

A Critical Discussion of Imam Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Analysis of *Dhātul-Lah* (Essence of God)

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Abstract

The use of philosophy to discuss Dhāthul-Lāh (the Essence of God) has affected Islamic theology and other articles of faith negatively, hence the need to desist from its use because it is an issue that is beyond human imagination especially since Allah is an Unseen Being, Who does not resemble any of His creature. One of the Islamic scholars who strove to dislodge the application of philosophy to discuss the Islamic articles of faith was Imam Al-Ghazali who argues this in his book, Kitāb Qawā'id al-^oAqā'id in Ihyā' ^oUlūm ad-dīn (Revival of the Religious Sciences). His argument suggests that he aims at some sects, whose views differ from that of ahl as-sunnah due to their philosophical interpretation of verses or statements on the names and attributes of Allah. Despite his argument in favour of ahl as-sunnah, the Islamic group that never supported the use of philosophy, he was also in contrast to some of them. This paper therefore studies Al-Ghazali's philosophical analysis of Dhātul-Lah and analyses it, using the views of some of the scholars of ahl as-sunnah. The descriptive method is used to carry out this research work. The paper observes that the use of philosophical expressions to discuss the essence of Allah and other articles of faith in Islam was popular during the time of Al-Ghazali as some Islamic scholars had argued against it before him but without success. This discussion commends the efforts of Al-Ghazali and concludes that theological error is inevitable when applying philosophy to discuss the Essence of God and other articles of faith, hence the need to balance the theological problems with the Qur'anic expressions and the tradition of the Prophet.

Keywords: Imam Al-Ghazali, Philosophy, *Dhātul-Lah*, Theology and Religious Sciences



Introduction

The first statement of testimony is called “*Lā ilāha illal-Lāh*” in Islam and it is the statement that confirms somebody is a Muslim. It means there is no being worthy of being truly worshipped except Allah. This statement is very delicate since denouncing or not keeping with its requirements may fence somebody out of Islam. To be well acquainted with this statement, Islamic scholars have divided it into three inseparable parts, namely; *Tawḥīd al-Ilāhiyyah* (which expresses that all acts of worship should be done to Allah alone), *Tawḥīd ar-Rubūbiyyah* (which expresses that Allah is the Creator, the Provider and the Controller of the universe) and *Tawḥīd al-’asmā’ wa-ṣiḥāt* (which expresses the names and attributes of Allah). The Essence of Allah (*Dhātul-Lah*) falls in the last expression, *Tawḥīd al-’asmā’ wa-ṣiḥāt*. It connotes that the Islamic religion is founded on the fact that Allah is Unique in His Kingdom and actions, He has no partner in this. He is Unique in His essence, and attributes, He has no similarity. Again. He is Unique in His divinity and worship and He has no rival. The unbeliever believes in the second and third parts of *Tawḥīd* to some extent but disbelieves in the first one while the Islamic scholars differ in the last part which caused the demarcation between them and led to the issue of sects in Islam. One of the major causes of different opinions of Islamic scholars is the interference of philosophy in Islamic theology (Sulayman Bn ‘Abdullah, 1397 H).

According to Gibb, H.A.R & Kramers, J.H. (1981), the line of demarcation places the Islamic sects under the *sunnis* or *Mushābihīns* and *Mu^cattilīns*. However, none of the Islamic theologians declares frankly for one of the two views of God (i.e *tashbīh* (comparing Allah with the creation) or *ta^cḥīl* (denying Allah of all attributes) but rather one asserts that he stands for *tanzīh* (keeping God pure against *tashbīh*, and for *tathbīt* which is a positive determination based on *tanzīl* (revelation) and recognition of the revealed text, against *ta^cḥīl*). The Islamic theologians have eagerly accused one another of one or even both names. Among such theologians is Imam al-Ghazali whose expression in his book, *Kitāb Qawā^cid al-’Aqā^cid in Iḥyā^c ‘Ulūm ad-dīn* (Revival of the Religions Sciences) suggests that he aims at other sects, whose views differ from that of *ahl as-sunnah* due to their philosophical interpretation of verses or statements on the names and attributes of Allah.

This book is the magnum opus of Imam al-Ghazālī which was written over years beginning in 1095, Stern, M.S. (2002). Lewis, B. et al, (1965) opine that it was composed during the period when he was in retirement at Damascus and Tus. Its contents, as claimed by Imam al-Ghazali, are based on the belief of *ahl as-sunnah* in their explanation and understanding of the statement of testimony (Al-Ghazali, M. nd). Sayyid Qutb (1980) thinks that *Tawhīd* or *Kalmah* is the foundation of Islam and it is the specific word with which the Messengers of Allah were sent to their various communities, Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) inclusive. Allah says:

Not a messenger did We send before thee without this inspiration sent by Us to him: that there is no god but I, therefore worship and serve me (Qur'an 21:25).

