the teachings of religion that guarantee the perfection of life in this world and the hereafter.

So the science of Sufism can guide people to self-enslavement to God, by doing all the commands and abandoning all His prohibitions. The human soul needs to be cleansed first before enslaving itself to God. (Mat Saman Kati Mokhtar Petah) The sign that proves that a person has "himself" is the nature of arrogance, *riya* ', greed, *ujub* (self-important), love for others besides Allah and others. It is this self that must be ridd of and instead fill in. Then he realized and felt himself close to God Almighty by his side. (Husin Nasir bin Mohd, 2008) Sufism is considered as certifying the knowledge of Tawhid and the knowledge of Fiqh, and also as a useful fruit to both sciences. (Husin Nasir bin Mohd, 2008)

### Compilation of the Book of Minhaj 'Abidin: A Study

Imam al-Ghazali is seen to be very meticulous and careful in compiling the book of Minhaj al-'Abidin. This is in accordance with the title of this book which is "The Way of the Worshipers", that worship is the way to meet God and His Heaven. This is the path taken by the prophets, saints, the pious and sincere people. The road to Heaven is not an easy path for servants to take. So it is not surprising that many people go to this path, but unfortunately they instead deviate in the middle of the road. This last work is to be a treatise of guidance and as the last will of Imam al-Ghazali to this ummah. This is because after the end of the writing of this book, he passed away at the age of 55 years.

Through the book of Minhaj al-'Abidin, Imam al-Ghazali, he has explained that a person will go through seven stages in his journey towards becoming a worshiper or 'abid. A servant when it is desired by Allah, then he will feel a touch of the whispering (Nur Ilham Ilahi) in his heart. The birth of the feeling to remember how he was given by God with many and innumerable favors, then he needs to be grateful to the giver of this favor (God). It was then that he was struck by fear due to his forgetfulness and negligence towards Allah SWT, and this is the stage known as the whispering of fear. Then makes himself to think of seeking knowledge as proof of truth. So it is this factor that demands him to learn knowledge and approach the pious to fulfill his religious responsibilities.

That is why imam al-Ghazali placed the discussion on the importance of knowledge and worship as the basis in the content of the book Minhaj al-'Abidin. Several important aspects related to knowledge and worship have been discussed such as the importance of knowledge before worship, knowledge without teaching, useful knowledge, sincerity in seeking knowledge and the danger of doing good deeds without knowledge.

Once a person has possessed this knowledge, or *Makrifat al-Yaqin*, it will encourage him to concentrate and serve Allah (obedience). The second stage is the question of "How is this self to worship, when many vices and sins have been committed and are always stained with the stain of filth?". So inevitably a servant is obliged to repent to God to cleanse himself from the impurities of immorality and be forgiven of all sins that ultimately qualify him to serve God. In relation to that, Imam al-Ghazali in the second chapter, discusses about "*Uqbah Taubat*". Among the aspects touched upon are why we must repent, what is meant by *nasuha* repentance, conditions of repentance, *muqaddimah* repentance, barriers to repentance, types of sins and ways to repent from those sins.

The third stage, when a person has acquired knowledge, and he has been cleansed from the filth of immorality, then he rises to worship God, suddenly found around him many obstacles that surround him. These obstacles became a big enough challenge to him to achieve the goal of becoming a member of the worship. So Imam al-Ghazali explained in the third chapter that there are four obstacles one must avoid, namely the world, creatures, the devil and lust. Each one of these obstacles is discussed at length and how to push and get rid of these obstacles. All these obstacles must be overcome with four things, namely being *tajarrud* from the world, isolating oneself from beings, fighting the devil and defeating lust. Imam al-Ghazali also acknowledged that to cross these obstacles is too difficult, especially to defeat lust and fight the devil. So all this can be restrained by the nature of piety. Thus, the fourth chapter discusses the nature of *taqwa*. In order to achieve this nature, a servant is obliged to take care of the five senses, namely the eyes, ears, tongue, heart and stomach.

The fourth stage, in crossing the path of worship of a servant will be disturbed by several other obstacles such as sustenance, fear of danger, hardship and disaster, and various *Qada* 'from Allah SWT. All this is discussed by Imam al-Ghazali in the fifth chapter which requires a servant to trust and submit to Allah, be patient and be content with the provisions or *Qada* 'of Allah.

