

# THE VALIDITY OF SALĀH ACCORDING TO AL-GHAZĀLĪ WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE OBLIGATION TO OBSERVE HUDŪR AL-QALB THROUGHOUT THE SALĀH

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## Abstract

*This paper investigates how al-Ghazālī tried in his Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn to justify the obligation to observe ḥudūr al-qalb (presence of mind and remembrance of Allāh) throughout the whole prayer. In order to reach this goal, this paper is primarily divided into three subsections: A reply of al-Ghazālī to his opposition, his arguments and the way ḥudūr al-qalb can be observed in the prayer. After analyzing the Qurānic, Sunnaic and rational argument, this paper concludes that although the majority of Muslim jurists maintained that ḥudūr al-qalb is an obligatory only at the time of the first takbīr, al-Ghazālī maintained that ḥudūr al-qalb is obligatory during the whole prayer, without which a prayer would remain incomplete.*

## Introduction

Muslim scholars dispute whether *taṣawwuf* (mysticism) is foreign to Islam or a part of it. This dispute between the *fuqahā'* (scholars of Islamic Law) and the *ṣūfīs* (scholars of Islamic mysticism) reached its zenith sometime before the time of al-Ghazālī. After an intensive investigation and research, al-Ghazālī, a medieval jurist, theologian, philosopher, and mystic, found that certain aspects of *taṣawwuf* observed by the

*ṣūfīs* were an integral part of the Shariah. He, therefore, tried to combine esoteric aspects of *taṣawwuf* and outward deeds of the Shariah. In regard to the five-time prayers, al-Ghazālī mentioned several esoteric duties which, according to him, must be observed along with the outward deeds of the prayer. One of these esoteric aspects is to observe *ḥudūr al-qalb*. The phrase *ḥudūr al-qalb* literally means "presence of mind." As an Islamic term, it means that, while performing *Ṣalāh* (prayer) and other deeds of religion, a person must think only of the acts and words with which his tongue and other outward organs of the body are engaged and be devoid of all other thoughts. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how al-Ghazālī tried in his *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* to justify the obligation to observe *ḥudūr al-qalb* throughout the whole prayer.

In order to reach this goal, this paper is divided into three subsections: reply of al-Ghazālī to his opposition regarding the obligation of *ḥudūr al-qalb* during the whole prayer, arguments of al-Ghazālī to justify the obligation to observe *ḥudūr al-qalb* during the whole prayer, and how *ḥudūr al-qalb* can be observed in different parts of the prayer.

### **Reply of al-Ghazālī to His Opposition Regarding the Obligation of *Ḥudūr al-Qalb* during the Whole Prayer**

Al-Ghazālī maintained that for the soundness of the prayer, *ḥudūr al-qalb* is obligatory throughout the whole prayer, whereas, according to a majority of jurists, it is obligatory only at the time of first *takbīr* (glorifying of Allah in the prayer by saying *Allāhu Akbar*). Although al-Ghazālī mentioned this majority view, he did not comment on their Qur'ānic / Qurānic or *Sunnaic* arguments. However, he stated that a consensus (*ijmā'*) of all jurists about this issue was assumed. Referring to this *ijmā'*, he raised a question that someone might ask him: how did he decide that *ḥudūr al-qalb*

is a condition that must be observed during the whole prayer and without which the prayer cannot be sound, whereas jurists reached a consensus that *ḥudūr al-qalb* is not obligatory except at the time of the first *takbīr*?

Al-Ghazālī, in response, said that the jurists neither deal with the esoteric aspects of the religion nor penetrate hearts of the people or the way of the hereafter. Rather, they deal with exoteric rules of the religion that are considered outward functions of the organs of the body. Hence the claim of jurists' consensus in observing *ḥudūr al-qalb* [an esoteric aspect of the religion only at the time of the first *takbīr* is impossible].

In order to invalidate this consensus, al-Ghazālī cited opposing views of a number of early Muslims. First, Sufyān al-Thawrī said that the prayer of the one who does not maintain *khushūʿ* (fear and remembrance of Allāh) is invalid. Second, al-Ḥasan said that every prayer in which the presence of mind does not occur is quicker to receive punishment [than to receive reward]. Third, Muʿādh ibn Jabal said that the prayer of the one who during his *ṣalāh*, willingly tries to know who are on his right and left is not sound. Apparently the aspects mentioned in the opinions of these three early Muslims are not confined to any particular part of the prayer. Rather, they embrace the whole prayer. Also these statements indicate that presence of mind during the whole prayer is obligatory for its soundness.

