

An Internal Messenger: The Ethical Conscience

(Verse 7)

وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَزَيَّنَهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَكَرَّهَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْكُفْرَ وَالْفُسُوقَ وَالْعِصْيَانَ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الرَّاشِدُونَ..

“However Allah has made true belief something that is loved by you and He has made it alluring to your hearts and He has made disbelief (Kufr), evil deeds and disobedience hateful to you. Such people (those who have true faith and keep away from these evil traits) are those who are rightly guided.”

Those traits that a person recognizes as good and bad within his own self which he is able to discern without being taught and are also a part of the issues of human nature, are referred to as the *ethical conscious* or the *ethics of human nature*.

However, there are traits engrained deep within the nature of mankind whose goodness and badness (of the particular trait) cannot be discerned simply through human nature. Rather, these qualities stem from the Divine, Heavenly teachings or from the teachers of the religion (the Prophets and Messengers) and are known as *ethical traits which are not innate* – and thus, it is these which must be learnt.

Amongst all nations and peoples around the world – oppression, tyranny and marriage with ones’ immediate family members are all despicable and appalling acts – although oppression is a trait that mankind intrinsically knows is bad – however the despicability of marrying ones’ family members is recognized (only) through the teachings of the Divine religions.

In order to differentiate between the teachings which form a part of our nature and those which do not, there are methods and formulas which when put into practice, enable us to discern these two types of knowledge:

1. Those traits which are innate are not limited to a particular class or race of people and it is not necessary for a person to refer to someone else to learn these things.

2. Seeing as to how the innate ability is ones' own guide and leader, thus geographical, economic, political and instructional factors do not play any role in attracting a person's attention to these things.
3. Any sort of propaganda or teachings that try to go against the innate traits – even if they try to destroy the growth and development of them – can never destroy the roots of those traits which are instilled deep within a person. [1](#)

The Qur'an clearly announces that: Within the heart of a person, Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) has placed the traits of inclination (to Him), love and adoration for the true faith, and love for Allah – the Creator of all the Worlds – and has made mankind love Him. He has also made disbelief and disobedience as hated and detested traits (within a person) when He (Glorified and Exalted is He) said:

وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَزَيَّنَهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَكَرَّهَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْكُفْرَ وَالْفُسُوقَ وَالْعِصْيَانَ

“However Allah has made true belief something that is loved by you and He has made it alluring to your hearts and He (Allah) has made disbelief (Kufr), evil deeds and disobedience hateful to you.”

Therefore, not only has Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) blessed us with a cognizance of His self and moulded us with the belief of having an origin, rather He has also decorated our hearts with the respectable, up-right traits that can be discerned without a teacher or instructor and these have been engrained deep within all of us. This is the wider meaning that we are able to comprehend from the sentence:

...حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ...

“...has made true belief something that is loved by you ...”

In the second part of this verse, in addition to making us detest disbelief (Kufr), it has also been mentioned that the hatred for sins and transgressions are traits which have been built-in to all of us as well. Therefore, the meaning of making true faith loved and cherished by us is not simply related to the cognizance (Ma`rifah) and recognition of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He). Rather in addition to this, our intrinsic nature has also been taught a series of ethical traits and unknowingly, our soul is attracted and pulled towards these qualities.

At this point, we refer to some of the traits that are a part of man's innate disposition, which can be seen from the clear verses of the Qur'an: Cognizance of Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) and recognition of the starting point of creation and end (of life); the recognition of the world of creation and realizing that there is a Fashioner for all of these amazing things. These are all things so engrained in our natural disposition that mankind has been moulded and fashioned to search and find the answers to

these.

Going past the need to search out Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He), we come to issues such as the love and attraction that people feel towards the noble ethical traits which have also been infused into our creation. In addition, the desire towards good things and the abhorrence of bad things are also rooted in our innate disposition.

We cannot find a single nation throughout the world which would consider it good to keep something (for ones' self) that one has retained in trust for another person or who would think that to act treacherously in regards to a responsibility that one was given is a noble trait.

Similarly, we cannot find people who would consider it despicable to keep ones' promises and feel that it is good to break ones' pledge or guarantee. If a father makes a promise to his child to carry out a certain act and he does not live up to it, then he will definitely be reproached by his child. It is through the innate natural disposition that the child possesses that he can see nothing else except that one must fulfil and live up to his promises.

It has been written on the innate natural heart by the Pen of Creation (of Allah) on every single person that one must always speak the truth and other than speaking the truth, a young child knows nothing else. Thus, it is a part of a person's make-up that he is given a pure heart and the characteristic of modesty.

This is true even for those women who are drowned in sin that at the first instance of them committing a lewd act, they immediately try to bring back a sense of chastity and purity back into their lives.

In addition, when people want to distribute and allocate wealth which has been plundered from other people, they strive to be just and to show equality in their action of distribution and even at this time, they know and realize that to be unjust in the distribution of this wealth is not right (even though they themselves have stolen the wealth from others).

All of these commonly known innate principles are known and taught to all of humanity through their primary school known as creation. The mechanism of creation has placed all of these traits of perfection within the deep valleys of the person. The Noble Qur'an clearly states this truth in the most complete way in various chapters, such as where it is mentioned:

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّيْنَاهَا فَأَلْهَمْنَاهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا

“(I swear) by the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it; and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right (deeds).”²

وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ

“And We have shown him (the human being) the two paths (of right and wrong action).”³

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا

“Verily We created man from a drop of mingled sperm in order to test him. Thus, We have given him hearing and sight.”⁴

Not only has Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) placed the love for the good traits deep within the hearts of mankind and has made him feel averse to bad, wicked deeds, rather He has also given mankind a soul that punishes its’ self when the person goes beyond the limits (set for ones’ self). It is this soul that reprimands and scolds the person in the worst possible way, just as Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) has said:

لَا أُقْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ

“I swear by the Resurrection Day and I swear by the self-reproaching spirit.”⁵

4. While explaining the continuous struggles of Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) – the idol destroyer – there is a short verse of the Qur’an in which an allusion is made to the (innate) intelligence of humanity. In this story, the event in which Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was brought in front of the court in order to put him on trial (for destroying the idols) has been mentioned.

