

## The Inner Knowledge (*'Ilm Al-Batinah*) of good deeds according to Iman Al-Ghazali

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### Abstract

This article analyses al-Ghazali's theory of the Inner Knowledge (*'Ilm al-Batinah*) of good deeds or devotional acts (*'ibadah*). This article is theoretical in nature, and it involves bibliographic research, employing descriptive and analytic methods. The article argues that al-Ghazali formulates unique and profound ways of understanding good deeds, which, if analysed accordingly alongside his theory of Inner Actions (*al-A'mal al-Batinah*), can be developed into a spiritual model of good deeds. The article found that al-Ghazali places great emphasis on the need to understand inner knowledge of good deeds which requires one to understand their Inner Meanings (*al-Ma'ani al-Batinah*), real purposes, as well as their different grades and significance. His analysis of these elements is unique and profound, filled with spiritual insight. Al-Ghazali's insight of this spiritual dimension of good deeds can increase one's consciousness, and help one to be more attentive or present in performing good deeds or worship.

**Keywords:** Good Deeds, Inner Knowledge (*'Ilm Al-Batin*), Inner Meaning (*Al-Ma'Ani Al-Batinah*), Inner Actions (*Al-A'Mal Al-Batinah*)

### 1. Introduction

Imam Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali al-Tusi (1058-1111 CE / 450-505 AH)—one of the most prominent Muslim polymaths—has left abiding legacies to the world, one of which is his profound analysis of inner dimension of good deeds or devotional acts (*'ibadah*). In his most celebrated magnum opus *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), al-Ghazali offers his own profound and systematic analysis of spiritual dimension of good deeds which are still useful to us.

Al-Ghazali discusses various kinds of good deeds, such as the prescribed actions, devotional acts or worship, customary actions, and moral actions including mystical virtues. Based on analytical studies of al-Ghazali's main works related to good deeds or devotional acts, there are two main approaches of al-Ghazali's to good deeds which form two main principles of his formulation and spiritual insight of good deeds. The first one is theoretical

principle of the Right Knowledge (*'Ilm*) and the second one is practical principle of the Right Action (*'Amal*). Each of them consists of both outer and inner dimensions as illustrated in figure 1 below.

