

## Part 3: The Quranic View of the Heart

Perhaps there is no need to explain that what is termed in literature and gnosis (*irfan*) as "the heart" is not the organ which lies in the left side of the body and which, like a pump, sends blood flowing through the various arteries and veins:

***"Certainly in this is a sure reminder for whoever has a heart." (50:37)***

It is clear that what is meant by heart is a sublime and distinguished reality which is totally different from the organ of the body having the same name. Again, in the Quran, we are told:

***"There is an illness in their hearts, so God increases them in illness." (2:9)***

The cure for this illness is not to be had from a heart specialist. If a doctor could cure these kinds of illnesses, he would undoubtedly have to be a soul specialist.

### Definition of Heart

So what is the definition of this heart? In reality, the answer to this question must be looked for in the depths of the human essence. While the human being is a single existence, he has hundreds and thousands of secondary existences. The human "I" consists of countless thoughts, longings, fears, hopes, loves, and so on. These are all like rivers and streams which join together in one special place. This special place is a deep, profound sea, the depths of which no aware human has claimed to be informed of.

Philosophers, gnostics (*urafa*) and psychologists have each turned their attention towards the depths of this sea, and each succeeded in discovering a fraction of its secrets. Yet perhaps it is the gnostics who have been the most successful in this field. That which the Quran calls the heart consists of the reality of this ocean, to which are joined all the streams and waterways that we call the human soul, amongst which is reason (*'aql*) itself.

Whenever the Quran speaks about revelation (*wahye*), it never mentions reason. On the contrary, it is

always concerned with the Prophet's heart. The meaning of this is that the Prophet did not obtain the Quran through the power of reason and logical deductions, for it was the Prophet's heart that had reached a stage beyond our comprehension, and it was at this level that he found the ability of perceiving the sublime realities of the Quran. Verses, signs, 'ayat of Surah *Najm* and Surah *Takwir* explain this to some extent. [1](#)

The Quran, where it speaks of revelation and of the heart, explains things on a level above reason, yet still it does not contradict it. The Quran in these instances explains a view that is above reason, to the comprehension of which reason has no path.

## **The Characteristics of the Heart**

The "heart", in the Quranic view, is also a means of knowledge and understanding. The addressee of a part of the Quran's message is the heart. A part that only the ears of the heart can hear, and which no other ear can detect. Thus the Quran lays heavy emphasis on safeguarding and perfecting this means, this important tool. Repeatedly in the Quran we come across issues like the purification of the self (*tazkiyat-an-nafs*) and the enlightening and cleansing of the heart!

***"Definitely has succeeded He who purifies it." (91:9)***

***"No, on their hearts is a kind of rust for what they were doing." (83: 14)***

And, about enlightening the heart, we are told:

***"If you are cautious of God, He will place for you (the light of) discernment." (8:29).***

Or, in another verse:

***"And those who strive in Our path, We will place Our path before them." (29:29)***

Correspondingly, that the human's condemnable deeds and actions pollute his soul and take away his pure attractions and desires has also been repeatedly mentioned in the Quran. The faithful are cited as supplicating:

***"Our Lord, do not deviate our hearts after having guided us." (3:7)***

And, when describing those who do bad:

***"No, what they were doing has rusted their hearts." (83:44)***

Or,

***"Because they deviated, God caused their hearts to deviate." (61:5)***

The Quran similarly speaks about hearts being locked and sealed and becoming cruel:

***"God has put a seal on their hearts and their hearing and a covering on their sight." (2:7)***

***"And We put a screen over their hearts so they cannot understand it." (6:25)***

***"Thus does God seal the hearts of the disbelievers." (7: 101)***

***"So their hearts hardened, and many of them became wicked." (57: 16)***

All of this shows that the Quran maintains a high spiritual current for the human being and considers it necessary for each human individual to keep his heart safe and healthy. In addition, due to the fact that in a corrupt social current the efforts of an individual to stay clean and pure will mostly be futile and come to nothing, the Quran stresses that the human being use all his efforts in order to purify and sanctify his social environment. The Quran clearly states that the loves, faiths, insights and sublime attractions, together with the effects of the Quran and the advices which are accepted with it, all depend on the human being and human society remaining free from the filth of slavery to desires, of acting like animals, of promiscuousness, and so on.

