



Al-Ghazālī's Qur'anic Sufi Hermeneutics: Case Study on the Story of Abraham in Search of God

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Abstract : *This article is an attempt to expose the concept of the Qur'anic sufi hermeneutics developed by Imam Al-Ghazālī, as a major contribution to the corpus of ta'wīl-based hermeneutics. This study use a library research method and deductive method with theoretical hermeneutic theory. Theoretical hermeneutics is intended to "read" and "objectively reveal" al-Ghazālī's thoughts in the discourse of interpretation. This study analysed by using Edward Husserl's phenomenology investigation to highlight the illumination of Al-Ghazālī's method to reach the essence of the text. Therefore, the study found that the discovery of the essence of the text can be achieved by mystical intuition rather than by categorical intuition. In his commentary, He even asserts that individuals who seek a spiritual path are endowed with mystical intuitive abilities. Therefore, mystical experiences and spiritual readers help reveal the secret layer and meaning of the Quran. Al-Ghazālī's interpretation of Q.S al-An'am verses 76-78 about Abraham's contemplation while seeking God's essence shows how he used faculties higher than the cognitive faculties of sensory perception, creativity and reason. His interpretation of the letter al-An'am relies solely on mystical intuition and cannot be understood by anyone who is not inclined towards such an interpretation.*

Keywords : *Hermeneutics, al-Ghazālī, Abraham, Allegorical, Text.*

Abstrak : Artikel ini merupakan upaya untuk mengungkap konsep hermeneutika sufi al-Qur'an yang dikembangkan oleh Imam Al-Ghazālī sebagai kontribusi besar bagi korpus ta'wil berbasis hermeneutika. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kepustakaan dan metode deduktif dengan teori hermeneutika teoritis. Hermeneutika teoritis dimaksudkan untuk “membaca” dan “mengungkap secara obyektif” pemikiran al-Ghazālī dalam diskursus interpretasi. Studi ini dianalisis dengan menggunakan investigasi fenomenologi Edward Husserl untuk menyoroti metode iluminasi al-Ghazālī untuk mencapai esensi teks. Oleh karena itu, studi ini menemukan bahwa penemuan esensi teks dapat dicapai dengan intuisi mistik daripada intuisi kategoris. Dalam komentarnya, Dia bahkan menegaskan bahwa individu yang mencari jalan spiritual diberkahi dengan kemampuan intuitif mistis. Oleh karena itu, pengalaman mistik dan pembaca spiritual membantu mengungkap lapisan rahasia dan makna al-Qur'an. Tafsir al-Ghazālī terhadap Q.S al-An'am ayat 76-78 tentang perenungan Ibrahim ketika mencari esensi Tuhan menunjukkan bagaimana ia menggunakan fakultas yang lebih tinggi daripada fakultas kognitif persepsi indrawi, kreativitas dan akal. Penafsirannya terhadap surat al-An'am semata-mata mengandalkan intuisi mistik dan tidak dapat dipahami oleh siapa pun yang tidak condong ke arah penafsiran semacam itu.

Kata Kunci: Hermeneutik, Imam al-Ghazālī, Ibrahim, Alegoris, Teks.

A. Introduction

Religious critical studies through a hermeneutical approach¹ in the context study of the Qur'an have attracted the attention of many Muslim scholars, especially those who are observers study of the Qur'an.² This discourse becomes interesting because it connects hermeneutics as a methodology for reading the Bible with the Qur'an as the absolute word of God to be tested and studied critically.³ The main question that

¹ The etymological roots of the word “hermeneutics” see Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 12.

² The call was simultaneously voiced by contemporary Muslim scholars, see Adian Husaini and Abdurrahman al-Bagdadi, *Hermeneutika dan Tafsir Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2007), p. 2.

³ Muzayyin, "Menguji Otentisitas Wahyu Tuhan Dengan Pembacaan Kontemporer: Telaah Atas Polemical Studies Kajian Orientalis dan Liberal", *Jurnal Esensia*, Vol. 15, no. 2 (2014).

needs to be asked then is whether this Biblical methodology is relevant when applied in the Qur'an?⁴ The answers to this question are truly diverse (interpretative) and full of debate (debatable).⁵ If we classified it, there are at least three camps that respond to this issue. First, the camp that accepts hermeneutics as a whole, second, the camp that rejects hermeneutics in totality. the third is some others who accept it with some conditions.⁶ Therefore, according to Sahiron Syamsudin, the arguments for acceptance and rejection were structured in such a way as to strengthen their respective positions.⁷

Apart from the debate, hermeneutics as an art of interpretation is an effort to find or produce new meanings from a sacred text is not something new.⁸ This disclosure can be said to have been theorized since a long time ago among classical Islamic thinkers, but the terms and usage are different.⁹ This thing was strengthened by one of the progressive thinkers, Farid Esack in his book *Qur'an: Pluralism and Liberalism*, that the hermeneutics practice has been carried out by Muslims for a long time, especially when dealing with the al-Qur'an. One of the pieces of evidence of the hermeneutic problem that is always studied in the classical Qur'anic treasures is about *asbabun-nuzul*, *nasakh-mansukh*, and the existence of categorization of *Syi'a* interpretations, *Mu'tazilah* interpretations, clear philosophical

⁴ According to Amin Abdullah, the hermeneutic approach for many people tends to be avoided. See Amin Abdullah, *The Hermeneutic Approach in the Study of Religious Fatwas, in the Introduction to the Book Atas Nama Tuhan: Dari Fikih Otoriter Ke Fikih Otoritatif* (Jakarta: Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2004).

⁵ Mohd Akil Muhamed Ali, "Hermeneutics in the Eye of Al Ghazālī," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 4 (n.d.): 2015.

