**Purifying the Soul**

Allah (S.W.T) says in the Noble Qur'an after He swore several times in surat Ash-Shams, (Verses 9&10), what can be translated as, "Indeed he succeeds who Zak-Kaha purifies his ownself, and indeed he fails who Das-Saha corrupts his ownself."

Imam Ibn Katheer says: "This verse means: He who purified his soul obeying Allah (S.W.T), and purified it from vices and bad manners, he succeeded. And he who corrupted it by immersing it in sins and disobeying Allah (S.W.T), he utterly failed." This verse was also interpreted by Ibn Abbas (R.A.). He said: "He whom Allah (S.W.T) purified his soul, he succeeded, and he whom Allah (S.W.T) corrupted his soul, he failed utterly." The prophet (S.A.W.) frequently used to say in his supplication: "Oh Allah! Grant me the sense of piety and purify my soul as You are the best to purify it, You are its Guardian and its Master…" {Reported by Imams Muslim and Ahmad}

Allah (S.W.T) also said in surat Al-A'la, (Verse 14), what can be translated as, " Indeed whosoever purifies himself shall achieve success." which means he purified his soul from the evil morals and followed what Allah (S.W.T) revealed to His prophet (S.A.W.).

Purifying the souls of people was one of the most important tasks of the great messengers including the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). Allah (S.W.T) described him in surat Al-Baqarah, (Verse 151), what can be translated as, "Similarly We have sent (Muhammad) of your own, reciting to you Our verses and sanctifying you, and teaching you the book and Al-Hikmah…"

Also Allah (S.W.T) said in surat Al-Emran, (Verse 164), what can be translated as, "Indeed Allah conferred a great favor on the believers when He sent among them a messenger from among themselves, reciting unto them His verses, and purifying them …" He (S.A.W.) purifies them with what is revealed to him. He purifies their convictions and their conduct because man's life in this world and his destiny in the Hereafter do not succeed with knowledge only; rather there has to be purification.

"Taz-ki-yah": Linguistically, it means spiritual cleansing, growth, and blessing. Based on this, purification from the Islamic perspective means cleansing the soul from corruption, and growing it with the belief in Allah, and by doing good deeds and refraining from doing evil so that the soul will be blessed in this world and in the Hereafter.

The purified soul is the one that is purified according to Allah's legislation and deserves all the beautiful traits in this world and the great rewards in the Hereafter.

"Tad si yah" (Corruption) is the opposite of "Taz-ki-yah" (purification) because corruption makes the soul filthy with sins and disobeying Allah (S.W.T). So, the soul deserves all the bad traits in this world and the severe punishment in the Hereafter.

The Noble Qur'an proclaimed that man success depends on purifying his soul, and that failure is the result of corrupting the soul. Allah (S.W.T) swore to confirm this reality several times; the fact that shows its seriousness.

The prophet (S.A.W.) confirmed that man's righteousness or corruption starts with the heart. If the heart is righteous, man becomes righteous, and if the heart is corrupted, man becomes corrupted. The prophet (S.A.W.) says: "Truly in the body there is a lump of flesh which, if it be good, the whole body is good, and which, if it be corrupted, the whole body is corrupted. Truly it is the heart."{Reported by Imam Bukhari}

In another Hadith, the prophet (S.A.W.) told us that the immediate reason for the righteousness or the corruption of the heart is the way it deals with sins that confront it. If the heart accepts those sins and embrace them, a dark spot is left behind in the heart. If the heart rejects those sins, a bright spot is left behind. The prophet (S.A.W.) said: "Trials are presented to the hearts like a mat, one stick at a time. If any heart accepts it, a dark spot is left in it. If any heart rejects it, a bright spot is left in it. Consequently, the hearts become two types: Bright heart like the Safa that gets no harm from any sin as long as the skies and the earth exist, and a dark heart that does not know any good deed and does not reject any evil unless it is from its whims and desires." {Reported by Imam Muslim}

This is confirmed in the Noble Qur'an: Allah (S.W.T) said in surat Al-Mutaffifeen, (Verse 14), what can be translated as, "Nay! But on their hearts in the raan (covering of sins and evil deed) which they used to earn."

