

Imām al-Ghazālī
Mukhtaṣar ihyā' ‘ulūm ad-dīn

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IMĀM AL-GHAZĀLĪ

Mukhtaṣar *iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn*

The Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn
As abridged by himself

Translated from the Arabic,
and annotated by
Ḥajji Marwan Khalaf



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documents the following edition

ISBN 978-9963-40-051-5

Original title:
Mukhtaṣar iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn

Translated from the Arabic and edited by
ḤAJJĪ MARWAN KHALAF

2013
ISBN 978-9963-40-051-5

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Cover design Mehmet Nazım Adil.
Printing: Alföldi Printing House,
Hungary.

GENERAL VIEW

Publisher's Preface	7
Acknowledgements	9
Translator's Preface	11

MUKHTAṢAR

First Quarter	
On Worship (<i>al-'Tbādāt</i>)	15
Chapter 1-10	
Second Quarter	
On The Practices (<i>al-'Adāt</i>)	159
Chapter 11-20	
Third Quarter	
On The Mortal Vices (<i>al-Mublikāt</i>)	233
Chapter 21-30	
Fourth Quarter	
On The Saving Virtues (<i>al-Munjiyāt</i>)	347
Chapter 31-40	

Bibliography	475
About Imām al-Ghazālī	477



PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

By the publication of this book entitled *Mukhtaṣar*, we aim to acquaint an English-speaking readership with the abridged version of Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's magnum opus, the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn*, 'The Revival of the Religious Sciences', which has been regarded as one of the most important writings of the Islamic tradition for ninehundred years and is esteemed and appreciated among Muslims worldwide like no other work.

According to the written records available to us today, the Master himself invested a great deal of energy in the preparation of this concise version to produce a volume that would enable him (cf. p. 23) to take his work along on his journeys.*

Whereas in the full-length version of his work, the author's knowledge and wisdom unfolds over the course of forty books, we here have only forty chapters; in these everything concerning human life from the cradle to the grave is discussed with refreshing brevity and unambiguous lucidity. The book opens with a fundamental discussion of questions of knowledge and faith which makes up its first quarter; its second quarter is devoted to questions of everyday life, such as the proper conduct in marriage and the like; this is followed in the third section by an exceedingly subtle description of the intricacies of the inner workings of the human soul and the 'miracle of the heart', and

* As in other cases of Ghazālī reception, doubts have been raised as to whether this abbreviated version was actually penned by the famous scholar himself; let it therefore be said that this essentially unanswerable question is of scant relevance, as the text presented here was given its final form through comparison with the corresponding passages of the full-length version, some of which were additionally appended by the editor – the authenticity of which is unquestioned.

the fourth part delineates the paths to salvation, and reaches its climactic conclusion in the last chapter 'Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife'. Throughout the book, topics are raised that are of interest not just to the religious-minded, but to mankind in general. The chapter on 'Intention, Sincerity and Truthfulness' (*an-niyyah wa l-ikhlāṣ wa ṣ-ṣidq*) for instance, focuses on the fundamental questions which turn an action into a good deed that brings its agent honour and helps us become true human beings. It might well come as the greatest surprise to one who has been brought up and taught in the Western tradition, that about one-thousand years before the German philosopher Immanuel Kant by his concept of 'good will' identified the intention as the main criterion for the morality of an action, Sayyidinā Muḥammad ﷺ, the prophet of Islam, had already proclaimed to humanity this all-important principle for every action and (intentional) non-action.

With this book, Imam Ghazālī consolidated the legacy left by the Holy Prophet into a form that makes it indispensable reading for every Muslim, as well as for those inspired by the fundamental questions of our existence; the text also incites and encourages the yearning for those means whereby we might attain happiness in this life and the hereafter.

We are pleased to make this famous scholar's dogmatically precise and intellectually profound masterpiece, which in a unique way taps into the sources while simultaneously conserving them, accessible in such a convenient form, a shining star in the firmament of mankind's literary heritage.

Wa min Allāh at-tawfīq.

On the 8th day of Sha'bān 1334,
June 2013.

SALIM E. SPOHR

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first of all thank The Almighty for granting me the time and ability needed for this task, and I beg forgiveness from Him, for anything that may draw his displeasure. And I say prayers and greetings on His Beloved Prophet, Muḥammad, the Arab, and the Hashemi.