The history of mankind shows that whenever a ruling power intends to place a society under its authority and exploit it, it strives to corrupt that society. To do this, it increases the facilities and means of promiscuousness for the members of the society, encouraging that society to promiscuousness. A warningful sample of this filthy system is the disaster that overtook the Muslims of Muslim Spain – which is counted as having been one of the sources of the Renaissance and the most advanced civilization of Europe.

The Europeans, in order to remove Spain from the authority of the Muslims, began their work by corrupting the spirit and ethics of the young Muslims. As far as they possibly could, they flooded the Muslims with the means of amusement, pleasure and permissiveness, which went to the extent that even the army commanders and government officials were deceived and polluted. In this fashion, they were able to do away with the strength, will, courage, faith and spiritual sanctity of their Muslim foes and turn them into weak, despairing creatures addicted to lust and alcohol.

It is crystal clear that to triumph and prevail over such people is no task at all. The Europeans, in revenge for the three, four hundred year Muslim government, took such a revenge that history is ashamed to record it. The very Christians who, in accordance with the teachings of Christ (a.s.), were duty bound to turn the other cheek, created such a sea from the blood of dead Muslims that they outdid even Ghengis Khan and perhaps the crusaders. However, the defeat of the Muslims was the result of the corruption of their own souls and their failing to act in accordance to the Quran and its teachings.

In our own days, too, wherever exploitation places its ugly foot, it relies on this very point that the Quran has warned about, striving to immerse the hearts in corruption. Once the heart has become corrupted,

reason is rendered useless, and this becomes the greatest chain that the wrists and ankles of the human being can be bound by. Thus we see that exploitation and capitalism do not fear to open schools and universities, yet we notice that they use all their strength and resources to corrupt and spoil the hearts and souls of the students. They are well aware of the fact that a heart and soul which is sick offers no resistance, and merely submits to every kind of baseness and exploitation.

The Quran gives great importance to the nobility and sanctity of the spirit of society. In one sacred verse we are told:

***"Cooperate in righteousness and piety (taqwa) and do not cooperate in sin and enmity." (5:2)***

The first point that this verse indicates is that we are to do good and sacred things and not do foul and filthy things, while the second point is that we are to perform good works as a society in groups and not just individually.

There are two or three traditions about the heart which I will also relate to you, sayings of the Prophet and Imams which will give a good conclusion to this subject. In the books on the Prophet's life it is written that one day a man approached the Prophet and said to him that he had some questions he wanted to ask. The Prophet asked him whether he wanted to be given the answers or if he wanted to ask. The man said he wanted the answers. The Prophet told him, "You come to ask me the meaning of good and beautiful (behaviour) and bad and foul."

The man admitted that this was, in fact, what he had come to ask. The Prophet knocked three fingers on the man's chest and told him to ask the answer from his own heart, and added, "This human heart is made in such a way that it is linked with beauty and fineness; with beauty it becomes restful and easy, but with bad and evil it becomes upset and restless."

Just as a matter that is not homogenous with the human body which enters the body causes it to become upset and unsettled, and the work of the various organs to become disarranged, so the human soul becomes disarranged and upset by unworthy actions.

That which within us is called a troubled conscience stems from this absolute lack of homogeneity between the soul and bad, unworthy actions. *"Seek the opinion of your heart, even if judges give their opinion (to the contrary)."*

What the Prophet has said here is that if a person really seeks the truth and, in order to seek the truth, makes himself neutral and unaligned, his heart will never betray him. On the contrary, it will guide him on the correct path. Fundamentally, for as long as the human being is a sincere seeker of truth, whatever comes to him is the truth and reality. Of course, this is a subtle point which predominately leads to mistakes. Whenever the human being is drawn to the path of misguidance, the reason is that, from the outset, he had a special motive, and was not seeking truth purely for the sake of truth.