⁶ Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika Hans-Georg Gadamer dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an dan Pembacaan Al-Qur'an Pada Masa Kontemporer, Dalam Upaya Integrasi Hermeneutika Dalam Kajian Kur'an dan Hadis*, ed. Syafa'atun Almirzanah and Sahiron Syamsuddin (Yogyakarta: Lembaga Penelitian Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, 2011), p. 23.

⁷ Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawesea Press, 2009), p. 1.

⁸ Farid Esack, *Membebaskan yang Tertindas* (Bandung: Mizan, 2000), p. 82.

⁹ Aksin Wijaya, *Arah Baru Ulumul Qur'an: Memburu Pesan Tuhan di Balik Fenomena Budaya* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Belajar, 2009), p. 176.

interpretations shows an awareness of certain social groups and horizons of interpretation.¹⁰

One of the Muslim thinkers who contributed to the formulation of classical hermeneutics was Abū āmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, better known as Imam al-Ghazālī, *Hujjah al-Islām*,¹¹ and also one of the great Sufi Theologian (1057-1111).¹² This is because classical Islamic hermeneutic literature was significantly influenced by al-Ghazālī. His book *Jawāhirul Qur'ān* is a major contribution to the ta'wīl-based hermeneutic corpus.¹³ Al-Ghazālī's approach to text interpretation became the main source of al-Qur'an hermeneutics that based on ta'wīl.¹⁴ One of the main rules outlined in its hermeneutics is that the external (*zahir*) meaning of the text cannot be separated from the internal (*batin*) meaning.¹⁵ Therefore, al-Ghazālī in his work tries to strike a balance between the meanings of "zahir" and "batin" or "literal" and "metaphorical" of the Al-Qur'an..

In most metaphorical interpretations, a term is applied to something that cannot be applied literally. Hence Al-Ghazālī believes that the use of some metaphorical terms can help in understanding God's will. One of the dimensions of al-Ghazālī's hermeneutics is the essence of the meaning behind the text can only be reached through mystical intuition rather than categorical intuition. Another dimension is that for those without mystical intuition, the task of understanding the al-Qur'an text

¹⁰ Farid Esack, *Qur'an: Pluralism & Liberation* (Oxford: One Word, 1997), p. 161.

¹¹ This is understandable because Al-Ghazālī's studies extend from physical to metaphysical issues. See Imam al-Ghazālī, *Majmu'ah Rasail*, trans Kamran A. Irsyadi (Yogyakarta: DIVA Press, 2018), p. 5.

¹² Mohamad Akil Muhamed Ali, et al., "Hermeneutics in the Eye of al Ghazālī," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol 6. No.4. 2015." p. 43.

¹³ Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, *The Qur'anic Sufi Hermeneutics of Syakh Mustafā al-Alawī: A Critical Study of His Lubab al-Ilm Fī Surah al-Najm* (Bellville: University of the western cape, 2018), p. 32-68.

¹⁴ The meaning of ta'wīl see, Salah 'Abd al-Fatāh al-Khamidī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Ta'wīl fī al-Qur'ān* (Urdun: Dār al-Nafa' Islām, 1996). p. 29-30; see Al-Ghazālī, "Qanūn al-Ta'wīl", in *Majmū'ah Rasail al-Imam al-Ghazālī*. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2006), p. 580-582.

¹⁵ See, Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, *The Qur'anic Sufi Hermeneutics of Syakh Mustafā al-Alawī*, p. 17.

becomes problematic.¹⁶ In other words, only individuals who seek the spiritual path (*ma'rifat*) are blessed with the ability of mystical intuition (*sufi*).¹⁷ Hence they can reach or reveal the essence of the inward meaning behind the text and get closer to what God intended. Therefore, this article will describe the hermeneutic concept with a Sufistic pattern developed by Imam al-Ghazālī in his work *Jawahirul Qur'an*, and its application to the case study of the story of the Prophet Abraham while seeking God (Q.S al-An'am 76-78) in his book *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, which is an example of the application of al-Ghazālī's Sufistic hermeneutics.

The study on Imam al-Ghazālī's hermeneutics has been widely carried out by researchers from both Western and Eastern scholarship. Some of these studies were written by Frank Griffel.¹⁸ His research mainly concerns the rules of interpretation made by Imam al-Ghazālī in his book *Faysal al-Tafriqa*, in a way to understand the text properly and correctly. By using a descriptive analysis approach, Frank Griffel revealed that al-Ghazālī's efforts to make rules of interpretation were none other than because of the conflict between reason and revelation, in addition to avoiding the group of interpreters from accusing unbelievers one another. Another researcher is Muhammad Kamal,¹⁹ by which investigated the similarity of aspects between al-Ghazālī's hermeneutics and Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology in terms of understanding the meaning of the text. Another work is Mohd Akil Muhamed Ali's entitled *Hermeneutics in the Eye of Al-Ghazālī*.²⁰ This work discussed the theory and method of interpretation of al-Ghazālī by using a socio-political analysis and historical context whose purpose is to inform the development of al-Ghazālī's thought in the light of hermeneutic context and modern approach to the Qur'an. As to Mahbub Ghazali, in his

¹⁶ Muhammad Kamal, "Al-Ghazālī's Hermeneutics Phenomenology," *Religion East & West: Journal of the Institute for World Religions*, Vol. 2, no. 4 (2004): pp. 77-89.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁸ Frank Griffel, *The Reconciliation of Reason and Revelation through the "Rule of Interpretation" (Qanun al-Ta'wil)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 111.

¹⁹ Muhammad Kamal, "Al-Ghazālī's Hermeneutics Phenomenology."

²⁰ Mohd Akil Muhamed Ali, "Hermeneutics in the Eye of Al Ghazālī."

works on *Al-Ghazālī's Sufistic Hermeneutics in Misykāt al-Anwār*,²¹ deliberately identified the character and form of Al-Ghazālī's interpretation in his work *Misykāt al-Anwār*. His research concludes that al-Ghazālī's interpretation model has similarities with Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics concept.