Having successfully crossed the fourth stage and turning a person to almost succeeds in rising to become a worshiper, a servant feels himself weak, lethargic, lazy and unfit to establish worship. This is because of his tendency all this time to negligence, pleasure, luxury, relaxation, then the fifth stage, this requires him to have a guide that leads to good and prevents from evil that is the nature of *al-Raja* '(hope) and *al-Khauf* (fear ). Expecting every good to be rewarded and every evil rewarded by hell which brings fear.

After going through these five stages, Imam al-Ghazali said that a servant will face the sixth stage with 'Uqbah who injures and damages his deeds of worship. Two qualities that destroy the deeds of worship of a servant are *riya'* which is to show obedience to the people and *'Ujub* which is to feel better than others. So these two destructive factors can be prevented with sincerity and remembering the grace of God which is always under His care and love. While the last and seventh stage is that a servant will feel himself drowning in the ocean of God's blessings bestowed on him, such as God's guidance and taufiq, God's protection and control, glory and victory, then he feels afraid if he falls into the valley of disbelief, negligence and humiliation in the sight of Allah, then Imam al-Ghazali concluded, a servant should praise Allah and be grateful to himself for all the gifts from Allah.

After going through these seven stages, Imam al-Ghazali asserted that this human being will taste the deliciousness and sweetness of worship. They found a path of worship that became their destination. The coming of longing and Mahabbah (love) to Allah SWT. These are what are said to be the gardens and gardens of God's pleasure. This servant on the side of Imam al-Ghazali was physically the only one who was in the world, but the fact of his heart was already in the hereafter. This person is just waiting for the day and time to find the very sweet moments, namely the arrival of the Angel of Death who brings good tidings with the letter of death.

### **Kitab Minhaj Abidin: Al-Ghazali's Great Contribution in the Formation of Community Moral Values**

The book of Minhaj Abidin is one of the last works written by Imam al-Ghazali. In this book, he has laid a clear foundation in the formation of an individual's morals, which is to deepen knowledge. Thus, the main discussion in the book of Minhaj al-'Abidin is related to the superiority of knowledge. This is because knowledge and morality are two different things. Knowledgeable persons do not mean they are moral. People who practice their knowledge are considered to be moral people. Ibn 'Umar once said, a person will not reach a solid level of knowledge, if he is no longer envious of others who are higher in knowledge than him, not insulting others whose knowledge is lower. Does not expect a certain price reward for the knowledge taught. Said Hawa also gave an opinion on this matter by mentioning that arrogance is a disease that is very quickly contagious to the scholars. They feel the glory of knowledge, the beauty of knowledge and the perfection of knowledge, so that they feel themselves noble, perfect and look down on others (Said Hawa, 2005).

Imam Ghazali asserted in the Book of Minhaj al-Abidin that worship is the fruit of knowledge. Worship that is truly accepted by God is worship that is sourced from knowledge, and not based on custom or tradition alone. The first thing in one's life is to be knowledgeable. Knowledge is the axis that is the place of rotation of one's worship. In fact, because these two things are the reason for the revelation of the Qur'an and the Messenger sent and made the earth and the sky. This means that the creation of the two states of the world and the hereafter is due to the glory of knowledge and worship.

Clearly here, knowledge is more noble than worship. Science is likened to a tree. So the fruit is worship. So the glory is for the original tree. What brings its benefits is the result of its fruit. Thus, the knowledge must inevitably be given priority which is the guiding premise to worship. The Prophet saw explained in his hadith that knowledge is the Imam of deeds, and deeds are his followers as *makmum*. Humans have to pursue the bounty of these two parts, without neglecting either of them.

Imam Syafie also explained that if compared between seeking knowledge and complimentary worship, then seeking knowledge is more important. This is in line with the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad saw that a person who learns one chapter of knowledge is better than a person who prays a hundred *rak'ahs*. (Imam al-Ghazali, 1999) Imam Malik explained: (Habib Abdullah Haddad, 1987) "We find many people who seek knowledge until the age of 40. When they reach that age, they also turn their attention to increasing good deeds and doing what they learned. That there was no more time to focus on worldly issues no matter what.

This explanation of Imam Malik illustrates the far difference of human behavior today by doing charity first before seeking knowledge. So much of the practice is based on customary values that eventually become a firm hold and are difficult to rectify. That is why we see society today, even those who remain and continue to perform worship, but the ritual aspect does not affect them. The performance of the worship is only seen outwardly, but does not permeate into their hearts and minds.