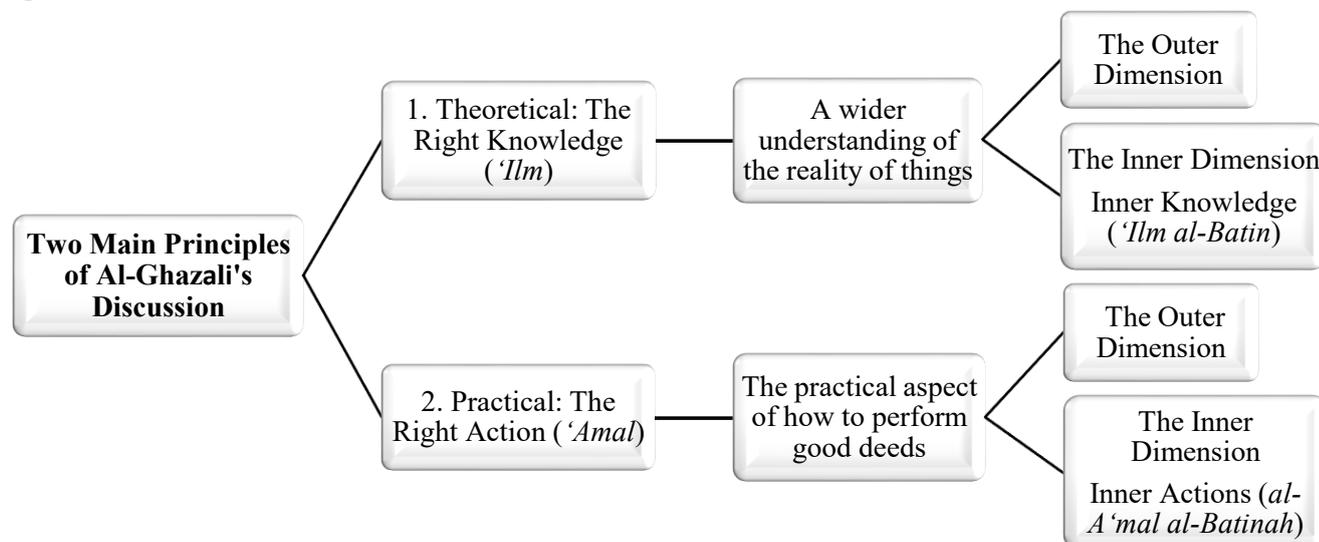


Fig 1: Two Main Principles of al-Ghazali's Spiritual Model of Good Deeds

It is the unique approach of al-Ghazali to explain the right knowledge and the right action of almost good deeds that he discussed in his works. As illustrated in figure 1 above, both of these main principles of the Right Knowledge and the Right Action consist of outer and inner dimensions and it is the latter which will be examined here. In general, the theoretical principle of the Right Knowledge refers to a wider understanding of the reality of things. In relation to good deeds, this includes an understanding of their deeper meaning, real purpose, and significance. The practical principal of the Right Action, on the other hand, refers to the practical aspects of how to perform good deeds accordingly. The inner dimension of the first principle is Inner Knowledge (*'Ilm al-Batin*) of Good Deeds and the inner dimension of the second principle is Inner Actions (*al-A'mal al-Batinah*). To understand the inner meaning (*al-ma'ani al-batinah*), the real purpose, different grade and significance of good deeds are the main elements of Inner Knowledge (*'Ilm al-Batin*) which is the main focus of this article. Whereas, in Inner Actions (*al-A'mal al-Batinah*) al-Ghazali analyses different inner or spiritual actions which form inner preconditions (*al-shurut al-batinah*) that need to be observed in performing good deeds. This second principle, however, will be analysed in another occasion.

As will be substantiated below, this article argues that by disclosing the inner dimension, al-Ghazali breathes spirituality into almost all kinds of good deed that he addresses, attending both to the heart and mind. He does this by seeking knowledge to serve knowledge, and by addressing both the heart and mind which can lead a person to attain spiritual joy. He analyses what he considers to be a certain mystery and wisdom of good deeds, presenting them in an understandable way with examples. He earnestly advises readers to reflect and act upon them, so that their good deeds will transform from mere physical motions of pure ritualistic observance to spiritually rich deeds, filled with real understanding, wisdom, and realisation.

## 2. Method

This article is qualitative article and falls within the domain of the history of religious thought which involves bibliographic/library research. It uses descriptive and content analysis methods. First, it describes general relevant issues before analysing specific area of the main books of al-Ghazali on his insight of inner knowledge of good deeds (devotional acts or worship).

Al-Ghazali left millions of words and they deal with almost all branches of knowledge known in his time. However, only theological and ethical works related to the issues at hand have been chosen for this article. They are *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), *Kimiya' Sa'adah* (The Alchemy of Happiness or Eternal Bliss), and *al-Arba'in fi Usul al-Din* (The Forty Fundamentals of Religion) and some other works.

In his works especially *Ihya'*, al-Ghazali discusses various kinds of good deeds, such as the prescribed actions, devotional acts or worship, customary actions, and moral actions including mystical virtues. This article, however, focuses on some primary kinds of religious good deeds (devotional acts or worship) that he addresses in the earlier part of his ethical writings, particularly *Ihya'*. They are purity or purification (*al-taharah*), ritual prayer (*al-salah*), fasting (*al-sawm*), divine tax (*al-zakah*), pilgrimage to Mecca (*al-hajj*), Qur'an-recitation (*tilawah al-Qur'an*), praise or recollection of God [Allah] (*al-Dhikr*), and invocation of Him (*al-Du'a'*). It is the common approach of al-Ghazali to discuss the excellence (*fada'il*) or significance of good deeds, their outer dimensions, and then followed with the exposition of their inner dimensions. As mentioned above, primarily, his discussion of good deeds can be divided into two main principles; the first one is theoretical principle of the Right Knowledge (*'Ilm*) and the second one is practical principle of the Right Action (*'Amal*). The primary focus of this article, however, is on the inner dimension of these principles, namely, on the inner knowledge (*'ilm al-batin*).

