THE TASTE OF TRUTH:
THE STRUCTURE OF EXPERIENCE IN AL-GHAZALI'S
*AL-MUNQIDH MIN AL-DALAL**

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In the year 488/1095 the renowned scholar and teacher Abu Hamid al-Ghazali underwent a spiritual crisis that transformed him utterly. This crisis, which lasted for some six months, led him to abandon his prestigious position at the Nizamiyya *madrasa* in Baghdad, a position to which he had been appointed three years earlier by the brilliant Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk. Under cover of secrecy, amid a buzz of speculation by colleagues and students as to his motives and condition, al-Ghazali slipped out of Baghdad to embark on a life of prayer and seclusion that was to last for some eleven years. (1)

The crisis which al-Ghazali experienced has often been described and discussed, but there has been little systematic scrutiny of his later works in the light of his decisive and dramatic experience. Nevertheless; the effects of that experience are evident throughout these works. His celebrated narrative of his personal quest for truth in *al-Munqidh min al-dalal* presents a highly structured and even artful account of his experience. The work attempts to set his experience within a particular pattern which engages the reader and which is intended to persuade. In this respect, it is significant that al-Ghazali's own account stands not as the record of an incommunicable mystical experience (though that is involved), as in so many "conversion" accounts, but offers a multiplicity of ways to the truth: authority and example, rational argument and proof, and ineffable experience. The way in which *al-Munqidh min al-dalal is* composed bears this out: not only the highly self-conscious structure of the work, but the tone of the writing, the tone of voice of a particular individual in a particular situation, and not the incredible exploits of some fabulous *exemplum*. The *Munqidh is* built around the recurrent topos of sickness and health, in which, broadly speaking, sickness or disease represents error, ignorance, skepticism and the like, while health and healing convey notions of truth, knowledge, and certainty. Within this broad thematic framework, al-Ghazali offers his own direct account, but his experience is also embedded in the very structure of the work by the use of a rather artificial, but compelling, mirroring device.

Notes:

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at a Colloquium on Mysticism and Philosophy at Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C., in November 1985. 1 am grateful for the suggestions and comments offered by my colleagues at that Colloquium, especially by Professors Richard M. Frank and Dimitri Gutas.

1. For his life and a description of his crisis, see among many others, W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of al-Ghazali* (Edinburgh, 1963), 47-57, 133-138. Duncan B. Macdonald, "The Life of al-Ghazzali, with Especial Reference to his Religious Experiences and Opinions." ,*JAOS*, 20 (1899), 71-132, is dated, but contains much useful information. See also the introduction to Hellmut Ritter's masterful translation of the *Kamiya yi sa'adat,* al-Ghazali's Persian epitome of the *Ihya',* under the title *Das Elixier der Ghckseligkeit* (Jena, 1923; reprint Diisseldorf, 1959), 9l9. The posthumous publication of the great Ghazali expert A.J. Wensinck, "Ghazali s bekeenng," in *Semietische Studien utt de nalatenschap van Prof. Ds. A.]. Wensinck* (Leiden, 1941), 154-177, is still important.

example, rational argument and proof, and ineffable experience. The way in which *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* is composed bears this out: not only the highly self-conscious structure of the work, but the tone of the writing, the tone of voice of a particular individual in a particular situation, and not the incredible exploits of some fabulous *exemplum*. The *Munqidh* is built around the recurrent topos of sickness and health, in which, broadly speaking, sickness or disease represents error, ignorance, skepticism and the like, while health and healing convey notions of truth, knowledge, and certainty. Within this broad thematic framework, al-Ghazālī offers his own direct account, but his experience is also embedded in the very structure of the work by the use of a rather artificial, but compelling, mirroring device.

During the years which he spent first in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and finally in his native Iran, al-Ghazālī wrote works of a radically different nature from his earlier compositions. Those early works had been largely in Islamic jurisprudence, but there were also important writings on theology and, of course, philosophy, as well as several polemical works. His new works included principally his great *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of the Sciences of Religion*), an encyclopaedic work in which, with all the fervour of the newly converted, al-Ghazālī strove to integrate under the aegis of Ṣūfī mysticism and Ṣūfī practice, all the acceptable spiritual teaching and praxis of his time. The huge work was born out of a period of renunciation and seclusion. But it was also the product of an ardent ambition. Despite its length, the *Iḥyāʾ* is a work impressed with urgency. At the time of his spiritual crisis, the 500th year of Islam loomed a mere dozen years ahead. According to long tradition, each century was destined to bring forth a renewer of religion (*mujaddid al-dīn*). Al-Ghazālī himself notes the congruence of his own transformation and new vocation with the approach of the half-millenium. Clearly, as he himself implies, he aspired to become this renewer for the fifth Islamic century.[2] Later generations would accord him this role.[3]

In what follows, I dwell on al-Ghazālī's own experience, rather than on an attempt to expound his ideas alone. Al-Ghazālī was a thinker gifted with an almost fabulous dexterity and fluency of ideas, but these ideas are seldom original and are usually pressed into the service of an overriding objective: to transform the community, indeed, the age, as he himself had been transformed.

[2] See *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, ed. F. Jabre (Beirut, 1959), 49. (Afterwards cited as *Munqidh*.)

[3] See my *Theodicy in Islamic Thought* (Princeton, 1984), 30, 132, for some examples.

The personal element is almost inescapable with the later element. It is not the autobiographical emphasis alone that is striking; after all, Ibn Sīnā, who had died some sixty years earlier, had also left an autobiography. And in any case, al-Ghazālī's concern is not with the story of his life as such, but with a single, if predominant, aspect of it. Autobiographical facts are minimal in his account and bear only on his spiritual progress. Such facts are carefully selected and interwoven with argument and discussion, sometimes inseparably so. Hence, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*The Deliverer from Error*), is not autobiographical in the usual sense, but the experience and the personal perspective of the author constantly occupy the forefront of the work.