I am eternally grateful to several people who were prime assistants in this humble work, listed in chronological order, and not in order of merit:

To my friend Aḥmad Ṭālib, who gave me the Arabic version of this book when he visited me in hospital, thus inspiring me to undertake the task on seeing the conciseness of the book, and its appeal to my lazy nature.

To my Shaykh, and guide Shaykh Nāzīm Al-Ḥaqqānī, for his spiritual guidance. He advised me as to the style of publication. May God sanctify his secret.

To my friend John Becket, who read the translation and corrected my English usage, and advised on the style as well. I am also grateful to his wife, Fatima, for giving me encouragement, as undoubtedly she gave John.

To my children, who put up with me and assisted. Being born British, their comments on my English usage were mostly devoid of sarcasm! Their expertise in the use of computers was a further redeeming factor for the time and money spent on their education.

I apologise to any readers who may take offence at anything I included from my own mind, apart from the original Ghazālī.

Al-Ḥamdulillāh and ṣalawāt on His Rasūl, *peace be upon him*.

MARWAN KHALAF

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

A good friend of mine, Aḥmad, came to visit me in hospital after my first stroke, and he brought me a gift. It was a small book, titled Mukhtaṣar Ihyā' 'Ulūm ad-Din by Imām Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, who is known as Ḥujjat al-Islām.

This doubly good deed, visiting sick people and giving gifts, which is recommended by the Messenger of God, *peace be upon him*, by saying, 'Visit the sick' and 'Give and exchange gifts,' deserved a response from me, which was, not, of course, sought nor expected by my generous friend.

So I decided to return the favour in part by translating that valuable book, for posterity, and to curry favour, with Imām Ghazālī, may God sanctify his secret.

Having never before attempted any project like this in any seriousness, it was not long before I realized its enormity for me: English not being my native tongue and Arabic being no less daunting, after forty years away from practicing it on a regular daily basis, in England. The satisfaction of the task was an inspiration for me to persevere, and I am truly thankful to the Almighty for the Assistance I was feeling all along, with an underlying urge to continue, for I loved the subject matter, and the learning I was undoubtedly receiving with every letter, word, phrase and page of Ghazālī's inspirational writing on this, which to me is almost a holy subject!

So much rubbish is being put forth in print, speech and other media, concerning Islam; the most retrograde being, sadly, from so-called Muslims, within Islam, apart from that of outright enemies of Islam and others.

On the other hand I have the feeling that Islam is winning, and will continue to win and advance, for it is the religion of God, the Dā'im, the Permanent, and the Omnipotent, provided it is

practiced in good faith, good manners and gently, the way that Muḥammad espoused and practiced.

As nothing can be perfect except God Almighty, my efforts must contain mistakes, errors, and slips, for which I abjectly apologize, to the readers and to Imām Ghazālī himself.

I invite comment, advice, and input to help me and the publishers to refine the book, and raise its standards wherever possible.

And *'min Allāh at-tawfīq'* ... from God is success.

London, 7 May 2012.

MARWAN KHALAF

مُخْتَصَر إِحْيَاءِ عُلُومِ الدِّينِ

لِلشَّيْخِ الْإِمَامِ حَجَّةِ الْإِسْلَامِ
مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ أَبِي حَامِدٍ الْغَزَالِيِّ الْمَوُفَّقِ ٥٥٠ هـ
مُتَأَلِّفِ الْإِحْيَاءِ نَفْسُهُ

مُدْرَجٌ فِي رِغْلِهِ عَلَيْهِ
بِعَنَايَةِ وَإِشْرَافِ النَّاشِرِ

FIRST QUARTER

On Worship
(*al-‘ibādāt*)

(Chapter I-10)

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	23
----------------	----

CHAPTER ONE On Knowledge and imparting Knowledge

SECTION	... 25
<i>Expounding on praiseworthy and deprecated knowledge; and on primary obligations and secondary ones</i>	28
SECTION	
<i>Not all types of knowledge are praiseworthy – Referring to sorcery, talismans, astrology, philosophy and the like</i>	33
SECTION	
<i>The etiquette of the tutor and of the pupil (the seeker)</i>	33
<i>The duties of the guide and teacher</i>	36
SECTION	
<i>On the disadvantages of knowledge and the distinguishing features of scholars of the Hereafter, and those of bad scholars</i>	38
SECTION	
<i>On the Intellect (the Mind) and its nobility</i>	40

