

RELIGIOUS AND MORAL ISSUES IN IMAM AL-GHAZALI'S WORK "REPENTANCE"

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Abstract

This article scientifically analyzes the interrelation between religion and morality based on Imam Al-Ghazali's teachings on repentance. In the course of the study, the essence of the concept of repentance, its structural stages, and its role in human spiritual life are examined in depth. In particular, it is substantiated that repentance is not merely a religious practice, but a complex process that transforms a person's inner world and leads them toward spiritual and moral perfection. The article highlights the role of repentance in purifying the human heart, disciplining the self (nafs), and shaping moral virtues. Furthermore, the inseparable connection between religion and morality is analyzed through Al-Ghazali's views, revealing their significance in human development and perfection. It is demonstrated that through repentance, a person can overcome inner conflicts, achieve psychological balance, and develop a conscious approach to life. At the same time, special attention is given to the contemporary relevance of the concept of repentance, emphasizing its importance as a means of addressing moral crises, spiritual emptiness, and social problems. According to the research findings, repentance is identified as a significant spiritual and moral concept that plays a crucial role in self-awareness, self-improvement, and the pursuit of human perfection.

Keywords: Repentance, religion, morality, spirituality, spiritual purification, the perfect human, self-discipline (nafs), Al-Ghazali's teachings, Islamic philosophy, moral development.

Introduction

In the history of Islamic civilization, the issues of human spiritual perfection, moral purification, and inner development have always occupied a central place. In this regard, the scholarly legacy of Imam Al-Ghazali holds particular significance. In his works, he deeply analyzed the state of the human heart, the ways of its purification, the discipline of the self (nafs), and the intrinsic relationship between religion and morality.

In particular, the section on “Repentance” in his famous work *Ihya Ulum al-Din* serves as an important source for understanding the transformation of the inner world, purification from sins, and the attainment of the level of a perfect human being. The concept of repentance occupies one of the central positions in Islamic teachings. It is not merely the abandonment of sin, but also a process in which a person re-evaluates their actions, engages in self-reflection, and undergoes spiritual renewal. From this perspective, repentance appears not only as a religious act but also as a concept with deep moral and philosophical meaning.

Imam Al-Ghazali expands this concept further, interpreting it as one of the key stages of human spiritual perfection. In today’s era of globalization, when humanity is facing various moral and spiritual challenges, studying Al-Ghazali’s legacy becomes increasingly relevant. The weakening of moral values, the dominance of personal interests, and the emergence of spiritual emptiness create a need to turn to classical teachings that encourage self-improvement.

The aim of this article is to reveal the religious and moral essence of the concept of repentance based on Al-Ghazali’s views, to analyze its role in human perfection, and to explore the relationship between religion and morality. In addition, the article examines not only the individual but also the social significance of repentance.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In Islamic teachings, repentance is one of the fundamental concepts that plays a decisive role in a person’s spiritual life. Imam Al-Ghazali interprets repentance not merely as verbal seeking of forgiveness or temporary regret, but as a profound transformation of the human heart and an inner spiritual process. According to him, true repentance is a complex process that encompasses the whole being of a person and transforms their thinking, emotions, and actions.

In Al-Ghazali's teaching, repentance consists of three main interconnected components. First, a person must recognize and fully comprehend their sin. This stage requires not just awareness but deep understanding. Second, sincere remorse (nadam) arises, in which the individual experiences regret, inner pain, and self-reproach. Third, the person makes a firm decision not to return to the sin and reinforces this decision through practical actions. Thus, repentance is not only an internal experience but must also be reflected in external behavior, demonstrating its dynamic and evolving nature. Through repentance, a person learns to control their desires, achieves inner purity, and attains spiritual elevation. Al-Ghazali also emphasizes that repentance has different levels. For ordinary individuals, repentance means abandoning clear and evident sins. However, for those who have reached higher levels of spiritual perfection, repentance includes even turning away from negative intentions or any thoughts that distract from God. This highlights the depth and breadth of the concept of repentance.

In Islamic thought, religion and morality are considered inseparable and intrinsically interconnected concepts. This relationship is especially systematically explained in the teachings of Imam Al-Ghazali. If religious practices do not influence a person's inner world and moral qualities, such religiosity cannot be considered complete.

For example, acts of worship such as prayer, fasting, and others should lead a person toward virtues such as honesty, patience, humility, and truthfulness. Otherwise, the true essence of worship is not fully realized. In this sense, morality constitutes the inner content of religion.

At the same time, morality is formed and strengthened on the basis of religion. A person's understanding of good and evil, as well as their behavioral norms, are often shaped by religious values. Religion guides individuals toward goodness, prevents them from wrongdoing, and provides direction in life. Thus, moral norms are grounded in religious principles, helping individuals live rightly within society.

From the perspective of modern society, the interrelation between religion and morality remains highly relevant. Today, issues such as the weakening of moral values, the rise of individualism, and spiritual emptiness pose serious challenges. In this context, religious and moral teachings—particularly the ideas of Al-Ghazali—encourage individuals to work on themselves, achieve inner purity, and foster positive social relationships.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

In Islamic ethical teachings, repentance is regarded as one of the key factors ensuring a person's spiritual perfection and moral maturity. Imam Al-Ghazali interprets repentance not only as a religious act, but also as a force that educates a person's inner world and fundamentally transforms their behavior. According to him, through repentance a person becomes aware of their shortcomings, strives to eliminate them, and ultimately attains moral elevation. First of all, the ethical significance of repentance is reflected in teaching a person to acknowledge their mistakes.