The crisis which precipitated al-Ghazālī's renunciation and flight from Baghdad was in fact his second such wrenching experience. In his early youth, he had been shaken by a prolonged siege of doubt. Nothing seemed certain. The information afforded by the senses was suspect, for the senses could err and be deceived: to the naked eye, a star seems no larger than a *dīnār*, but mathematical proofs make clear that it is larger than the earth.[4] He took refuge in "first principles" or *a priori* truths, but even here doubts arose. If his senses could deceive him, might not his intellect also go astray? He envisaged a potentially endless series of perceptions exposed as misperceptions by some as yet undiscovered arbiter of truth—a kind of epistemological vertigo. He writes,

> Perhaps behind the perception of the intellect is yet another arbiter; when it appears, it will prove the intellect wrong in its judgment, just as the arbiter of intellect appeared and proved sense false in its judgment. The non-appearance of this perception does not prove its impossibility.[5]

Moreover, the dream-state which we all experience reveals the intrinsic uncertainty of all our knowledge. In dream we believe in the truth and substance of events which waking reveals as illusory. How shall we know that what we believe in our waking state is not also illusory in relation to some as yet unrevealed truth?[6] Dream and sleep are especially significant because al-Ghazālī, like Ibn Sīnā before

[4] *Munqidh*, 12. In his later work, the popular paraphrase of the *Iḥyāʾ* entitled *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn*, (Cairo, 1344), 267, al-Ghazālī notes that when one sees with the outer eye alone, "opacity overwhelms it and you see the big as little, the far as near, and the ugly as beautiful."

[5] *Munqidh*, 13.

[6] *Ibid.*

him, considers the senses virtually inoperative during sleep; the knowledge gained in dreams seemed to circumvent the waking senses.[7]

This early skeptical crisis lasted almost two months in which al-Ghazālī remained, as he puts it, in the school of the "Sophists."[8] His doubt was a "puzzling disease" which he suffered until God finally "healed" him."[9] As we shall see, the notion of healing is central to al-Ghazālī's preoccupation in this work, and in others; and we shall note further examples later.

His first crisis seems to have been prompted by al-Ghazālī's shedding of the state of unreflective acceptance, or *taqlīd*: the acceptance of beliefs as true because others say so. If the knowledge afforded by the senses and by the intellect could deceive, it was equally impossible to return to the state of unquestioning acceptance. As he notes, his *taqlīd* had shattered "like glass." Moreover, unreflectiveness is a precondition of *taqlīd*: one cannot voluntarily become unreflective.[10]

It used to be fashionable to see al-Ghazālī as some sort of enlightened intellectual casting off the shackles of authority in a quest for truth; but this is exaggerated.[11] There is a very definite place for acceptance of authority in his teaching; indeed, he will conclude that it is part of the function of reason, of the human intellect itself, to discern its own limits and accede to higher authority. He does not always term this *taqlīd*—a word, after all, fraught with numerous connotations; sometimes he uses the more nuanced term *taslīm*, i.e., assent, acceptance, concession. Indeed, in his last work, completed

[7] See *Munqidh*, 43; and Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla fī maᶜrifat al-nafs al-nāṭiqa wa-aḥwālihā* in A.F. Ahwānī, ed., *Aḥwāl al-nafs* (Cairo, 1371/1952), 186. According to an anecdote recounted in Macdonald, "Life of al-Ghazzālī," 89–91, al-Ghazālī first came to understand the Ṣūfi way through a divinely inspired dream. The fiction of a dream to account for an unexpected change of heart is, of course, a common device.

[8] On the term "sophists" in the early Islamic context, see J. van Ess, *Die Erkenntnislehre des ᶜAḍudaddīn al-Icī* (Wiesbaden, 1966), 232.

[9] *Munqidh*, 13.

[10] *Ibid.*, 15. See, too, al-Ghazālī's *Iljām al-ᶜawāmm ᶜan ᶜilm al-kalām*, printed on the margin of ᶜAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *al-Insān al-kāmil* (Cairo, 1949), 80: "The *muqallid* does not perceive his *taqlīd* and does not know that he is *muqallid*. On the contrary, he believes in himself that he is right (*muḥiqq*) and knowledgeable (*ᶜārif*), and he has no doubt about his belief in this."

[11] Another well-worn cliché sees al-Ghazālī as an advocate of a kind of medieval Islamic *aggiornamento*, sweeping away the dusty and rigid prescriptions of a stultifying legalism; so Macdonald, "Life of al-Ghazzālī," 71.

just days before his death, he enjoins ordinary people to concede authority to those with privileged spiritual knowledge (*maᶜrifa*).[12]

Some scholars have cast doubt on the genuineness of al-Ghazālī's early crisis.[13] Let me note here only that al-Ghazālī was by no means unique in experiencing skepticism. As Joseph van Ess showed some time ago, there had existed a long history of skeptical thought within the Islamic world.[14] For example, the early thinker Ṣāliḥ Ibn ᶜAbd al-Quddūs wrote a *Book of Doubts* (*Kitāb al-shukūk*) in which he sought to instill doubt in his readers. As he stated, "whoever reads it, doubts concerning what exists until he fancies that it does not exist, and concerning what does not exist until he thinks that it does exist."[15]

In any case, the crisis that befell al-Ghazālī in later life, when he was about thirty-eight years old, was of another magnitude. His account of it in *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* was written long after, when he was about fifty, or some five years before his death in 505/1111. It strikes a modern reader as both compelling and baffling. Compelling because of its apparent directness, and the sheer excellence of the writing. Baffling because al-Ghazālī's seeming openness often conceals as much as it reveals.

I would like to suggest why this may be so and to show how it is connected with al-Ghazālī's search for the truth. As is well known, this search led him to investigate four distinctive approaches to the truth: theology, Ismāᶜīlī teaching, philosophy and Ṣūfī mysticism. Each of these four may be seen as embodying a quite specific approach to knowledge. Theology, as proceeding by dialectic and controversy: an adversarial and disputatious approach. Ismāᶜīlī teaching—*taᶜlīm* is al-Ghazālī's usual designation—as epitomizing sheer authoritarian procedures: acceptance of belief on the authority of a sinless *imām*. Philosophy, as dependent on reason and demonstration. And the Ṣūfī way, which relies on inner transformation, on inspiration and illumination, and on realizing these in living practice.

There is no need to dwell on al-Ghazālī's presentation and critique of either Ismāᶜīlī teaching or of dialectical theology (*kalām*). His

[12] See *Iljām*, 40. But cf. al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-qushayriyya* (Cairo, 1966), I, 25: "Whoever trusts in *taqlīd* and does not reflect on the proofs of God's oneness (*dalāᵓil al-tawḥīd*) falls from the prescribed paths of salvation" (*sunan al-najāt*); commenting on a dictum by Abū Muḥammad al-Jarīrī (d. 311/923).