Based on several former works, I argue that this article would take another part from that works, particularly related to the thought of the Sufi hermeneutics of Imam al-Ghazālī in his position as a method. In addition, the hermeneutic method with its sufistic pattern is applied in the case study of the story of Ibrahim while seeking God in (Q.S al-An'am 76-78), considered as absence of accounts aspect from that former works. In this regard, the author might think that the need to present this work to the public and complement other aspects of al-Ghazālī's Hermeneutic thought that may not have been part of the discourses of these former researchers. Therefore, the author in this article tries to apply al-Ghazālī's theory of Sufistic hermeneutics, to find the true meaning behind the metaphorical text, especially in the process of searching for the God of Prophet Abraham in the phrases "Hadza Rabbi" in Surah al-An'am 76-78.

B. Al-Ghazālī and Sufistic Hermeneutics Approach

The formulation of classical hermeneutics on the al-Qur'an is significantly influenced or inseparable from the contribution of al-Ghazālī,²² a person who is not only widely known as a theologian, Muslim philosopher but also as an expert in commentary.²³ This is evidenced by his works covering various Islamic disciplines, including one in the field of Qur'anic studies, namely the *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, which is a major contribution to the

²¹ Mahbub Ghazālī, "Hermeneutika Sufistik Al-Ghazālī in Mishkāt al-Anwār," *Jurnal Mutawatir* 5, no. 1 (2015).

²² Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, *The Qur'anic Sufi Hermeneutics...*, p. 68; see also Mohamad Akil Muhamed Ali, *Hermeneutics in the Eye of al-Ghazālī...*, p. 43; Al-Ghazālī's biography fully, let's see Griffel Frank, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²³ Read Ar-Raihani Muhammad, *Tafsir al-Ghazālī* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2010).

ta'wil -based hermeneutics corpus.²⁴ Al-Ghazālī in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* uses language that seems to have a metaphorical character (nature) as when he mentions “gems and pearls”.²⁵ The use of the term or *tamsil* (exemplification) shows directly the truth of the Qur'an where the meaning of "jewels and pearls" is only metaphorical.²⁶ In most metaphorical interpretations, a term is applied to something that cannot be applied literally. Hence al-Ghazālī believes that the use of some metaphorical terms can help in understanding God's will.²⁷

Al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical epistemology building departs from the conception of the text, in which the Qur'an is divided into "jewels and pearls", as it is also divided into the meaning "outward and inward".²⁸ His views on the concept of the text depart from two basic points of departure, “Asy'ariyah Theology and Sufistic Gnosticism (the teaching of universal spirituality)”²⁹ The starting point of Asy'ariyah theologians influencing al-Ghazālī is the fact of Asy'ariyah's concept of the al-Qur'ān text. In the Asy'ariyah view, the text of the al-Qur'ān is an attribute of the Divine Essence, not an act.³⁰ As long as the word of God is the eternal nature dzatiah (sifat Dzatihah), then the separation between the "nature of qadimah (sifat Qadim)" inherent with the substance of God with *tajalli* in the world in the form of text (the

²⁴ Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, *The Qur'anic Sufi Hermeneutics...*, p. 32.

²⁵ See Al-Ghazālī, *The Jewels of the Qur'an Al-Ghazālī's Theory*, Trans. by Muhammad Abul Quasem (Malaysia: University of Malaya Press, 1977), p. 89-156.

²⁶ See Al-Ghazālī, *The Jewels of the Qur'an*, pp. 59-60; Al-Ghazālī, *Jawahir al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār-Ihya' al-Ulum, 1990), p. 57-59.

²⁷ Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, *The Qur'anic Sufi Hermeneutic*. p. 69.

²⁸ Look, Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries on the Qur'ān in Classical Islam, Routledge Studies in the Quran* (London New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 7.

²⁹ Mohd Akil Muhamed Ali, “Hermeneutics in the Eye of Al-Ghazālī,” p.43.

³⁰ In contrast to the Mu'tazilah who hold that the Qur'an is new and created, because it is not included in the attributes of the original substance. See Abu Zaid, Nasr Hamid, *Teks Otoritas Kebenaran*, trans. Sunarwoto Dema (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2012), p. 86.

al-Qur'an that is read) becomes something that is inevitable.³¹ While his Sufistic Gnostics put free themselves by embracing the absolute on the other side.³²

Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid in his analysis states that if the "text of the al-Qur'an" in its current form which is read and written in the *mushaf* is only an "imitation" for the nature of *kalām* (God's word) that *qadim*. This shows that the "language" in the "text" is an external garment or skin in which "immanent content" and *qadim* are stored. Therefore, if Asy'ari's thought before al-Ghazālī regarding the concept of divine kalam was limited to the distinction between *qadim* and imitation in his reading, then the Sufistic dimension in al-Ghazālī's thought could assist him in developing the concept through another dichotomy, namely "Dzahir and Batin".³³ So that with this dichotomy, it is possible for the al-Qur'an to exist both *zahir* and *batin*, not only on the plains of meaning and sign but also on the structural aspects of the narrative and composition text.³⁴

Al-Ghazālī's view that the al-Qur'an has a dichotomy of outer and inner meaning is based on the words of the Prophet, "*Indeed, the al-Qur'an contains the meaning of the verse which is *zahir* and *batin*, events at the time it was revealed and previous stories.*" According to him, the meaning of the al-Qur'an is very broad for *arif* people (experts of *makrifat*). He gave an example of the analogy made by Ali ra. regarding the meaning or interpretation of Surah al-Fatihah which has a very broad meaning and if it is charged to 70 camels to be carried together, then they will not be able to carry it. This shows that the secrets contained in the al-Qur'an will never run out to be explored and the wonders of its influence are countless. Each word has an outer and inner meaning, each of it has a level of meaning from the lowest meaning to the highest meaning.³⁵

³¹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Tekstualistas Al-Qur'an Kritik Terhadap Ulumul Qur'an*, trans. Khoiron Nahdliyyin (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2001), p. 337.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 350.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 337-338.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.337.

³⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Revival of Religious Learnings Imam Ghazzali's Ihyā Ulūm-al-Dīn*, trans. Fazlu al-Karim, vol. 1 (Pakistan: Dārul-Ishāt, 1993), p. 224.

One of the main rules or principles outlined in al-Ghazālī's hermeneutics is that it departs from the text dichotomy that the meaning of "literal text" (exoteric) should not be separated from the meaning of "inner text" (esoteric).³⁶ Therefore, al-Ghazālī in the work of *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* tries to balance between the "literal and metaphorical" meaning of the al-Qur'an.³⁷ The relation with the literal meaning of the text should not be separated from the hidden meaning, al-Ghazālī stated:

‘Then, know that the realities we hinted at have secrets and jewels; [but also] they have seashells, and the shell is that which appears first. Some people who reach the seashells know [only] these, while others break the shells and carefully examine the pearls [inside them].’³⁸

Al-Ghazālī does not intend to limit the interpretation of the external meaning of the al-Qur'an, but emphasizes the relationship between “external and internal” meanings; namely: between “pearl and shell”. He simply disagrees with interpreters who focus on the shell then deny the internal meaning of wahyu (the pearl) or focus on the pearl ignoring the shell. Therefore, Al Ghazālī was not satisfied with the existing interpretation method. Most people ignore the artificiality of the verses and sources obtained by naql (text). Their interpretation is out of control. On the other hand, there are also those who hold fast to artificial and naql (text) meanings, so that the al-Qur'an appears as static and dogmatic teaching.³⁹

In approaching the meaning of the al-Qur'an intuitively, al-Ghazālī did not teach batiniyah, the tendency to seek hidden meanings from the verses. He believed that understanding the inner meaning of a verse was only possible through understanding its outer part; whereas in the shell one can find pearls.

³⁶ See Abu Zaid, *Tekstualistas Al-Qur'an Kritik Terhadap Ulumul Qur'an*, p. 337-338.

³⁷ See, Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, *The Qur'anic Sufi Hermeneutics of Syaikh Mustafa al-Alawi: A Critical Study of His Lubāb al-Ilm Fī Sūrah al-Najm*, p. 32.

³⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *The Jewels of the Qur'an Al-Ghazālī's Theory...* p. 34.

³⁹ Mohd Akil Muhamed Ali, “Hermeneutics in the Eye of Al Ghazālī...,” p. 43.

A seashell has a face towards its iriward part, and this face encotinters the pearl face to face and near resembles it because of the proximity of its neighborhood and continuarrce of its contact with the pearl; the seashell has also a face towards its outward part, and this face, nearly resembles all other stones because of the remoteness of its neighborhood and its lack of contact with the pearl. Likewise, is the shell of the Qur'an. Its outward face is the sound, and the man is entrusted with the knouledge of correcting its outlets in transmission. Thus, he is the possessor of the knowledge of the outward rind which is removed from the inward part of the shell, let alone the pearl itself and pronunciation is a man who possesses knowledge of letters.⁴⁰

In addition, al-Ghazālī in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* also opposes or criticizes those of his contemporaries or earlier who interact with the al-Qur'an, whether they are reviewers, readers, or interpreters who only rely on the external meaning of the verses of the al-Qur'an as well as excluding the esoteric dimension in the Tafseer:

Near to the science of reading is the science of the outward exegesis of the Qur'an. This is the last grade of the shell of the Qur'ān, which is near to contact with the pearl. This is the reason why its resemblance with the pearl has become strong so that some people imagine that it is the pearl itself and that beyond it there is nothing more valuable than it. It is with it that most people are content; how great are their deception and deprivation--for they have imagined that there is no rank beyond theirs! However, in relation to those who possess the knowledge of [other] sciences of the shell, they are at a rank high and noble, since the science of exegesis is mighty when compared to other sciences of the shell, because it is not meant for them while they are meant for it.⁴¹

From it, we can see that al-Ghazālī is committed to balancing the outer and inner meaning in the process of interpreting the text. It should be noted that al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical approach is important in two respects; *First*, its

⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *The Jewels of the Qur'an al-Ghazālī's Theory...*, p. 35.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 36.

rejection of tradition, which makes access to the essence of the Qur'an to some extent more difficult and complex. *Second*, the impetus it gives readers to understand the meaning of the Qur'an itself, is not constrained by dogmatic adherence to a particular school, which allows them to arrive at an independent understanding of the laws of the al-Qur'an.⁴²

In this connection, al-Ghazālī is famous for criticizing the esoteric interpretation of the Ismaili al-Batiniyyah school, which tends to emphasize only the meaning of *bāṭin* and rejects the literal meaning of the text of the al-Qur'an.⁴³ In this connection, al-Ghazālī is famous for criticizing the esoteric interpretation of the Ismaili al-Batiniyyah school, which tends to emphasize only the meaning of *bāṭin* and rejects the literal meaning of the text of the al-Qur'an.⁴⁴

One of al-Ghazālī's goals in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* is to present a Sufi interpretation of the Qur'an as the single most comprehensive way to reveal the meaning behind the text. From the gnostic point of view, most people tend to take the Qur'an only its rules without direct contact with it (al-Qur'an). Whereas, in the case of gnostics, he sees it as where his understanding comes directly from the presence of God and this happens because of his closeness to God through his spiritual state of gnosis (*ma'rifa*).⁴⁵

In other words, al-Ghazālī states that his esoteric interpretation can only be made for a select few who are endowed with the faculty of mystical intuition,⁴⁶ namely those who have reached spiritual realization through gnosis, such as

⁴² Kamal, "Al-Ghazālī's Hermeneutics Phenomenology," p.88.