In addition, according to al-Ghazālī, ʿAbd al-Walīd ibn Zayd said that scholars reached a consensus that no part of the prayer of a worshipper is in his favor except what he understands. This understanding requires presence of mind. Hence, according to ibn Zayd, the obligation to observe *ḥudūr al-qalb* or understanding throughout the whole prayer is a matter of consensus (*ijmāʿ*) of scholars. Moreover, al-Ghazālī mentioned many similar statements of pious jurists and scholars of the hereafter regarding *ḥudūr al-qalb*.

Besides, he quoted other indicators (*adillah*) to support his view regarding this issue.<sup>1</sup> The next subsection of this paper discusses these indicators as they were presented by al-Ghazālī.

### Arguments of al-Ghazālī to Justify the Obligation to Observe *Ḥudūr al-Qalb* Throughout the Whole Prayer

In order to justify the obligation to observe *ḥudūr al-qalb* during the whole prayer (*Ṣalāh*), al-Ghazālī provides several kinds of Qur'ānic, *Sunnaic* and rational arguments, and examples of practical occurrence of *ḥudūr al-qalb*.

#### Qur'ānic Arguments

Al-Ghazālī, quoting the verse, "Establish the *Ṣalāh* (prayer) for my remembrance" (20:14), argued that the imperative (*amr*) or command to establish the prayer for the remembrance of Allah in this verse is apparently for obligation. This remembrance requires presence of mind (*ḥudūr al-qalb*) during the whole prayer. If someone is heedless or absent-minded throughout the prayer, how can he be an establisher of the prayer for the remembrance of Allāh?

Al-Ghazālī, quoting another verse, "And do not be of those who are heedless" (7:205), also argued that this verse is a prohibition (*tahrim*), i.e., we are not allowed to be heedless in the whole prayer. Rather, we must have presence of mind during the whole prayer.

Citing a third verse, "Approach not prayers when you are drunk until you can understand what you say" (4:43), al-Ghazālī remarked that the sentence "until you can understand what you say" is a reason for the prohibition of drunkenness, i.e., in order to understand what we say in the prayer, we are not allowed to be drunk. Al-Ghazālī,

<sup>1</sup> Al-Ghazālī (1967), *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Cairo, pp. 214-215.

extending the aspect of understanding further, stated that there are many people who, although do not drink wine, do not understand what they say in their prayers. Hence the aspect of understanding during the whole prayer also includes those who are absent-minded and absorbed in concerns, anxieties and worldly thinking. In order to understand what we say in the whole prayer, we need to retain presence of our minds.

Moreover, al-Ghazālī argued that we say in the prayer, “[O Allah,] guide us in the straight path” (1:6). If our minds are heedless in the prayer, this kind of saying will be useless.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Sunnaic Arguments***

In addition to foregoing Qur’ānic arguments, al-Ghazālī also cited arguments of *ḥadīth* to justify *ḥudūr al-qalb* during the whole prayer. Al-Ghazālī neither referred to sources of *ḥadīth* nor distinguished between sound and weak *aḥādīth*. However, a later critic, Zayn al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Īrāqī, tried to refer all *aḥādīth* cited by al-Ghazālī to their sources and made critical remarks about their soundness or weakness. According to al-Īrāqī’s study, therefore, al-Ghazālī’s *Sunnaic* arguments regarding *ḥudūr al-qalb* may be divided into: (a) sound *aḥādīth*, and (b) weak *aḥādīth*.

#### **(A) Sound *Aḥādīth*:**

First, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) said:

The prayer is made obligatory, *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Makkah) and *Tawāf* (circumambulation of the Ka‘bah) are commended... only to establish the remembrance of Allāh. If you have no glorification and fear in your heart for the remembered one, who is considered your desired one and goal, what would be the value of your remembrance? (Abū Dāwūd and Tirmīdhī).

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 201, 212-213.

This *ḥadīth* clearly says that the prayer is made obligatory to remember Allāh. In order to remember, glorify and fear Allāh, we need to maintain presence of mind during the whole period of observing prayers and other worship.

Second, al-Ghazālī, quoting another *ḥadīth*, “When you pray, pray in such a manner that you are bidding farewell” (Ibn Mājah, al-Ḥakīm, and al-Bayhāqī), remarked that this *ḥadīth* means that you bid farewell to your *nafs* (soul), desire and life, and travel with yourself to your Lord. All these aspects cannot be observed without presence of mind during the whole prayer.