[13] See the discussion in Wensinck, "Ghazāli's bekeering," 166–167, and the dismissive remarks of Carra de Vaux. Also, Watt, *Muslim Intellectual*, 47–57.

[14] J. van Ess, "Skepticism in Islamic Religious Thought," *al-Abḥāth*, 21 (1968), 1–18.

[15] Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Ṭabaqāt al-muᶜtazila*, ed. S. Diwald-Wilzer (Wiesbaden, 1961), 47.

attack on Ismāʿīlism deserves a new and thorough examination, especially in the light of Ismāʿīlī responses.[16] So, too, with theology: at times, as in the *Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī takes the position that theology is adequate within its limited purposes, though "its objectives are not mine;" and at others, he seems to lament, with Faust, "und leider auch Theologie."[17] He saw theology principally as a defensive weapon, but not as an adequate instrument for discerning the truth of things. Or even more pointedly, as he puts it, remedies are as various as the diseases they heal, and what benefits one sufferer may harm another.[18]

In the *Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī presents himself as a man driven by urgency. From his earliest youth he experienced "a thirst to grasp the true natures of things," and it was his inmost nature (*gharīza*) to pursue truth relentlessly.[19] This thirst, this innate desire, God Himself implanted within him. Al-Ghazālī delights further in presenting himself as a bold and vigourous diver who seeks out the depths of the sea.[20] Indeed, this topos of the sea and of diving also recurs throughout his works: in his last work, he again draws on the image of the sea and speaks with disdain of those who hug the safe shore.[21] But despite his innate boldness, al-Ghazālī is at the same time plagued by doubt and uncertainty.

His condition of inner confusion is mirrored by his age. For him, it is an age of *fatra*, an age of spiritual torpor and lassitude, of lukewarmness and mediocrity.[22] Never mind that it is an epoch of Sunnī revival: three years before al-Ghazālī's birth, the Seljuqs (who had already seized Khurasan from the Ghaznavids) entered Baghdad and supplanted the brillant, nominally Shīʿite rule of the Būyids.

Never mind as well that al-Ghazālī's own academic career, to the time of his renunciation of that career, seemed to mirror the ascendancy of the Sunnī renewal. In this age of *fatra*, of spiritual indolence, false teachers abound; deleterious doctrines flourish and prosper. Philosophers and pseudo-philosophers advance heretical

[16] Henry Corbin, "The Ismāʿīlī Response to the Polemic of Ghazālī," S.H. Nasr, ed., *Ismāʿīlī Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Tehran, 1977), 69–98.

[17] See *Munqidh*, 16: "I found (*kalām*) to be a discipline adequate for its own purpose, but inadequate for my purpose;" and again, in the same passage, "and so, *kalām* was insufficient in my regard."

[18] *Munqidh*, 17.

[19] *Ibid.*, 10.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] *Iljām*, 41. The topos of the sea is common to suggest the immeasurable extent of the knowledge of God. For another use by al-Ghazālī, see my *Theodicy*, 40, 71.

[22] *Munqidh*, 47–48, 54.

teachings and undermine right belief. The poisonous emissaries of aggressively hostile heresies proliferate, such as the very Assassins, the militant Ismāʿīlīs who assassinated Niẓām al-Mulk, al-Ghazālī's patron, in 1092.

Worst of all, the *ʿulamāʾ* themselves, the "heirs of the prophets," are venal, ignorant and corrupt. At the opening of the *Iḥyāʾ*, al-Ghazālī writes that "the road to the next world is without guides or companions despite its many hazards."[23] The *ʿulamāʾ*, the learned scholars of the law and traditions, who should serve as guides, are "epigones overpowered and beguiled by Satan, and each of them is infatuated with his portion of the world."[24] Others have remarked on the extraordinary harshness with which al-Ghazālī judges his erstwhile professional colleagues; it is too strong to be a mere preacher's device.[25]

The age is unpropitious; he himself can find no certainty, no sure foothold. Certain knowledge (*ʿilm yaqīnī*) denoted that state "in which the thing to be known is disclosed in such a way that no doubt remains, nor may the possibility of error or misperception be associated with it" (*wa-lā yuqārinuhu imkān al-ghalaṭ wal-wahm*).[26]

And he writes further:

> I know therefore that everything that I did not know in this way, and about which I could not be certain with this kind of certainty, was a knowledge on which there was no reliance and no security. All knowledge in which there is no security is not certain knowledge." (*wa-kull ʿilm lā amāna maʿahu fa-laysa bi-ʿilm yaqīnī*)[27]

The quest for certitude, for an unshakeable basis of knowledge, forms the most prominent and celebrated theme of the *Munqidh*, but it is only one of two central "autobiographical" themes in that work. The other theme is sometimes overlooked or scanted. To ignore it, however, is to misunderstand both the work and its author's motives.

The second theme in the *Munqidh* (as elsewhere throughout the later works) is the repeated, almost desperate effort to realize his convictions in practice; to reconcile and harmonize knowledge and

[23] *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Cairo, 1352/1933), I, 3.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] Watt, *Muslim Intellectual*, 109.

[26] *Munqidh*, 11.

[27] *Ibid.* Cf. al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), an influence of al-Ghazālī, who states baldly in his *Kitāb ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, ed. J. Pedersen (Leiden, 1960), 73, *paen.*: "Everything has its truth, and the truth of certainty (*yaqīn*) is the fear of God."

action, an effort conveniently formulated in Arabic by the paronomastic hendiadys *ʿilm wa-ʿamal*—"Knowledge and Deed."[28]

Typically for al-Ghazālī, with his glib and voluble brilliance, his versatility, his remarkable curiosity, the study of the truth came easier than practice of it. "Knowledge was easier for me than practice," he writes.[29] He took delight in poring over the works of such Ṣūfī masters as al-Qushayrī, a generation before him, or of earlier writers such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī and al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī. And he studied the lives and examples of such famous early saints and masters as al-Shiblī, al-Junayd and the outrageous Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī. But as his learning in Ṣūfism increased, so did the uncomfortable awareness of his own imperfection. In this connection, it is perhaps worth noting at times a certain irony in this bookish man towards the written word. Certainly, he will never go so far as, for example, Thomas à Kempis with his famous statement that at the Last Judgment, we will be asked not what we have read, but what we have done.[30] Such an attitude would have seemed unbalanced. For al-Ghazālī, the question was even more pointed, for he writes that "whoever thinks that illumination (*kashf*) is dependent on written proofs, narrows the vast compassion of God."[31] The truth must be available to all, even the unlettered.