CHAPTER TWO On Doctrine (*i'tiqād*)

SECTION	
<i>Expounding on the doctrine of the Sunnis</i>	41
<i>His Virtue (al tanzīh)</i>	41
<i>Life and Omnipotence (al-ḥayāt wa-l-quḍrah)</i>	42
<i>Knowledge</i>	43
<i>Will</i>	43
<i>Sight and Hearing</i>	44
<i>Speech</i>	44

<i>Deeds</i>	45
<i>The meaning of the second half of the dual Attestation</i>	46

SECTION

<i>On leading to Right Guidance (irshād)</i>	48
--	----

SECTION

<i>The meaning of 'Islam' is listening and surrender and the meaning of 'Belief' is the acquiescence of the heart</i>	49
---	----

CHAPTER THREE
On The Secrets of Purity

... 50

SECTION

<i>On purifying the external</i>	51
<i>The etiquette of the relief of nature</i>	51
<i>Method of performing the ritual ablutions</i>	52
<i>The method of bathing</i>	56
<i>Method of ablution using earth</i>	56

SECTION	57
---------------	----

CHAPTER FOUR
On the mysteries and functions of Prayer

SECTION

<i>On the merits of prayers, prostration, group prayers, adbān (call to prayer) and others</i>	
<i>The merits of the adbān</i>	59
<i>The virtue of the 'written' (predetermined) prayers</i>	60
<i>The virtue of completing the basics</i>	60
<i>The advantage of group prayer</i>	61
<i>The advantage of prostration</i>	61
<i>The advantage of submission</i>	61
<i>The advantage of building a mosque</i>	62

SECTION

<i>On the outward actions in prayer</i>	62
---	----

<i>Rukū' (bowing)</i>	64
<i>Sujūd (prostration)</i>	65
<i>Tashabbud (Reaffirming Oneness and saluting The Messenger ﷺ)</i>	66
<i>Distinction between the obligatory and the supererogatory actions</i>	66

SECTION

<i>The essential internal actions of the heart (on which prayer depends)</i>	67
--	----

SECTION

<i>On following and leading (prayers)</i>	68
---	----

SECTION

<i>On the merits of the Friday prayer, its etiquette, its supererogatory worship and obligations</i>	70
<i>The timing in detail</i>	71

SECTION

<i>On supererogatory prayers</i>	72
--	----

SECTION

<i>On the prayers of the two feasts</i>	72
---	----

SECTION

<i>On the eclipse prayer</i>	74
------------------------------------	----

SECTION

<i>On the drought prayer</i>	74
------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER FIVE
On the mysteries of the Alms Tax (zakāb)

... 76

SECTION

<i>The types of zakāb. Classification of liability to the alms tax (zakāb) and the six types of liable effects</i>	77
<i>Zakāb on cattle</i>	77
<i>Al-Mu'sbirāt ('tenths' tax)</i>	78
<i>Alms tax on breaking the fast</i>	79

SECTION

<i>Paying the tax and its rules</i>	79
---	----

SECTION	
<i>On the recipient of zakāb</i>	80
SECTION	
<i>On voluntary charity</i>	81
<i>(Which is preferable, charity, or zakāb?)</i>	84
CHAPTER SIX	
<i>The secrets of fasting</i>	85
SECTION	85
SECTION	86
SECTION	87
SECTION	
<i>On voluntary fasting</i>	87

CHAPTER SEVEN

On the mysteries of Pilgrimage, and related matters

SECTION	
<i>On the virtue of pilgrimage; and the virtue of Mecca, Medina</i> <i>and Holy Jerusalem. And on packing in preparation</i> <i>for journeying to the 'Three Holies'</i>	89
<i>The privileges of The House and of the Honourable Mecca</i>	90
<i>The virtue of living in Mecca, and its disadvantage</i>	92
<i>The virtues of al-Madinah</i>	92
SECTION	
<i>On the conditions for the obligation to perform the pilgrimage:</i> <i>its correct performance, essential constituents,</i> <i>the duties in it, and its prohibitions</i>	93
SECTION	
<i>Ten sentences concerning the order of the outward actions</i> <i>prior to departure and until the return home</i>	