In an authentic hadith reported by Imam At-Trmizi that the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said: "When a person commits a sin a dark dot is dotted on his heart. Then if that person leaves that evil deed, begs Allah to forgive him, and repents, then his heart is cleaned, but if he repeats the evil deed, then that covering is increased till his heart is completely covered with it, and that is Ar-Raan which Allah mentioned (in the Qura'n)…" Be careful! All our convictions and our deeds have direct influence on our hearts to the extent that those convictions and those deeds will either purify the hearts or kill them or make them sick.

The heart was made by Allah (S.W.T) to be the place for reasoning, contemplation, peace, calm, belief, pity, mercy. Allah (S.W.T) says about the Non-believers in surat Al-A'raf, (Verse 179), what can be translated as, "…They have hearts wherewith they don’t understand…"

Allah (S.W.T) also said in surat Muhammad, (Verse 24), what can be translated as, "Do they not then think deeply in the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up?"

Allah (S.W.T) also said about the believers in surat Al-Fath, (Verse 4), what can be translated as, "He it is Who sent down As-Sakinah (tranquility) into the hearts of the believers."

Allah (S.W.T) also said in surat Al-Hadid, (Verse 27), what can be translated as, "…And We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him (Jesus) compassion and mercy…"

Allah (S.W.T) said in surat Ash-Shu'ra', (Verses 88 & 89), what can be translated as, "The day whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail, except him who brings to Allah a clean heart.'

Allah (S.W.T) said in surat Qaf, (Verse 33), what can be translated as, "…And brought a heart turned in repentance (to Allah)." And there are many other verses that describe the hearts and their tasks.

Allah (S.W.T) describes the Noble Qur'an that it is a cure and healing for heart sicknesses:

Allah (S.W.T) said in surat Al-Esra', (Verse 82), what can be translated as, "And We send down from the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe…"

Allah (S.W.T) also said in surat Yunus, (Verse 57), what can be translated as, "…There has come to you a good advice from your Lord (the Qur'an) and a healing for that in your breasts (the heart)…"

The diseases that afflict the hearts are two:

* Diseases of doubts: A man may be afflicted with one that is in the roots of the Deen or its branches. The Noble Qur'an clarifies these doubts and eliminates them for everyone who has the correct understanding and belief. If these diseases persist in the heart, they corrupt its vision.
* Diseases of whims and desires: A man may be afflicted with one desire that Allah (S.W.T) tests him with. This desire may dominate and control the heart. In the Noble Qur'an, there is a cure for this disease for everyone who has the correct understanding and belief. If this desire settles in the heart, it will destroy it.

Both of these diseases are behind the corruption of the hearts. With their corruption, people get corrupted, and with the people's corruption, the society gets corrupted. Life is then transformed to a life of misery and hardship. At this point, there will be failure in this life and in the Hereafter.

In next Khutbahs, we will talk more about the means and practical ways that help purify the souls. "In sha'llahu ta'la"

**Purifying the Soul (2)**
 The Practical Means for Tazkyiah (Soul Purification):

The most important task for man after knowing Allah (S.W.T.) is Tazkiyah or (soul purification). Man's success or failure in this life and in the Hereafter depends on whether man purifies his soul or not. Islam prescribed to us means that help purify the souls. It is a must that we use these means when we are in the process of Tazkiyah or (soul purification). We can not use any means that are not prescribed by Islam.