There is also the oppressive sense that erudition, that book-learning alone, not only might prove insufficient, but that by itself it could actively hinder the development of the requisite inner perfection that leads to salvation. In this notion, which is strong in al-Ghazālī, we catch echoes of a familiar tradition of rebuke to the learned for their neglect of essentials. A generation earlier, for example, the litterateur Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. c. 414/1023) had struck the same note. Al-Tawḥīdī, who managed to combine religious and philosophical ardor with personal scurrility to an unusual degree, is one of the least acknowledged influences on al-Ghazālī. Al-Tawḥīdī took the learned to task for their very approach to the sacred text of the Qurʾān, thus:

> The wonder is that you, O scholar and jurist, O litterateur and grammarian, who discourse on desinential inflections and recherché words, or on the explication and manner of revelation [of the scriptures] . . . how they are to be recited . . . how they rule on general and on specific cases . . . on exoteric and esoteric senses . . . figures of speech and modes of eloquence . . . and who recites with this letter and who with that . . . but you will not find in anything I have mentioned and described to you the least speck which points to any purity you might have in your inmost state (*ṣafāʾik fī ḥālik*) . . . On the contrary, you do not know the least sweetness of a single letter . . . All your knowledge is mere verbiage (*lafẓ*) . . . and all your practice is refusal (*rafḍ*) . . .[32]

[28] *Munqidh*, 35, with reference to the Ṣūfīs: "And I know that their way was perfected only by knowledge and action."
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Imitatio Christi* (Rome, 1924), 5: "Certe adveniente die judicii, non quaeretur a nobis quid legimus sed quid fecimus."
[31] *Munqidh*, 14.

Al-Ghazāli's later crisis was caused not by doubt but by truth. He had found that sure and certain knowledge which he earlier sought, but it was not a knowledge which could be contained in books or in words. As Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), a Ṣūfī master of a generation earlier, had noted, "the tongue cannot articulate what is in the heart."[33] Inner truth is unutterable. He had acquired a knowledge that demanded to be put into living practice day by day. It was a question, as he puts it in another of his fruitful oppositions, not of "utterances" or "opinions" (*aqwāl*), but of "states" (*aḥwāl*).[34] Here he employs classic Ṣūfī terminology for those gratuitously accorded and hierarchically realized inner states of awareness which signify spiritual perfection (*ḥāl/aḥwāl*, as opposed to *maqām/maqāmāt*, the "degrees" earned by personal striving). There remained for me, he writes, not that which is attained by following a course of study (*samāʿ wa-taʿallum*), but that which is realized by "taste and practice" (*dhawq wa-sulūk*).[35]

The notion of "taste" (*dhawq*) is something of a commonplace which al-Ghazālī appropriates for his own purposes. The saving truth was to be found not in demonstration nor in argumentation nor in recourse to authority, though these all did lead to specific truths.[36] The highest truth occurred in that confluence of perception and action denoted by the notion of "taste."

To taste means to experience directly. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī will later define it as a figurative expression (*majāz*) for "the root of perception" (*aṣl al-idrāk*).[37] In many languages, taste serves metaphorically to denote the direct experience and assessment of some-

[32] *al-Ishārāt al-ilāhiyya*, ed. W. al-Qāḍī (Beirut, 1973), I, 40.
[33] *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, 70.
[34] *Munqidh*, 35. See the pertinent remarks on Ṣūfī terminology, and particularly the designations for "states" and "stations" in Richard Gramlich, *Muḥammad al-Ghazālīs Lehre von den Stufen zur Gottesliebe* (Wiesbaden, 1984), 6–7.
[35] *Munqidh*, 36.
[36] *Ibid.*, 45.
[37] *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Cairo, 1354-57/1935-38), XXII, 169 [to Q. XXI: 35].

thing.[38] In Arabic, one can, for example, "taste a bow" (*dhāqa al-qaws*) or even, according to the apt expression, "taste the flavour of disbelief" (*dhāqa ṭa*ᶜ*m al-īmān*).[39] The usage is common in poetry. It occurs often in the Qurʾān—most memorably, for the experience of unpleasant things: in III:177, e.g., "taste the torment of burning" (*dhūqū* ᶜ*adhāb al-ḥarīq*) or in the famous verse, "Every soul will taste of death" (*kullu nafsin dhāʾiqatu al-mawt*: III:185; XXI:35; XXIX:57). The extension of the basic meaning is discussed at some length by the ninth century writer al-Jāḥiẓ in his *K. al-ḥayawān*, and by others.[40]

Among Ṣūfī authors, the term was current and had acquired a technical connotation. Al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) thus speaks of "the taste, the direct perception, of notions" (*dhawq al-*ᶜ*ānī*).[41] Among later masters, and especially Ibn al-ᶜArabī (d. 638/1240), it is fairly common, often linked with the term *kashf*, e.g. "realization and direct experience."[42] Later Persian mystics also use it routinely.[43]

In the *Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī accords a special prominence to *dhawq*.[44] For him, it means the perfect integration of knowledge and action. It is, he says, "like witnessing with one's own eyes and taking in one's own hands."[45] Thus, it is curiously mute and incommunicable; even its description must be conveyed by means of examples drawn from the senses of sight and touch. And yet, for al-Ghazālī, "the most special" (*akhaṣṣ*) characteristic of the highest Ṣūfī mystics, and what is uniquely theirs, can only be attained by taste, not by learning.[46]

[38] So, among many possible examples, Job VI:30, "is injustice on my tongue? Can my palate not discern evil?" and XII:11, "Truly the ear tests arguments as the palate tastes food." (Transl. *The Book of Job* [Philadelphia, 1980]).

[39] Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1863; reprint, Lahore, 1978), III, 988.

[40] *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, ed. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1938–43), V, 29–33.

[41] al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, II, 220. Cf. al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 528: "Taste is the beginning of ecstatic love of God" (*al-dhawq awwal al-mawājīd*); and al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-luma*ᶜ, ed., R. Nicholson (London, 1914), 372. In his *Risāla fī al-kalām* ᶜ*alā al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*, Ibn Sīnā refers to the "way of the practitioners of experiential wisdom" (*ahl al-ḥikma al-dhawqiyya*) in Ahwānī, *Aḥwāl al-nafs*, 199. (I thank D. Gutas for drawing my attention to this treatise.)