Usually, the first call of every Messenger is the call to this *Kalmah* which usually meets the people's resistance, the call of the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) is also inclusive (Qutb, S. 1980). After the demise of the Prophet, Islam and Muslims started to get in contact with other cultures and ideas which Muslims started to absorb in good spirits. This made them engage in free thought which took little account of the literature interpretation of the Qur'an and which was about to get out of the entirely semantic and juridical bounds of the earlier culture due to the interwoven of the Islamic sciences with philosophy (Holt, P.M. et al, 1970). This free thought which does not give regard to the literal interpretation of the Qur'an also affects the Islamic doctrine of the nature of Allah, therefore, any person or group of people who gives free interpretation to the part of the Qur'an or *Hadīth* that speaks about nature of Allah is regarded as *Mushābih* (Somebody who assimilates, compares God to man, in order word an anthropomophist) or *Mu'atṭil* (Somebody who divests God of all attributes), Gibb, H.A.R & Kramers, J.H. (1981) submit.

The aim of Imam Al-Ghazali in writing this book was to redirect the believers' attitude and to impart the internal knowledge of piety which will lead to the supernal realm (Stern, M.S., 2002), towards the eradication of philosophical expressions in discussing the names and attributes of God, an action that can remove someone from Islam. He therefore tried to re-



interpret the nature or essence of God in a manner acceptable to the creed of *Ahlu-s-Sunnah*, the majority of the Muslim group. This work, therefore, critically studies Imam Al-Ghazali's philosophical discussion on *Dhātul-Lah* (Essence of God) from the perspectives of the *ahlu-s-Sunnah*, using the Qur'an and tradition of the Prophet (SAW) as the basis. The descriptive method is used to carry out this work since it deals with the contextual examination of various submissions of the Islamic scholars and the two primary sources of guidance in Islam (the Qur'an and *Hadīth*, the Prophetic tradition) in order to guide us to the certainty concerning Imam Al-Ghazali's views on the nature of God. This work therefore will discuss the status of Imam Al-Ghazali as a philosopher, theologian and scholar in some Islamic sciences, the Islamic sect, *Ahlu-s-Sunnah Wal-Jamā'ah*, which Imam Al-Ghazali was claiming, some suggested Islamic heretical sects against which he wrote this portion of his book, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-dīn*, his submissions on the essence of Allah, the effects of philosophy and scholasticism sciences on the Islamic beliefs on the essence of Allah, a critical study of Imam Al-Ghazali's submissions on *Dhātul-Lāh* against the *ahl as-Sunnah's* submissions.

Status of Imam Al-Ghazali as a Philosopher and Islamic Scholar

Various Islamic scholars, like Adh-Dhahabi, Ibn Kathir Ahmad Bn Muhammad Khalkan and Ali Nadwi have described Imam Al-Ghazali as a great scholar, to the extent that they gave him some nicknames which include: *Hujjah Ad-dīn* (Proof of Religion), *Zany ad-dīn* (Beauty of religion), *Al-Faqīh* (Islamic jurist), among others due to his profound knowledge in many fields of Islamic disciplines. Imam Al-Ghazali started his education career and excelled in various Islamic sciences like calligraphy (*Al-khatt*), philosophy and others. He studied philosophy which is the concern of this paper through private reading, during his leisure time when he was teaching at Nizamiyyah University. He studied, understood and pondered on it until it appeared to him undoubtedly that philosophy is nothing but trickery, deceit, realization and imagination (Al-Ghazali M., 1988). In the opinion of Esposito (1995), without a doubt, al-Ghazali was a spiritual writer whose concern was with interior religious experience, yet his work would have lacked an entire philosophical dimension without philosophy. Al-Ghazli's works in various fields have had a powerful

influence on Muslim thought ever since and today he is one of the writers who have received the most attention from Western scholars.

