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UZLAH AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN IHYA' 'ULUM AL-DIN

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Abstract

This article examines how al-Ghazali weighs the spiritual benefits of uzlah against responsibilities toward others in Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din. Drawing on conceptual analysis and a close reading of Kitab Adab al-'Uzlah, it considers the benefits and drawbacks of uzlah and the merits of social association. The analysis distinguishes the views al-Ghazali reports, his own judgments, and the author's reconstruction. The value of uzlah depends on the circumstances. It can support worship and protect against moral harm, but it can also impede learning, earning a living, helping others, honoring their rights, and recognizing one's own shortcomings. Social association can likewise become a means of pursuing status. The article identifies five considerations that inform the choice: obligations, epistemic preparedness, inward disposition, the quality of relationships, and the benefits gained or forgone. Obligations set limits on the choice, and the other considerations guide judgments of merit within al-Ghazali's hierarchy of spiritual goods. This reading contributes to the study of religion and philosophy by showing how spiritual formation can involve both setting limits on social contact and remaining open to correction. It preserves contemplation's value beyond its social benefits. Its implications for contemporary debates are conceptual and concern the justification of uzlah. Its psychological effects remain a separate question.
Keywords: *Uzlah, Al-Ghazali, Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din, Sufi Ethics, Social Responsibility*

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana al-Ghazali menimbang manfaat spiritual uzlah dengan tanggung jawab terhadap sesama dalam Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din. Metode yang di gunakan penelitian kepustakaan menganalisis konseptual terhadap Kitab Adab al-'Uzlah, artikel ini menguraikan manfaat dan keterbatasan uzlah serta nilai pergaulan sosial. Analisis membedakan pandangan yang dikutip al-Ghazali, penilaiannya sendiri, dan rekonstruksi penulis atas argumennya. Nilai uzlah bergantung pada keadaan. Uzlah dapat menunjang ibadah dan melindungi seseorang dari pengaruh buruk, tetapi juga dapat menghambat upaya untuk menuntut ilmu, mencari nafkah, membantu sesama, memenuhi hak mereka, dan mengenali kekurangan diri. Pergaulan sosial pun dapat menjadi sarana untuk mengejar kedudukan. Artikel ini mengidentifikasi lima pertimbangan dalam memilih uzlah, yaitu kewajiban, kesiapan pengetahuan, sikap batin, kualitas hubungan, serta manfaat yang diperoleh atau dilepaskan. Kewajiban membatasi pilihan yang dapat dibenarkan, sedangkan pertimbangan lainnya membantu menilai keutamaan setiap pilihan dalam tatanan nilai spiritual al-Ghazali. Pembacaan ini berkontribusi pada kajian agama dan filsafat dengan menunjukkan bahwa pembentukan diri secara spiritual dapat mencakup pembatasan pergaulan sekaligus keterbukaan terhadap koreksi. Dalam kerangka ini, kontemplasi memiliki nilai yang melampaui manfaat sosialnya. Relevansi kajian ini bagi perdebatan kontemporer terletak pada penjelasan konseptual tentang kapan

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uzlah dapat dibenarkan. Dampak psikologisnya merupakan pertanyaan penelitian tersendiri.

Kata Kunci: *Uzlah, Al-Ghazali, Ihya' 'Ulum Al-Din, Etika Sufi, Tanggung Jawab Sosial*

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A. Introduction

The relationship between inward life and communal life is a central concern in Sufi ethics. People need space to examine their intentions, direct their attention, and loosen their dependence on others' judgments. They also live in relationships shaped by rights, needs, and mutual dependence. This raises an ethical question. When is uzlah justified, and when does it mean forgoing goods attainable only through association with others? Al-Ghazali addresses these questions in Kitab Adab al-'Uzlah, a book within Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din.

Al-Ghazali opens the book by acknowledging disagreement over the relative merits of uzlah and mukhalathah, or association with others. He also identifies a tension between the preceding book's praise of friendship and some worshippers' preference for uzlah. A statement praising uzlah therefore needs to be read alongside the conflicting views he presents and evaluates. The task is to identify the reasons he gives for favoring one course of action in particular circumstances (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 221–226).

Recent studies have interpreted uzlah in light of changing social conditions. Imanuddin et al. (2020) connect it with the pursuit of truth in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, while Maulidiyah and Romziana (2024) examine Qur'anic interpretations concerning limits on social media use. Ihsan et al. (2025) discuss Nawawi al-Bantani's thought in relation to the fear of missing out. These studies illustrate the range of contexts in which uzlah has been discussed. Applying the concept to distinct problems requires examining what would justify uzlah in each case.