[42] *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, ed. ᶜUthmān Yaḥyā (Cairo, 1972–86), esp. VIII, 186, 213; and also, VI, 81, 241, 436, and 438.

[43] The rhyming formula "*shawq wa-dhawq*" occurs frequently, e.g., in the *Ṭarīq al-taḥqīq* usually attributed to the fourteenth century Persian mystic Ḥākim Sanāʾī of Ghazna, ed. B. Utas (Lund, 1973), 2, lines 30–32. See also Nūr al-Dīn al-Isfarāʾīnī, *Kāshif al-asrār*, ed. H. Landolt (Paris, 1986), 20, *ult.*; 27, line 1; 64 (*dhawq-i maḥabbat*); 83 (*al-samāᶜ shawq wa-tawq wa-dhawq*); also, 86, 122, 132 (*īn shawq va dhawq dar dil*).

[44] *Dhawq* is invoked in the *Munqidh* on 34–36, 40–41, 43–45.

[45] *Munqidh*, 44.

[46] *Ibid.*, 35.

In Christian mysticism there is, of course, a well developed theology of the spiritual senses.[47] This arose out of scriptural meditation and commentary, particularly in the work of Origen and such followers of his as Evagrius; but Clement will also speak of "the eyes of the heart" (*ὀφθαλμοὶ τῆς καρδίας*) and of "tasting immortal knowledge" (*γεύεσθαι τῆς ἀθανάτου γνώσεως*).[48] In *Contra Celsum* Origen speaks of closing the outer senses so that "the eye of the soul" (*ὀφθαλμὸς τῆς ψυχῆς*) may awaken; only then "will you see God" (*μόνως οὕτως τὸν θεὸν ὄψεσθε*).[49] A key verse was Psalm XXXIII:9, "Taste and see that the Lord is good," which prompted much commentary.[50] To be sure, mystical literature speaks less of "taste" than of vision. The sense of taste is invoked when the utter ineffability and interiority of an experience is to be stressed.[51] Thus, Dante speaks of the "sweetness of eternal life" *che, non gustata, non s'intende mai*, which is never understood unless it is tasted (*Paradiso*, III: 38–39). This development is quite understandable in the Christian tradition, given the importance of the doctrines of the Incarnation and the central role of the Eucharist. In this context, it is easily understandable that Thomas à Kempis will employ the phrase "gustare Deum."—a notion inconceivable in Islamic terms.[52]

Through study, solitude and reflection, al-Ghazālī had come to the conviction that Ṣūfism represented the best way to the highest truth, but this truth could not be obtained by mere study or hard work. It entailed complete inner transformation and a corresponding outer

[47] The basic study is still Karl Rahner, "Le début d'une doctrine des cinq sens spirituels chez Origène," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*, 13 (1932), 113–145; and the same author's continuation under the title "La doctrine des 'sens spirituels' au moyen âge, en particulier chez Saint Bonaventure," *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*, 14 (1933), 263–299. For a survey of the subject, with ample references, see the *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris, 1965), VI, 626–644 (s.v. "goût spirituel"). For the physiological basis of taste, though not the "spiritual" senses, in the medieval Jewish understanding, see David Kaufmann, *Die Sinne: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Physiologie und Psychologie im Mittelalter aus hebräischen und arabischen Quellen* (Leipzig, 1884), 157–172.

[48] Clement of Alexandria, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, XXXVI:2 and LIX:3, cited in Rahner, "Le début d'une doctrine . . . ," 115, n. 8; for the text, see K. Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London, 1912), I, 71; 111.

[49] *Contra Celsum* VII:39, cited in Rahner, "Le début," 119. See now the edition of Marcel Borret in "Sources chrétiennes" (Paris, 1967–76), IV, 102.

[50] See, among others, Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), *The Twelve Patriarchs*, trans. G.A. Zinn (New York, 1979), 91, who cites this verse in a rapt discussion of the "tasting of inner sweetness." The notion of the "sweetness" of God (*dulcedo Dei*) is important in this context.

[51] Perhaps the most remarkable discussion of the matter occurs in the work of the great French poet Paul Claudel in his essay entitled "La sensation du divin," *Présence et prophétie* (Freibourg, 1942), 47–126, and especially 116–118.

[52] *Imitatio Christi*, 49 (Book 2:4).

change. But despite his conviction, he could not act. There is a sense of panic in some of his descriptions of his condition: "I was convinced," he writes, "that I stood on the edge of a crumbling cliff and was coming close to hellfire, if I did not take care to repair my inner state."[53] Again, in more stylized fashion, he exclaims: "To the journey! To the journey! [*al-raḥīl! al-raḥīl!*]. Only a little of life is left and you stand on the brink of a great voyage, and all your knowledge and deeds are nothing but sham and play-acting!"[54] The Arabic original of this passage is in rhyming prose (*sajᶜ*)—a stylistic device which al-Ghazālī seems often to use to suggest strong feeling.

To follow the Ṣūfī way required certain irretrievable steps. It demanded poverty, renunciation and seclusion. It meant surrender of his position as a renowned and popular professor, and it meant renouncing his influential connections with the ruling authorities. It entailed leaving his family. It also meant leaving Baghdad and his circle of students, friends and colleagues. It meant the deliberate acceptance of obscurity. From his own account, it seems evident that he found hardest of all the surrender of his position, or all that is subsumed under the notion of *jāh*, i.e., not only his academic position, but all the accoutrements of prestige and status that attended it.

His conflict was so severe that it prompted a complete breakdown. In his own words:

> I wavered incessantly between the strong pull of worldly desires and the promptings of the next world for almost six months, from the month of Rajab 488 [July 1095]. Then, in that month, I crossed the boundary from free will into constraint. God locked my tongue so that I was unable to teach. I used to exert all my effort so that I might be able to teach for one day to gladden the hearts of those who frequented me, but my tongue could not articulate a single word. I was utterly incapable of speech.[55]

His aphasia was accompanied by other symptoms: he became depressed; his digestion failed; he lost all appetite for food and drink; he could not stomach even a sip of broth; he grew enervated and weak. Doctors diagnosed his ailment but confessed themselves unable to cure him.