The Period in which Imam Al-Ghazali Lived

This great Imam lived in a period when Islamic belief was in currents and cross-currents of devilish thoughts and pagan ideas resulting from the Muslims' encounter with the foreign sciences. This *fitnah* (trial) which perpetrated into the belief of Islam occurred in the year 105 A.H during the caliphate of Hisham bn °Abd al-Malik (from Umayyad dynasty) when Al-Ja'd Bn Dirham appeared and claimed that al-Qur'an is a creation of Allah. He was slaughtered in Kufah by Khalid bn °Abdullah during the °Id al-Kabir of the year 124 A.H. and the °Abbasid reign especially, during the reign of al-Ma'mun, the *fitnah* escalated. According to Muhammad bn °Abdul-Wahhab, it was Ma'mun who caused many *fitnah* on °*al-aqīdah* for the Muslims because he assisted in translating the Greek books of philosophy and the statement that the Qur'an is a creation was emerged properly during his reign. Not only this, he even compelled people to accept that idea and many Islamic scholars like Imam Ahmad and others were persecuted.

Ahlu-Sunnah Wal-Jamā'ah

The Prophet has been reported to have said that his community, the Muslims will divide into seventy-three sects and that only one of these sects will enter Paradise. The seventy-third of the sects are *Ahlu-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah* according to °Abd Ar-Rahman Al-Jawzi Al-Baghdadi (1993). The thought and course of this sect are based on the message of the Messenger of Allah and that is why their thought is called the thought of *ahlu-Sunnah*. Their thought is also called the thought of *al-Jamā'ah* because their thought is that of the Islamic group which agrees on the truth and never leave their circle in any matter concerning the °*Aqīdah* (Islamic creed, belief or faith). This sect is also called people of tradition and *Ḥadīth* or victorious group or the saved group. The source of its °*Aqīdah* is al-Qur'an, the *sunnah* and the consensus. It believes that the Prophet (S.A.W) explained everything concerning the fundamental of religion and nobody is expected to create anything in the religion again and surrender should be made to Allah and His Apostle in the esoteric and exoteric matters as nothing like *qiyās* (deduction by analogy) or *thawq* (tast) or *Kashf* (Revealed knowledge)



should not contradict both the Qur'an and *sunnah*. Pure reasoning should be in conformity with the revelation and if it contradicts the revelation then precedence will be given to the revelation (Mani^c, H.A, 1418H).

Some Heretical Sects Which Imam Al-Ghazali is Believed to Aim at

There are some heretical sects that Imam al-Ghazali mentions in his book and there are others, which are not mentioned directly but they could be detected indirectly through the contents of this book which point to their creed and thought. The following are mentioned heretical sects; Mu^ctazilah, Murj'ites, Isma^cilites, al- Barahimiyyah and A-Rawafidah. The involvement of these sects in philosophy and scholasticism to understand and practice the Islamic faith or creed, especially in the areas of beliefs in the names and attributes of God makes them to be heretics in their ideologies. Imam Al-Ghazali aims to criticize these heretical sects and others that fall within the doctrines of the scholastic, the theologians and the philosophers, (Esposito, J.L. (1995) and redirect the Muslims to what he considers to be pristine Islam. These heretical sects might have been involved in adhering to one or other doctrine of any of the three groups, the scholastic, the theologians and the philosophers. Is either such sect tempered with the essence of Allah or His attributes, actions, or the report brought by the Prophet (S.A.W) by applying the reason or rational to judge or explain such issue, the attitude which was not in operation during the time of the Prophet (S.A.W) and his companions. Such issues are very difficult to deal with through human reasoning.

The Effects of Philosophy and Scholasticism Sciences on Islam

Islamic community was one in its beliefs originally but the situation changed when these two studies (Philosophy and Scholasticism Sciences) were introduced into discussing the essence of God. It was these two sciences that subject Muslims to those issues that caused schisms in Islam due to the contact of the Muslims with the foreign sciences like Greek philosophy and its scholasticism, Esposito, J.L. (1995). Ibn Khaldun (1988) confirms that although the later scholars had mixed the two sciences together to the extent that it is difficult to distinguish between the issues contained in them. The main concern of *ilm al- kalām* (scholastic theology or defensive apologia) according to its scholars, is *al-^caqā'id al- 'Imaniyyah* (Doctrines that have to do with faith). It is translated to be defensive

apologia because of its function which is to establish religious beliefs firmly, by producing proofs and to cast aside doubts through the application of philosophy.