⁴³ In the view of the Batiniyah, what Allah wants is the inner meaning of the verse, not the textual meaning. See, Wahyudi, "Ta'wil Sufi Al-Ghazālī Dan Ibn 'Arabi Terhadap Ayat-Ayat Al-Qur'an: Studi Komparatif" (Surabaya, UIN Sunan Ampel, 2017), p. 87. The arguments commonly used by the inner group are QS. Al-Hadid: 13; That is, then between them has installed a wall (separator) with a door. On the inside there is mercy and on the outside, there is the only punishment.

⁴⁴ Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, *The Qur'anic Sufi Hermeneutics* p. 70.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.69.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.68-69.

the elite group (ma'rifah) who deal with spiritual matters.⁴⁷ Al-Ghazālī's interpretation of Sūrah al-An'am: 76-78 shows how he used the higher faculties of the cognitive faculties of sensory perception, creativity, and reason. His interpretation of al-An'am relies solely on mystical intuition and cannot be understood by anyone who is not inclined towards such an interpretation.

C. The Positions of al-Ghazālī's Hermeneutics and Western Students

The hermeneutical structure of al-Ghazālī, as explained in his book *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, can be said to stem from his skepticism, which is like Cartesian doubt, that is methodical *videlicet* leads to the rejection of prior knowledge,⁴⁸ such as his efforts in constructing the interpretation of the al-Qur'an made by previous figures. In his search for the truth, al-Ghazālī offered the principle of "epistemology of doubt" in his Islamic thought. He wrote "it is doubtful that can lead to the truth. A person who does not doubt, it means he is not using his logic. A person who does not use logic, will not be able to see at all. A person who cannot see will remain in blindness and misguidance".⁴⁹

In line with the above explanation, al-Ghazālī divides three stages of investigation of an object to arrive at the truth, *the first* stage requires critical examination and study of each doctrine; *the second* rejects the doctrine if it is found to be inadequate; and *third*, looking for a new starting point. From the outset, this

⁴⁷ See Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*, Book 8, Translated by Muhammad Abdul Quasern (London: Kegan Paul Internasional, 1982).

⁴⁸ Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, *The Qur'anic Sufi Hermeneutics p. 105*; Also look at Muhammad Kamal, *Al-Ghazālī's Hermeneutics Phenomenology*, p. 80.

⁴⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mizān al-'Amal*, Edited by Sulaiman Dunnya, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1964). p. 409; Al-Ghazālī distinguishes two levels of methods in reaching the truth. The first level, with the method of illumination (radiance) God. He got it by freeing himself from skepticism. The second level is the method of wandering in a long time interval, where at this stage he has walked with the light of faith, without any hesitation. See Al-Ghazālī, Majmū'ah Rasāil, Trans. Kamran A. Irsyadi (Yogyakarta: DIVA Press, 2018). pp. 6-7; to know in detail the epistemological reasoning, al-Ghazālī's doubts in Islamic scholarship can be seen in the book by Aksin Wijaya, *Nalar Kritis Epistemologi Islam* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2014), 25-40.

skeptical approach is epistemological, because it goes through a process of inquiry to arrive at certainty and an investigation of empirical and rational knowledge in discussing human capacity to arrive at the Ultimate Reality.⁵⁰ In response to this, al-Ghazālī believed that "ratio" was not sufficient for one to reach the truth, and so he transcended Cartesian philosophy and the negative collusion of Kantian epistemology by relying on another cognitive source, namely "mystical intuition".

According to al-Ghazālī "ratio" will not be able to achieve knowledge of the Ultimate Reality (God), because it can only be achieved by means of *riyāḍah*, not by way of *logos* "reasonable". This is understandable because al-Ghazālī said that the human soul comes from God, while the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), as a rational proposition, becomes baseless and must be replaced by *volo ergo sum* (I will, therefore I am), a mystical dictum through which true knowledge of the Ultimate Reality makes it possible to be approached. So, by negating the rules of a set of rationalistic propositions, and making mystical intuition or spiritual journeys and experiences a very possible basis for revealing the Ultimate reality.⁵¹ This can be seen in the context of interpretation where the spiritual interpretation goes beyond the limits of its rationality even though it does not completely negate its rationality in order to reveal the hidden meaning behind the text. Al-Ghazālī mentions the source of knowledge is *al-'ilm al-mukāsyafah* (knowledge of disclosure). *Al-'ilm al-mukāsyafah* is a kind of knowledge that is obtained through revelation and illumination. With this knowledge of revelation, the hidden meanings of the al-Qur'an can be known.⁵²

Muhammad Kamal summarized al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical position as follows;

1. It starts with the presupposition to be free from all the structures, rules, and judgments are given previously to understand the meaning of the al-Qur'an.

⁵⁰ Kamal, "Al-Ghazālī's Hermeneutics Phenomenology," P.79-80.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.80.

⁵² Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*, book 8, Translated by Muhammad Abdul Quasern, p. 31.

