

Health of the Spiritual Heart

*And disgrace me not on the day when they are raised
the day on which property will not avail, nor children
except he who comes to Allah with a sound heart.
Surah ash-Shuara, 26:87-89*

The human body has been created for a specific purpose. When it is sound and healthy it fulfills its purpose well and enables us to live an active and satisfactory life. When it becomes sick, the body loses its ability to function and does not carry out the purpose of its creation. The result is discomfort and unhappiness.

The human heart can also experience **health** and **sickness**. When the heart is sound and healthy we are filled with tranquility and an awareness of our responsibility. When the heart is sick it does not carry out its functions well, and adversely affects our thoughts and actions. Life loses its real meaning and purpose as the sick heart will see all things with its diseased outlook. Uneasiness, discontent, and a general lack of direction in life are all a result of a sick heart. Sickness of the heart is a calamity which has a profound effect on the eventual outcome of the human being. Imam Ali (a) says: *Surely from the afflictions, is poverty, and worse than poverty is the sickness of the body, and worse than sickness of the body is sickness of the heart. Surely from the blessings is ample sustenance, and better than that is health of the body, and better than that is the health of the heart.*

Just as a sick body may cease functioning if it does not receive adequate care, a sick heart can also die if not tended to. The death of the heart is far more serious than the death of the body, for with its demise the human being loses all hope. In Nahjul Balagha, Imam Ali (a) describes the pious people and says: *They see the people of this world magnifying the death of the bodies, but they are more concerned about the death of the hearts of the living.* In another hadith he says: *He who dies and is relieved is not really dead, it is the one who is dead while alive who is really dead.*

One of the results of sickness of the heart is the **loss of spiritual pleasure** in worship. With a sick heart the human being can find no joy in *dhikr* and *du'a*, feels no stirring of the heart, no surge of faith, and no emotion at being able to talk to his Lord. This is a debilitating sickness which prevents further spiritual progress. A hadith from Nabi Isa (a) says; *Just as a sick person finds no joy in delicious food, a sick heart finds no joy in the worship of Allah.* Many believers perform the daily rituals of worship but are unable to relish the pleasure of communicating with the Creator. They are unaffected emotionally even when they engage in acts of worship. A sound heart is able to feel close to Allah and is moved when remembering Allah. It reacts, and the reaction in turn affects the body, A beautiful verse of the Holy Qur'an describes such believers: *Allah has revealed the best announcement, a book consistent in its various parts, repeating, whereat do shudder the skins of those who fear their Lord, then their skins and their hearts become soft to the remembrance of Allah . . . (39:23)*

It is the duty of believers to look after the **health of their hearts** and prevent it from becoming sick. The approaching holy season is a good time to check the status of our hearts. Are we inclined to worship Allah during these special nights? Do we stay up, or wake up early to be from among those who seek forgiveness when the world is asleep and heedless? Are our hearts soft enough to be affected by all we do in this holy month, so that we can weep and beseech Allah? If we find

ourselves unaffected and cold to the beautiful supplications and munajat recited during these holy nights, then we know that we are getting sick and need to be cured. It is up to us to look for the remedy. As the Holy Prophet (s) says: *Surely you have been appointed as doctors of your own souls.*

Enlivening the Heart

In order to cure the heart, the following remedies are recommended in Islam:

1. Remembrance of Allah in solitude

According to the Holy Prophet (s) nothing is more beloved to Allah, and nothing saves the human being more effectively from problems in the world and in the Hereafter, than the remembrance of Allah. It gives life to the heart, motivates us to do good, gives us reason and satisfaction in life, and puts our lives in perspective. This is why Imam Ali (a) says, *The best of all treasures is the remembrance of Allah.* When a believer remembers Allah in private its effect on the heart is greater. It softens the heart and enlightens it, allowing increased nearness and intimacy with Allah. The believer is able to talk to Allah without any concerns of what others around him may think or say. He can weep and beseech to his heart's content. The Holy Prophet (s) says: *Attain softness of the heart through a lot of dhikr in privacy.*

2. Wisdom and Knowledge

Obtaining knowledge is instrumental in keeping the heart alive. The heart is enlivened when it comes across new knowledge and wisdom, and in return we are reminded and encouraged through this knowledge. Luqman al-Hakeem once advised his son; *My son, seek wisdom, for Allah enlivens the dead heart through the light of wisdom the way He enlivens the dead earth through water from the sky.* A Hadith of Imam Ali (a) says; *Surely the hearts get tired just like the bodies, so seek for them new objects of wisdom.* A believer should set aside some time from his daily schedule to read, or listen to, wisdom that inspires him spiritually.

3. Keeping company with the Virtuous

A human being is affected by the company he keeps. When he is often with people of high moral qualities, he becomes inspired to be like them. That is why Islam emphasizes a great deal on choosing friends of good moral standards. Imam Ali (a) says: *Associating with people of moral excellence is life for the hearts.*

And success is only from Allah