## 3. Result and Discussions

### 3.1 Al- Ghazali's spiritual orientation

Since his time, al-Ghazali already observed that majority of Muslims attach great emphasis only on outer dimension of religious observance, which is only its shape (*sura*) or body, neglecting their inner dimension which is real essence, spirit (*ruh*) or life (*hayah*). This observation is still valid to this time. In his seclusion period, al-Ghazali attained various truths, one of which is his realization of dual dimension of good deeds, namely the outer and inner dimensions. It is later, which is the essence of good deeds without which the good deeds performed would only appear as outward actions that are devoid of real value (Quasem, 1974: 50).

Realizing the importance of inner or spiritual dimension of good deeds, al-Ghazali does not regard a mere outward observance of good deeds as effective, considering it as a lifeless body, performed as no more than a habitual action devoid of spiritual element (Quasem, 1974, 50; Mohd Rosmizi Abd Rahman, 2014, 232). Consequently, he attaches a great emphasis on the need for balanced observance of the outer and inner dimensions of good deeds. He reminds readers to not satisfy with the observance of only outer dimension of good deeds for it does not yet fulfil the requirement to attain eternal happiness. One should do more than what is required if one wants to attain a higher degree of eternal happiness.

Some of these requirements can be found in al-Ghazali's formulation of inner knowledge which includes the need to have a deeper understanding of the real or inner meaning, real purposes, as well as significance of good deeds.

In order to achieve the real purpose of any good deeds, and to make it a more spiritually fruitful deed, al-Ghazali recommends two principles that need to be understood and observed. The first principle is the theoretical principle The Right Knowledge (*'Ilm*) and the second one is the practical principle of the Right Action (*'Amal*). As mentioned above, this section will only focus on the first principle, with special reference on its inner dimension.

Al-Ghazali emphasises the right understanding of the knowledge (*al-'ilm*) and action (*al-'amal*) of good deeds as the primary principle. His way of thinking and mystical insight pervade his analysis and thought. He maintains that knowledge is the foundation or the means of performing good deeds, which in turn is the beginning of guidance, the first journey to Allah (al-Ghazali, 1986, IV.1: 20; al-Ghazali, 199 IV.1: 24-25;3; al-Ghazali, 2004: 144). In pursuing knowledge, however, he emphasises pure intention. Man should seek knowledge for the sake of Allah in order to serve knowledge, not to serve his worldly purpose. He observes that scholars who seek knowledge in order to serve their personal purpose (i.e., to gain status, wealth, respect, etc.) will not be able to grasp the essence and spiritual aspect of knowledge. They also will not be able to comprehend the secrets and mysteries behind that knowledge, but their understanding will be limited to the standard outer meaning (Mohd Rosmizi, 2014: 235).

With this conception of knowledge and spiritual mission, al-Ghazali advises readers to ponder upon the inner knowledge (*'ilm al-batin*) of things beyond the teachings of common jurists and the ordinary perception of the general Muslim society, namely, the knowledge of the essence that has been forgotten and changed. In relation to good deeds, this knowledge includes their inner meaning (*al-ma'ani al-batinah*), purpose, and significance. Al-Ghazali observes that the meaning of many disciplines or sciences of knowledge has been changed, limited, and thus their real meaning has been forgotten (al-Ghazali, 1986, I.1: 31-38; al-Ghazali, 1962:73-100). Thus he discourages *taqlid* or naïve belief except to prophets, for they are the people who apprehend the essence and wisdom of things (al-Ghazali, 2004, V, 75).