Al-Ghazālī does not report the diagnosis of his physicians. Certain

[53] *Munqidh*, 36. This suggests that the word *munqidh* in the title of the work may allude to Q.III:103, "You were on the brink of an abyss of fire and He saved you from it" (*fa-anqadhakum minhā*).

[54] *Munqidh*, 36.

[55] *Ibid.*, 37.

of his symptoms suggest "melancholy" (*sawdāᵓ*),[56] though the temporary loss of speech may point to other conditions. Thus, according to the tenth century physician Isḥāq Ibn ᶜImrān, "if doctors, mathematicians or astronomers meditate, brood, memorize and investigate too much, they can fall prey to melancholy."[57]

As it happens, al-Ghazālī's own pupil ᶜAbd al-Ghafīr Ibn Ismāᶜīl al-Fārisī, who left the earliest biographical account of his teacher, knew him after his crisis and remarked quite starkly: "After reflection and investigation, I became convinced that the matter was other than what had been supposed, and that the man [*sc.* al-Ghazālī] had recovered from insanity" (*junūn*).[58]

Whatever the diagnosis, there can be little doubt that the paralyzing crisis occurred. The details are too precise and too specific to be dismissed as mere self-dramatization. And the curious symptom of aphasia seems to be alluded to elsewhere, at the very beginning of the *Iḥyāᵓ ᶜulūm al-dīn*, the work that resulted from the years of seclusion following his crisis. There he says "God loosed the knot of silence from my tongue and encircled me . . . with the necklace of rational speech."[59] Such remarks, especially in the opening passages of works, are often dismissed or ignored as mere rhetorical persiflage. This is unfortunate since the hackneyed formulae and well-worn phrases of such *exordia* often conceal meaningful information, as in the present instance.

Al-Ghazālī's description of his ultimate collapse is affecting to the reader, not only because it is presented vividly and dramatically, but because it has been well prepared and anticipated. The breakdown seems to occur as the unavoidable consequence of his desperate search for truth. At every stage, the possibility of healing and the menace of disease tantalize and afflict him. Thus, his early skepticism is called a "puzzling disease"; the study of *Kalām* is assessed as a "remedy," one among several, for a certain "disease"; and philosophy is presented, at least in part, with constant reference to medical analogies. In

[56] *Ibid.* Ibn Sīnā uses the Arabicized Greek term *malankhūliyyā* (*al-Qānūn fī al-ṭibb* (Beirut, n.d.), II, 65ff. For a discussion of early views on aphasia (and aphonia), see Rudolph E. Seigel, *Galen on Psychology, Psychopathology, and Function and Diseases of the Nervous System* (Basel, 1973), 247–8, especially, 247: "*asphasia* . . . indicated only speechlessness caused by fear and perplexity."

[57] Cited in Manfred Ullmann, *Islamic Medicine* (Edinburgh, 1978), 74.

[58] Published in ᶜAbd al-Karīm al-ᶜUthmān, ed., *Sīrat al-Ghazālī* (Damascus, 1960); for this passage, see 44. See also Macdonald, "The Life of al-Ghazzālī . . . ," 105; and Richard J. McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Boston, 1980), xviii.

[59] *Iḥyāᵓ ᶜulūm al-dīn*, I, 2, line 4.

reference to *taᶜlīmī* teaching, al-Ghazālī remarks, "They have nothing of the healing (*shifāᵓ*) that saves from the shadows of [mere] opinions."[60] In each case, he measures the worth of an approach by the healing, or saving, truth which it affords; and there is a certain sense of urgency in the work, for the author assesses theology or philosophy or Ismāᶜīlī doctrine not only on its objective merits, but on its final redeeming force. This gives an immediate and personal momentum to the quest. The reader has the sense that as the search for truth continues and mounts, so, too, does the inner distress, the "illness," of the seeker. His final collapse comes with a certain climactic effect.

At the same time, al-Ghazālī's remarks on the three discarded approaches are apposite and telling; they convince in part because they are dramatically enhanced by the narrative structure.

There is perhaps another motive for this effort to pattern his experience. Al-Ghazālī has often been seen as an inconsistent, elusive and mercurial thinker—a chameleon who assumed the coloration of his immediate intellectual milieu. Hence, there are several al-Ghazālīs, or images of al-Ghazālī, formed by admirers as well as detractors.

There is, of course, the "Algazel" of the Latin Scholastics, another Arabian philosopher in the line of Avicenna and Alfarabi and others whom St. Thomas Aquinas, in a famous passage, saw as descendants of "homines bestiales in desertis morantes."[61] By contrast, there is the wonder-worker and sorcerer of his simpler followers, a manipulator of prodigious occult powers.[62] There is the Ḥanbalite view of al-Ghazālī as an incompetent bungler in matters of tradition (*ḥadīth*).[63] There is the spiritual dilettante and dabbler whom certain philosophers particularly abhorred for his supposed insincerity and inconsistency, as Ibn Rushd charged:

> He does not adhere to any one way in his books. With the Ashᶜarites we see him as an Ashᶜarite; with the Muᶜtazilites as a Muᶜtazilite; with the philosophers as a philosopher; and with the Ṣūfis as a Ṣūfī.

[60] *Munqidh*, 33; cf. also, 32 with its example of a sick man who is ignorant of the specific nature of his disease, and so cannot discover a remedy.
[61] *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 6 (4).
[62] Ormsby, *Theodicy*, 132–134.
[63] *Ibid.*, 98, n. 9.
[64] *Faṣl al-maqāl*, ed. G. Hourani; (Leiden, 1959), 27–28; transl. G. Hourani, *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London, 1961), 61. See Ormsby, *Theodicy*, 100–101. Wensinck uses the term "Proteus" to describe him, "Ghazālīs bekeering," 155.

Ibn Rushd could even charge him with corrupting the innocent and unwary, and recommend that certain of his books be suppressed. His great compatriot Ibn Ṭufayl would voice similar charges of confusion and inconsistency.

Of course, too, there is al-Ghazālī the champion of the Ashᶜarite "school" of theology, and claimed as such by later generations; but what are we to do with an al-Ghazālī appropriated by hostile schools whom he himself attacked and defamed? I refer to the massive reworking of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāᵓ* at the hands of the seventeenth-century Shīᶜite polymath Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī under the title *al-Maḥajja al-bayḍāᵓ fī iḥyā al-Iḥyāᵓ* [*GAL*, Suppl. I, 749].

