

دليل المريدين

إلى كتاب منهاج العابدين للإمام حجة الإسلام الغزالي

للعبد الفقير إلى ربه الغني الحميد

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A Mureed's Guide

to Al-Ghazali's Minhaj Al-Abideen

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CHAPTER THREE

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1. What is the point of *Tafarrud*?

Tafarrud is required for two main reasons:

- a. To minimize distractions and;
- b. To preserve your heart from ulterior motives and ostentation.

That is because worship requires that you are inwardly sincere and outwardly available, and mixing with people jeopardizes both.

2. What is the ruling of *Tafarrud* and *`Uzla* (seclusion)?

Imam Al-Ghazali considers one's practice of solitude and seclusion *optimal (awla)* only if one is:

- a. not needed by others and;
- b. not abandoning a religious obligation.

Hence the practice is occasionally applicable and optimal only during the moments one is not fulfilling religious obligations (personal or communal), family responsibilities and the like thereof, which involve dependents.

3. Is there a lawful way to completely cut oneself off from people for the purpose of worship?

Imam Al-Ghazali considers it *permissible* for one who wishes to cut himself off from people for the purpose of worship only if he:

1. is not needed by people;
2. settles in a place where religious obligations involving the assembly of people are no longer incumbent on him and;
3. is truly convinced that the harms of residing among people outweighs the harms of abandoning them.

4. Can religious leaders seclude themselves from people?

Imam Al-Ghazali considers it *impermissible* for a leader in sacred knowledge to abandon people when they are in need of him for matters relating to their religious practice, guidance or defending the faith from heresy and innovation. Regarding such a person, the Imam says:

“For a man like this, there can be no question of seclusion from his fellow human beings. Far from it! He must install himself in their midst, as a wise counsellor of God’s people, a defender of God’s religion and an interpreter of God’s laws.”

5. What do religious leaders require most of all in order to withstand the companionship of people?

Imam Al-Ghazali answers,

“*First of all*, he needs long-enduring patience, enormous tolerance, a kind and gracious attitude, and constant readiness to seek help for God Most High.

Secondly, he needs to be inwardly detached from people, even though he is together with them in physical form. If they talk to him, he will talk to them. If they visit him, he will treat them with all due respect, and he will thank them. If they say nothing to him, and turn away from him, he will take advantage of that opportunity. If they are engaged in something right and good, he will assist them. If they indulge in foolish talk and bad conduct, he will contradict them and leave them, or he may rebuke them, if he is hopeful that they will accept it. He will also fulfil all their entitlements, including social visits and special visits to the sick, as well as the satisfaction of needs presented to

him, to the best of his ability. He will not demand any form of remuneration from them, nor will he expect that of them. He will not expose them to alienation because of that [failure to remunerate him]. He will spend on them generously, if he can, and he will be shy of accepting gifts from them. He will be tolerant of any annoyance they cause him, showing them a cheerful face and letting them see him in fine form. He will hide his own needs from them, enduring them by himself and dealing with them in his heart and his inner being. He also needs to pay special attention to his own person, by giving it an opportunity to engage in devout worship. As Umar ibn al-Khattāb (may God be well pleased with him) once said: *“If I sleep through the night, I am bound to neglect my own person, and if I sleep through the day, I am bound to neglect the flock, so how is it for me to sleep between these two?”*

6. Isn't communal living encouraged in the Sunna?

Communal living is encouraged by the Prophet ﷺ providing one's society is healthy, safe and religiously sound. But when corruption and misguidance is prevalent among people, choosing solitude over bad company takes precedence for those who struggle to guard their faith and religious practice. This is the context within which the Prophet ﷺ encouraged seclusion by saying, *“Stick to your own home, attend to your personal affairs, and leave the business of the common herd.”*