A third *ḥadīth* quoted by al-Ghazālī is: “If a man prays two *rak'ahs* in which he does not talk to himself (about anything of the world), his past sins are forgiven” (Bukhārī and Muslim). This *ḥadīth* indicates that, if someone wants forgiveness of Allāh through his prayer, he must not concern himself with any worldly thinking except the remembrance of Allāh in his prayer, for which he needs to maintain presence of mind during the whole prayer.

Al-Ghazālī cited a fourth *ḥadīth*: “Indeed a person performs the prayer but neither one sixth of it nor one tenth of it is written down (by angels) for him. Rather, what he understands of his prayer is written down for him” (Abū Dāwūd, Nasā'ī, Aḥmad and Ibn Hibbān). This *ḥadīth* states that, for a prayer (*Ṣalāh*) to be written down by angels or to be accepted by Allāh, we need to understand what we say in it. This understanding requires presence of our minds throughout the whole prayer because the saying and recitation continue up to the end of any *Ṣalāh*.

Citing a fifth *ḥadīth*: “The one who establishes the *Ṣalāh* converses with his Lord confidentially (*munājah/ munājat*)” (Bukhārī and Muslim), al-Ghazālī also argued that conversation with heedlessness is not considered at all a *munājah. ḥudūr al-qalb* during the whole prayer, therefore, is obligatory to make the whole *Ṣalāh* a *munājah* to Allāh.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 201, 212-214.

**(B) Weak *Aḥādīth***

In order to reinforce his position, al-Ghazālī also cited a number of other *aḥādīth* that are narrated through a weak chain of reporters. First *ḥadīth* of this kind is: "Allāh does not look to that prayer in which the person does not make his mind present with his body." Al-Īrāqī said that the *ḥadīth* scholar al-Azdī narrated this *ḥadīth* on the authority of Suwayd ibn al-Ghaffalāh as a *mursal ḥadīth* (a *ḥadīth* at the end of whose chain of reporters, i.e., following *tabīʿī*, one or more narrators are missing) and counted ibn al-Ghaffalāh among the weak narrators. However, this *ḥadīth* clearly proves that presence of mind in the whole prayer is obligatory.

Second *ḥadīth* of this category is: "Prayer is the embodiment of modesty, humility, supplication, moaning and repentance." al-Īrāqī remarked that Tirmīdhī narrated this *ḥadīth* through a problematic (*muḍṭarīb*) chain of reporters. However, the aspects mentioned in this *ḥadīth* cannot be observed in the prayer unless our minds are present throughout the *Ṣalāh*.

Al-Ghazālī cited a third *ḥadīth* of this type: "ʿĀ'ishah a wife of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) said: 'The Messenger of Allāh (p.b.u.h) used to talk to us and we used to talk to him, but when the prayer time came we became as if he did not know us and we did not know him.'" According to al-Īrāqī, this is also a *mursal ḥadīth*. However, this *ḥadīth* indicates devotion and mindfulness of the Prophet and his followers for the prayer.<sup>4</sup>

**Rational Arguments**

In addition to Qur'ānic and *Sunnaic* arguments to prove the obligation to observe *ḥuḍūr al-qalb* throughout the whole prayer, al-Ghazālī also put forward some rational arguments. He said that if someone swears that he will approach so and

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

so, will praise him and ask something from him, and then if the words bearing these meanings are uttered by his tongue when he is asleep, his swearing will be not fulfilled. Similarly, if these words uttered by the swearer's tongue in darkness in the presence of that person, but the swearer is neither aware of the person's presence nor seeing him, the swearing will be not performed. In both cases, the other person is not present in the heart of the swearer. Hence the words of the swearer are not considered a speech to the other person. Moreover, if those words are uttered by the swearer before the other person in day light, but the swearer is heedless because of his absorption in some anxiety and does not direct his speech to the person, the swearing will remain incomplete. If, because of the absence of the other person in the mind of the swearer, this kind of swearing is not fulfilled in the mentioned situations, the prayer also will not be perfectly observed without the presence of Allah in our minds.

Al-Ghazālī also argued that, if the worshipper does not have presence of mind during the whole prayer, the glorification through bowing and prostration could occur for an idol that is present before him without his knowledge; or it could even occur for the wall before him. *Hudūr al-qalb*, therefore, is obligatory throughout the whole prayer for the worshipper to be free from *shirk*.<sup>5</sup>

### Examples of the Practical Occurrence of *Hudūr al-Qalb*

Strengthening his position about observing *hudūr al-qalb* during the whole prayer, al-Ghazālī cited several examples of the practical occurrence of *hudūr al-qalb*. He said that when prayer time came, ʿAlī [the fourth caliph of the Prophet (p.b.u.h)] used to tremble and his face used to change. Once he was asked, "O Commander of the faithful, what has

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.



happened to you?" He replied that it was the time of an *amānah* (trust), which Allāh had entrusted to the heavens, earth and mountains but they became fearful of it and refused to bear it, but that he was going to bear it.