Ibn Khaldun (1988) further submits about *‘ilm al-kalām* that man is charged with the faith in the transcendence of Allah. His knowledge, power, creation, will, the resurrection of man after death, then faith in the Messengers and that there is *al-Jannah* (Paradise) and hell fire. Those are the bases of the doctrines that have to do with the faith which could be explained by the use of reason and its proofs could be found in the Qur’an and *sunnah* (tradition of the Prophet). The *Salaf* (the Muslim predecessors) used the Qur’anic and sunnatic evidence to prove this, thereafter came disagreement in explaining these doctrines as a result of the *mutashābihāt* verses (passages not clearly intelligible in the Qur’an) and those that portray the anthropomorphic expressions about the essence of God and attributes of God. This disagreement, in explaining the *mutashābihāt* and these anthropomorphic expression about the essence and attributes of God resulted into argument, differences of opinion and proofs by the use of reason and additional tradition. This led some groups to be doubtful of Allah’s essence as regards anthropomorphic issues like the hand, foot, face and etc. to the extent that they believed that Allah is composed of a body but not like the bodies and until they made the body as one of his attributes, which cannot be traced to the Qur’an and the prophetic traditions originally.

Other people even likened Allah’s attributes with that of His creations, in terms of direction, *istiwā’* (His establishment on the seat), His descending (*nuzūl*), voice, word and so on. There were arguments among the scholars regarding these and others but finally, the faith was retained in the states which the *Salaf* (Islamic predecessors) left it through the efforts of some Islamic scholars. Later many sciences and works emerged, and people set deadly on research and other directions and the *Mutakallimūn* were able to compose a book on the transcendence of God. Therein, Al-Mu‘tazilah started their heretical doctrines in every aspect of Allah’s transcendence by rejecting the literal meaning of qualities of Allah like knowledge, power, will, life, hearing and seeing. This made them to say that al-Qur’an is a creation of Allah. Some Caliphs also forced people to follow these doctrines



and those who refused were persecuted. This prompted *ahl as-Sunnah* to attack this doctrine by applying reasoning proofs. It was Abu al-Hasan al-Ash^cari, the leader of *al-Mutakallimūn* who started that task. He was able to make balance between these issues through tradition and reasoning by presenting proofs against those who held the heretical views concerning those fundamentals of faith. Imam Al-Ghazali gave the last blow to the use of pure reasoning to determine God's essence. Consequently, anybody who applies pure reason to discuss the essence of God is regarded as Ash^carite, the follower of Abu al-Hasan al-Ash^cari as well as a member of Al-Ghazali. This is because not all who claim to be *ahl as-Sunnah* agree with them in their theological ideologies.

***Dhātul-Lāh* (Essence of Allah) according to Imam Al-Ghazali**

Imam Al-Ghazzali treated the essence of Allah in section one of his book, *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm ad-dīn* (Revival of the Religions Sciences) under *Al-ʿAqīdah* (creed, belief or faith) wherein he used philosophical and logical proof evidence for the full explanation of the themes in this section. This is called *ar-risālah al-Qudsiyyah fī Qawāʿid al-ʿAqāʿid* (The Holy Message about the pillars of faith). It is based on the affirmation of the essence of Allah, His attributes or qualities, His actions or deeds and the affirmation of the sincerity of the Prophet (S.A.W). The foundation of *ʿImān* is based on these four *arkān* (basic elements) of which each basic element contains, ten principles. The concern of this area is mainly on the submissions of Imam Al-Ghazali on the essence of Allah which are discussed as follows:

The First Basic Element: Knowledge about the Essence and Oneness of Allah (S.W.T)

Ten principles are discussed under this. It is to know:

1. Of the existence of Allah. Imam uses the Qur'anic verses to buttress this point convincingly before the philosophical and reasoning proof. He asserts that Allah is not a body which is subjected to motion and rest, which are events and since a new thing cannot be without the event which precedes it and that the expenditure of those events leads to the emergence of the new thing then, there must be an inventor who originated those events therefore the world cannot be free from events which preceded it hence the world itself is an event which needs an originator.