2. It emphasizes the unity of the hidden “external” and “internal” literal meaning of the revealed text.
3. To understand the meaning of the text must rely on mystical intuition. This issue is important as an intuitive experience to gain knowledge and understand the meaning of the al-Qur'an because nothing stands in the way of the mind and its object in intuition.
4. It encourages emotional adjustment to the text.⁵³

Kamal is exploring more further about the similarities between al-Ghazālī's hermeneutic position and Edmund Husserl's phenomenology (1859-1938),⁵⁴ especially with regard to understanding the meaning of a text.⁵⁵ A brief description of the main features of Husserl's phenomenology may be useful, namely to explain al-Ghazālī's method. Husserl belongs to the Cartesian philosophical tradition, which aims to build a new foundation for knowledge. To achieve this, Husserl began to understand human consciousness phenomenologically. He used phenomenology as a method to reach the “essence” of phenomena which consciousness meant intuitively and before any presuppositions and prejudices.⁵⁶

The first phenomenological step in Edmund Husserl's philosophy as described in al-Ghazālī's work, *Ihyā' Ulūm al-dīn* (Revival of the Religion Science) as one of the internal rules for reading and understanding the meaning of the al-Qur'an. According to al-Ghazālī, the initial stage for readers or interpreters of the al-Qur'an is when reading it they must isolate their minds from all foreign influences, and focus on the text directly and intuitively.⁵⁷ It has four functions:

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl (1859-1938) was a German philosopher who established the school of phenomenology., n.d.

⁵⁵ Muhammad Kamal, “Al-Ghazālī's Hermeneutics Phenomenology,” p. 77.

⁵⁶ Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, *The Qur'anic Sufi Hermeneutics of Syakh Mustafā al-Alawī: A Critical Study of His Lubāb al-Ilm Fī Sūrah al-Najm*, p. 35.

⁵⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *On the Etiquettes of Qur'an Recitation*, trans. M.A Qasem, n.d., p. 69.

1. To free our mind or understanding from the dogma of theological streams and from the rules, interpretations, and comments that have been given previously about the meaning of the al-Qur'an. Referring to authority, this is because a theological stream may be right in a place, but it can also be a barrier to understanding its meaning.
2. Reject all outward interpretations and literal meanings of the al-Qur'an. To free our minds from worldly goals that weaken spiritual power and from craving material gain.
3. Freeing the soul from sin, because sin is a barrier to understanding the meaning of the al-Qur'an. This is one of the fundamental characteristics of divine texts and their authorship.⁵⁸

Al-Ghazālī considers that the understanding relationship between the interpreter and the text leads to the portion between the use of ratio (*ma'qūl*) and text (*manqūl*). In this context, al-Ghazālī then mapped out several streams based on this relationship, namely the group that adhered solely to the text (*al-manqūl*), the group that adhered to the ratio (*al-ma'qūl*) by including the text, the group that adhered to the text (*al-manqūl*). text (*al-manqūl*) by including ratios, and groups that use ratios (*ma'qūl*) and balanced text (*manqūl*).⁵⁹ The classification according to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd is different from the classification of Western hermeneutics, namely theoretical hermeneutics, philosophical hermeneutics, and critical hermeneutics.⁶⁰ However, al-Ghazālī's classification has similarities with these hermeneutical streams. For example, the stream of pure textuality (*manqūl*) that emphasizes textual meaning has similarities with theoretical hermeneutics, which was initiated by Wilhelm Dilthey in his position of prioritizing text. While the stream of pure rationality (*ma'qūl*) has similarities with the theoretical hermeneutics conceptualized by Scheleirmacher, that the author's subjective psychology plays a role in understanding the text which according to pure rationality

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 70, 72.

⁵⁹ Al-Ghazālī, "Qanūn al-Ta'wīl", in *Majmū'ah Rasā'il*, pp. 15-20.

⁶⁰ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Qur'an, Hermeneutika, Dan Kekuasaan* (Bandung: Riseach for Qur'anic Studies, 2003), p.42-46.

is termed logic. The similarity lies in the center of the understanding focus which focuses on the interpreter.⁶¹

As for the moderate stream in which al-Ghazālī's position is located, it tends to philosophical hermeneutics.⁶² The tendency can also be seen from his opinion on things that interpreters should stay away from in an effort to explain the meaning of the al-Qur'an. According to al-Ghazālī, there are two things that a commentator must know. *First*, the inclination towards something is then forced to reinforce a goal. *Second*, explain the meaning of the al-Qur'an textually, without looking at the history or gharāib science al-Qur'an. This view is in line with the main theory of philosophical hermeneutics by Gadamer (1900-2002), an important figure who has greatly influenced Western hermeneutic thinking. According to him, the interpreter's understanding is very likely to be influenced by certain hermeneutical situations that surround them. In the process of interpretation, said Gadamer, an interpreter should be aware that he is in a certain position that can color his understanding of a text. Therefore, the interpreter must be able to overcome their rationality when they interpret the text.⁶³

Another study was conducted by Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, by looking at the points of similarities and differences between al-Ghazālī's Sufi hermeneutics and Gadamer's. In Hendricks' analysis, Gadamer's hermeneutics cannot be compared with al-Ghazālī's hermeneutics, because the two of these have more differences than similarities, especially when looking at a text. For Hendricks, Gadamer's hermeneutics is

⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 42-46; Scheleirmacher offers two approaches in reconstructing meaning, namely the linguistic approach which leads to direct text analysis, and the psychological approach which leads to the subjective-psychological element of the initiator himself. See K.M. Newton, *Menafsirkan Teks: Pengantar Kritis Mengenai Teori dan Praktik Menafsirkan Sastra*, trans. Soelistia (Semarang: IKIP Semarang Press, 1994), p. 52, quoted from Mahbub, "Hermeneutika Sufistik al-Ghazālī Dalam Mishkāt al-Anwār," p. 52.

⁶² See Richard King, *Agama, Orientalisme, dan Poskolonialisme: Sebuah Kajian tentang Perselingkuhan antara Rasionalitas dan Mistis*, trans. Agung Prihantoro (Yogyakarta: Qalam, 2001), p. 138. quoted from Mahbub, p. 53.