[First sentence]	97
Second sentence: <i>On the etiquette of ritual consecration</i> <i>from the Miqāt to the entry to Mecca</i>	99
Third sentence: <i>On the etiquette from entering Mecca,</i> <i>until the circumambulation</i>	100
Fourth sentence: <i>On circumambulation</i>	102
Fifth Sentence: <i>On the 'Endeavour' (sa'y)</i>	104
Sixth Sentence: <i>On standing on 'Arafāt, and what precedes it</i>	105
Seventh sentence: <i>On the remaining pilgrimage actions,</i> <i>following The Standing, namely overnighing, stoning,</i> <i>sacrifices, shaving and circumambulation</i>	107
Eighth sentence: <i>On the manner of the Minor Pilgrimage</i> <i>and after, up to the Circumambulation of Departure</i>	111
Ninth sentence: <i>On the Circumambulation of Farewell</i>	111
Tenth sentence: <i>On visiting al-Madinah, and its etiquette</i>	111

CHAPTER EIGHT

On reciting the Koran

SECTION	
<i>On deprecating the recital of the unwary</i>	117
SECTION	118
SECTION	118
SECTION	119

CHAPTER NINE

On Remembrances (*dhikr*) and Supplications

SECTION	
<i>On the ethics of supplication</i>	122
<i>The virtues of prayer on The Messenger of God ﷺ</i>	122
<i>The virtues of seeking forgiveness</i>	122
SECTION	123

CHAPTER TEN

The litanies or Remembrance (*awrād*)

... 125

SECTION

On the Merits of Recitations, and their Organisation and Rules 125

The special days and nights 126

ENDNOTES 129



Foreword

Thank God for all His bounties; for even enabling us to thank Him; and *prayers and peace be upon* the Master of Messengers, Muḥammad, His Prophet, Messenger and Servant, upon his family and Companions, and upon his successors after him, his Ministers in his time.

I missed, in some of my travels, a facility for extracting from the 'Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn' its essences, due to the difficulty of carrying it around with me, on account of its bulk. Hence I tackled this matter, seeking success and guidance from God and praising His Prophet.

It consists of forty chapters.

And God guides to the truth.

On Knowledge and imparting Knowledge

His saying ‘*Yarfa’i llābu lladhīna āmanū minkum wa-lladhīna ūtū l-’ilma darajāt* – God raises by degrees those of you who are believers and are granted Knowledge by degrees’ (Koran, 58:11). Ibn ‘Abbās, (the son of ‘Abbās), *Allāh be pleased with them* (رضي الله عنهم), said, ‘The Learned may rise among the Faithful by seven hundred degrees, between each two degrees is the distance of a five hundred year walk.’¹ And The Exalted said: ‘*Qul hal yastawī lladhīna ya’lamūna wa-lladhīna lā ya’lamūn?* – Say: Can those who Know be of the same level as those who do not Know?’ (Koran, 39:9).

And He said: ‘*Innamā yakhsbā llāba min ‘ibādihī l-’ulamā’*’ – Only those servants of Knowledge fear God.’ (Koran, 35:28). And further: ‘*Wa tilka l-amthālu naqribuhā li-n-nās, wa mā ya’qiluhā illā l-’ālimūn* – And those examples we impart to people, but only the Knowledgeable fathom them.’ (Koran, 29:43).

It is related that he, *may Allah honour him and grant him peace* (رضي الله عنه), said, ‘Those of Knowledge are the Beneficiaries of the Prophets.’ And, ‘The most useful of people is the Knowledgeable who, when needed, imparts knowledge, and when not needed, enriches himself with it.’² Also, ‘Belief is naked: its dress is fear of God, its manifestation (outward decoration) is life, and its fruit is Knowledge.’³ He said رضي الله عنه, ‘The nearest people to the rank of Prophethood are the people of Knowledge and the people of *jibād*; the people of Knowledge because they guide people to what the Prophets bring, whereas the people of *jibād* defend it with their swords.’⁴

He رضي الله عنه said, ‘The learned man is the trustee of God on earth.’⁵ And, ‘On the Day of Resurrection the power of attestation is granted to the Prophets, and then the Learned and then the Martyrs.’⁶

Abbreviations for eulogies:

ﷺ *ṣalla llābu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, *Allāb’s prayers and salutations be upon him* or *may Allah honour him and grant him peace* – this expression follows specifically after saying the name of the last prophet of Islam, Muḥammad.