2. That Allah is Eternal, nothing preceded His existence. He is the first and the last. Had it been that He is an originated being, and not eternal, He would have needed an originator who in turn would have subjected to another originator. This will continue like that. The fact that He was not preceded by anything makes him to be the Maker of the world and its Originator and Inventor.
3. That despite the fact that Allah is Eternal, He is also endless since His eternal has been confirmed then His end is impossible.
4. Allah is not a substance, confined to a domain and subjected to resting in and moving out of such domains which are events then, the substance is also an originated thing.
5. That Allah is not a body composed of substances. Since the body is an expression, indicating the composition of something from the substances and if it is wrong to label Allah with substance confined to a domain therefore, it is also wrong to say that He is a body.
6. That He is not an accident in a body that sets in in a place. This is because the accident is anything that sets-in body and everybody is an originated being and inevitably its originator must be before it. How then can He sets-in in the body when He has eternally existed without anybody, as He has existed before He created both the bodies and accidents?
7. About the transcendence of Allah concerning directions. The directions are distinguished with the man since he has upper, lower, right, left, front and back directions. The directions are originated things alongside the man and if Allah created man in a round or circular form like a ball, the directions would not have been at all, how then can the direction be attached to Him Who is Eternal, whereas the direction is an originated thing? Allah is above everything and nothing is above Him.
8. That Allah establishes himself on *al-ʿArsh* (The throne). This establishment is based on the meaning known to Allah alone. This *istiwāʾ* is by means of dominion (*al-Qahr*) and power (*al-ʾistilāʾ*). This is so since if the *istiwāʾ* is believed to mean settlement and establishment then it means that the one who establishes himself is a body whose body touches *al-ʿArsh* which may be the same as him, bigger or smaller than him and this is impossible.



9. That despite that Allah is free from form, measurement, directions and zones, He would be seen in the day of judgment by some people, and would not be seen in this world. Since Allah sees His creation without encounter or face to face, and since He can be known by His creation without how and form, therefore He can be seen just like that.
10. That Allah (S.W.T) is One without a partner, Unique without equal. He single-handedly created the creations. He has no similar who participates with Him in the creation not to talk of equality. He has no opposition to contest with Him not to talk of making hostility with Him. If there are two gods and one of them wishes to command something, if the second is forced to assist him then the first god has been defeated and incapable but if he is capable of contradicting and rejecting him, then the second is powerful and subdue while the first is a weak and deficient god.

The Second Basic Element is to have Knowledge about the Attributes of Allah (S.W.T)

It has ten principles under it. To have the knowledge that:

1. The Maker of the universe is a powerful God. This is because it is senseless to believe that a well-woven brocade was made by a dead person or by an incapable person.
2. He has the knowledge of every being and encompasses the whole creation (with His knowledge). An atom-like something which is far and in hiding, either in the earth or heaven does not escape from His knowledge.
3. He is Ever-Living. This is because if somebody has been confirmed of having knowledge and power then such a person must have been confirmed to be alive therefore, thinking that a powerful, knowledgeable, doer and a controller is without life necessitates the possibility of doubt in life of animals when they are moving or resting.
4. His Will comes before His actions and nothing happens except that it inclines to the will of Allah and happens in accordance with His Will.
5. He is All-Seeing. The notion of the mind and the secret of the imagination and thinking cannot escape from his vision likewise the

- sound of the creeping black ant on the solid stone in the dark night cannot escape from His hearing. His vision and hearing are perfect. He sees without pupils (of the eyes) and hears without ears.
6. He speaks with word and His word is a quality which is independent of itself and without sound or letter, therefore it is a word of mind which is readable with the tongue, committable to the memory and writable in the papers but the word in its physical form is not established in papers. If the physical word is established in the book of Allah in the papers, then writing the name of Allah will establish the physical being of Allah in the paper.
 7. The word which is independent of itself is eternal and so His entire attributes since it is impossible for the word to be events which accept changes. Based on this, His word is eternal which establishes His essence and what takes place is only the sounds which indicate the word. This is like a man who seeks and wishes a particular knowledge for his child before he is born. The demand and wish of such knowledge for the child are established in the essence of that man until when God created him until he matured and God created the knowledge for him in accordance with what his father had in mind then the child becomes somebody charged with that demand which has been established and existing in his father's essence until his child gets to know it therefore, the establishment of the demand in the word of God- which reads thus: "off your slippers" is established in the essence of Allah and Musa (A.S) only became an addressee after his existence, since the knowledge of that demand has been created for him, thus he heard the eternal word.
 8. His knowledge is eternal and He does not cease to be a knowledge in His essence and attributes and not that he acquires new knowledge about what happens to His creation but the knowledge exists in the ancient knowledge of His. If we have the knowledge of Zayd's arrival at sunrise and the knowledge is there until the arrival of Zayd at sun-rise then the knowledge about the arrival of Zayd at sunset is known through the former knowledge which needs no new knowledge. This is how the eternity of Allah's knowledge should be understood.