⁶³ H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshal (London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2006), p.39-41.

related to the idea of "fusion of horizons"⁶⁴ which one cannot read the text separately, namely between the text horizon and the reader's horizon or the past and present context. In addition, an interpreter must understand the hermeneutic circle that describes the process of understanding a text, so that it does not just understand what the author means. Interpreters are also required to understand life experiences and the language used by the author so that they are considered important in the understanding process. Gadamer further stated that the text that is independent of the author opens up opportunities for readers to be interpreted openly to find the truth of the message behind the text. Therefore, he gives the reader the freedom to identify a blend of horizons and shared understandings of the text and to engage openly with the text and dialogue in hermeneutical circles.⁶⁵

By looking at the aspects of Gadamer's hermeneutics above, Hendricks comments that the premise of Islamic Sufi hermeneutics is quite different from that of western hermeneutics; the translator had to admit at that initial moment that all knowledge comes from God and that the Qur'an cannot be seen to the same extent from other books. Muslim commentators have the belief that knowledge of God is superior to all knowledge and for him, the Qur'an is the most important knowledge. Western bachelors in their theological hermeneutics, as we see in the case of the Bible for example create their own visions of truth and reality, whereas in Islam there is a structured premise to interpreting the al-Qur'an as completely as necessary for the strictest ethical and moral values. which separates the two hermeneutical worldviews. The Scriptures are not to be understood solely as literary or philosophical texts.

Among western bachelors, Gadamer's interpretation of hermeneutics is perhaps the closest to the esoteric hermeneutics of the Sufis of the subjective approach. Similar to Sufi

⁶⁴ See Rahmatullah, "Menakar Hermeneutika Fusion of Horizon H.G. Gadamer Dalam Pengembangan Tafsir Maqasid Al-Qur'an.," *NUN*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (n.d.): p.154.

⁶⁵ Mogamat Mahgadien Hendricks, *The Qur'anic Sufi Hermeneutics*, p. 112.

hermeneutics, Gadamer uses a subjective approach to interpretation. But for al-Ghazālī, the interpretation of the text of the Qur'an is not just an intellectual exercise. With freedom of reason and subjectivity, each reader develops his own interpretation of the text and his belief in its validity. Gnostic subjectivity has parameters, it arises from the spiritual state of the soul (ma'rifa) connected to the divine presence whose result (fruit) is transcendental knowledge, the knowledge that transcends the intellect.⁶⁶

D. Application of al-Ghazālī's Sufi Hermeneutics to the Story of Ibrahim

One of the examples from a metaphorical interpretation of al-Ghazālī's interesting Sufi hermeneutics highlighted is that of Ibrahim's utterance "This is my Lord" when he met the stars, the moon, and the sun. His esoteric interpretation of the story is generally symbolic and more *allegorical* (figurative). He explains this in his book *Misykāt al-Anwār* on the symbolism of the Divine light manifested in the stars, moon, and sun.

"If from the realm of *malakūt* there are noble and lofty essences of light (*nuraniyyah*) called angels, from which emit various lights to human souls, and therefore they are called *arbab* (gods), then Allah is the Lord of gods (Rabbal-arbab). In addition, the essences of light also have different levels. So this is precisely when the example in the realm of reality is the sun, moon, and stars."⁶⁷

Al-Ghazālī made the sun, moon, and stars as a form of imagery (example) in the realm of reality whose essence or level of light is stratified, where the light is false and no light really shines but the light of Allah that radiates into all corners of the universe.⁶⁸ As for the pure-hearted man who will be able to receive the Divine light and guide him to the path of truth and be able to reveal the realm of *malakūt* (ghaib), and the highest light,

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 113.

⁶⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Misykāt al-Anwār* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Arabiyyah, 1964), p. 67.

⁶⁸ QS. al-Nur (24)

namely Allah SWT.⁶⁹ As the story of Ibrahim's journey in search of his Lord that mentioned in QS. Al-An'am: 76-78.

"When the night was dark, he saw a star (then) he said: "This is my Lord", but when the star set, he said: "I do not like those who go down" (76). Then when he saw the rising moon he said, "This is My God." But when the moon goes down, he said, "Verily if my Lord had not guided me, I would surely have been among those who went astray" (77). Then when he saw the sunrise, he said, "This is my Lord, this is greater." But when the sunset, he said, "O my people! Indeed, I am free from what you associate with (78)."

The al-Qur'an has recorded how the process of contemplation of Prophet Ibrahim as. seeking God in the Surah al-An'am. However, many of them assume that Prophet Ibrahim was an *atheist* (godless), because he vowed to the divinity of the sun, moon, and stars, before then, believed in this way of thinking. Even though we know that one of the characteristics of the prophet is *ma'shum* (awakened from sin, especially shirk).⁷⁰ Because of it, in relation to this contemplation of Prophet Ibrahim, al-Ghazālī has a different view from most views in general that using the perspective of Sufism, he assumes that the verses in Surat al-An'am which narrate Prophet Ibrahim contemplating God are a process of disclosure (*kasyf*).⁷¹ Prophet Ibrahim was given a vision of the inner eye to penetrate the barrier (*hijab*) that can reach God. *"Thus did We show Ibrahim the portents (We are) in the heavens and the earth and (We showed it) that he might be of the sure".* (QS. Al-An'am: 75).

As conveyed by Muhammad Raihan in his work *Tafsir al-Imam al-Ghazālī*, that al-Ghazālī gave an interpretation of the

⁶⁹ Al-Ghazālī also likens a clean heart to a clear mirror and reflects a clear shadow. As mentioned that such is the essence of everything that has been written in *Lauhul Mahfuzh*. As soon as the curtain is lifted and the mirror is in front of *Lauhul Mahfuzh*, then the essence of knowledge is revealed and all forms of obstacles are lifted. This often happens to a person either in a state of sleep or while awake. That is what is commonly experienced by people who are always closer to Allah SWT. See, Al-Ghazālī, *Ringkasan Ihyā 'Ulūmu al-dīn*, Ed. Abdul Rosyad Siddiq (Jakarta: Akbar Media, 2009), p. 234.