By contrast, in the *Munqidh*, there is a deliberate attempt to show a conscious and consistent pattern in his life, to portray even his doubt and breakdown as meaningful episodes within a significant order of experience.

In the *Munqidh*, to be sure, there is a subtle blurring of the boundaries between direct personal statement and rather more conventionalized utterance. Indeed, part of the power of the work arises from the continual eruption of the distinctive individual voice against a framework of convention. After all, this is an exemplary account. It is the story of a successful search for truth. It stands in a long line of Ṣūfī narratives of realization, repentance and inner conversion. In those accounts, a key element is the "occasion for repentance" of the mystic (*sabab tawbatihi*).[65]

Nevertheless, these accounts maintained a certain fabulous distance. The exemplary figure was enfolded within successive layers of tradition and reportage which both authenticated and haloed him. Dicta handed down by chains of transmission from one generation to the next had a hallowed lustre. The exemplary figure could be assimilated and internalized by pious emulation.

But here, in al-Ghazālī's account, the *exemplum* presents himself before the reader and speaks in his own characteristic voice. The speaker is a recognizable individual with whom a reader can identify. That urgency, that call to an inner turn, which suffused the legends of earlier mystics (and yet who stood at a safe remove), are here thrust into the foreground. The *exemplum* speaks in the first person, in his own

[65] See, e.g., the story of the young prince Ibrāhīm ibn Adham who is out hunting when he hears a voice thunder at him "O Ibrāhīm! Is it for this that you were created?" The call continues until it rises from the very pommel of his saddle, and then he dismounts, dons the woolen cloak of the Ṣūfī, and embarks on a life of asceticism, al-Qushayrī, *Risāla*, I, 51.

voice. Furthermore, he recounts a history of doubt and even madness; he is harsh against himself at many points and seems unsparing of his own weaknesses. As a result, the work has always been strangely celebrated but also, quite anomalous. It has been translated into many languages; it has attracted no commentaries within the Islamic tradition. (Indeed, its value has generally been placed higher among Western readers than within the Islamic tradition, until relatively recent times.)

Al-Ghazālī's crisis is important for yet another reason. The constant interplay on sickness and health, on falling ill and then convalescing, permeates the *Munqidh*. The importance of this theme is not solely strategical or rhetorical. It is no accident that while his doctors are able to mutter some learned but ineffectual diagnosis of his condition ("this is something which has settled in his heart and crept from it into his humours" [*wa-minhu sarā ilā al-mizāj*]),[66] they are completely unable to treat him or cure him. This is not simply the usual sense we all have that our physicians seldom do justice to our complaints. It reflects a long-standing opposition within the Islamic tradition.

Al-Ghazālī presents his collapse in realistic terms. It is a disease, but a disease that eludes the skills of conventional medicine. Doctors trained in "Greek medicine" were helpless—the fact is significant, and the inclusion of his physicians' learned jargon is calculated. Only "prophetic medicine" (*al-ṭibb al-nabawī*), not "Greek medicine" (*al-ṭibb al-yunānī*) could heal him.[67] The old conflict between an imported foreign science and a native and hallowed tradition of prophetic medicine is dramatically embodied, though in a sophisticated guise. The same conflict had provoked the adage "Medicine is the staircase to apostasy" on the lips of a prominent intellectual of the preceding generation.[68] And elsewhere, but especially in the *Iḥyāʾ*, al-Ghazālī will often resort to a paraphrase of a well-known *ḥadīth*, when he writes: "He who sent illness also sent its cure, and promised recovery." And he elaborates: "Knowledge and practice are the mixture from which the medicines for all the diseases of the heart consist."[69] In the end, only God or those "physicians of God," the prophets, could heal his affliction; the medicine which he needed had

[66] *Munqidh*, 37.
[67] Ullmann, *Islamic Medicine*, 5. The opposition must not be drawn too starkly: al-Ghazālī certainly does not reject medicine; see, e.g., *Iḥyāʾ*, IV, 246ff.
[68] al-Tawḥīdī, *Akhlāq al-wazīrayn* (Damascus, 1965), 114; *al-ṭibb . . . sullam al-ilḥād.*
[69] In Gramlich, *Lehre*, 167.

to come from on high.[70] For the "diseases of the heart" (*amrāḍ al-qalb*), conventional medicine was useless.

Of course, the matter is not so simple. Al-Ghazālī does not indulge in a simplistic rejection of "foreign science." Quite the contrary. There is probably no writer in the Ṣūfī tradition who incorporates within his work so much terminology, method and material derived from other sources as does al-Ghazālī. This is especially striking in the area of medicine.[71] And his reliance (often unacknowledged) on such authorities as Galen is pervasive, especially in the *Iḥyāʾ*.[72] At the same time, while al-Ghazālī uses medical or astronomical or geometric examples freely, he usually transforms them. This is particularly so in his examples drawn from medicine and anatomy. He relies on the brute fact only to transform it.

In the *Munqidh* this occurs in a special way. The work is balanced between sets of contrasting pairs of states, or events, or faculties. What misled and deluded him in his unillumined condition before his collapse later, after his inner turn, becomes an instrument of perception and healing.

In his siege of skepticism, the senses were treacherous and unreliable; but after his crisis, he discovers that the highest truths may only be experienced directly, not uttered, and the organs of such experience are the transfigured, spiritual senses, especially "taste." Earlier, dreams deceived and puzzled him; but with his new-found certainty, dream is revealed as the innate, unmediated state of knowing which all human beings share with the prophets. The knowledge disclosed in sleep is the closest we come to the supreme awareness of prophetic intellect.

The contrasts extend to specific circumstances and events. Thus, tellingly, when al-Ghazālī discusses his return to teaching after his eleven-year absence, he formulates the change as follows:

> For myself, I know that even though I return to teaching, I have not gone back (*fa-mā rajaʿtu*). Going back means a return to what was, and at that time I promulgated the knowledge by which prestige (*jāh*) is

[70] *Munqidh*, 46: "For the prophets, peace be upon them, are the physicians for the diseases of the heart." Cf. also the comparison of prophet and physician in *Iljām*, 43.
[71] See his somewhat laboured comparison of the act of prayer with the preparation of medicaments, *Munqidh*, 46–46. Even in his earlier, pre-Ṣūfī work *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, ed. S. Dunyā (Cairo, 1961), 235, he can write "Opinion (*ẓann*) is like the action of a sick man who guards against what he fancies injurious." There are numerous such examples throughout his work.
[72] See Ormsby, *Theodicy*, 45–51. For explicit allusion to Galen's *De usu partium*, see *Munqidh*, 19; for Galen as the paragon of the physician, see *Munqidh*, 43.

