




Understanding the Soul Lessons from Jami al-Sa'adat

Session One

Human perfection has many levels.

The greater the amount of self-discipline and effort on the part of the individual, the higher the level of perfection that he would attain.

Jami al-Sa'adat



Jami al-Sa'adat

- One of the most comprehensive books on Islamic Ethics
- Written in the late 18th century
- Originally in Arabic, printed in three volumes
- Online version is condensed

Mulla Muhammad Naraqi

He passed most of his life in poverty in the seminary of Kashan. It is reported that he sometimes could not afford buying candle or oil for the lamp and studied late at night using the light of the washroom of the school.

He worked hard to counter deviant thinking of Muslim groups.

He emphasized that enjoining good and forbidding evil was most important to counter corruption in society. He promoted the idea of having an institution be in charge of that.



Science of Ethics – ‘Ilm al-Akhlaq

The diseases of the soul are evil habits and submission to lusts that degrade man to the level of beasts.

The pleasures of the soul are moral and ethical virtues which elevate man and move him closer to perfection bring him close to God.

It is the goal of ethics to raise and guide man from the lowest animal state to that exalted position superior to that of the angels.



Ethics is considered to be the most exalted and valuable of sciences. The worth of any science is directly related to the worth of the subject with which it is concerned.

Since the subject of the science of ethics is man and the means through which he can attain perfection and we know that man is the noblest of creatures . . . therefore, it follows that ethics is the noblest of all sciences.



In the past, the philosophers did not consider any of the other fields of learning to be truly independent sciences.

They believed that without the science of ethics and spiritual purification, mastery over any other science is not only devoid of any value, but it would in fact lead to the obstruction of insight and ultimate destruction of those who pursue it.

That is why it has been said that . . .
'knowledge is the thickest of veils', which prevents man from seeing the real nature of things.



Difference between Nafs and Ruh

Some Explanations

1. The soul (*nafs*) is that heavenly essence which employs the body and uses its various organs to attain its goals and purposes. The soul has also other names as spirit (*ruh*), intelligence (*'aql*), and heart (*qalb*) although these terms have other usages as well. (Jami al-Sa'adat)
2. Soul (*nafs*) represents "the animal life" in the human organism, while spirit (*ruh*) represents the "rational principle".



3. It appears that three views are prevalent:

- (a) nafs and ruh are synonymous
- (b) nafs represents the living, conscious principle, and ruh, the intelligent and rational principle of life
- (c) vice versa.

<https://www.al-islam.org/shiite-creed-shaykh-saduq/concerning-souls-nufus-and-spirits-arwah>



Human Disposition

Disposition" is that faculty (*malakah*) of the soul which is the source of all those activities that man performs spontaneously without thinking about them.

Malakah is a property of the soul which comes into existence through exercise and repetitive practice and is not easily destroyed.



A particular disposition (*malakah*) may appear in human beings because of one of the following reasons:

1. Natural and physical make up: It is observed that some people are patient while others are touchy and nervous. Some are easily disturbed and saddened while others show greater resistance and resilience.
2. Habit: That which is formed because of continual repetition of certain acts and which leads to the emergence of a certain disposition.
3. Practice and conscious effort: Which if continued long enough will eventually lead to the formation of a disposition.





Even though the physical make-up of an individual produces certain dispositions in him, it is by no means true that man has no choice in the matter and is absolutely compelled to abide by the dictates of his physical make-up.

On the contrary, since man has the power to choose, he can overcome the dictates of his physical nature through practice and effort and can acquire the disposition of his choice.

Exercise

List some faculties (malakah) that are part of your personality. How did you acquire them?

If they were part of your God given nature, has life made them stronger or weaker?

Which faculties have you acquired through circumstances and/or hard work?