Al-Ghazālī also mentioned that when Saʿīd al-Tanūkhī used to establish prayer, tears used not to stop coming down his beard from over his cheeks. Moreover, al-Ghazālī stated that it was narrated about Muslim ibn Yasīr that, whenever he wished to pray, he used to say to his family members: "You hold conversation, I will not hear you." It was also narrated about him that, once during his prayer in the congregational mosque of Basrah, a corner of the mosque fell down, for which people gathered there, but he did not realize it until he had completed his prayer. These anecdotes prove that some Muslims were very mindful during their whole prayers. They also indicate that the occurrence of *ḥudūr al-qalb* is possible. Because of the possibility of *ḥudūr al-qalb* its obligation throughout the whole prayer is considered a logical duty.<sup>6</sup>

### **How the *Ḥudūr al-Qalb* can be Observed in Different Parts of the Prayer**

Al-Ghazālī tries to explain the manner of the observation of *ḥudūr al-qalb* in all parts of the *ṣalāh*. Some important examples are as follows:

#### ***Ḥudūr al-Qalb* at the Time of Calling for the Prayer**

Starting with the call for the prayer (*adhān*), al-Ghazālī suggested that in order to maintain *ḥudūr al-qalb* at the time of *adhān*, a person should remember the terror of calling [for Judgment] on the Day of Resurrection and should feel

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

outwardly and inwardly that he is responding and hastening to this call (*adhān*). Those who make haste at the time of *adhān* will be called on the Day of Judgment with kindness. According to al-Ghazālī, a worshipper should keep his mind on *adhān*. If he finds his heart full of joy, happiness and eagerness to make haste for the prayer, then he will be assured of rewards in the life hereafter. Proving the observance of presence of mind at the time of *adhān*, al-Ghazālī quoted a *ḥadīth* that the Prophet (p.b.u.h) used to say to his *mu'adhdhin* (the person who calls for the prayer) Bilāl: "O Bilāl, comfort me" (al-Daraqutnī). That is to say, the Messenger (p.b.u.h) used to comfort his mind through the calling of Bilāl to the prayer because according to other reports, the prayer always caused pleasure for him. Since *adhān* was the reminder and call for that prayer, the Prophet (p.b.u.h) was very mindful of it.

#### ***Ḥudūr al-Qalb* at the Time of Facing the Ka'bah**

Al-Ghazālī maintained that the outward turning of our faces towards the Ka'bah [house of Allāh at Makkah] during the prayer is not enough to accomplish the *Ṣalāh*. Rather, we also must turn our minds to Allāh along with turning our faces to His house. Furthermore, he explained that since the turning of the faces towards the Ka'bah is not performed without turning them away from other directions, turning of our minds to Allāh is also not accomplished without turning them away from all things other than Him. To justify this kind of presence of mind during the whole time of facing towards the Ka'bah for the prayer, al-Ghazālī quoted a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (p.b.u.h): "When a man stands in prayer and his wish, face, and mind are directed towards Allāh, he comes out of his prayer [sinless] as he is on that day when his mother gave birth to him." The sentence "and his wish, face, and mind are directed towards Allāh" indicates that our minds should be present during the whole time of facing towards the Ka'bah for a prayer.

### ***Hudūr al-Qalb* at the Time of Standing in Prayer**

Al-Ghazālī insisted that the standing in prayer must be with both body and mind. According to him, during the standing one must bend his head down, which is higher than other limbs. This bending indicates bending of his mind and freeing it from pride. One also must remember that he is before Allāh, who knows everything about him. Moreover, al-Ghazālī suggested that, if the worshipper is unable to know the real essence of Allāh, he should stand before Him as if he were standing before a king of the time; or as if he were being observed by a righteous person of his family or by someone to whom he wishes to be known as a righteous person. At that time all organs of his body will be calm and fearful. But he must remind his heart: "You fear a servant of Allāh, i.e., a king or a man of your family, but you do not fear Him although He is fit to be feared most." Al-Ghazālī, justifying this kind of thinking in prayer, cited a *ḥadīth* that when Abū Hurayrah, a companion of the Prophet (p.b.u.h), asked the Messenger (p.b.u.h): "How should we be shameful before Allāh," the Messenger (p.b.u.h) replied: "You should be shameful to Allāh just as you become shameful before a righteous man of your people."