Differences in source material also shape the questions scholars ask. Hidayat et al. (2023) situate uzlah within the account of the Companions of the Cave and the protection of faith, whereas Yasir et al. (2025) relate it to the quality of friendships. Jaenuri (2023) considers how uzlah is contextualized in Kifayah al-Atqiya. These studies address aspects of the relationship between uzlah and communal life. Protecting one's faith under threat, however, raises different questions from choosing uzlah when others need instruction or assistance. The ethical judgment depends on the relationships at stake and the obligations they entail.

In their study of al-Ghazali's ethics, Purnama and Santalia (2022) identify good company and recognition of personal shortcomings as elements of spiritual purification. Their discussion brings out the role of relationships in spiritual formation. Indonesian philosophical scholarship on al-Ghazali's ethics also includes Abdullah's (2020) comparison with Kant. This article focuses on how one book of the Ihya' weighs the need for spiritual protection against the claims others have on the practitioner.

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Permana (2026) offers the closest comparison by examining the importance of uzlah in the Ihya', with an emphasis on avoiding sin, expecting less from others, and resisting greed. The present article asks how the drawbacks of uzlah and the benefits of association qualify its value. It builds on existing work by explaining how these considerations interact when a practitioner must decide whether uzlah is justified.

Vasalou (2022) explores how al-Ghazali's medical analogy informs his account of moral education and practical reasoning. Mian (2022) examines the roles of knowledge, will, bodily capacity, and grace in ethical agency. Both studies direct attention to the circumstances in which people act. This article applies that concern to choices about uzlah when personal motives and others' needs diverge. It derives its framework from the reasons al-Ghazali gives in the text.

The article asks two questions. First, how does al-Ghazali weigh the benefits and risks of uzlah and association? Second, what limits does he place on uzlah when learning, service, and others' rights are at stake? The article argues that uzlah is a conditional ethical choice shaped by obligations, preparedness, and the benefits of relationships. This reading shows how spiritual formation involves both regulating social contact and remaining accountable to others. Orientation toward God continues to shape al-Ghazali's hierarchy of values, within which some forms of contemplation may take precedence over social engagement.

B. Method

This study uses conceptual analysis and close reading to examine how al-Ghazali weighs spiritual aims and responsibilities toward others in Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din. The primary corpus is limited to Kitab Adab al-'Uzlah. Secondary literature situates the argument in scholarly debates, supplies intellectual context, and helps identify possible interpretations. Conclusions about al-Ghazali's position rest on the primary text. The design is limited to textual inquiry and uses purposively selected secondary literature.

The primary source is the digital reproduction of the second volume of the Ihya' available through Ghazali.org. It includes an introduction by Badawi Thabanah and identifies Maktabah wa Matba'ah Karya Putra, Semarang, as the publisher. The reference is undated because the title page gives no date of reproduction. Page citations follow the printed pagination (pp. 221–243). Al-Zabidi's commentary helps clarify the classification of benefits (al-Zabidi, n.d., Vol. 6, pp. 340–341). The analysis considers the preceding book's discussion of friendship insofar as the opening of Kitab Adab al-'Uzlah makes that connection.

Supporting literature was selected for its relevance to uzlah, al-Ghazali's ethics, religious self-formation, and social relationships. The search for journal articles covered 2020–2026. Books and classical works supplied intellectual context and primary formulations of key concepts. Search terms included uzlah, seclusion, solitude, al-Ghazali, social ethics, and Ihya'. Searches were conducted on journal and academic publisher websites and in catalogs. Sources were selected purposively. Where only

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abstracts or official descriptions were available, the discussion was limited to the stated scope of the studies.

The analysis traced the views presented in the text, identified their supporting reasons, and compared passages that favor or limit uzlah. Each unit of analysis consisted of a paragraph or a set of connected passages expressing one consideration. Initial categories included worship, moral risk, knowledge, service, character formation, and social rights. The discussion of learning on pages 236–237, for example, was first read as a benefit of association and then examined to determine when the knowledge in question was obligatory. Where such learning is obligatory, the passage bears on both obligation and epistemic preparedness. The precedence given to contemplation on pages 238 and 241–242 qualifies claims about the superiority of service.