Al-Ghazali also reminds his readers not to be content with their ordinary outward practices of good deeds, or with mere fulfilling the basic outer preconditions, for—whether they realise or not—these kinds of good deeds are still at risk, and indeed, are not free from various defects. These kinds of good deeds are certainly the minimum requirements for salvation, which is the state of a person's being saved from Hell, but not yet able to taste the pleasure of spiritual experience, not to mention to attain a higher degree of eternal happiness. He insists that the performance of good deeds without the observance of the inner spiritual dimension will not be able to leave the desired effect on the soul. Indeed, such an observance will only pave the way to pure ritualism and legalism that form the barrier towards spiritual experience. Arafat has analysed how al-Ghazali considers those who are obsessed with religiosity and acts of piety are exposed to many risks, such as they may offend against the principles; may obsess with the proper articulation of the sounds and letters of the recitals; may become rude and rough (Arafat, 1970:59-60). For this reason, al-Ghazali encourages his readers to also acquire and understand the inner knowledge of good deeds

and to observe some of their inner preconditions (*al-shurut al-batinah*). It is through the understanding of these elements that one will be able to realise some wisdom, reality, and secrets and mysteries of certain kind of good deeds, and consequently, they will have a positive impact on him.

### 3.2 Al-Ghazali's theoretical principle of the inner knowledge (*Ilm Al-Batinah*) of good deeds

Al-Ghazali's discussion of knowledge concerning good deeds can be divided into two main categories. The first is knowledge of certain matters that are pertinent to the basic knowledge of good deeds. These include knowledge of factors harmful and helpful to good deeds. The second category of knowledge which is the focus of this article is the knowledge of good deeds, such as knowledge of their inner meaning, excellence or significance, types and stages, as well as outer and inner preconditions. This article only examines briefly the knowledge of good deeds, and it focuses more on analysing its inner dimension which could be called the inner knowledge (*'ilm al-batin*) or the secrets (*asrar*) of good deeds.

Being a great jurist and Sufi master, al-Ghazali is not only able to give detailed discussion of almost all kinds of good deed that he addresses, but also is able to breath spirituality into each of them. Unlike the standard jurist practice who normally only discuss the standard outward knowledge of relevant devotional acts, al-Ghazali introduces one important aspect, namely, inward knowledge (*'ilm al-batin*), or the knowledge of the essence. The interpretation of inner knowledge must not contradict its outer meaning, but should be helpful in understanding it at a deeper level. In this context, he invites readers to understand the inward meaning (*al-ma'ani al-batinah*), real purpose, and the significances of devotional acts. In doing so, al-Ghazali describes the significance and wisdom of devotional acts that he addresses, as well as their different grades and real purpose. He is also able to scrutinise their deeper or inward meanings and mysteries. Throughout his discussions, he tries to prove that this inner knowledge was realised and practised in the early centuries of Islam, but subsequently became neglected. Consequently, the performance of good deeds has been reduced to a mere ritual act, which is devoid of spiritual dimension.