In reply to the person who asked the meaning of "righteousness", the Prophet told him that, if he really was in pursuit of "righteousness", he was to know that whatever makes his heart content and his conscience untroubled is righteousness, while whenever he was desirous of a thing that brought no peace to his heart, he was to be sure that that thing was sin.

Similarly, the Prophet was asked about faith (*iman*). The Prophet said in reply: *"The person who whenever a bad deed is committed, feels discomfort and regret and, whenever a good deed is committed, feels glad and happy, is endowed with faith."*

It is narrated from Imam Sadiq (a.s.) that: *"A believer is one who, whenever he is freed from speech related to the world<sup>2</sup>, feels the sweetness of Divine love in his heart, and then it seems to him that the world is very trivial and, with all his being, he longs to quit this (material) world and leave it behind. And this is a reality which God's Guardians (awliya) have proved with their lives."*

In the history of the life of the Prophet, it is written that one day, after the morning prayer, the Prophet went to see the people who were called *ashaba suffah*. These were the poor Muslims of Medina who had no worldly possessions at all and who lived alongside the Prophet's mosque in Medina. The Holy Prophet looked at one of them, who was called either Zayd or Hareth ibn Zayd, and saw that he looked lean and ill, and that his eyes were sunken. "How are you?" asked the Prophet. "I am passing this morning as one of the certain (*ahle yaqin*)", he replied.

"A great claim" the Prophet told him, "what are its proofs?"

"The proofs of my state of certainty is that my sleep is taken from me at night, and I am always fasting during the day. And I spend the nights till morning in worship."

"This is not enough", the Prophet told him. "What else?"

"O Rasul" the man said, "Now I am in such a state that it seems as if I am seeing the people of Paradise and the people of Hell and hearing their voices. If you give me permission, I will relate to you the inner states of your companions."

"Enough, enough", said the Prophet, "but tell me, what is your aspiration?"

*"Jihad fi sabilillah"* said the man, "(armed) struggle in the path of God."

The Quran states that purifying the heart gives to man such a position that as said by Amir ul-Muminin (a.s.), *"If the screen is taken away from in front of him, nothing would be added to his certainty."*

That which the Quran has in view in its teachings is the culturing of human beings who will profit both from knowledge and reason and also from the means of the heart, and use them both in the best manner in the path of truth; human beings the perfect examples of whom are our Prophet and Imams and their true and devoted pupils.

1. In Surah Najm (53:2–11) we read:

"Nor does he (the Prophet) speak from desires, it is nothing other than revelation descended, taught him by the Extreme in Power, the Lord of Strength; so he was shown (created) perfection, which was on the highest horizons. Then he drew near, and he bowed; he became as close as two bows, or nearer. So He revealed to His servant that which He revealed. The heart did not mistake in what he saw."

The Quran states all this in order to show that the level of these matters is beyond that of the workings of reason. Here the subject is seeing and culminating. Or, in a verse of Surah Takwir (71: 18–24) we read: "Surely it is the word of a noble messenger".

The Quran was sent by God the Almighty by means of an angel to the Prophet. "Master of Might, trusted by the Lord of the 'Arsh," and, therefore, of all of existence, which descends from the 'arsh and which we know so little about. "Obeyed and trusted; your companion is not insane", i.e. because you do not consider his words to accord to your logic, you think him mad, but you are wrong. "He certainly saw him on the clear horizon", "He is not miserly with the unseen", he does not keep what he experiences to himself, for his own benefit; what he is relating is his own clear and certain experience.

2. The author has explained elsewhere that Islam maintains a difference between attachment to the world and making it the centre of all of one's attractions, hopes and aspirations. See Religion and the World, also published by Besat Foundation. Translator's note.

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