The interpretation is supported by page references, attention to the structure of the argument, and a distinction among reported opinions, al-Ghazali's judgments, and the author's reconstruction. The author derives the five analytical considerations by reading related passages together. Arabic terms are explained in context, and brief translations are offered as working renderings. The analysis treats reports in the Ihya' as elements of its argument. It does not independently authenticate individual hadith. The study involves neither human participants nor personal data and therefore requires no participant consent.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Uzlah as a Matter of Ethical Judgment

In the first chapter of Kitab Adab al-'Uzlah, al-Ghazali gathers views on uzlah and association and sets out the reasons behind them. In the second, he weighs their benefits and risks. An ascetic's account may describe a valid personal experience, but its relevance to others depends on their knowledge, obligations, and inward disposition. The structure of the book calls for assessing these factors before deciding whether a particular practice is justified (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 221–226).

The opening and many of the accounts that follow present uzlah favorably. For al-Ghazali, the relationship with God is the primary orientation of life. The question is which practices serve that end in a given situation, especially when apparently pious conduct can undermine its own purpose. He considers responsibilities toward others within this religious framework.

The placement of uzlah in rub' al-'adat connects it to the ethics of communal life. The regulation of inward life thus remains a concern within social relationships. Garden (2014) situates the Ihya' within a project of religious renewal, while Griffel (2009) examines the connections among philosophy, theology, and Sufism in al-Ghazali's thought. In the text itself, al-Ghazali grounds the value of association in the fact that several religious and worldly aims require help from others (al-Ghazali, n.d., p. 236).

Physical separation alone does not capture the distinction between uzlah and association. A person who is alone may still seek public recognition, while someone

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working with others may remain inwardly oriented toward God. Al-Ghazali recognizes, however, that people differ in their ability to sustain inward attention while interacting with others. Neither a person's physical separation nor their presence in company establishes their inward disposition (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 226–228).

Treiger's (2012) study of mystical cognition and Gianotti's (2001) work on the soul and eschatology provide a broader intellectual context for al-Ghazali's account of inward experience. In Kitab Adab al-'Uzlah, the merit of worship depends on sustained attention and what practitioners actually do. The comfort of being alone is insufficient to establish the merit of uzlah, which depends on the religious aims and preparedness of the practitioner. This article uses social responsibility as an analytical category for obligations toward others and the benefits made possible by social relationships. These include learning, teaching, meeting needs, maintaining relationships, and avoiding harm. The category connects these elements of al-Ghazali's argument while keeping their meaning grounded in the vocabulary and religious aims of his text.

2. The Benefits of Uzlah and the Limits of Self-Protection

The first benefit of uzlah is the time it affords for worship, reflection, and closeness to God. It allows practitioners to give sustained attention to these pursuits. At the start of the second chapter, al-Ghazali distinguishes religious and worldly benefits, some of which involve attaining goods and others avoiding harm. On this account, uzlah can create conditions for sustained attention, regardless of whether the practitioner feels any aversion toward others (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 226–228; al-Zabidi, n.d., Vol. 6, pp. 340–341). Uzlah can protect against ostentation, backbiting, the influence of companions' bad habits, and involvement in harmful settings. Repeated exposure can make people less sensitive to conduct they once found objectionable, even when they make no conscious effort to imitate it. Where a relationship poses such a risk, the case for limiting contact depends on the character of that relationship and the harm it may cause (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 228–232).

In his discussion of fitnah, al-Ghazali recounts instances in which people withdrew from disputes because the appropriate course of action was unclear. Staying out of a dispute may help avoid worsening it. These accounts explain the risks of intervening without knowing how to help. The reasons for abstaining depend in part on whether a person has the capacity to act constructively (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 232–233). Uzlah may also ease the burden of reciprocal expectations. People may feel pressure to please others, compare possessions, or accept more invitations than they can manage. Uzlah can reduce exposure to pressures that encourage greed or strain relationships. Having fewer acquaintances may also reduce the number of claims others make on a person. The ethical distinction is between limiting new voluntary relationships and setting aside obligations to people who already have legitimate claims (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 233–235).

Self-protection helps explain the appeal of uzlah, but its justification also depends on what is lost when contact with others diminishes. Permana's (2026) discussion of sin

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and greed helps explain the benefits of avoidance. This article also examines its moral costs. When uzlah leads someone to abandon obligatory learning or neglect people in their care, the benefits of inward protection are insufficient to justify it.

