problems that their predecessors could not do, modern metaphysics can tackle problems that the great thinkers of the past could not cope with.

That metaphysical concept is effective, which is able to offer original answers to fundamental questions and at the same time create workable models of the investigated reality. Metaphysics cannot be not only a gallery of opinions, but also a collection of antiquities. Its vitality directly depends on how adequate it is to the demands of our time. In other words, the justification of metaphysics is not something that can “exist on its own”, regardless of the specific forms and objectivity of metaphysical discourse. Justification of metaphysics can be given only “from within” the discourse itself, in the course of its development. Thus, in the course of its formation, metaphysics becomes its own justification.

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AL-GHAZALI’S THE NICHE OF LIGHTS AS PHILOSOPHICAL TRACTATUS

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Islam’s faith and practice are based on interpretations of the Quran and hadith. The Quran – from the Arabic word meaning “recitation” – is a book in Arabic that Muslims believe is the literal word of God given to the prophet Muhammad through the intermediary of the archangel Gabriel. Throughout Islamic history, certain people have arisen who have produced such well-respected interpretations of sacred texts that they have become enduring touchstones of piety and practice. Many Muslims have deemed al-Ghazali such a person. During his own lifetime he was known as “the Proof of Islam” (hujjat al-islam) and “the Renower of the Religion” (mujaddid al-din) [2].

The exact date when Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111) wrote The Niche of Lights (Mishkat al-anwar) is not known. However, the nature of the book and the fact that al-Ghazali mentions other dated works have led scholars to suppose that treatise was composed toward the end of his life, after he had written his magnum opus, The Revivification of the Religious Sciences.

The treatises that al-Ghazali composed in the first part of his life criticized and refined the rational methods employed by the jurists, theologians, and philosophers in their search for knowledge of God. They do not explain the inner dimension of Islamic teachings or describe how to cultivate the sincere intentions and virtuous attitudes that should accompany religiously guided behaviour. They neither emphasize the need for a Muslim to become near God in this life nor recognize the
notion that divine knowledge can be actualized directly within the heart – the center of one’s being.

As al-Ghazali argues in *The Niche of Lights*, there is a knowledge of God that goes beyond the rational ability to know Him and is unveiled by God in the heart. Jurisprudence, theology and philosophy are not directly concerned with how to actualize this direct God-given knowledge; their interest lies in knowledge acquired through reason. The practices of Sufism are aimed at cleansing the soul from the dross of ignorance and egoistic tendencies. In the second part of al-Ghazali’s life, after achieving mastery over law, theology, and philosophy, he began following Sufism seriously, writing books that combined the teachings of law and theology, philosophy with ideas explaining the necessity of cleansing the soul. Such texts brought out the inner aspect of Muslim teachings and showed the necessity of cultivating beauty, goodness, and sincerity in religion so as to attain nearness to God in this life. *The Niche of Lights* is among the works written in the last part of al-Ghazali’s life and combines all three aspects of Islamic teachings – law, theology and philosophy, and purification of the human heart from everything other than the remembrance of God.

In *The Niche of Lights*, al-Ghazali expresses a worldview – a way of giving meaning to reality through presenting an interrelated cosmology and psychology – by which a thoughtful Muslim might explain what the universe is and what it means to be human in a manner that is in harmony with the Quran and hadith. The underlying principle that guides the text is *tawhid*, thus placing it in the mainstream of Islamic thought. As a text, it provides an answer to why “God is the light of the heavens and the earth”[1], and the same time it shows that in order to really understand this, one must undertake a journey whose goal is to perceive this as clearly as one perceives the sun.

One of the level of religious practice *tawhid* means that Muslims should declare with their whole reality that God is one. An implicit idea found throughout *The Niche* is that God’s oneness demands from the practitioners that they reflect the One by actualizing unity, wholeness, and harmony in their lives. In *The Niche of Lights* we find perhaps the earliest attempt to present theological and philosophical discussions of *tawhid* combined with a deep concern for realizing God’s unity through the deepening of one’s piety and the refinement of the one’s practice.

The leitmotif of the text is the Quranic notion that God is light. This metaphor provided al-Ghazali – and later Islamic thinkers – with a powerful means of expressing the reality of God and describing what happens to a human when approaching the divinity. For al-Ghazali there is no better relates to creation than the characteristics of light.

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