

Understanding the Soul

Lessons from Jami al-Sa'adat

Session Two

The ultimate aim of the purification of the soul and acquirement of a moral and ethical character is to attain felicity and happiness. The most consummate felicity and happiness for man is to be the embodiment and manifestation of Divine attributes and characteristics.

Jami al-Sa'adat



Four Faculties of the Soul

1. The power of intelligence (*al-quwwah al-aqliyyah*)-angelic.
2. The power of anger (*al-quwwah al-ghadabiyyah*)-ferocious.
3. The power of desire (*al-quwwah al-shahwiyyah*)-animalistic.
4. The power of imagination (*al-quwwah al-wahmiyyah*)-demoniac.



The purification and right training of every one of these powers will result in the emergence of a particular dimension in the human being.



1) Faculty of Reason



If man did not have the power of reason, it would have been impossible for him to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, true and false.

Faculty of Reason

The purification and rightward training of the Power of Intellect will result in the development of knowledge, and subsequently wisdom, in a human being.

Wisdom means possession of an understanding of the objects of the world which concurs with the reality of things.



Faculty of Reason

Deficiency: Foolishness

Moderation: Wisdom

Excess: Cunningness



2) Faculty of Anger



If man did not possess the faculty of anger, he could not defend himself against attack and aggression.

The purification of the Power of Anger will result in the emergence of the faculty of courage, and subsequently forbearance (*hilm*).

The presence of courage means that the power of anger is entirely at the command of the intellect.

Faculty of Anger

Deficiency: Cowardice

Moderation: Courage

Excess: Recklessness



3) Faculty of Desire

If the force of sexual attraction and desire did not exist in man, the continued existence of the human species would be endangered.

Chastity is the result of the faculty of desire being controlled by the intellect.



Faculty of Desire



Deficiency – Apathy

Moderation – Chastity

Excess - Greed

4) Faculty of Imagination



The imaginative power in man provides the preliminary material for the formation of demoniac schemes, plots and machinations.

If man lacked the power of imagination, he could not visualise universals or particulars, and he would be unable to make any inferences based on them.

The purification of the Power of Imagination will cause the emergence of the faculty of justice in a human being.

Faculty of Imagination

As for justice, it refers to the condition when the Power of Imagination is completely under the command of the Power of the Intellect. This implies the regulation of all the powers of the soul by the Power of Intellect. In other words, the presence of the faculty of justice in the soul necessitates the presence of the other three faculties of wisdom, courage and chastity.



Faculty of Imagination

Deficiency: Submissiveness

Moderation: Justice

Excess: Tyranny



The Result

If the faculty of reason is put in control of the other faculties, it keeps them in their rightful place and moderates their excesses; they will work for the welfare of man and shall perform useful functions; otherwise, nothing except evil and mischief will come of them.

What would be the dominant characteristic and nature of an individual's soul is entirely dependent on the outcome of this struggle. In other words, whichever of the four powers emerges victorious, it shall determine the character and inclination of the soul. That is why some souls are angelic, some are animalistic and bestial and still others are demoniac.



An Analogy

Imagine a traveller on horseback accompanied by a dog and a man who is a spy for the bandits.

The mounted traveller represents reason. The mount represents desire and passion. The dog represents the power of anger and fierceness. And the spy represents the imaginative power.

If the traveller just mentioned is successful in controlling his mount, the dog, and the spy, and in maintaining his authority over them, he shall arrive at his destination safely; otherwise, he will be destroyed.



A Point to Ponder

An important matter must be pointed out. In the view of Islamic ethicicians, a person who has developed the four faculties within himself, is not praiseworthy unless the possession of these virtues benefits other people also. This is what reason tells us. That is, it tells us that purely internal and private virtues do not have much value, and their possessor does not deserve praise.

