

Timeless Teachings for Young Readers

Imam al-Ghazali's writing offers children of all ages the spiritual guidance they need at a time when their values are being formed

BY GRAY HENRY

SHAYKH ABDAL HAKIM MURAD (T.J. Winter), Shaykh Zayed Lecturer of Islamic Studies in the Faculty of Divinity at University of Cambridge, and dean and founder of the Cambridge Muslim College, notes, "If the Qur'an tells us that the heart is the essence of man, so that the Prophet (*salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) on his Ascension saw the highest perfection with his heart [Quran 53:11], and if revelation itself descended 'on his heart', then the heart is the unique interface of the eternal and the finite realms..."

The Louisville, Ky. based Fons Vitae, working in collaboration with Shaykh Hamza Yusuf Hanson, has undertaken the monumental task of publishing Imam al-Ghazali's 11th century 40-volume magnum opus, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din)* as an educational package re-crafted for families and schools. Regarded in the Muslim world over the centuries as the greatest compendium of Islamic spirituality and ethical behavior for everyday life, it lays down practical teachings and explains how the outer aspects of Islam can, through their inner spiritually transformative meanings, change every situation into one that strengthens the innate human nobility of character. Prophet Muhammad said, "I was sent only to perfect good character."

Hamza Yusuf explains, "The Ghazali Children's Project is nothing less than a revolution in developing humane, ethical and committed Muslim youth, who are in dire need of guidance in these troubled times. Imam al-Ghazali is the Proof of Islam, and these teachings, presented in a beautiful life-affirming way, will prove to be a major shift in the way Islam is taught to young people. As a community, we owe much to Fons Vitae for bringing them to fruition. Let the transformation begin!"

Ingrid Mattson, the London and

Windsor Community Chair in Islamic Studies at Huron University College at Western University in Canada, and a former ISNA president, says, "The Imam Ghazali Children's series is a gift to our children who deserve a pedagogy of Islam that allows them to develop the innate goodness which God has placed within each human being so they

can become moral, kind and happy adults."

Ghazali Children's Series provides authentic quality guidance for children of all ages at a time when their values are being formed. Imam al-Ghazali's systematic approach for developing virtuous character is provided in an educational package that includes beautifully produced children's books, source texts for parents and teachers, workbooks with activities, and a school curriculum, all supported by an interactive parent-children's website and Pilot School Program. These materials offer a creative, enjoyable, and spiritual supplement or alternative to standard Islamic Studies curricula with a strong focus on the purification of the heart.

Regarding the purification of both the outward and the inward, Abū Hāmid Muhammad ibn Muhammad Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) wrote that one should know with certitude that the purification of the



Heart comes through ridding the soul of its vices and reforming it with virtue, and that a person who stops at outward purification alone is like someone who wants to invite a king to his home, then busies himself with decorating its front door, while leaving the inside full of rubbish and debris.

The project aims to establish, from the start of a child's life, reflexive habits such as humility, patience, love, altruism, gentleness, forbearance, and respect for other faiths while providing children with real and effective tools to address such failings as selfishness, backbiting, arguing, laziness, envy, bragging, hypocrisy, greed, wasting time, and pride.

Children need to be raised as spiritual beings who are self observant and self correcting. The project has seen how 4 and 5 year olds are drawn to spiritual truths.

Teachings need to engage the imagination and the spirit of children and attract

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their enjoyment and love. A child needs to be handed back his or her dignity and religion in a way that he or she can understand what it is *really* for and therefore truly *desire* consciously to keep his or her innate goodness of character intact.

The project envisages that children, for generations to come, will be able to understand that their faith is about the interior process of perfecting the Spiritual Heart and eliminating base character traits, which accumulate when the true nature of the Heart is neglected.

Fons Vitae is experiencing the global Muslim community coming together enthusiastically endorsing and supporting this series. A major grant from the John Templeton Foundation has contributed to the publication. The Ghazali Project has been officially launched in Morocco, Indonesia, Great Britain, Canada, and the U.S. It is becoming part of imam training programs and is now used in prison outreach. Currently, translations are underway in Arabic, Urdu, German, Swedish, and Malay.

THE PLAN

The first two book sets, *The Book of Knowledge* and *the Book of Belief*, are now available with the *Book of Purity* and *The Book of Prayer* nearing completion.

Each set contains a complete translation, in readable English, of Ghazali's original text for parents and teachers accompanied by a beautifully illustrated version adapted as stories for children ages 7–11. It is also appropriate for other ages and for parents. The accompanying workbook includes activities and even comics, which reinforce Ghazali's teachings, as well as a full school curriculum.

This educational package is supported by:

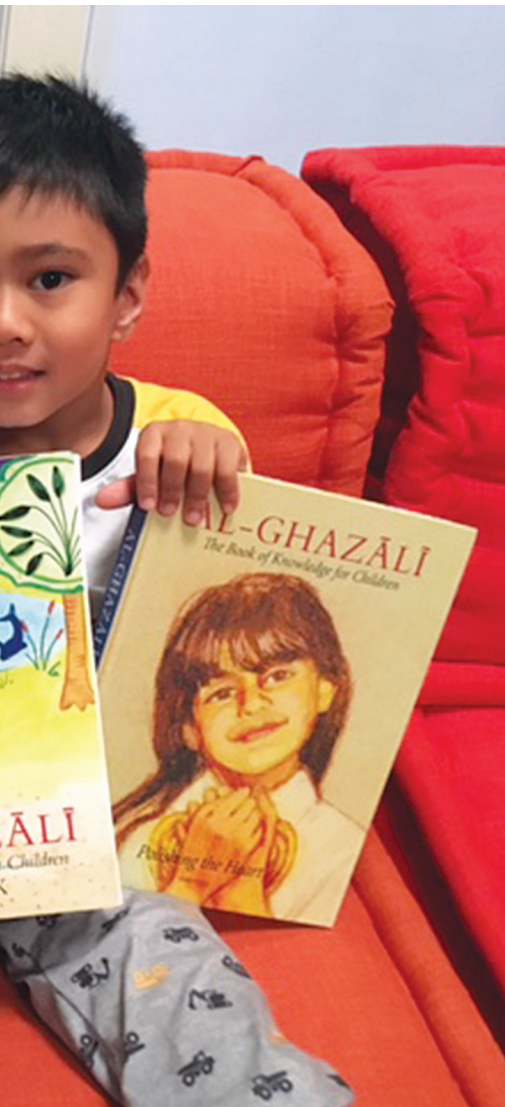
- A team of recognized Islamic scholars and educators;
 - An instructional DVD included in the Children's Book of Knowledge (which also includes showing how the stories may be adapted for small children);
 - A Pilot School Program;
 - An interactive website <http://ghazalichildren.org> (currently active and is expected to be completed in late Fall, 2016);
- The website offers:

The educational package book sets and other relevant children's books, also available in e-book formats;

A meeting place for children with a variety of activities, including story time, contests, videos by children, and other ways to interact using the ideas they are being taught about Ghazali's teachings;

A venue for parents and teachers, providing a variety of resources, and a place for discussion, curriculum updates, and feedback. ■

Gray Henry, Director, FonsVitae, authored this article with the help of Zaytuna Institute in Hayward, Calif.



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