Moreover, repentance fosters feelings of humility and modesty in the human heart. In a person who admits their faults, negative traits such as arrogance, pride, and self-superiority gradually disappear. As Imam Al-Ghazali emphasizes, arrogance is one of the most dangerous vices that distances a person from the truth. Repentance serves precisely to eliminate this vice and leads a person toward moral purity. A repentant individual not only transforms themselves positively but also influences those around them. Such a person becomes known in society as trustworthy, honest, and worthy of respect. Thus, repentance contributes to the formation of a healthy moral environment in society.

Imam Al-Ghazali considers repentance an essential stage in leading a person toward perfection. According to him, through repentance a person not only purifies themselves from sins but also gains self-awareness, enriches their inner world, and strives for moral excellence. This demonstrates that repentance has not only religious but also deep ethical and educational significance. It occupies a central place in a person's moral development, helping them overcome their shortcomings, cultivate positive virtues, and form themselves as a complete individual.

In Islamic spiritual teachings, repentance is regarded as one of the most important means of spiritual purification. Imam Al-Ghazali interprets repentance as a process that cleanses the human heart from sins and spiritual vices, restoring it to its original pure state. According to him, the human heart is naturally pure and luminous, but it becomes clouded due to sins. Repentance removes this cloudiness and restores the heart to clarity and purity.

In Al-Ghazali's teachings, the process of spiritual purification occurs in several stages. The first stage is self-awareness—recognizing the flaws and deficiencies within one's heart. At this stage, a person engages in self-analysis, acknowledges their mistakes, and reaches a state of inner awakening. The second stage is sincere remorse, where

deep feelings of regret arise in the heart. The third stage is practical transformation—when a person begins to correct their behavior and cultivate themselves through good deeds.

The spiritual purification achieved through repentance also ensures inner stability. Sins and mistakes create anxiety, fear, and inner conflicts within the human heart. As a person purifies their heart through repentance, their faith strengthens, and positive qualities such as patience, gratitude, honesty, and compassion develop. This leads the individual toward maturity not only as a person but also as a member of society.

From a modern psychological perspective, the concept of repentance can also be seen as an important factor that helps relieve inner tension, reduce stress, and free a person from psychological pressure. Acknowledging one's mistakes, striving to correct them, and deciding to start a new life create a sense of inner freedom.

In today's era of globalization and rapid development of information technologies, humanity faces various moral and spiritual challenges. Under such conditions, the issues of enriching the inner world, restoring moral values, and maintaining psychological balance become especially important. From this perspective, the views of Imam Al-Ghazali on repentance have significant theoretical and practical relevance for modern society.

First, the concept of repentance serves as an important means of addressing the widespread problem of spiritual emptiness. Although technological progress has made life easier, it often negatively affects the human inner world. The dominance of material values, a fast-paced lifestyle, and the influence of social media have led individuals to drift away from their inner selves.

Second, repentance plays a crucial role in overcoming moral crises. In modern society, vices such as corruption, dishonesty, injustice, and indifference are becoming increasingly widespread. The concept of repentance in Al-Ghazali's teachings encourages individuals to take responsibility for their actions, acknowledge their mistakes, and strive to correct them. This, in turn, contributes to the formation of an environment of honesty, justice, and trust within society.

Thirdly, repentance also plays an important role in improving an individual's psychological state. The speed and complexity of modern life increase stress, anxiety, and inner conflicts. The process of repentance helps a person acknowledge their mistakes, draw conclusions from them, and achieve psychological relief. This, in turn, contributes to strengthening mental well-being.

In addition, the concept of repentance is an important factor in improving social relationships. Especially in family relations, repentance holds a significant place, as it can serve as an effective means of resolving conflicts between individuals.

Another important aspect is the role of repentance in the upbringing of young people. Educating the younger generation to become spiritually mature individuals is one of the most important tasks of modern society. Through repentance, young people learn to recognize their mistakes, work on themselves, and choose the right path. This helps them grow into responsible, honest, and conscious individuals in the future.

CONCLUSION

In the teachings of Imam Al-Ghazali, repentance is closely connected with spiritual purification, as it cleanses the heart from sins and moral vices, thereby creating the foundation for the development of positive qualities. This process contributes to the maturation of a person as an individual.

Another important aspect discussed in the article is the interrelation between religion and morality. According to Imam Al-Ghazali, religion regulates a person's external actions, while morality shapes their inner world. Repentance acts as a key mechanism that unites these two dimensions, harmonizing religious belief with moral conduct. This harmony plays a decisive role in the formation of a complete and virtuous individual.

From the perspective of modern society, the relevance of Al-Ghazali's teachings is clearly evident. The concept of repentance holds significant theoretical and practical value in addressing issues such as spiritual emptiness, moral crisis, and psychological instability faced by humanity today. The teachings of Imam Al-Ghazali on repentance represent an important intellectual heritage that ensures human spiritual and moral development. Through repentance, a person gains self-awareness, purifies their heart, and strives for perfection. Therefore, studying and applying this teaching in life is important not only for individuals but also for the progress of society as a whole.

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