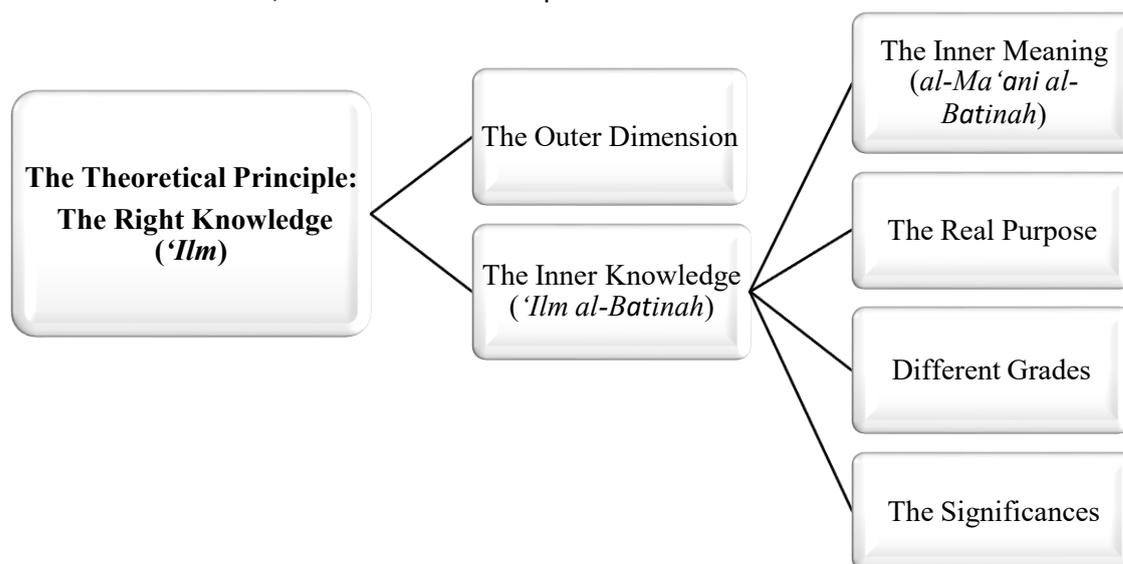


Fig. 2: The Right Knowledge (*'ilm*): The Theoretical Principle of al-Ghazali's Spiritual Model of Good Deeds

Figure 2 above further illustrates the aspects of the theoretical principle of the Right Knowledge as addressed by al-Ghazali. It shows four main aspects of inner knowledge of good deeds that one should understand, namely, the inner meaning, the real purpose, different grades, and the significances.

#### 3.4 The Theoretical Principle: Inner Knowledge (*'Ilm al-Batin*) of Good Deeds

A common approach that al-Ghazali employs in addressing the inner knowledge of good deeds is to describe their significance and wisdom, as well as their different grades and real purpose. Further it is significant that he is able to scrutinise their inner meaning and secrets. For instance, in discussing purification (*al-taharah*), unlike the ordinary understanding—which is limited to the purification of the physical body and clothes from excrements and impurities—he argues that there are indeed three other stages of purification, namely:

The second stage is the purification of the bodily senses from crimes and sins. The third stage is the purification of the heart from blameworthy traits and reprehensible vices. The fourth stage is the purification of the inmost self (*sir*) from everything except God. This last stage is that of the Prophets and saints (al-Ghazali, 1986: I.3, 126).

These inner stages of purification are generally not considered by the majority of his contemporary jurists. The ablution or lustration (*al-wudu'*)—which is another form of the prescribed purification normally performed as the precondition for ritual prayer, and regarded as a mere outward ritual by the majority of Muslims—is also considered by al-Ghazali as containing inner meaning and secrets, and thus should be observed properly, and attentively. Even the cleansing of teeth and mouth, he argues, should be performed accordingly. This is because not only is the cleanliness of mouth highly encouraged by Islam, but it is the place used to recite Allah's holy words. However, the outer purification is not sufficient, and indeed is useless if the inner self is filled with dirt and filth. Because of this he reminds readers to take care of their inner purification, specifically the purification of the heart or the soul, which he considers as the inner meaning of purification. He argues that those who only perform external ablution without inner purification of their hearts should be ashamed when they want to perform prayer, for the prayer is a communion with Allah the Most Holy and the Most Pure. He illustrates such an act as a person who wants to invite a king to his house which is only cleaned at the outside gate, but leaving its inside filled with dirt and filth. This act, he argues, only invites contempt and perdition (al-Ghazali, 1986: I.2, 135; al-Ghazali, 2011: 37-38).

Al-Ghazali relates various acts of good deeds to their respective inner dimensions, establishing the connection between the outward and inward action, *'alam mulk* (the visible, physical, material or phenomenal world) and *'alam al-malakut* (the spiritual world or the realm of the divine world), and most importantly, the spiritual relationship between man and Allah. This is obvious particularly in his discussion of ritual prayer and pilgrimage. He not only offers general inner meaning of these devotional acts, but also explains the specific inner meaning or inner dimension to almost every act involved. This attempt is highly mystical, and as he himself has attested, it could not be found in ordinary books. According to him, every act of worship has its own significance, wisdom, and secrets, some of which can be known while some others remain mysteries. The understanding of the inner dimension of each act

will increase readers' consciousness, and help them to be more attentive or present in their worship.

