



Understanding the Soul

Lessons from Jami al-Sa'adat

Session Three

When we speak of man's capacity to bring about changes in his dispositions . . . we mean one should avoid going to either extremes in regard to them [faculties of the soul] and maintain a condition of balance and moderation so that they may perform their functions properly. Just as the seed of a date grows into a fruitful tree through proper care . . . so also can man attain perfection and wisdom through self-discipline and intelligent perseverance.

Jami al-Sa'adat

Pleasure and Pain of the Soul

Pleasure is a condition experienced by the soul when it perceives something harmonious with its own nature.

Pain and suffering is occasioned when the soul comes into contact with things which are in disharmony with its nature.





Since the powers of the soul are four in number, it follows that the pleasures and pains of the soul must also be divided into four categories, each corresponding to one of the four faculties.



Pleasure of the Faculty of Reasoning

Pleasure of the reasoning faculty lies in gaining knowledge about the real nature of things, and its pain lies in ignorance and deprivation from such knowledge.

This sort of pleasure has many degrees, the highest of which is experienced in nearness to God. This most sublime of pleasures is attained through love and knowledge of God and acquired through abiding effort to be ever nearer to Him. When one's whole effort is directed towards attaining this real and lasting pleasure, sensual pleasures will be overshadowed; they shall take their proper place in man's life, being pursued in moderation.





The strongest and the purest of pleasures is the pleasure experienced by the faculty of reason.

This is a form of pleasure which is both inherent and natural to man.

It is a pleasure which is constant, not subject to the changing experiences in his daily life.

Pleasure of the Faculty of Anger

Pleasure of the faculty of anger and fierceness lies in the feeling of being victorious and in satisfaction at overcoming an enemy and taking one's revenge. Its pain lies in the feeling of being overpowered and defeated.



Pleasure of the Faculty of Desire

Delight of the faculty of desire and passion is enjoyment of foods, drinks, and sexual association while its pain lies in denial of such experiences.



Pleasure of the Faculty of Imagination

Pleasure of the imaginative faculty lies in the visualization of particulars which lead to the appearance of carnal desires and demonic tendencies, while its pain lies in the insufficiency and inadequacy of these visions.

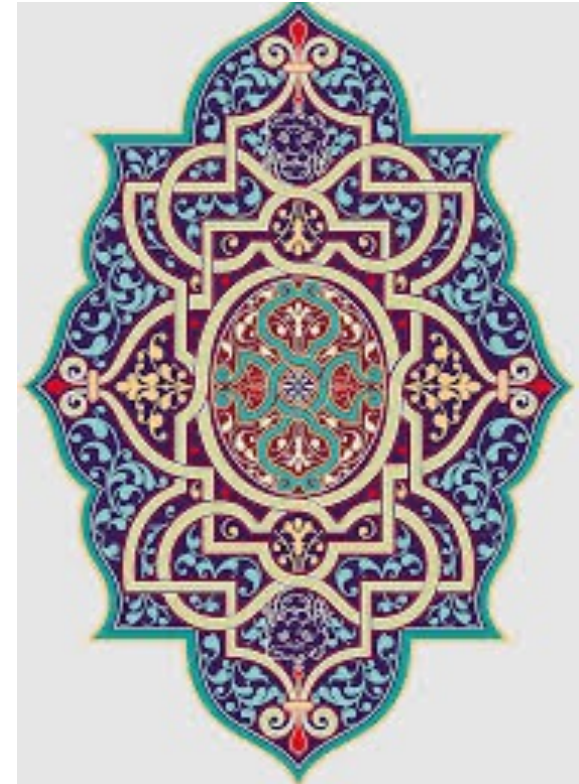


Types of Pleasure and Pain

Man has always lived with both pleasure and pain . . . Ethics play a great role in moderating these feelings. It is within an ethical criteria that these feelings can be controlled by distinguishing which pleasure is moral and which is immoral.

There are many types of pleasures, but in a particular categorization, we can divide pleasure into the following types:

- 1- sensual pleasure
- 2- illusionary pleasure
- 3- intellectual pleasure
- 4- mystical (spiritual) pleasure.





The rank of different pleasures in one's eyes differ from person to person **contingent upon his world-view.** A *mumin* (believer) conceives the greatest pleasure to be acquiring God's absolute satisfaction even if he has to endure harsh and severe physical conditions along the way. This level of sheer pleasure can be achieved by allowing the soul to govern the body and the physical side of our entity.

<https://www.islamquest.net/en/archive/fa3107>

Happiness of the soul

The soul of a truly happy man is developed with the knowledge and the love of God. It is illuminated by the radiance emanating from the Godhead.

When that happens, nothing but beauty shall emanate from him; since beauty can emanate only from what is beautiful.