ﷺ *‘alayhi s-salām*, *peace be upon him* – follows after naming any prophet other than Muḥammad, or one of the archangels.

ﷺ / رضي الله عنه *Allāb be pleased with him/her* – this phrase is usually uttered after a Companion’s name. For female companions it is *raḍiya llābu ‘anhā* and for more than one person, it is *raḍiya llābu ‘anhum*:

ﷺ *Allāb be pleased with them*.

Faṭh al-Mawṣulī⁷ said, 'Is it not that the patient deprived of food, drink and medicine dies?' They replied in the affirmative. 'So it is with the heart, if deprived of Wisdom and Knowledge for three days, it dies.'

He tells the truth, for the nourishment of the heart is Knowledge and Wisdom, and in them is its life, as food and drink are life for the body.

For whosoever lacks Knowledge has a sick heart, and its demise is a certainty. He does not feel it, because the distractions of the world numb his senses. When, however, death lifts the veil of those distractions, the senses return and great pain is felt, together with endless regret. That is the meaning of his saying ﷺ, 'People are asleep; when they die, they become alert.'⁸

As for the rank of Knowledge, it is pointed to in his saying ﷺ, 'The Angels lower their wings upon seeing the seeker of Knowledge, in appreciation of what he is about.'⁹ Also, 'Seeking a single window of Knowledge is better for you than if you prayed a hundred *raka'āt*.'¹⁰

Abu d-Dardā' said, 'Whosoever does not see that seeking Knowledge is *jihād* is failing in his opinion, and in his mind.'

As proof of the advantage of teaching are His words: '*Wa idh akbadha llāhu mīthāqa alladbīna ūtū l-kitāba latubayyinunnahu lin-nāsi wa lā taktumūnahu* – For God took a covenant from the People who were given The Book that they expose it to people and not withhold it' (Koran, 3:187). The Messenger of God ﷺ upon reciting these words said, 'Knowledge was never granted until God took a covenant from the recipient, akin to that He took from the Prophets, that "You expose it and do not withhold it".'¹¹

He said ﷺ, that he told Mu'ādh bin Jabal, when he appointed him to the Yemen, 'For God to guide through you but one man is better reward for you than the whole world and what it contains.'¹² And 'Umar, *Allāh be pleased with him*, said, 'Whosoever relates a tradition (of the Prophet ﷺ) that is acted upon is rewarded by as much as the rewards gained by the actions carried out resulting from its narration.' Mu'ādh said, about teaching

and learning (and its narration is referred to, with authority, elsewhere), 'Learn "Knowledge";' for its learning for the sake of God is in itself a benefaction (*ḥasanah*), seeking it is worship, participation in it is praising and eulogising Him, and its research is *jihād*. Teaching it is charity, and expending of it to the worthy is piety. It is the bosom friend in solitude, the companion in seclusion, the guide in joy and in sorrow, the minister among comrades, and the associate among associates. It is the guiding light on the path to Paradise – God elevating people with it to become leaders in virtue, guides to be followed towards the good, their paths legendary and their deeds coveted. The angels desire to adorn them and with their wings to caress them. All things, soft and solid, praise them – even the creatures in the oceans pray forgiveness for them, as do the lions of the earth and its cattle, and even the heavens and their stars; for Knowledge returns life to hearts in the darkness of death, and lights to perception in darkness. It gives strength to bodies in weakness, God's servant attaining through it the ranks of the virtuous, and the high stations. Contemplation of it is akin to fasting, and its deliberations are akin to the night prayers. And through it God is obeyed and by it worshipped, and His Oneness (*tawḥīd*) is professed. With it the link of birth is maintained, and it is the *imām* whose follower is application. He inspires the happy with it, while the wretched are denied it.'¹³