Uzlah does not in itself transform character. Fewer occasions for anger give little indication of whether someone has learned to control it. Likewise, someone without rivals may have had little occasion to confront envy. Temporary avoidance may be necessary, but the calm it brings provides limited evidence of how practitioners will respond when difficult situations recur. Al-Ghazali warns that quiet may give practitioners a mistaken impression that their faults have disappeared (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 240–242). The medical analogy discussed by Vasalou (2022) helps explain why moral education requires attention to the condition a practice is meant to address. Reducing contact may help someone susceptible to bad influences, but it may offer little benefit to someone who avoids criticism out of pride. The analogy concerns the ethical suitability of uzlah for a particular person. Its use here makes no claim about clinical efficacy.

Uzlah may protect someone from harmful pressure while removing opportunities to receive correction. It may reduce dependence on recognition, or it may encourage the public perception that the practitioner is too pious to associate with others. Its ethical value therefore depends on the practitioner's knowledge, needs, and motives, as well as on how the choice affects others and their rights (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 240–242).

3. Association as a Setting for Learning and Service

In discussing the drawbacks of uzlah, al-Ghazali begins with religious and worldly aims that require help from others. He identifies seven groups of benefits available through association: learning and teaching, giving and receiving assistance, character formation, companionship, opportunities to earn spiritual reward and help others earn it, humility, and experience. These benefits show how social relationships can support religious formation (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 236–242).

Learning comes first because worship requires knowledge. People who are unfamiliar with their obligations still need instruction, however diligent their worship. Al-Ghazali compares choosing uzlah under these conditions to a patient leaving a physician before learning how to treat an illness. The example makes preparedness central to the choice of uzlah. A practitioner who is unaware of gaps in their knowledge may be especially confident that their spiritual condition is sound (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 236–237).

Teaching receives a more qualified assessment. Instructing sincere learners has considerable value, but teaching may also be a means of gaining status, attracting followers, or cultivating ties to rulers. Al-Ghazali criticizes ambition pursued in the name of education. The reasons for limiting instruction must therefore be weighed against the needs of sincere learners and the teacher's capacity to meet them (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 236–237). Learners' genuine needs and teachers' ambitions can coexist. A teacher considering uzlah must ask whether reducing instruction would preserve a sound religious orientation or deprive learners of necessary guidance. Expanding instruction also calls for

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judgment, since its value depends on the learners' dispositions and the purposes it serves (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 236–237).

The second benefit of association concerns livelihood and assistance. Those who need to earn a living face different circumstances from those who already have sufficient resources. Transactions require contact with others and appropriate limits on that contact. Al-Ghazali also discusses using labor and wealth to meet others' needs. Doing so requires time, effort, and resources, even when the intention to help is already present (al-Ghazali, n.d., p. 238). Al-Daghistani (2023) examines connections among adab, the acquisition of wealth, and Islamic economic thought, including al-Ghazali's. This context helps explain why earning a living belongs within a discussion of religious formation. In Kitab Adab al-'Uzlah, the need to earn a living provides a reason to maintain social contact. Those who have sufficient resources and those who must work have different choices about how to pursue spiritual aims while providing for themselves and their dependents.

Al-Ghazali considers service potentially more meritorious than uzlah devoted to certain supplementary acts of worship. He nevertheless gives inward activity and knowledge of God a higher place for those capable of pursuing them. The distinction is between fulfilling obligations and comparing the relative merits of activities with different normative standing (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 238–240).

Association also allows people to fulfill others' rights and gives others opportunities to do the same. Visiting the sick, attending funerals, and welcoming visitors all have this reciprocal dimension. These practices qualify an ideal of spiritual independence. Al-Ghazali weighs their benefits against the risks of association, leaving room for different degrees of obligation and for exceptions justified by the circumstances (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 239–240).

4. Testing Character and the Ambivalence of Intention

Association can shape character by placing people in circumstances they cannot fully control. Others may disagree, withhold recognition, or need help at inconvenient times. Such encounters give people opportunities to practice patience and moderate their demands. Al-Ghazali identifies benefits of this kind for practitioners whose character is still developing. In some relationships, the difficulty of an encounter can itself become an occasion for moral education (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 238–239). The educational value of association depends on whether a relationship gives practitioners room to recognize and address their faults. Al-Ghazali also identifies reasons to leave harmful company. A judgment about whether to remain in a difficult relationship must therefore consider both the possibilities for growth and the risks of continued contact (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 228–232, 238–239).

Al-Ghazali's discussion of pride shows how uzlah can preserve a reputation for piety. A person may remain at home to avoid being treated as an equal or having personal shortcomings exposed. The practitioner can remain preoccupied with others' opinions even after withdrawing from their company. Reduced contact and greater physical

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separation therefore give little indication of whether a person has become less dependent on public approval (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 240–241).