> won; by my words and my deeds I strove for that, and it was my aim and purpose. But now I strive for the knowledge by which prestige is abandoned . . .[73]

The emphasis which al-Ghazālī places on *dhawq* seems confined to his latest phase. Even in the *Iḥyā'*, though taste is ranked as the basis or indispensable root of the senses, it is not given the same prominence. In the *Iḥyā'*, it is the heart that is the primary organ of perception. By the heart (*qalb*), al-Ghazālī means not merely that "lump of flesh filled with dark blood on the left side of the chest, and which dead men and animals also have"; but a subtle, translucent organ of perception and power. It is because of the heart, in this sense, that man differs from the animals. The presence of this heart shows man's kinship with the angels; and it is because of his heart that man is said to have been created in the image of God.[74]

Various forms of perception, various kinds of knowledge, originate in and emanate from the heart. At the summit of human knowledge is prophetic consciousness, but the heart also contains the capacity for the lowest and most squalid knowledge, such as appear in magical practices, e.g., casting spells.

Man, for al-Ghazālī, is an arena of conflicting natures. He is a being of radical extremes, a coincidence of opposites that mirrors in small the huge oppositions of the cosmos. At one and the same time, he is a quasi-angelic being, capable of the loftiest endeavours and also, "a dungheap covered with skin."

The heart enables man to attain knowledge of God, insofar as He is knowable. All men possess this organ of transcendent perception. The insight accorded to prophets, the highest and most luminous natures, is available to every individual. It is not the prerogative of the few. How do we know this? In sleep and in dream we witness things immediately, without the intermediary of the intellect; and we never doubt our knowledge.

In a number of passages, al-Ghazālī invokes sleep and dream as indicators of the prophetic consciousness latent in the human heart. It is interesting to note that early on, in his crisis of doubt, dream had appeared as another symptom of the general inaccessibility of truth: when we dream we seem to know with immediate knowledge, but

[73] *Munqidh*, 49–50.

[74] See *Iḥyā'* III, 2–42, on the "wonders of the heart" (*'ajā'ib al-qalb*). For the senses as "spies of the heart" (*jawāsīs*), see *Iḥyā'*, III, 5, lines 12ff. In his discussion of the heart, al-Ghazālī presents his doctrine of his senses, inner and outer, see *ibid.*, and *Munqidh*, 41.

when we wake, we realize that we were dreaming and deceived. And he cites the *ḥadīth*: "People are sleeping and when they die, they awake." But later in the *Munqidh*, dream will be reinterpreted and revalidated as the most convincing evidence of prophetic knowledge.[75] Prophecy is the highest form of knowledge and entails the perception of that which the intellect cannot perceive. Through the perceptions in dreams, the ordinary person can glimpse the fact that such prophetic knowledge is real; but beyond that, only "taste" affords perception.

Just as dream serves to characterize the skeptical crisis of al-Ghazālī's youth but is then offered at a later stage as the very token of a higher and prophetic knowldge, so, too, with the problems of the knowledge afforded by the senses and by the intellect.

In his early siege of doubt, al-Ghazālī had feared that behind every perception of the intellect lay another arbiter which would invalidate that perception. As it turns out, there is indeed another "sphere behind the intellect" and indeed, another arbiter.[76] It is the intellect's role in this regard to recognize its proper limits and to accede to this higher level of perception. Knowledge gained through the intellect, and which characterizes the *'ulamā'*, is gained through study and demonstration; the higher prophetic knowledge occurs through inspiration (*ilhām*).[77] At this level, al-Ghazālī writes, "one knows necessarily that he has reached a point beyond the intellect, and there opens for him the eye from which the unseen is disclosed and which only the few perceive."[78]

The *Munqidh* is constructed on a pattern of artful correspondences: dreams misled, but are later seen to contain prophetic knowledge; the intellect could err, but later discovers its proper unerring function in the provision of demonstration. The senses transfigured by the truth stand revealed as the most trustworthy instruments of perception. The fact that nothing is what it seems to be inspired panic and confusion in his skeptical state, but in his converted state, this same fact stands as a guarantor of the possibility of transcendent knowledge.

In the *Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī patterns his own experience with a striking artfulness. The structure of the work embodies the structure of his own experience, as he sought to present it. On the one hand, this

[75] *Munqidh*, 43.

[76] *Ibid.*, 54; *Iljām*, 44.

[77] *Iḥyā'*, III, 7.

[78] *Munqidh*, 54.

is clearly a matter of persuasive strategy: al-Ghazālī wishes to persuade his reader not so much by argument as by example. On the other hand, however, the very decisive nature of the crisis, recounted with the advantage of hindsight, imposes a pattern on his experience.

Of course, al-Ghazālī uses the notion of "taste" as a metaphor for "experience." But the metaphor is well chosen in accord with his strategic—indeed, his proselytizing purpose in the *Munqidh*. Though he is openly eclectic and allows several approaches to truth, he presents the deepest truth as accessible only through immediate, living experience, or "taste." Taste has a direct meaning for the reader, as an ordinary, and daily, physical experience. The experience of taste has, however, the further merit of being notoriously incommunicable. Unlike the other senses, taste has few analogues. While al-Ghazālī tends to dwell on the frailty and uncertainty of bodily experience, he also shows that this same elusive experience, through the medium of those most mundane instruments, the senses, offers us a privileged access to transcendent truth. (His emphasis on the lowly sense of taste is also his typical way of revealing a mysterious wisdom in the operations of the senses, and thus awakening his heedless reader to wonder.) But ultimately, his reliance on such a notion as "taste" is an astute way to communicate something incommunicable to a wide and diverse circle of readers.

Finally, perhaps, the most paradoxical aspect of the structure of the work lies in the contrast between the mute helplessness of al-Ghazālī's six months of inner conflict during his collapse, when he could neither eat nor speak, and the ultimate incommunicability of his later experience. No other contrast could so effectively mirror his inner transformation. His tongue is locked in a "knot" during his ordeal; in his later state of inner transformation, the knot is loosed and the saving truth is experienced as a "taste," interior and ineffable, upon the tongue.