The process of soul purification is an on-going process as long as man is alive. It is implied by the sincere submission to Allah (S.W.T.) who created man and Jinn for no purpose other than the sincere submission to Him alone. Allah (S.W.T) says the Noble Qur'an in surat Ath-Tharyat, (Verse 56), what can be translated as, "I did not create the Jinn and the humans but to ya'bodoon (submit to me)." "The "ibadah" is a collective noun that includes every thing that Allah (S.W.T.) loves and accepts from sayings and the physical acts; the hidden (acts by heart) and the openly (acts by limbs). The acts by limbs are many, which we start with the useful knowledge:

The useful knowledge is the first means to purify the soul. This is every knowledge that brings man closer to Allah (S.W.T.), increases man's fear of Allah (S.W.T.) and guides man to do good deed. This knowledge includes the knowledge of Islamic rules that apply to Aqheeda, acts of worship, dealings. This knowledge also includes other types of knowledge that guide man to contemplate about Allah's creation, His great power and perfection.

Knowledge is the foundation of deeds and its guide. It is as useless to do something without knowledge as having knowledge without a deed. Allah (S.W.T.) ordered us to have knowledge before the deed: Allah (S.W.T.) says the Noble Qur'an in surat Muhammad, (Verse 19), what can be translated as, "(O Muhammad) Have knowledge that there is no god except Allah and seek forgiveness for your sin and for the believers males and females." So, Allah (S.W.T.) commanded the messenger Muhammad (S.A.W.) that he has to have knowledge of the Oneness of Allah first followed by asking for forgiveness which is an action. Imam Al-Bukhari in his authentic book cited this verse to show the importance of knowledge and that it should precede the deed.

The useful knowledge based on the Oneness of Allah (S.W.T.) is the fundamental and first practical means to purify the soul and bring it closer to Allah (S.W.T.). It is also the means to increase the fear of Allah (S.W.T.) and corrects the path and increases belief. For this reason, seeking knowledge is one of the greatest acts of worship. There are many verses and Ahadiths that show the importance of knowledge, its status in the sight of Allah (S.W.T.), and the position of those who have knowledge.

For knowledge to have an effect in the process of Tazkiyah of the soul, two conditions must be met:

* Good deeds must follow knowledge with sincerity for the sake of Allah (S.W.T.), performed according to their rules upheld equally by the scholar and the student.
* The person who has knowledge must avoid the arguments that lead to animosity and evil soul.

The first condition includes:

Acting according to the knowledge. Allah (S.W.T.) warned us from knowledge that is not followed with action and from a saying that is not followed with action. The prophet (S.A.W.) also clarified to us that the scholar would be asked on the Day of Judgment about his knowledge and what he did with it. Did he seek it and teach it for the sake of Allah (S.W.T.) alone.

The prophet (S.A.W.) also used to ask Allah (S.W.T.) the useful knowledge and seek His refuge from the knowledge that is useless. So, the prophet (S.A.W.) used to say: "Oh Allah, I seek your refuge from a knowledge that is not useful, from a heart that does not humble, and from a soul that is not satisfied and from a supplication that is not granted."

Imam Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali said: "If someone does not acquire this useful knowledge, he will fall into the four things that the prophet (S.A.W.) used to seek Allah's refuge from. His knowledge will be against him. So, he will not benefit from it because his heart does not humble before Allah (S.W.T.) and his soul is not satisfied with this world. Rather he is holding tight to this world and always seeking it. His supplication will not be heard because he does not obey Allah's orders and does not refrain from anything that displeases Allah." Imam Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali also said: "A sign of the people of knowledge is that they are humble, they hate reverence and people's high remarks of them, they do not look down on people, they are always seeking the Hereafter taking from this world only what they need, they are constantly worshipping Allah (S.W.T.). The more knowledge they have, the more fearful of, the more humble, and the more submissive to Allah (S.W.T.) they become."

The second condition is:

Avoiding arguments because this will lead to evil soul, and the animosity towards others. In an authentic Hadith the prophet (S.A.W.) said: "No people got misguided after they were guided, but they were plagued with argument." Then, the prophet (S.A.W.) recited what Allah (S.W.T) says the Noble Qur'an in surat Az-Zukhrf, (Verse 58), what can be translated as, "…They quoted it for you not except for argument. Nay! But they are a quarrelsome people."{Reported by Imams At-Trmthi, Ahmad and Abn Majah}

A scholar from the Salaf generation said: "If Allah (S.W.T.) loves a man, He will provide to him the opportunity to do good deeds and keep off the argument. And if Allah (S.W.T.) wants harm for a man, He will keep off the good deed and will plague him with argument."