Al-Ghazali observes that undesirable traits may go unnoticed when the circumstances that provoke them are absent. Encounters with others can expose tendencies that are difficult to detect through self-examination alone. Recognizing anger or pride is an opportunity for correction, which still requires effort. Association can reveal difficulties that uzlah may leave unexamined (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 241–242). Association can both reveal harmful tendencies and provide occasions to practice better responses. Recognizing anger is one step toward controlling it, and the absence of provocation tells little about whether it has been overcome. Uzlah and association can therefore serve different purposes at different stages of moral education.

Mian (2022) argues that, for al-Ghazali, ethical agency depends on knowledge, the capacity to act, and grace as well as will. Applied to uzlah, this account cautions against assuming that practitioners can always judge the purity of their intentions. Their stated intentions need to be considered alongside how they fulfill their obligations and respond to correction. Uncertainty about motives gives practitioners reason to continue examining their conduct.

Eggen (2021) examines the social and spiritual dimensions of trust and trustworthiness in Islamic ethical discourse. This comparison helps explain why commitments retain their force when social contact diminishes. In the present analysis, the comparison clarifies the question of rights. A practitioner's decision to intensify worship still needs to account for promises and responsibilities, as well as the consequences of uzlah for the people to whom they are owed.

5. Reconstructing the Ethical Limits of Uzlah and Association

Al-Ghazali concludes that an unconditional judgment about the superiority of uzlah is mistaken. The phrase "al-hukm 'alayha mutlaqan bi-al-tafdil nafyan wa-ithbatan khata'" rejects any categorical affirmation or denial of its superiority. Al-Ghazali asks readers to consider the person choosing uzlah, the circumstances of those with whom they associate, the reasons for interaction, and the benefits that would be lost (al-Ghazali, n.d., p. 242). His conclusion calls for comparing the circumstances of each case and provides the basis for the following reconstruction.

The first consideration is obligation. The discussion of required knowledge and livelihood on pages 236–238 provides its basis. Obligation comes first in this reconstruction because an activity's merit cannot justify neglecting a binding duty. Teaching, offering assistance, and visiting others can carry different normative weight. Some needs place duties on particular people, some can be met by others, and some actions are recommended. The ordering used here reconstructs distinctions within al-Ghazali's argument (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 236–240).

The second consideration is epistemic preparedness. It follows from the warning against choosing uzlah before learning one's religious obligations and from the analogy

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of a patient leaving a physician too soon (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 236–237). Preparedness requires enough knowledge to understand and meet the obligations one encounters. Those who lack that knowledge need relationships through which they can learn. The two considerations overlap. Obligation identifies what one must do, and preparedness concerns whether one knows enough to judge and act.

The third consideration is inward disposition and motive. It follows from al-Ghazali's criticisms of teaching for status and choosing uzlah to preserve a reputation for piety (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 237, 240–241). People's stated reasons may differ from what motivates them. The assessment must therefore consider what practitioners actually do, which responsibilities they set aside, and how they respond to correction. These signs provide grounds for assessing claims of piety, even when a person's motives cannot be known with certainty.

The fourth consideration is the quality of relationships. It follows from al-Ghazali's insistence that the circumstances of one's associates affect the judgment (al-Ghazali, n.d., p. 242). Some relationships enable learning, while others intensify greed. The needs of sincere learners also differ from the demands of followers seeking advantage. Practitioners may therefore have reason to limit particular relationships. The relevant question is what those relationships involve and what limiting contact would achieve or cost.

The fifth consideration concerns the benefits gained or forgone. Al-Ghazali weighs these benefits within a hierarchy of spiritual purposes (al-Ghazali, n.d., pp. 238–242). Once obligations are accounted for, practitioners compare activities they can actually undertake. Service may be less meritorious than contemplation in some circumstances, and time spent alone may have little value if it serves no spiritual purpose. Knowledge helps identify the available goods, motives shape how they are pursued, and relationships affect which opportunities exist. The comparison depends on the kind of good at stake as well as on the circumstances.

The reconstruction supports an understanding of socially engaged Sufism in which spiritual life entails responsibilities within a community. The case for making contemplation's legitimacy depend on its contribution to social transformation is weaker. Al-Ghazali gives contemplation value beyond its immediate social benefits and places knowledge of God above some supplementary activities. This priority shapes how the text weighs spiritual and social goods.