Al-Ghazali's discussion of the inner dimension of prayer is to be found in the third section of the book of *The Mysteries of Prayer and Its Importance (Kitab Asrar al-Salah wa Muhimmatiha)* of the *Ihya'*. Edwin Elliot Calverley translated *Salah* as "worship." For convenience, however, this article will use the term "prayer," the traditional translation for the term. Al-Ghazali argues that prayer (*al-Salah*) comprises only "Invocation (*dhikr*) and Recital (*qira'ah*), Bowing (*ruku'*) and Prostration (*sujud*), Standing (*qiyam*) and Sitting (*qu'ud*)" (al-Ghazali, 1986: I.4, 160). The purpose of prayer is "to give lustre to the heart, and to renew the remembrance of Allah, and in order that the bond of faith in Him may be established." This definition of prayer is quite extensive and furnished with spiritual insight, unlike the standard jurist definition which normally maintains that prayer is certain recitation and action that begins with *al-takbir* (declaration that Allah is great) and ends with *al-taslim* (salutation). Al-Ghazali maintains that prayer should have certain inner qualities or inner preconditions—which is the subject of the next discussion—such as the presence of the heart, apprehension, magnifying, awe, and others. The invocation is "conversation and communion with Allah," therefore, it should be done mindfully (*ibid.*). Al-Ghazali considers unmindful invocation and recital as useless and even invalid, for it is no more than a mere physical movement of the tongue, performed without any hardship which does not achieve its desired purpose (al-Ghazali, 1986: I.4, 160-161). Realising this reality, therefore, he emphasises the need to perform the supererogatory actions or recitations, for they complete the prayer as the limbs complete a man.

Since a major part of the ritual prayer is comprised of invocations, praises, and recitation of the Qur'anic verses, it also relates to his discussion of the Qur'an-recitation, praise or recollection of God (*dhikr*), and invocation (*du'a'*). All of these acts share many common preconditions—which are to be examined later—among them are understanding what is recited, and the presence of the heart. The mind and the heart, as well as the physical body, should understand and testify what the tongue is reciting. They should show humility and be in awe when the tongue recites praises, or verses that contain the praises and attributes of Allah. They should be in fear when the praises or recital contain threats and punishments, and should be joyful when they contain rewards and salvation. Heedless or unmindful recitation and performance of good deeds, for al-Ghazali, is a humiliation to Allah which deserves punishment. It is like a person who wants to approach a king by offering a servant who is already dead. The offering of a corpse is a humiliation to a king which deserves serious punishment (al-Ghazali, 2003 II.1, 46; al-Ghazali, 2010: II.1, 26). This stance is indeed Qur'anic (for instance, the Qur'an 107: 4-5).

Realising the different degrees in the performance of ritual prayer, as well as in other kinds of good deeds, al-Ghazali argues that there are also different stages in these different kinds of good deeds. For instance, the prayer of the body is different from the prayer of the soul. He thus criticises the jurist's ordinary understanding of prayer, which only emphasises the outward performance or only underscores the outer preconditions. For the majority of jurists, a prayer is already considered valid if the primary outer preconditions are observed, although no supererogatory actions or recitations are performed. For al-Ghazali that statement, however, is like a doctor's statement which claims that the handicapped servant

offered to a king is alive and not dead, and therefore is sufficient for the offering. Al-Ghazali was convinced that far from being accepted, this kind of deficient offering and good deeds which are full of defects will be rejected, and indeed deserve punishment. Like his previous argument, such actions are considered as a humiliation to the king and Allah (al-Ghazali, 2003: II.1, 46-47; al-Ghazali, 2010: II.1, 27). This state is applicable to the other kinds of good deeds. Thus, at the spiritual level al-Ghazali does not hesitate to claim that a prayer without the real essence is nothing but void. This argument is substantiated by some Prophetic traditions and other reports (al-Ghazali, 1986: I.4, 159ff.; al-Ghazali, 2001: 196-199).

Likewise, al-Ghazali also argues that there are different classes of men according to the degrees in which they read the Qur'an. He classifies them into three categories, namely, those who only move their tongue physically while their heart is unmindful; those whose heart already understands and follows the recital; and those whose heart "goes ahead to the meanings first, and then the tongue serves the heart and interprets it" (al-Ghazali, 1986: I.4, 167). This mystical insight of different degrees of the Qur'an-recitation further indicates that al-Ghazali is contemplating the real essence and deeper knowledge of the act, which goes beyond the ordinary jurists' perception. Thus, unlike the majority of Muslims who are only concerned with rewards, al-Ghazali is concerned more with revealing the real purpose and inner states of an act.