Imam Malik said: " Argument concerning knowledge turn off the light of knowledge and stiffen the heart."

Imam Al-Hasan Al-Bassri heard a folk arguing. So, he said: "These people are bored with worship, they find it easy to talk in vain, and their righteousness is diminished so they vainly talked."

Some of the effects of the useful knowledge on purifying the soul:

* The Muslim would know the correct Aqheedah, strengthen his belief and keep away from false beliefs.
* The Muslim would know the rules of Halal and Haram and all that he needs from the rules of worship and dealings.
* The Muslim would know the due right of every act of worship. This way he is not busy doing a recommended deed and forgetting an obligatory deed.
* The knowledge would protect the Muslim from everything that would destroy him, like the whims and desires and Satan’s traps.
* The knowledge helps the Muslim fear Allah (S.W.T.), love Him, and get closer to Him.
* The knowledge helps the Muslim become more humble with others.
* The knowledge helps wipe out the sins because knowledge is from the greatest good deeds. Allah (S.W.T) says the Noble Qur'an in surat Huod, (Verse 114), what can be translated as, "…Verily, the good deeds remove the evil deeds…" and the prophet (S.A.W.) says: "Follow the bad deed with a good one that will wipe it off." Omar (R.A.) used to say: "A man walks out with sins like the mountains of Tehamah (to a circle of knowledge). If he hears some knowledge, he fears Allah, reassesses himself and repents. So, he leaves the circle of knowledge with no sin. So, do not leave the circles of knowledge."
* The knowledge helps Muslim long for the Hereafter and takes only what he needs from this worldly life. So, he is not busy going after things that will vanish in this life instead of being busy running after the everlasting life in the Hereafter.

So, we should all help one another to acquire the correct knowledge through learning it and teaching it. This must include all; man, women, children, young and old with no exception. We must also know that we cannot achieve knowledge unless we are patient, perseverant, and persistent and struggling with our own self and benefiting from our time instead of wasting it. Also, everyone who learns something useful should teach it to others. This way, Tazkiyah or soul purification is collective and continuous until we meet Allah (S.W.T.).

**Purifying the Soul (3)**

The Righteous Deed:

Good knowledge and righteous deeds are strongly related; the knowledge that does not lead to good deed is not a good knowledge. Also, the deed that is not based on the correct divine knowledge is not a good deed and will not be accepted by Allah (S.W.T.).

The good deed includes all kinds of good deeds; it is not restricted to the acts of worship. It includes everything that pleases Allah (S.W.T.); sayings, actions (seen as well as hidden).

The most notable deeds that help purify the soul are the pillars of Islam: Salah, Zakah, Fasting, and Hajj (the mandatory and the recommended ones).

 The prayer is the main pillar of Deen, the key to Paradise, and the first thing that person will be accountable for on the Day of Judgment. Salah is the second pillar of Islam after the two declarations of Islam. It is the only act of worship that was prescribed during the night when the prophet (S.A.W.) was ascended to the sky. Many verses as well as Ahadith show the importance of the prayer.

There are conditions that must be met for the prayer to be an effective means for the purification of the soul. The most important of these conditions:

* The Salah must be complete, well performed on time without any compromise, performed exactly as the prophet (S.A.W.) performed it, and performed sincerely only for the sake of Allah (S.W.T.).
* The Muslim must perform Salah with all solemnity, submissiveness and full submissive a fully aware heart. This is because Salah without full submissiveness is like a body without a soul. The Muslim can never be successful unless he prays with full submissiveness. Allah (S.W.T.) says what can be translated as, "Successful indeed are the believers. Those who offer their prayers with all solemnity and full submissiveness." {Al-Mu'minun, 1 &2}

How do we accomplish all solemnity and full submissiveness in Salah?