As for intellectual considerations, the merit of Knowledge cannot be obscure, for it is the means for nearness to God the Most High, and for His proximity and good neighbourliness. It is eternal happiness and perpetual pleasure, which have no end, for in it are the glory of this world and the happiness of the Hereafter. This life is the garden of the Hereafter, and the man of knowledge sows with it for himself eternal happiness through the refinement of his ethics according to what knowledge dictates; and by teaching, he plants eternal happiness, for he is refining people's ethics and calling them, with his knowledge, to that which draws them to God: '*Ud'u ilā sabīli rabbika bi-l-ḥikmatī wa-l-maw'izati l-ḥasana wa jādilhum bi-llati biya aḥsan* – Call to

the Way of your Lord by means of wisdom and pleasant exhortation, and debate with them with grace' (Koran, 16:125). For he is then calling the select with wisdom, the commoners with exhortation, and the obstinate with argument, thereby achieving salvation for his soul and those of others – and that is the perfection of man.'

SECTION

*Expounding on praiseworthy and deprecated knowledge;
and on primary obligations and secondary ones*

The Messenger of God ﷺ said, 'Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim man and woman.'¹⁴ And what is obligatory for him, on reaching adolescence or on becoming a Muslim, is to know the words of the *Shahādah*¹⁵ (the dual declaration¹⁶ 'There is no Deity but God, Muḥammad is his Messenger') and understand the meaning. But he is not (at that early stage) obliged to 'perfect' them by reciting proofs. It is sufficient for him merely to sincerely believe them with no doubt or equivocation, albeit by way of imitation.

As The Messenger of God ﷺ used to do with the 'rough' A'rāb¹⁷ once they took Islam. He has to begin work on learning the novelties of God's orders, such as praying according to the new instructions, about prayer at the allotted times, and preparing for it beforehand; similarly with fasting. He has to learn about the annual alms tax (*ṣakāh*) if he possesses anything on which it will become due when a year is up from when he took Islam, *ṣakāh* being a duty, a necessary duty. He must be alerted to the obligation of pilgrimage, but is not obliged to learn its intricacies at present, nor to set off to perform it, yet.

As the days pass, he is obliged to learn what he must do and what disobedient actions he must abandon, according to need. Should he have doubt about his beliefs, he is obliged to contemplate and delve into them, learning enough to enable him to remove the doubts; and further learn the knowledge by which

shall be his salvation from the destructive qualities of the ego (*mublikāt*) and the gaining of the higher degrees, the attainment of which is likewise a primary obligation for Muslims.

Beyond this, other kinds of knowledge are secondary rather than obligatory.

Know ye that knowledge is graded by its proximity to the Knowledge of the Hereafter and beyond; and just as the studies of jurisprudence are ranked higher than other subjects, so it is that knowledge which is to do with the essences of jurisprudence is preferred to that which concerns the outward judgments in jurisprudence. The jurist may determine whether a worldly matter is true or false; but above that in rank is the Knowledge by which worship is adjudged as being accepted or rejected (by The Almighty). That is part of Ṣūfī Knowledge, as will come later.

The eminent Scholars whose Schools have been followed by people and whose teachings have guided them, all possessed both the jurisprudence of worldly affairs and that of Reality, and applied them.

This is seen from the descriptions of their conduct during their lives, and reports about their teachings. They are five: ash-Shāfi'ī, Malik, Abū Ḥanīfah, Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal and Sufyān ath-Thawrī¹⁸, *Allāh have mercy on them*. Each one of them was *pious*, an *ascetic*, a *scholar of the Sciences of the Hereafter*, as well as a *scholar of outward jurisprudence*, which concerns the worldly affairs of people, and (last but not least) their sole desire from all of their knowledge was the *Divine Countenance*.

Of these *five attributes* the only one followed by present-day jurists is that of excessive dissemination and learning of the minutiae of worldly jurisprudence. The other four are only usable for the Hereafter, whereas this fifth one is usable both for worldly fame and for the Hereafter.

[Actions are judged by the resolve behind them. People use worldly jurisprudence for fame, claiming it raises them to the level of the five Scholars. What folly, like comparing angels to blacksmiths! (*Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn*).]