True happiness cannot be attained or retained unless all the faculties and powers of the soul are purified and reformed. By reforming some faculties of the soul, or all of them, for a short period of time, happiness will not be attained. It is similar to physical health. A body can be said to be healthy only when all its limbs and organs are healthy. Therefore, the individual who seeks to attain ultimate and perfect happiness, must free himself or herself from the clutches of demonic and animal forces and tendencies and step on the ladder of ascension to the higher realms.



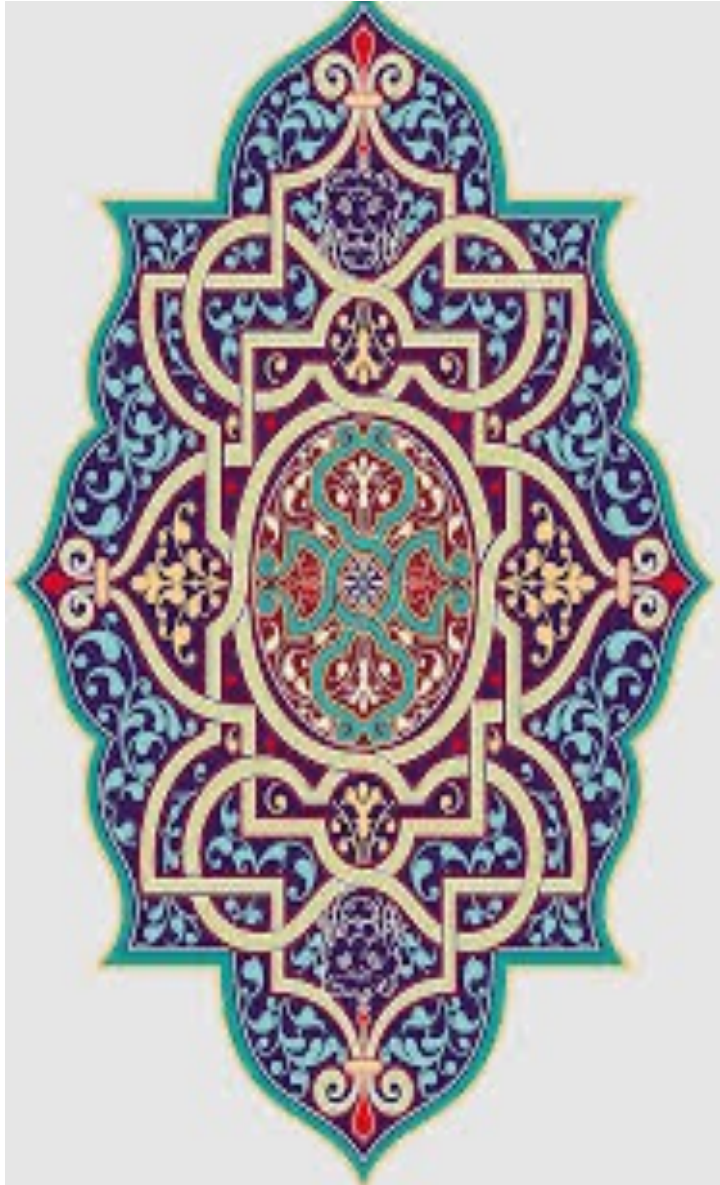
Connection with Allah

The greatest bliss is the good pleasure of Allah: that is the supreme felicity

Sura Tawba, no.9, verse 72

Complete happiness can only come from closeness to Allah. The human soul has come from God and yearns to be with Him. Connecting to God through the mind and tongue helps fill that yearning and eases the restlessness of the human heart.





Some thoughts on happiness

The ultimate happiness is that of the hereafter when a soul knows that Allah is pleased with it. But in the world there can be happiness on the path towards that. There is happiness in the knowledge that we are servants of God, in obeying Him and earning His pleasure. In accepting His decree and trusting in His plan for us. Imam Ali (a) says; *The happiness of a believer is in obedience to his lord, and his unhappiness is in his sins* (Ghurarul Hikam, p.400)

Al Ghazali on happiness

- Happiness comes from Self-Knowledge, the knowledge that we have a heart or spirit that is originally perfect but has become obscured by passions and desires.
- Happiness depends on our faculties: if we exercise our higher faculties (like Reason, Imagination), we will be happier than if we exercise our lower ones (mere physical pleasures)
- There are examples in history of truly happy people, and they were “prophets”—people who have attained a perfect union with Ultimate Reality
- We are happy to the degree to which we can emulate these prophets
- We are all born with a “knowing pain in the soul,” which causes us to seek happiness, but most of us seek substitute pleasures deriving from the body which cannot resolve a pain that is essentially spiritual.



Exercise

Reflecting on your soul's faculties

- i) Which faculty is most balanced in you? What do you do for it that brings you happiness?
- i) Which faculty is deficient? How does that bring you pain?