The following actions help the Muslim to become full submissive in his Salah:

* The Muslim must recognize the importance of Salah. He must realize that it is a connection between him and Allah (S.W.T.). He must perform the Salah out of his conviction that it is an order from Allah (S.W.T.). He must know that Salah wipes out sins and lifts him to higher degrees and protects him from committing sins.
* The Muslim must push away all thoughts from his mind when he is performing Salah. He must keep away all things that interfere with his concentration and focus on what he is doing in Salah. He must keep away all things that interfere with his humility during Salah like various sounds (pagers, cell phone), pictures….. He must focus his eyes on the place of his prostration and never turns left or right or look up.
* The Muslim must contemplate the verses that he or the Imam is reciting. He must look into the meanings of these verses. He must contemplate death and its fright, grave, the people gathering on the Day of Judgment, and the various events of the Day of Judgment. The prophet (S.A.W.) reinforces this in his Hadith: "Pray like you are leaving this world."{Authentic Hadith reported by Imams Abn Majah and Ahmad.}

The more submissive the Muslim has in his prayer, the more reward he will get. With full submissive, the Muslim feels content, his soul is reassured, and Salah will have its effective deterrent against evil. With that, Salah becomes one of the greatest means to purify the soul and lift it to higher degrees closer to Allah (S.W.T.).

 Zakah is the third pillar of Islam. It is the growth, purification and blessing. It is one of the means that help purify the soul. Allah (S.W.T.) says what can be translated as, "Take Sadaqah (alms) from their wealth in order to purify them and sanctify them…"{At-Tawbah, 103}

Because of its importance, Zakah was associated with Salah, in the Qur’an, in 82 verses. Abu Bakr (R.A.) said: "I will fight every one who disassociates Zakah from Salah." He indeed fought those who did with the companions’ consensus.

Zakah will not have its fruits unless three conditions are met:

* The Muslim must keep away from hypocrisy, showing off, and reminding people of his generosity. Allah (S.W.T.) does not accept a good deed unless it is for his sake only. Allah (S.W.T.) cancels the reward of the charity when the charity-giver hurts people and boasts with his generosity. Allah (S.W.T.) says what can be translated as, "O you who believe! Do not render in vain your charity by reminder of your generosity or by injury…" {Al-Baqarah, 264}
* The Muslim must spend from what he loves, not from what he hates. He must be content with what he spends. Allah (S.W.T.) expressed that in the following verse: Allah (S.W.T.) says what can be translated as, "By no means shall you attain Al-Birr (piety), unless you spend (in Allah's cause) of that which you love…" {Al-Emran, 92} This closeness to Allah (S.W.T.) will not be attained until you spend from what you love, and you spend it generously. This way, you free your soul from being a slave to your money and stinginess that impede purification of the soul.
* The Muslim must spend from the good earnings, not from the bad ones. Imams Bukhari and Muslim reported that the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said, "If a person gives in charity of the value of even a date out of his pure earning, and Allah accepts only that which is pure, Allah accepts it with His Right Hand and fosters it for him, as one of you fosters the colt, till it becomes like a mountain."

This way, Zakah will be a practical and a fruitful way to purify the soul. Zakah is a practical test for the believer to obey Allah (S.W.T.) who orders him to spend. It is also a means to purify the soul from stinginess. This way, Zakah will pave the way to success. Allah (S.W.T.) says what can be translated as, "And whosoever is saved from his own covetousness, such are they who will be the successful." {Al-Hashr, 9} Zakah is also a practical way with which the believer shows his gratitude and his thanks to Allah (S.W.T.).

 Fasting is the fourth pillar of Islam. Allah (S.W.T.) prescribed it upon other nations in the history of humanity. Allah (S.W.T.) made the month of fasting so special that he revealed in it the Qur’an.