9. His Will is also eternal and it is attached to every event which takes place at the suitable time of occurrence based on the previous ancient knowledge of Allah. This is so since if His Will is an event, it will also be like other events and if it is not in His essence then He is not the one who wills it, so far that you cannot be the person who produces a motion which is not in your essence. That motion necessarily needs another Will which also needs another Will of which the process is unlimited and if it is possible to create a Will without another Will then it is possible that the universe came into being without a Will.
10. Allah (S.W.T) is Knowledgeable with knowledge, living with life, powerful with power, willing with Will, speaking with word, hearing with hearing, seeing with sight. All these attributes are eternal. Saying that he is knowledgeable without knowledge is like saying that one is wealthy without money, and so on.

The Third Basic Principle: To have the Knowledge about the Actions of Allah (S.W.T)

This is to have the knowledge that:

1. Every event that takes place in the universe is His action and His invention and nobody joins Him in all these. He is the Creator of every creation and He is the One Who provides them with power and motion therefore, all actions of man are His creations and are in connection with His power. He is the Creator of all these since a creation does not know the explanation of the action which it produces.
2. The uniqueness of Allah in the invention of the motion of the servants does not mean that the motion is not destined for them by way of acquisition. It is the God who created the power and what it produces as well as the free and voluntary Wills. Power is an attribute of the servant but created by Allah and not acquired by Him whereas the motion is a creation of Allah and an attribute of the servant as well as his acquisition. The motion is created in terms of destination in connection with a power which is an attribute of man. Motion in relation to another attribute, is called ability and named acquisition due to that relation. How then can motion be regarded as a forced action upon man when he can necessarily distinguish

- between compulsion and volition or how can it be the creation of man when he does not know the components of the motion which he acquired and its number in detail?
3. Though, the action of servant is his acquisition nevertheless, it does not mean that it is carried out without the Will of Allah. Nothing happens in the authority and in the kingdom except with the decision of Allah, His power, His Will and Wish. Since the actions of the servants are creations of Allah, then it is right to establish that they are according to the Will of Allah.
 4. It is Allah Who is the Sole Authority to create, invent and arrogate the imposition of obligation on the servants to himself nevertheless, both creation and imposition of obligation are not compulsory on him contrary to the belief of al-Mu'tazilah that the two are compulsory on him for the welfare of the servants. This is impossible since He is the One Who obligates, commands and forbids. How then can He aim at obligation or at compulsion and decision?
 5. Allah has the right to place on the creation that (burden) which he cannot bear, contrary to al-Mu'tazilah's view. If it is not right, then the request by the servant through the prayer that Allah should avert it would have been impossible. They said: "O Our Lord! Lay not on us that for which we have no strength..." (Q 2: 286).
 6. He (S.W.T) has the right to suffer and punish the creation without previous offence and without affixed reward because He does whatever He likes in His kingdom and it is unimaginable that His authority goes beyond His kingdom. Oppression means intervention by someone in the authority of another and this is impossible in the part of Allah since He cannot concur with other in exercising authority. Furthermore, the killing of animals and all kinds of pain afflicted on them are pains which resulted from the man without any previous offence committed by the animals.
 7. Allah does whatever He wishes with his servant and it is not incumbent on him to keep with their welfare as it is mentioned in the previous principle, since He would not be questioned for what He does but they would be questioned of what they do.



8. Knowing Allah and obedience to His commands are obligatory and should be in accordance with His dictate and *Shari'ah*, not dictate of reason. This is contrary to al-Mu'tazilah's view. This is because reason cannot guide to the knowledge of problem that takes place after the death.
9. It is not impossible that Allah sent the Prophets (A.S), contrary to al-Barahimah whose doctrine is that there is no gain in sending them since the reason can stand in their place. This is not true since reason cannot guide to the deeds which can save man in the day of judgment as it cannot also guide to the medicine useful for the health. The need for the Prophet is like the need for the medical doctors but the sincerity of medical doctor is known through experience as the sincerity of the Prophets is known through miracle.
10. Allah has sent Muhammad (S.A.W) as the last Prophet and the Abrogator of all previous laws of Jews, Christians and Sabians and Allah supported him with the open miracles and wonderful signs like the split of the moon (into two), the praise of Allah by the pebbles... and above all, the Noble Qur'an.

Critical Examination of Imam Al-Ghazali's Submissions on *Dhātul-Lāh*

As has been mentioned in this study, Imam al-Ghazali's submissions on the essence of Allah, his attributes and actions are aimed at the doctrines of most of the heretical sects mentioned earlier. However, his submission on those subjects needs further clarification as follows:

His Submissions on the Word of Allah

A question can be asked: Does Allah's word have letters or sounds? In his submission, Imam Al-Ghazali mentioned the word of God as having no letter or sound. To this, Imam Ibn Taymiyyah, an *Ahlu-Sunnah* scholar submits that Allah's word is a real word and is among His qualities. His word can be heard as it has letters and sounds but is not comparable with the words of other creations. His evidence on this is that Allah says:

... and to Moses Allah spoke direct (Q.4: 164).