7. If one is able to guard his faith and religious practice in times of corruption, should he practice seclusion?

Imam Al-Ghazali says

As for the man who is keenly perceptive, and strong in the matter of God's religion, he will recognize the time of corruption, which the Prophet ﷺ has warned the Community against, and in which he has commanded them to practise seclusion (*uzla*). He will see that seclusion is preferable, because of the corruption and perils inherent in social intercourse. He must not cut himself off from the assemblies of Islam and those devoted to the common good. If he wishes to isolate himself from people for a period of time, he should settle on a mountain peak, or in a desert hollow, for the sake of what he considers to be in the best interest of his religion. Wherever this man may be, I cannot see him failing to be enabled by God (Almighty and Glorious is He) to attend the customary gatherings, congregational prayers and other assemblies of Islam. He will therefore attend them, to avoid losing his share of the blessing they confer, for the assemblies of Islam are of the same importance, in the sight of God (Exalted is He), even if people change and become corrupt. From what we have heard, this applies to the state of the saints called *Abdal*, for they attend the assemblies of Islam wherever they may be.

8. Is it possible to live among people while being in a state of solitude?

Imam al-Ghazali answers,

“Yes indeed, this man will be together with people in person, but his heart will be so far removed from them! That, upon my life, is a difficult matter and a hard way to live. Our Shaykh (may God bestow His mercy upon him) had this to say about it, in the advice he bequeathed [to his son]: “O my son, live with the people of your time, but do not follow their example.” Then he said: “How hard is it to

live with the living, while following the example of the dead!” According to Ibn Masud (may God be well pleased with him): “You must both mingle with people and stay apart from them to save your religion from ruin.”

9. When does companionship triumph over seclusion?

Imam al-Ghazali outlines in detail the inapplicability of seclusion and the necessity of keeping company for the seeker who enters a compound, college or convent for spiritual development. That is because this type of training requires patience with others who share the same goal, the companionship of the righteous, and an accomplished guide.

10. What about visiting friends for the sake of God?

Imam al-Ghazali says,

“In answer to this question, you must know that visiting those who are brethren for the sake of God (Almighty and Glorious is He) is one of the precious elements of the worship of God (Exalted is He). It contains the noble grace of nearness to God (Almighty and Glorious is He), as well as various other benefits and the welfare of the heart, but only on two conditions:

—Firstly, you must not overdo that [visiting] and carry it to excess. The Prophet ﷺ once said to Abu Huraira (may God be well pleased with him): Visit at decent intervals, for then you will share more love.

—Secondly, you must preserve the correctness of that [visiting], by avoiding hypocritical display and ostentation,

idle talk and backbiting, and everything of that kind, for it will have dire consequences for you and your brother.”

11. What will give me incentive to practice seclusion and solitude?

Imam al-Ghazali outlines three things that will give one incentive and make seclusion easy:

“—The first is to immerse all your moments in worship, for worship is a profitable occupation, whereas socializing with people is one of the symptoms of bankruptcy. If you see yourself indulging in meeting and talking with people, in the absence of need and emergency, you should recognize that as a waste of time, prompted by idle curiosity and self conceit. How appropriate is the saying of the poet:

Idle curiosity has led me to greet you,
for the idly curious seldom does any work.

Once you have truly embraced worship, you will discover the sweetness of intimate conversation [with the Lord], for you will become familiar with the Book of God (Glory be to Him), distracted from your fellow creatures, and estranged from their company and their chatter [...]. You must heed the poetic saying of our Shaikh (may God bestow His mercy upon him):

Be content with God as a friend,
and leave human beings aside.
Be true to your love,
whether present amongst them or absent.
However you wish to view people,
you will find them to be scorpions.

—The second [way to make seclusion easy for you] is detaching your ambition from them, once and for all, since their business is quite worthless for you. If it is pointless to hope for something useful from a person, and there is no reason to fear his harmfulness, his existence and his non-existence are indistinguishable.

—The third is that you should carefully observe their disastrous misfortunes, remember that and impress it repeatedly on your heart. If you strictly adhere to these three principles, they will drive you away from the company of your fellow creatures. They will drive you to the door of God (Exalted is He) and exclusive dedication to His worshipful service. They will make Him dear to you, and cause you to cling to His door. God is the Source of enabling grace and protection!”