Similarly, the practice of praise (*dhikr*) also consists of several degrees. In *The Beginning of Guidance* (1953), al-Ghazali speaks of four degrees, of which the first one is the shell, and the other three are different degrees of the kernels. To repeat the praise outwardly with the tongue is the first degree, which is the shell of the praise. The second degree is when the heart has already started to attach itself to praise, and when exercised constantly will penetrate into the mind. In the third degree, the praise already firmed and influences the heart until the heart cannot be diverted to other things easily. But the highest stage which is the real essence and objective of the praise is the state which is sought. It is the state when praise is already hidden, and what remains in the heart is the object of the praise, namely, Allah. It is a state of *fana'* (self-absorption, self-dissolution, or self-annihilation), where those who at this stage are already so absorbed in his praise until the person is so drawn and annihilated himself in the praise, and spiritually united with the object of the praise, which is Allah (al-Ghazali, 2010:II.6, 47-48).

Al-Ghazali also establishes the relationship between the outer and inner dimensions of good deeds. For instance, he relates the call for prayer to the call on Resurrection Day, outward facing the *qiblah* with the turning towards the face of Allah, intention as the resolve to respond and to obey Allah's command, bowing and prostration as sign of humbleness of which the latter is considered as the highest degree of submission, and many others (al-Ghazali, 1986:I.4, 165-171). He also relates the Qur'an-recitation and the praise with the presence of Allah, in which he reminds that the former is the recitation of the holy words of Allah Almighty, and the latter is the exclusive praise of Him, and therefore they both are not an ordinary recitation and praise. Based on various narrations and reports, he tries to show the magnificence of the Qur'an (al-Ghazali, 1986: I.8, 280). Only those who understand their real meaning and significance will be able to appreciate and become more attentive in their performance.

The strong relationship between the outer and inner dimensions is also emphasised in the discussion of pilgrimage. Al-Ghazali maintains that pilgrimage is “the seal of all that is commanded, the perfection of Islam and the completion of religion” (al-Ghazali, 1986: I.7, 239). Based on the Prophetic traditions, he argues that pilgrimage was prescribed as the replacement to monasticism (*al-ruhbaniiyyah*) which was neglected by adherents of some previous religions (al-Ghazali, 1986: I.7, 266; al-Ghazali, 2003: II.4, 56; al-Ghazali, 2010: II.4, 36). Both of these practices share certain similarities, such as the need to leave family and properties, and to focus on the journey exclusively to God (Quasem, 1974: 57). In pilgrimage, Allah has chosen and made certain places holy, and prescribed certain actions exclusively for the ritual of pilgrimage, of which some of their mysteries (such as the throwing of the pebbles, and *al-sa'i*, namely, running between two small mountains of *al-Safa* and *al-Marwah*) are unknown by reason. It is through the performance of these acts without question that perfect obedience (*kamal al-'ubudiiyyah*) is achieved (al-Ghazali, 1986: I.7, 269-270; Quasem, 1974: 57). Al-Ghazali illustrates this state by comparing it to a great king who receives the visitation from his people who are expected to come in humility. Therefore, a pilgrim who realises this holy visitation should be humble and filled with humility before Allah Almighty, the King of all kings, and they should respect the holy places, and perform the prescribed actions with full obedience (al-Ghazali, 2003: II.4, 56-57; Ghazali, 2010: II.4, 36).