### **The Importance of Understanding Islamic Worship and Inner Worship**

Many among us focus on the obligation of outward worship/ *syarak*, but neglect the obligation to know the knowledge of inner worship. It is a work of the heart that we must know about gratitude, trust, contentment, patience, sincerity and others. Similarly, the inner things that must be avoided such as envy, anger, *riya'*, arrogance and so on. All this is knowledge that guarantees not only man's relationship with God, but also with fellow human beings. Closer relationship with God and closer brotherhood with the

community. Thus, Islamic worship must be digested with inner worship that gives birth to the attributes of *Ubudiyah* and saves us from futility.

Islamic worship is an obligatory worship as well as inner worship. Ilmu Tauhid, Ilmu Syariah and Ilmu Tawasuf must be aligned which complement each other. The imbalance between these sciences produces people who are knowledgeable, but shrouded in pride and arrogance, many worship sharia, but externally filled with *riya* and like to humiliate others. All this spoils the Islamic worship and takes away the reward. The person who perpetuates the qualities will always above of the inner vices. Eventually we are worried that we will be confused and suspect that we are on the path of obedience to Allah SWT. We are too sure that Allah will give us a great reward, but the fact is that we are getting further and further away from Allah's guidance, due to deception as a result of worshipping without knowledge.

Let it be known that all the outward practices have a close relationship with the inward practices, either adding good to us or ruining the outward practices with fatigue and misfortune. A person who does good deeds without knowledge, is likely to do things that ruin his deeds, more than things that bring good to him. Muhammad bin Abil Ward (Sheikh Ibn 'Athailah, 2007) said that man is destroyed for two reasons. Among them are doing the complimentary worship/deeds and ignoring the obligatory (*fardhu*). While in deeds, deeds are concerned with physical deeds, but ignore the inner part (heart).

### Factors that Obstruct Worship

As a result of his observations, Imam al-Ghazali found that there are four main hindering factors namely: The world, beings, the devil and lust. All these barriers are already known and need to be removed within us. If all these obstacles are not removed, it is certain that the goal of worship that we do will not bring the desired results. So these four obstacles also need to be overcome with four things, namely to empty the heart of excessive love for the world, to isolate oneself from beings, to fight the devil and to defeat the devil's interference.

In general there are three conditions that prevent the worshiper from achieving the goal of worship towards Allah SWT. (Husin Nasir Mohd, 2008)

- i. The condition that prevents us from starting to move is called '*awaiq* (عوائق). It covers the world, beings, devils and lusts.
- ii. The condition that slows down or restricts the journey towards Him is called '*awaridh* (عوارض). It covers sustenance, self - restraints and obstacles from *Qada* 'Allah.
- iii. The condition that damages and cancels our journey is termed as *qawadih* (قواعد). It covers the nature of *mazmumah takabbur*, *riya* ', *Ujub*, *sum'ah* and *syuhrah* (the desire to fame)

In addition to the challenges from the world and lust, beings also become one of the hindering factors to human beings either to change attitudes or worship in particular. Many of us fail in life due to the factors of those closest to us. The failure of a husband is due to his wife and children, or vice versa. Our failure is due to the influence of our closest friends. Good neighbors will shape us into good people. Also a good country, will give birth to a good society. This is what Imam al-Thauri said that our evil deeds and hatred towards someone is mostly from among those who are close to us and we know well. Al-Thauri further explains that to escape from the distractions and obstacles of those closest to us is too difficult and arduous.

Daud al-Tha'ie (Abu Sulaiman) said in this age we should run away from the people as if running away from lions. This is a pretty scary parable of the times. (Al-Ghazali Abu Hamid Muhammad, 1999) Abu 'Ubaid further added, he does not consider a person to be a good person unless he does not make himself known among many people. People like this will be awarded glory by Allah Almighty. Thalhaf ibn 'Ubaidillah r.a said: "Whoever wants to avoid his shame being known by others, let him stay in his house. Whoever associates excessively without choosing from among the good or evil people with human beings, then his religion has been confiscated while he is unaware of it. (Abdun Nafi et al., 1999)

According to Abu Bajar al-Warraq, the devil also deceives human beings with goodness as bait to commit evils that are sometimes unnoticed by human beings. For example many of us like to prioritize things that are not important, over other things that are more important. Prioritize complimentary worship over obligatory matters, or prioritize customary matters over sunnah. Similarly, doing religious affairs excessively which eventually this practice becomes useless, will even bring sin, such as taking ablution excessively, reciting the verses of the Qur'an repeatedly in prayer and others. These are all satanic traps to drag people into evil and waste the practice of worship to God.