6. Contemporary Relevance and Interpretive Limitations

Research in religious studies needs to distinguish the general experience of choosing to be alone, the experience of unwanted isolation, and the religious practice of uzlah. Barbour (2004) examines the ethical and spiritual value of solitude in autobiography, showing the range of meanings people attach to being alone. For al-Ghazali, the grounds for choosing uzlah depend on the practitioner's spiritual aims and

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condition. Physical separation may be part of the practice, and its religious significance depends on the purposes it serves.

Weinstein et al. (2023) use daily diaries to examine time spent alone and time spent with others. They report no uniform optimum, and find that associations with well-being vary by the outcome measured and whether time alone was chosen. Their study offers a methodological comparison because it attends to the circumstances in which people spend time alone. Its psychological measures address different questions from those of sincerity, divine reward, and knowledge of God that inform the assessment of uzlah.

Maulidiyah and Romziana (2024) and Ihsan et al. (2025) bring uzlah into discussions of digital connectivity. The present analysis suggests that restrictions on access can be assessed by considering why they are imposed, what people do with the time they regain, and whom they still need to contact. Limiting opportunities to seek recognition raises different questions from removing channels used by family members or learners. This example illustrates how the considerations might be applied. Evidence about user behavior would be needed to evaluate particular interventions.

For Indonesian religious studies, this reading offers a way to examine how spiritual commitments inform decisions about communal life. Piety can give practitioners reasons for service or for choosing uzlah. Textual analysis can clarify these reasons, and research with communities can examine how people act on them. This distinction allows doctrinal studies, philosophy of religion, and the study of religious practice to address related questions using evidence suited to each.

Khikamuddin et al. (2024) provide an example in their fieldwork on al-Ghazali's eco-Sufism at Pesantren Al-Anwar 3 in Central Java. They connect several spiritual concepts, including uzlah, with environmental management. Their study illustrates how teachings can inform communal action. Determining whether uzlah independently affects environmental concern would require separate evidence. The ethical analysis can guide questions about responsibility, including how work is divided, which commitments are kept, and whose needs are met. Çoban (2024) offers a biographical comparison. Al-Ghazali's letters indicate that he continued to write, teach, and communicate with rulers during his period of uzlah. His experience qualifies the view that uzlah entails complete isolation. The reconstruction of its ethical limits rests on Kitab Adab al-'Uzlah, while the letters help assess how plausible complete isolation is as an account of the practice.

The capacity to act also matters in decisions about public intervention. Cook (2000) traces the extensive history of Islamic debate on commanding right and forbidding wrong. In the present reconstruction, a duty to respond to others' needs depends on the nature of the obligation, the practitioner's ability to help, and the risks of intervening. Spiritual aims cannot excuse neglect of a binding duty, and the merits of public activity depend on the circumstances.

Vasalou (2021) examines goodness, beauty, and love in al-Ghazali's ethics. Her account provides a broader context for understanding self-formation as more than

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avoiding wrongdoing or doing as much service as possible. In Kitab Adab al-'Uzlah, inward activity has value as part of a life oriented toward God, while social relationships provide occasions to honor rights and test character. Assessing a claim to piety requires considering both the person's reasons and their conduct.

The scope of this study is limited to one book of the Ihya'. It uses a digital reproduction of a printed edition and does not establish a critical edition. Secondary works consulted through abstracts or official descriptions provide context and help map the literature. The analysis leaves the authentication of individual reports and the study of communal practices or psychological effects to separate inquiries. Future research could ask whether and how the considerations reconstructed here appear in practitioners' reasoning, including where their experiences diverge from the textual account.

D. Conclusion

In Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, the relative merits of uzlah and association depend on the circumstances. Al-Ghazali recognizes that uzlah can support concentrated worship and protect against moral harm. He also considers what practitioners lose when it impedes learning, service, the fulfillment of rights, and the testing of character. Association makes goods available that practitioners may forgo through uzlah, but it can also become a means of pursuing status. The ethical judgment depends on the purposes, conditions, and relationships involved.

This article reconstructs five considerations that connect these judgments: obligations, epistemic preparedness, inward disposition, the quality of relationships, and the benefits gained or forgone. The considerations are derived from related passages in the text. Obligations set limits on what practitioners may choose, while judgments about relative merit retain the priority al-Ghazali gives to knowledge of God. Contemplation remains valuable in its own right, and practitioners remain accountable to those who have legitimate claims on them.

Reading the benefits of association alongside al-Ghazali's scrutiny of the motives for uzlah clarifies when and for whom the practice is justified. This textual account can inform contemporary questions about spiritual formation and social engagement. Evaluating communal practices, psychological effects, or digital applications requires evidence appropriate to those questions.

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