And We called him from the right side of mountain (Sinai).and made him draw near to Us, for mystic (converse), (Q 19:52).

The “call” and “mystic” (converse) confirm that His word has sound quality. The two (i.e the call and conversation) will not be except through sound. The word is also made up of letters since His word is readable and since there is none like Him therefore, His word is not comparable with that of His creation (°Uthaymin, M.S. 1404H).

Al-Istiwā’ of Allah on al-°Arsh

Imam Al- Ghazali confirms this quality but explains further in a way contrary to the doctrine of *Ahl as-Sunnah*. He said Allah’s *istiwā’* is pure from contact with the °*Arsh*, stabilization, fixation, descending on it and transition from it, whereas, *Ahl as-Sunnah* confirms this act in the manner in which Allah puts it without any further explanation. They say: “among the attributes of Allah is *al-istiwā’* which Allah attributes to Himself in His book and confirmed by the Prophet (S.A.W). They support this assertion with many verses of the Qur’an (like Qur’an 7 verse 54, 10 verse 3, 13 verse 2, 20 verse 5 and so on) and *ahādīth* (statements of the Prophet (S.A.W). According to them, Ummu Salamah (R.A), the wife of the Prophet (S.A.W) and Imam Malik have been quoted to have said when they were asked about chapter 20 verse 5 of the Holy Qur’an which read thus: “(Allah) Most Gracious is firmly established on the throne” that: “*al-istiwā’* is not obscure, reason cannot determine how it takes place but affirming it is an act of *īmān* (faith) while disputing it is an act of infidel” (Muqadasi, A.A. 1990).

Imam al-Ghazali’s submissions on *al-istiwā’* negate this attribute and further affect the *nuzūl* (descending) of Allah into the heaven next to this word at the last third part of the night as contained in the doctrine of *Ahl as-Sunnah*. Furthermore, the Qur’an, *sunnah* (prophetic tradition) and the consensus of the Islamic scholars reveal that Allah will come down on the day of judgment to decide the cases of his servants, in the shade of clouds and the Angels will be there, He descends on the heaven next to the earth every night and in the evening of ‘Arafat day. He will also descend on the earth before the day of resurrection and on the people of Paradise. These are His actions which He carries out at those places therefore, it is not permissible to deny Allah of the act of movement and transition because the same action is known with His creation. The most appropriate position of this is to be silent on the issue of *istiwā’* in order not to create another



attribute which has no evidence from the Qur'an and *Hadīth* for Allah according to Muhammad bn Salih al-^cUthaymin (1404H) who also says further that the attitude of silence should also be applied to the attributes of seeing and hearing. Any further explanation on them, as did by al-Ghazali who denied Allah of having pupil of the eyes, eyelid and auditory meatus, will lead to the creation of another attribute for Allah without evidence. This is so since both the Qur'an and *Hadīth* have confirmed the two eyes for Allah. Allah says: "But construct an ark under Our eyes and Our inspiration..." (Qur'an 11:37). The Prophet (S.A.W) also said in a *Hadīth* about Ad-Dajjāl that: "...your Lord is not A one-eyed Being..."

***Jawhar* and ^c*Araḍ* (Substance and Accident)**

The use of *jawhar* and ^c*araḍ* (substance and accident) shows al-Ghazali's philosophical and scholastic factors in that both are used in scholastic philosophy. Substance, according to A.R. Lacey (1996), is what can exist without depending on anything else, except God, Who alone can create and destroy them and Who Himself is that only substance in the strictest sense. Accident, on the other hand is that which in itself has no independent or self-sufficient existence but only inheres in a substance. The substance may remain in a more or less fixed form, while its accidents disappear or alter. In Aristotelian logic, accident is an inessential property which may be attributed to a substance without being essential to that substance. For instance, a girl may be blonde, but she must be female: blondeness in this example is an accident, but femaleness is not (Antony flew, 1979). Al-Ghazali is right in that he rejects Allah as being *Jawhar* or ^c*Araḍ* because there is no evidence to prove this in the Qur'an and *Hadīth* or *Ijmā' al-'ulamā'* (the consensus of the Islamic Scholars). Paul Edwards (1972) establishes it that this philosophical term, in later Greek, occurred principally in controversies among early Christian theologians about the real nature of Christ. The use of such a strange term, which became controversial in another religion in the doctrine of Islam, is therefore unacceptable.