As human beings, we often do things in a divisive manner. Prayers to be hastened, but come whispers to delay it, intention at first to give alms, but come whispers of affection to property and many other examples that often make us end up losing for various reasons.

### **Appreciation of Taqwa in Producing Moral People**

Imam al-Ghazali further added that taqwa also means keeping ourselves away from exaggerating in halal matters. This means that the meaning of taqwa according to Imam al-Ghazali is not only not to approach things that clearly cause sin and vice, but also to stay away from things that are worried about the possibility of sin and vice. This understanding is quite detailed on the basis of keeping from bringing harm to religion. He gave a parable of the condition of a person who is ill. Surely he not only did not eat something that could harm himself, but abstained from something that he feared could bring harm to his illness. This definition is seen to be quite practical with the present times where many things especially in the matter of food, drink, employment and others are not clearly known which belong to the matter of collusion which is feared to lead to haram. Imam Ghazali invites us to be more careful in religious matters so that our practices and efforts are not wasted.

Things that are feared to harm in religious affairs are divided into two parts:

i. Simply illegal and immoral

ii. exaggerating in halal matters, i.e. exceeding necessity and striving relentlessly which can lead his master to haram and vice. It occurs indirectly through the nature of greed, gluttony, extremism, arrogance, exaggerating and others.

Imam al-Ghazali further explains that if we are not harmful in matters of religion we should stay away from things that are haram and refrain from exaggerating in things that are halal so as not to get caught up with things that are haram and harmful. This is the meaning of taqwa put forward by Imam al-Ghazali according to the situation and position of society in his time.

From the point of view of evil behavior, Imam al-Ghazali divides it into two types. Among them are:

i. Original Evil: That is the evil that is forbidden by Allah as a prohibition that forbids simply because the act is immoral

ii. Non -Natural Evil: Acts forbidden by God as a prohibition of educating. It involves excessive acts in halal matters.

When we stay away from all acts of immorality, then this is called *Taqwa Fardhu* which obliges a person to receive punishment from Allah SWT, if we leave *Taqwa Fardhu*. While the second is called Good *Taqwa* and *Adab* (civilized manner) which causes a person to be slow to enter heaven due to the calculation (hisab) of the practices done in the world, if we do not maintain the *Taqwa Baik*. Imam al-Ghazali called a person who performs the first taqwa (*Taqwa Fardhu*) as a practice of *taqwa* that is lower in dignity or degree than the second (Good *Taqwa* and *Adab* (civilized manner). People who succeed in doing Good *Taqwa* and *Adab* (civilized manner) are given the highest degree of *taqwa*.

This means that a person who is *istiqamah* / continuous in abandoning excessive things is given a higher position, even if it is seen outwardly to avoid the act of immorality is more important and get a high rank. Yet the assessment on the part of Imam al-Ghazali is different and if appreciated and pondered deeply, the person who succeeds in preventing himself from taking excessive halal things, he will certainly avoid haram deeds. Similarly, things that are illegal, many people stay away and will not take it once in a while, but the excessive things are very popular with the public because they are not seen as outwardly illegal. In this case, if we are able to perform these two types of taqwa at one time, it means that we have accumulated all the goodness that is in the nature of *taqwa*. So Imam al-Ghazali said we have reached *War'a al-Kamil* (perfect *warak*).

### **Closing**

The ritual or spiritual aspects discussed by Imam al-Ghazali in the book *Minhaj al-'Abidin* are important to be applied in building the morals and values of society today. Among them is the concept of building knowledge before doing good deeds which is the philosophy of worship. In the context of building the morals of today's increasingly challenging society, the concept of monotheism

brought by Imam al-Ghazali who is considered the father of motivation is able to change people towards knowing themselves and their purpose and goals to real life. The moral decay and loss of human values today is due to the heart being the cause of all spiritual diseases that are difficult to treat. So the effect is the birth of human beings who fail to manage themselves, make all the damage and corruption on Allah's SWT. Thus, the emphasis on the concept of tasawwuf as implemented by Imam al-Ghazali since the 5th century, as a need of the present and remains relevant.

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