

ALI 485: The Family: A Formation ground for personalities

Session one

Question to ponder over

What is the link between personality and spirituality?

What is personality

- Long-term tendencies to think, feel and act in particular ways
- Characteristics that come together in a person
- The thoughts, feelings and behavior patterns that are distinct from that of another.

From the readings

Personality represents those characteristics of the person consisting of fixed patterns of thought, emotion, and behaviour.

Personality as a set of emotional, physical, and intellectual characteristics that distinguish people from one another.

Allamah Majlisi considered man's personality consisting of soul and body and regarded its authenticity and identity as the rational soul that every person defines as "I"

People differ in the extent of their gain and benefit from the revelation. The origin of these differences is their personality which arises from their various traits and habits. Although God has granted man a particular ability and knowledge so that he can develop his personality constructively, he is trapped in his immature personality and takes a hostile stance against the truth. This behaviour and confrontation with divine teachings result from his abnormal personality, traits, and habits

Sayyid Muhammad Taqi Mudarrisi

A healthy personality

Islamic teachings stress the link between relationship with God and a healthy personality.

A healthy personality seeks perfection. Since God is all-Perfect there is an inclination towards Divine qualities.

The Quran on personality

قُلْ كُلٌّ يَعْمَلُ عَلَىٰ شَاكِلَتِهِ فَرَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن
هُوَ أَهْدَىٰ سَبِيلًا

Say: ‘Everyone acts according to his own disposition: But your Lord knows best who it is that is best guided on the Way’

Sura Israa, no.17, verse 84

This verse views man's behaviour as an outcome of his disposition. That is, no matter what man's action is, it is in accordance with his temperament. As the Persian saying goes, "What seeps out of the jug is what is inside it." By analogy, the relationship between disposition and action is the one between soul and body, namely the body embodies and reveals the soul's mission through its organs and their actions.

Allama Tabatabai

A person acts according to his/her disposition. When faced with a fearful situation, a brave person and a timid person will react differently. That is true for all different characteristics and situations.

Although disposition is innate, it does not force a person to act according to it. A person may react instinctively according to his disposition but still controls the choice of action. However it is challenging to go against one's disposition.

Possibility of change

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

Indeed Allah does not change a people's lot, unless they change what is in their souls.

Sura R'ad, no.13, verse 11

Human efforts

وَأَنَّ لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ
يُرَىٰ ثُمَّ يُجْزَاهُ الْجَزَاءَ الْأَوْفَىٰ

that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for, and that he will soon be shown his endeavour, then he will be rewarded for it with the fullest reward

Sura Najm, no.53, verses 39-41

Family and personality

- Genes
- Home environment
- Upbringing
- Education and activities
- Exposure to good/bad examples

وَالْبَلَدُ الطَّيِّبُ يَخْرُجُ نَبَاتُهُ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ ۗ وَالَّذِي خَبِثَ
لَا يَخْرُجُ إِلَّا نَكِدًا ۗ كَذَلِكَ نَصْرِفُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ
يَشْكُرُونَ

The good land—its vegetation comes out by the permission of its Lord, and as for that which is bad, it does not come out except sparsely. Thus do We explain the signs for a people who give thanks.

Sura A'raaf, no.7, verse 58

Case study - Fear

Saeeda lives with her husband and three children. She is grateful for the many blessings in her life. But she often feels afraid – of not bringing up her children well, of what the future might hold, of displeasing people around her, etc. Sometimes her fears seem very real and affect her physically and psychologically.

- 1) What could be the roots of her fears?
- 2) How do her fears affect her life?
- 3) What can she do to be less fearful?