

Azadari and the Heart

Then your hearts hardened after that, so that they were like rocks, rather worse in hardness; and surely there are some rocks from which streams burst forth, and there are some of them which split asunder so water issues out of them, and there are some of them which fall down for fear of Allah, and Allah is not at all heedless of what you do. (2:74)

The above verse refers to the Bani Israel who were told to sacrifice a cow and strike a murdered man with a part of it. The man would then become alive and tell them who his murderer was. The many excuses and questions the Bani Israel asked Prophet Musa (a) about this, and their obvious reluctance to do as they were commanded, is condemned by Allah in this verse.

The human heart is prone to many spiritual diseases. These diseases afflict the spiritual well being of the heart and prevent it from accepting and following the Truth. One of these diseases is hardness of the heart, known in Arabic as *Qaswatul Qulub*. Ayatullah Dastghaib in his book *Qalbe Saleem*, describes *Qaswat* as a hardness of the heart which keeps it away from the straight path. This spiritual disease prevents a human being from accepting the truth, and from submitting to, or having awe for, a Higher Authority. The heart becomes indifferent to advice or warnings. It is unaffected by scenes or stories which evoke emotion and pity such as the complaints of the oppressed and the weeping of the orphan. Generally speaking the heart becomes cold and stony.

In the verse above, the human heart that is hard is declared by the Almighty to be harder even than rocks. Three reasons are given for this:

1. Many rocks have rivers and streams of water gushing forth from them. But nothing comes out of the hard heart. It is devoid of all humane emotions.
2. The rocks sometimes split and break into pieces due to the effect of weather changes. Rain and winds affect the structure of the rocks, causing it to change in appearance. But the hard heart is not affected by anything. No preaching, advice, and warnings cause any changes in it. It remains completely unaffected.
3. Some rocks fall down in front of the power and might of Allah. Hard as they are, the glory of the Almighty is great and causes them to fall down. But the hard heart does not succumb to the power of God. It does not feel the glory of the Creator in its true essence and thus does not submit to His greatness.

All human actions stem from the heart, and a hard heart does not produce any virtuous actions. A wise saying says; *The body does not commit evil except because of the corruption of the heart, for the transgression of an army is due to the weakness of the ruler*. Many Ahadith emphasize on the importance of curing the heart of hardness in order to achieve true success. The Holy Prophet (s) says: *The person furthest away from Allah is the one with a hard heart*. Imam Ali (a) says: *The biggest misfortune is hardness of the heart*. In another Hadith he explains; *There are two types of companionships, one of the Shaytan, and one of the angels. Companionship of the angels creates softness of*

heart and understanding, while companionship of Shaytan creates forgetfulness and hardness of heart.

The human heart is not created hard. The child's heart is very soft and tender. The adult however, through accumulation of sins and heedlessness, gradually acquires a hard heart. Left untreated it can become, as described above, even harder than rocks. It is the duty of every believer to be wary of the state of his heart and take steps to avoid hardness.

Azadari and Softness of the Heart

The gradual hardening of the heart can lead to its eventual death. This is a type of death most hazardous for the human being, as it brings ruin in this world as well as the next. Imam Ali (a) in Khutba no.192 of *Nahjul Balagha* when describing the qualities of the Pious, says: *They see the people of the world attaching great significance to the death of their bodies, but they attach greater significance to the death of the hearts of their living.* It is the duty of every believer to prevent the hardening of his heart and its eventual death.

Islam has shown many preventive measures as well as remedies for the hard heart. Many of the activities performed by Muslims, individually as well as in congregation, help believers in this matter. The Shiahs are fortunate to be a community where every year the Azadari of Muharram helps prevent the hardening and death of the heart. The Majlises of Muharram and Safar, and the remembrance of the tragedy of Karbala, play a great role in softening the hearts of believers. The following are some ways in which Azadari help in preventing the hardening of the heart.

Azadari and Remembrance of Allah

One of the best ways to prevent the death of the heart is to remember Allah. A hadith says, surely the remembrance of Allah gives life to the hearts.

Majaalis of Azaa are forceful reminders to the believers about Allah and the Hereafter. Each preacher chooses his own topics, revolving around understanding religion and submitting oneself to Allah. It is an intensive period of reminders; reminder of the need to focus one's life on pleasing Allah, reminder of the Hereafter and the transiency of life, reminder of what is really important in life.

Azadari and Knowledge

One of the ways suggested by Islam, to soften the heart and prevent its death, is the acquiring of wisdom and knowledge. Luqman al-Hakeem advised his son to seek knowledge, saying: *Surely Allah gives life to the hearts through the light of wisdom, the way He gives life to the earth with rain from the sky.* Another hadith says: *Give life to your heart through good advice.*

It is intriguing to note that many of the ayats of the Holy Qur'an which talk about rain, and the life it bestows on the dead earth, are metaphorically interpreted to be referring to the light of Dine knowledge and its effect on the human heart. In verse above, Allah talks about the earth being swollen and giving out beautiful flowers as a consequence of the rain that falls upon it. In Tafsire Namune, the commentators explain that such is the effect of wisdom on the heart. The heart absorbs it, swells and is enlightened because of it, and the virtuous actions which spring forth are the beautiful flowers.

In another ayat, Allah says the rain falls on the earth and each valley absorbs it according to its capacity. When knowledge is given, each heart accepts it according to its own capacity. Some are affected more than others. The softer the heart, the more its ability to absorb and retain wisdom.

Through the majalis that are part of Azadari, knowledge and wisdom is transmitted from the pulpits of the mosques to the hearts of the believers. Hundreds of thousands of believers listen to Majalis during the 12 days, and later, thereby increasing their knowledge and softening their hearts.

Azadari and Grief

Although a human being likes happiness for himself all the time, perpetual feelings of joy and comfort lead to arrogance and rebellion. When man is satisfied with everything, all the time, he feels no need for God, no humility or empathy for others. Grief and sorrow soften the heart, increase humane feelings and make the human being wiser and more emotionally mature.

The Holy Prophet (s) has said: *When Allah loves a person, He places in his heart a part of sorrow, for Allah loves every grieving heart. And when He dislikes a person, He will place in his heart a part of laughter, for laughter deadens the heart and Allah does not love those who are excessively happy.* Grief brings about a state of the heart called *Riqqatul Qalb*, when the heart is most tender. Signs of such a state include a sorrowful heart, tears, humility, etc. It is a treasured state, and a hadith says: *When one of you achieves Riqqah, then pray, for surely the heart does not achieve riqqah except when it is sincere.*

Grieving for Imam Husain (a) and the sufferings of the holy family softens the hearts. The sorrow that is felt, the tears that are shed help to remove hardness of the heart and thus slow down or prevent the dying of the heart. The hardness accumulated in previous months is washed and melted away through the grief at the sufferings of a beloved divine leader. Thus one of the many benefits of Azadari is its assistance in keeping the hearts of believers soft and tender.