The greatest benefit attained in the month of Ramadan is Taqwa. Allah (S.W.T.) says what can be translated as, "O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may attain taqwa." {Al-Baqarah, 183}

This month is a great training school for the soul. In it, the soul quits its whims, desires, and needs, and learn patience. The Muslim also abstains from everything that causes breakfast from dawn to sunset. For fasting to achieve its role in purifying the soul, two conditions must be met:

* Fasting must be done for the sake of Allah (S.W.T.). It must be done out of belief in Allah (S.W.T.) and hoping his rewards. It must not be done as a habit. This way, the real meaning of fasting is realized. Imams Bukhari, Muslim and others reported that the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said, "Whoever observes the fasting during the month of Ramadan, believing in Allah and seeking His rewards, will have his/her past sins forgiven."
* Abiding by the orders of the prophet (S.A.W.) during the month of Ramdan helps us understand the meaning of this act of worship. For example, the prophet (S.A.W.) ordered us to have some food just before dawn prayer, he also ordered us to break our fast quickly after sunset and that our breakfast should be done only with few date fruits or some water. He also ordered us to supplicate to Allah (S.W.T.) when breaking our fast.

The Muslim must keep away from sins as he must keep away from allowed acts during fasting like eating, drinking. Imam Bukhari reported that the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said, "Whoever does not abandon falsehood in word and action then Allah has no need that he should leave his food and drink."

When these conditions are met, fasting becomes a great mean to purify the soul. It is a practical training to submit the soul to Allah (S.W.T.), it is also a practical training on patience, control and self-restrain from whims, desires and rage. It is also training for the soul to quit doing evil and to hurry to obey Allah (S.W.T.). It is also training the soul to appreciate the blessings of Allah (S.W.T.). This is attained when someone stops having these blessings for a short period of time to realize how great these blessings are. If those blessings are to continue without any interruption, their appreciation will be lost.

 Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam. It is distinguished from the other acts of worship in that it is a spiritual, physical and financial act of worship. It must be performed once in a lifetime for the capable. It must be performed in a specific place and a specific time. He who performs it will witness many worldly benefits as well as the benefits in the Hereafter. The greatest benefit is the attainment of the pleasure of Allah (S.W.T.) and His forgiveness. For Hajj to play its role in purifying the soul, some conditions must be met:

* Sincerity in performing Hajj for the sake of Allah (S.W.T.) alone.
* The Muslim must keep away from foul language, dispute and disobedience of Allah (S.W.T.) and everything that harm others.

Imams Bukhari, Muslim and others reported that the prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) said, "Whoever performs Hajj (pilgrimage) and dos not have sexual relations (with his wife), nor commits sin, no disputes unjustly, then he returns from Hajj as pure and free from sins as on the day on which his mother gave birth to him."

This way, Hajj becomes a practical way to purify the soul. It is a practical training for the soul when the Muslim suffers hardships in his travel. It is a training because the Muslim teaches himself to obey Allah (S.W.T.) through his application for the rituals of Hajj and his pillars. Also, the Muslim’s deeds are done out of his absolute obedience to Allah (S.W.T.), through his absolute submission to Allah (S.W.T.) because many acts of Hajj cannot be understood by the mind, like circling the Ka’bah, kissing the black rock… Hajj is a great lesson that teaches patience through the hardships of travel, leaving home, and staying away from family and children. For this reason, Omar (R.A.) said: "Pack and go to Hajj. It is one of two ways to do Jihad."

Hajj is also a treatment for the sickness of the soul like stinginess, egoism, hatred, and arrogance. This is done when the Muslim spends his money to travel, to lodge and to slaughter. This is also done when the Muslims are in one uniform clothing, one harmonious call, calling one Elaah. They are gathered under the brotherhood of Islam. There is no difference between an Arab and a non-Arab. Nor is there a difference between a white and a black. This is also done when Muslims get together on the mountain of Arafah where Satan is so humiliated. The prophet (S.A.W.) said: "There is no day that Satan feels so small, and so humiliated like he feels on the day of Arafah. This is because he sees how great the forgiveness of Allah (S.W.T.) to his people."

After this presentation for the pillars of Islam, it is clear to us how important these pillars in purifying the soul and training it. So, we must perform them and understand their meanings and benefit from their good fruits.