### ***Hudūr al-Qalb* at the Time of Reciting the Qur'ān**

In terms of recitation of the Qur'ān, al-Ghazālī divided the worshippers into three classes: (1) he who moves his tongue but his mind is headless during the recitation; (2) he who moves his tongue and his mind follows his tongue, understanding and hearing the recitation as if it were coming from someone other than him (this is the rank of the people of the right hand [*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*]); (3) and he whose mind is directed first towards understanding the meaning of the recitation and then his tongue serves his mind as a translator (this is the state of those who attain proximity to Allāh).

Hence, according to al-Ghazālī, in order to maintain *ḥudūr al-qalb* at the time of reciting the Qur'ān, one must understand the meaning of what he recites and try to bring it into his mind. For instance, when a worshipper recites "Bism Allāh (in the name of Allāh)," he must seek the *barakah* (blessing) of Allāh to start reciting His speech and understand that these words mean that everything happens by Him. Likewise, when he recites "Al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm (The Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful)," he should remember all kinds of mercy of Allāh to broaden his hope for them from Him. Similarly, when he recites "Iyyāka Na'budu (The only we worship)" (1:5), he should renew his sincerity of worshipping.

Thus al-Ghazālī explained how to observe *ḥudūr al-qalb* while reciting the opening *sūrah* (*al-Fātiḥah*) in the prayer. Then he said that we also must do the same while reciting verses of other *sūrahs* following *al-Fātiḥah*. Hence, at the time of reading other *sūrahs* we must not be heedless of Allāh's commands, prohibitions, promises of reward and punishment, advice, information about the prophets, mention of His graces, etc.

Al-Ghazālī, providing some examples of the observance of presence of mind during recitation of the Qur'ān, said that when Zarārah ibn Awfā' reached the verse, "Finally when the trumpet is sounded" (74:8), he fell down senseless and dead. Likewise, when Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī heard the verse, "When the sky is rent asunder" (84:1), he was so confused and fearful that his limbs started to tremble.

Moreover, al-Ghazālī, proving the importance and manner of the recitation of the Qur'ān, quoted a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (p.b.u.h) saying that on the Day of Judgment the reciter of the Book will be told: "Recite [the Qur'ān], be soft-hearted and read it slowly and distinctly as you used to read it slowly and distinctly in your worldly life" (Abū Dāwūd and Tirmidhī, *Nasā'ī*).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-225.

## Summary and Conclusion

According to Muslim jurists, *ḥudūr al-qalb* is obligatory for the soundness of the prayer. However, they differed about whether it is obligatory only at the time of the first *takbīr* or throughout the whole prayer. A majority of them maintained that it is obligatory only at the time of the first *takbīr*. Al-Ghazālī maintained that *ḥudūr al-qalb* is obligatory during the whole prayer.

Although al-Ghazālī mentioned the view of the majority of jurists regarding *ḥudūr al-qalb*, he did not mention any Qur'ānic or *Sunnaic* argument of theirs except to say that some people thought there was an *ijmā'* of all jurists about the obligation of *ḥudūr al-qalb* only at the time of the first *takbīr*. Al-Ghazālī, quoting the opinions of Sufyān al-Thawrī, al-Ḥasan and Mu'adh ibn Jabal in his favor, denied this *ijmā'*, and instead he cited an opposite *ijmā'* about the obligation to observe *ḥudūr al-qalb* throughout the whole prayer.

Additionally, al-Ghazālī cited a number of verses of the Qur'ān, *aḥādīth*, and rational arguments through which he proved that observance of *ḥudūr al-qalb* throughout the whole prayer is obligatory, without which a prayer cannot be accomplished. Furthermore, he strengthened his view through citing examples of practical occurrence of *ḥudūr al-qalb* for a number of early Muslims.

Finally, in an attempt to make *ḥudūr al-qalb* during the whole prayer a more practical and observable aspect of the *ṣalāh*, al-Ghazālī suggested some ways by means of which a worshipper can maintain the presence of mind. The gist of his suggestion is that a person must understand the purpose of what he does and the meaning of what he says in his prayer. Then he must remember that purpose and meaning in his mind. Thus he can make himself mindful during his whole prayer, so that his mind will not be diverted to anything other than Allāh and his prayer will be worthy of acceptance by Him.