⁷⁰ Muhammad Raihani, *Tafsir al-Ghazālī*, p. 258.

⁷¹ See Al-Ghazālī, *Misykāt al-Anwār*, 1964, p. 67.

word "show" with "(*wa ma arāda bihī ar-ru' yah al-dzahirah, fa inna dzālika ghairu makhshūsūn bi Ibrīhīma ḥatta yu'radlu min ma'radl al-imtihan*)". (Not sight, because sight is not only specific to Prophet Ibrahim who was even given a test). As for what is meant by Allah "showing" the prophet Ibrahim is a vision in a metaphorical sense, which is not a vision in the form of eyes, but the vision of the inner eye.⁷² Because if the word is understood as meaning the true meaning, then the vision is not directed to Ibrahim. For that, the verse explains one of the gifts that God gave to the prophet Ibrahim.⁷³

At that time, Prophet Ibrahim did not see with the zahir vision, but with the inner eye so that his faith became stronger. Al-Ghazālī calls it the fruit of thought. He said, "al-fikr miftah alma" rifah wa al-kasyf" (*thinking is the key to makrifah and kasyf*). This confirms that Imam al-Ghazālī's view of Prophet Ibrahim's contemplation rejects the assumption that he believed in forethought or was once an atheist (godless) or polytheist because he professed the divinity of the stars, moon, and sun. For while contemplating God in the view of al-Ghazālī, Prophet Ibrahim in a state of faith, only Prophet Ibrahim experienced what in Sufi terms is called *Kasyf*.⁷⁴ Prophet Ibrahim went to the stage of revelation to the next revelation, until his peak he arrived at the knowledge of the essence of God, *nur ala nur*, the light of all light.⁷⁵

According to al-Ghazālī, Allah SWT has seventy lights that became an obstacle to getting to Allah. A person will never get to an obstacle unless he suspects that he has indeed been able to successfully remove the barrier. Likewise, Allah has seventy thousand veils (barriers) from light and darkness. If Allah removed the veils, the light of His face would have burned all those who were swept by His sight. Therefore, al-Ghazālī emphasized that not everyone can reveal the essence and secrets

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷³ Muhammad, *Tafsir al-Ghazālī*, p. 150.

⁷⁴ The revelation or opening of the veil so that the inner eye of man can know the divine secret.

⁷⁵ The revelation or opening of the veil so that the inner eye of man can know the divine secret.

of God, except by those who *arif billah* scholars.⁷⁶ Therefore, Prophet Ibrahim said: "When the night was dark, he saw a star (then) he said: "This is my Lord" (Surah al-An'am: 76).

The star in the verse referred to, according to Imam al-Ghazālī it is not an object in large numbers that has light. Because from the beginning, Prophet Ibrahim knew that the millions of stars were not God, even the common people knew about it. However, the meaning of the star is in the sense of the path of *tarikah salikh*, which is one of the lights that is an obstacle to reveal the divine light. Prophet Ibrahim thought he had reached the revelation of one light and then came to his senses and ascended to the next revelation.

In the Sufi view, the light that is a barrier to God has various levels (*darajah*). Some of it are small and some are big. When the light using the star metaphor is a light barrier at the smallest level, then the moon and the largest is the sun. Prophet Ibrahim did not stop when contemplating the universe, he experienced a process of revelation from the lowest level to the highest level and then reached the degree of the essence.⁷⁷ "Indeed, I confront my self with the Lord who created the heavens and the earth, with an inclination to the true religion, and I am not of the polytheists" (Surat al-An'am: 79).

Prophet Ibrahim according to al-Ghazālī belongs to the *khawasy* group (special people who study the knowledge of Allah) who were awarded the inner eye vision by Allah so that he could see Allah as the highest light and the only true light.⁷⁸ Allah light can lead him to know the Holy Essence and dispel the light of the sun, moon, and stars from the realm of reality

⁷⁶ *Arif billah* which al-Ghazālī means is someone who has known Allah. He is a figure who has fulfilled the purpose of his creation, has purified himself and is ready to receive the highest knowledge in the form of knowledge of Allah (*ma'rifah*). Al-Ghazālī, *Misykāt al-Anwar* (Cairo: Maktab al-Arabiyyah, 1864), p. 11.

⁷⁷ Muhammad Raihani, *Tafsir al-Ghazālī*, p. 258.

⁷⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Misykat al-Anwar*, p. 10.

E. Conclusion

This study concludes that the epistemology of al-Ghazālī's hermeneutical building departs from the conception of the text, where the al-Qur'an is divided into "jewels and pearls", as it is also divided into the meaning of "outward and inner". One of the main rules or principles outlined in al-Ghazālī's hermeneutics is that it departs from the dichotomy of the text that the meaning of "literal text" (exoteric) should not be separated from the meaning of "inner text" (esoteric). Therefore, al-Ghazālī in the work of *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* tries to balance between the "literal and metaphorical" meanings of the āl-Qur'an. One of the dimensions of al-Ghazālī's hermeneutics is that the essence of the meaning behind the text can only be reached through mystical intuition rather than categorical intuition. For those without mystical intuition, the task of understanding the text of the al-Qur'an becomes problematic. In other words, only individuals seeking the spiritual path (*ma'rifah*) are endowed with mystical (*Sufi*) intuitional abilities. Therefore they can reach or reveal the essence of the inner meaning behind the text and get closer to what God intended. Therefore, one of al-Ghazālī's goals in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* is to present a Sufi interpretation of the al-Qur'an as the single most comprehensive way to reveal the meaning behind the text. [.]

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