Imam Al-Ghazali and the Belief of *Ahl as-Sunnah* on *Dhātul-Lāh*

The manner in which the *Salaf* (the Islamic predecessors) treated these issues is that they believe in every attribute of Allah and comment that the attributes are known but the modality is not known and the question about

them (or their modalities) is a religious innovation because nothing looks like Allah. *Ahl as-sunnah* does not see to the point that confirmation of qualities of Allah in the manner in which Allah puts them can bring about comparison (between Allah and His creation) since the agreement between an attribute of Allah and that of His creation in terms of name or quality does not mean that they are the same in the essence. Allah sees and hears, so also man but a sensible person will know the difference between the attributes and qualities through the essence. Therefore, whoever thinks of comparison or equality between Allah and His creation has fell between *tashbīh* (comparing Allah with the creation, and *taʿtīl* (denying Allah of all attributes), Ghalib, A.A. (1997).

In his efforts to present the *ʿaqīdah* based on the views of *ahl as-Sunnah*, al-Ghazali himself contradicts *ahl as-Sunnah* to the extent that it suggests that he wanted to form his own doctrine which is based on his assumption of what should be the exact views and doctrine of the supposed *ahl as-Sunnah*. In this respect, Ibn Khaldun is correct in making al-Ghazali the founder of a new tendency in theology, although, there is no striking novelty in his dogmatic view, observed B. Lewis et al (1965).

According to Ibn Khaldun (1988), the issue of measuring the Islamic belief, especially the attributes of Allah with reason is like the parable of a man who sees the scale which is useful for the measurement of the gold and thinks that the same scale can be used to measure a mountain. It is difficult to comprehend Allah's essence and his attributes, whereas scholasticism applies immense intellectual efforts to investigate and bring into a single system the articles of faith and reason, William L.R. (1980).

Conclusion

Imam Al-Ghazali lived in a period when there was theological problem in the Islamic belief of essence of God which resulted from the contact of the early Muslims with the philosophy and scholasticism sciences. Al-Ghazali studied philosophy and scholasticism sciences and excelled in both. He later realized that the two sciences could not be used to determine the essence of God as also believed by *ahl as-Sunnah*. He therefore started to attack them and their respective scholars, a situation that made him to write *Ihyā' ʿUlūm*



ad-dīn (Revival of the Religions Sciences). In this book and under *Al-^ʿAqīdah* (creed, belief or faith) section, he used philosophical and logical proof evidence to explain the essence of God. This is called *ar-risālah al-Qudsiyyah fī Qawāʿid al-^ʿAqāʿid* (The Holy Message about the pillars of faith).

Honestly speaking, it is not easy or possible to discuss the physical being of God for many reasons. This is because one cannot describe what he does not see and consequently it has been confirmed in the Qurʿan and tradition of the Prophet (SAW) that God is not like any of His creatures and cannot be seen in this world, how then can it be possible to describe Him? This means that using philosophy or scholasticism or any other sciences to describe Him may lead to exaggeration in His essence, attributes and actions as well as depriving Him of these or making similarities of Him with His creatures, all of which have contributed to schism and sects in Islam. It is also believed in Islam that everything is created by God, such beings like Angels, Jinn and things like love, hatred, affection, punishment, happiness and so on, are creatures of God, of which their physical beings are obscured from man and hence cannot be described.

Imam Al-Ghazali observed these theological problems and tried to provide solutions to them accordingly, by using his philosophical and scholasticism knowledge, an effort that made him contradict the sect to which he claimed he belonged (*ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿah*). It can therefore be observed that Imam Al-Ghazali is not totally in conformity with *ahl as-sunnah* in some areas like *al-Kalām* (word of Allah), *Istwāʿ* (Allah seat or establishment on the throne), the appearance of Allah to the righteous and His sighting by them on the day of judgement, face, directions, placement by Allah of burden which His servant may not bear on him. Again, some of his opinions or thoughts are the same as some of the heretical sects which his book is believed to aim at. Finally, all these theological problems under this discussion can be resolved if the path of the early Muslims who lived with the Prophet is followed. The Qurʿan was revealed in their presence, the Prophet (SAW) was accompanied by them and they never interpreted the Qurʿanic or prophetic expressions on Allah's essence in manners that affect their theological beliefs. Perhaps this and other factors make them to be regarded as the best of the Muslim Community.

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