Al-Ghazali reveals one more important inner meaning of this journey, namely, it is the final journey to the Hereafter, the spiritual journey of the soul. By this exposition, he opens the way to understand the inner dimension of various acts involved in pilgrimage. The journey of pilgrimage, he argues, contains various lessons and reminders. He advises pilgrims to remember the affairs of the Hereafter throughout their journey by relating most acts involved to their respective inner dimensions. For instance, separation of pilgrims from their families should be imagined as their separation from this world for the Hereafter. Their vehicles should be considered as their own coffins, their *ihram* clothes as their shrouds, and the entering of the *Miqat* (a stated place) as his entering of the *Miqat* of the Hereafter. The difficulties that they face in the journey should remind them of difficulties that they will face with the interrogation of the angels of *Munkar* and *Nakir*. Wild creatures they meet should remind them of the scorpions and worms in their graves. Their state of being alone and away from their families should be felt as it is the dreadful state of being alone in their own graves, and their *talbiyyah* recitation as their answers to Allah's call on the resurrection day. Thus, al-Ghazali regards each of these actions as containing its own secret and wisdom, and therefore, the pilgrims should always be mindful throughout their journey. He advises them to reflect on these inner meanings so that they can balance between the outward and inward observances of pilgrimage (al-Ghazali, 2003: II.4, 57; al-Ghazali, 2010: II.4, 37). By understanding and observing this inner dimension, actions involved in pilgrimage—as well as in other kinds of good deeds—will become more spiritually fruitful to the soul, and this is important in achieving the ultimate goal of the spiritual journey.

In fact, al-Ghazali injects spirituality into almost all kinds of good deeds that he addresses, too extensive to cover all of them. For the purpose of this article, the above analysis is sufficient to substantiate the argument (for more discussion, see Mohd Rosmizi, 2014). Al-Ghazali emphasises understanding and reflecting upon the real or the inner knowledge of good deeds. This spiritual or inner knowledge—which could be among the unfathomable truths that he gained in seclusion—is too precious and can be considered as a

phenomenon. It enables a person to realise the real inner meaning, significance, and purpose of an act—especially the prescribed devotional acts—as well as to relate it to the spiritual realm. This inner knowledge can certainly increase readers’ spiritual desires to perform good deeds diligently, and help them to be more attentive in their observance. But they are not to be limited to several kinds of good deeds that al-Ghazali addresses, for he only wants to set an example through his discussions. Indeed, he does discuss different customary practices—such as eating, marriage, and travelling—and different kinds of virtues or moral (and immoral) actions. Thus, this knowledge is applicable to a wider context, particularly to everyday activities, for Islam teaches that an ordinary act performed with sincerity accordingly will be considered an act of devotion which will be rewarded. In addition, al-Ghazali’s theory of inner knowledge can be applied to all periods, and it should not be limited to Muslim society, but it is also useful to other religious societies to some extent. The following discussion will examine the second principle, namely, the inward or inner actions (*al-a’mal al-batinah*), which is the inner practical aspect of good deeds.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This article has examined al-Ghazali’s theory of the Inner Knowledge (*’Ilm al-Batinah*) of good deeds or devotional acts (*’ibadah*). The article proves that al-Ghazali formulates unique and profound ways of understanding good deeds, and found that al-Ghazali places great emphasis on the need to understand inner knowledge of good deeds which requires one to understand their Inner Meanings (*al-Ma’ani al-Batinah*), real purposes, as well as their different grades and significance. This inner knowledge is an important part of his theoretical principle of The Right Knowledge (*’Ilm*)

Al-Ghazali’s interpretations of different elements of inner knowledge are profound, practical and indeed critically important to Muslims in this modern time. He injects spirituality not only into a potentially arid body of theology as observed by McDonald (1899: 72), but also into the practice of jurisprudence, formal religious observance, and some other disciplines of knowledge. His analysis of different elements of Inner Knowledge is unique and profound, filled with spiritual insight. His insight of this spiritual dimension of good deeds can increase one’s consciousness, and help one to be more attentive or present in performing good deeds or worship. His exposition of the psychology or inner dimension of good deeds can be considered as among his spiritual models devoted to humanity in order to awaken their souls and start their journey towards Allah, the Almighty God. It is a practical model that Muslims should follow if they wish to improve the quality of their good deeds, and desire to attain a higher degree of eternal happiness. Therefore, al-Ghazali’s theory of the Inner Knowledge should not be neglected, but can be developed and applied in different aspects of our lives and careers.

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