In summary, the event goes as follows: Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) had proceeded to destroy the idols in the temple one after the other, and then using these broken idols, made a hill in the middle of the temple. When he was finished, he took the hammer (used to break the idols) and placed it beside the largest idol of the temple (which he did not break) and then left.

Upon the people’s return (from out of the city), and seeing what had happened, it was clear to the elders of the community, based on his previous habits, that the one who had destroyed their idols was none other than Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him). Thus, they summoned Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) to the court and while in the presence of others, made him bear testimony to this act. When they asked him to explain what had happened in their idol worshipping temple, he said to them, “Ask this large idol what happened.”

At this time, those who had gathered to hear what had occurred were placed in a baffling dead end since if they were to say that the large idol did not have the ability to perceive things or have any intelligence, then they would have taken the side of Ibrahim (who believed that) it is not possible to worship something that cannot understand or perceive things. If they were to say that the idol has intelligence and can speak, then Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) could reply, “Then why are you asking me what happened – ask the idol!?”

At this point in time, the obscured instincts of these people was aroused and they looked at one another and said to Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) that, “You are the oppressor and transgressor.” The Noble Qur’an presents this event concerning Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) and his attempts to destroy the wrong thoughts of his people in the following manner:

فَرَجَعُوا إِلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ فَقَالُوا إِنَّكُمْ أَنْتُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ ثُمَّ نَكِسُوا عَلَىٰ رُؤُوسِهِمْ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمَا هُوَلاءِ يَنْطِقُونَ

“So then they turned (in thought) back to themselves and said, ‘Surely you are the ones who are doing wrong deeds.’ They were then confounded with shame (and said), ‘You know full well that these (idols) do not speak!’”⁶

In addition there is also mention of one’s ethical consciousness in the Islamic ahadith. For example, Amir al-Mu’minin `Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) has said:

إِنَّهُ مَنْ لَمْ يُعِنَ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ حَتَّىٰ يَكُونَ لَهُ مِنْهَا وَاعِظٌ وَزَاجِرٌ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ مِنْ غَيْرِهَا زَاجِرٌ وَلَا وَاعِظٌ

“The person who does not have the ability within his own soul to advise and warn himself (from keeping away from bad things) will never receive benefit from another person who tries to advise and council him (on these issues) and others who try to council him will have no effect whatsoever.”⁷

This sort of natural and universal perception cannot bring about forbidden acts within the society, nor can it lead to a person placing his own wishes and desires above that of the religion.

Freud and the Ethical Consciousness

Freud, the well-known psychologist, denied the existence of all sorts of inherent perceptions and collectively considered all of these as stemming from the societal forbidden acts and the effects from the societal inclinations and dispositions, and thus rejected and discarded all of them.

He was of the belief that just as the reigns of a horse help to control the unruliness and naturally make the horse submissive and tame, so too during the course of time, the rules and prohibited moral traits of a society reached to the stage of being the reigns for the control of humanity such that in relation to various issues, one is controlled and tamed and thus, deep down in one’s soul, in the light of these rules, the issue of the ethical conscious would take form.

“The ethical conscious is nothing more than the reigns that control society. The ethical conscious does not represent an inherent act or something that is deeply rooted in the soul of mankind. Rather, it is the simple outward approach of the acts that are forbidden within a society.”⁸

However, the view of Freud in relation to some of the good and bad ethical traits that mankind has

learned from the leaders and elders who have lived in this world was correct.

Without doubt, the marrying of one's close family members is something that all religious beliefs have classified as being repulsive. However as for those good and bad ethical qualities that are universally agreed upon by all people over the entire Earth which even those people who are far removed from cultured nations and the teachings of the Prophets and those who live in the furthest points of the world and accept the goodness and badness of such acts – can never be thought of as ethical traits that one learns and acquires and is not born with!

It is here that the truth of the verse under discussion becomes absolutely clear when the human being acknowledges that without doubt, Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) has made our souls have true faith and purity (within them) and has created our intellects with an aversion to bad and immoral acts:

...حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَزَيَّنَهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَكَرَّهَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْكُفْرَ وَالْفُسُوقَ وَالْعِصْيَانَ...

“...has endeared the faith to you and He has made it attractive to your hearts and He has made disbelief (Kufr), evil deeds and disobedience hateful to you...”

- [1.](#) For a deeper explanation in reference to how we can discern the innate traits, please refer to the book The Time of Returning back to True Faith, written by Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani.
- [2.](#) Surah al-Shams (91), Verse 7–8.
- [3.](#) Surah al-Balad (90), Verse 10.
- [4.](#) Surah al-Insan (76), Verse 2.
- [5.](#) Surah al-Qiyamat (75), Verses 1 & 2.
- [6.](#) Surah al-Anbiya' (21), Verse 64 & 65.
- [7.](#) Nahjul Balagha, Khutbah 78 (The word in this hadith, *يعن* is based on the passive voice verb in the meaning of a person who is not assisted from Allah (Glorified and Exalted is He) such that he would be able to remove the negative traits from within his own soul.)
- [8.](#) From the book, What do I know : The Sicknesses of the Soul, Page 64.

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