

Towards Self-realisation In Islamic Perspective: An Examination Of The Essentiality Of The Heart

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Abstract

Objective The main objective of this paper is to buttress the essentiality of the heart towards self-realisation from the perspective Islam. This is germane in a bid to enable man realize his mission so as to work towards salvation on the day of resurrection. The paper identifies the heart as important organ of the body which was originally endowed with a state of purity. It further emphasizes that this sound state enables it to recognize God and differentiate between truthfulness and falsehood. The paper affirms that this accounts for the reason why it serves as the custodian of the trust (Al-Amanah) given to man for exhibition on earth. It is in view of the above that the paper purposely stresses that everything concerning man is geared towards the state of the heart. The intent of the paper lies in the fact that, to enable man attain this originality, (the state of purification of the heart), man must be resolute to always engage in self assessment from time to time.

Methodology The paper adopts a critical analysis of the available literary work of Islam such as some verses of the Glorious Qur'an, relevant prophetic traditions and related write up of Islamic scholars. The make exposition of the evidences in relation to the topic and presented the discussion in logical and sequential order. This enables a flow of the ideas discussed, appreciation of the fact appraised and realisation of the objective of the paper.

Research Findings Based on scriptural evidences, the paper attests to the fact that the judgment of human feelings and actions, attainment of knowledge or inspirations, description of the state of a man (sound or sick) and reward on the day of resurrection all depends on the state of the heart. It further unveils that only self re-examination could assist man in retracing his footprint in a bid to realize his originality. When this is given due cognizance, it would accord man the chance of attaining success and perfection in this world and salvation in the day of resurrection.

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Applications To enable man attain his originality, (the state of purification of the heart), man must always put at the back of his mind the fact that the whole test of life is geared towards the heart. Man must therefore be resolute to always engage in self assessment from time to time. Man must be ready to reprimand himself whenever he falls below real expectation so that he could experience the peace of mind known by a purified heart.

Keywords: *The Heart, Human feelings/action, Self-Realisation, Islam*

Introduction

In a bid to pave way for proper understanding of this paper, it is highly imperative to understand clearly the meaning of the term “heart” and its function in human body. Anatomically, the heart is a blood pumping muscular organ situated in the centre of the chest with its apex directed to the left. Like many Muslim Philosophers, Al- Ghazali (1994) conceives the heart in twofold (physical form and spiritual form). The first exposition sees the heart as a special flesh, pine-like in shape, positioned in the left side of the breast and has within it a hollow cavity.

The second expression as expressed by Al- Ghazali (1994) is that the heart is subtle, divine and spiritual. It is the principal thing in man and therefore regarded as the essence of man. Human heart is also affirmed as that which in man perceives, knows, is aware, is spoken to, punished, and held accountable. It is viewed as a ‘king’ with two forms of soldiers,

the visible and invisible soldiers. The first is the one visible to human eye, while the invisible one cannot be seen with the naked eyes; they are rather discernible by the inner eyes. The visible soldiers include the eye, hand, foot, ear, tongue and the other organs, exterior and interior. The number of both the visible soldiers and the unseen one are known to no one except Allah. They were purposely created to comply with the instruction given to them by the heart.

The heart no doubt is the source and centre of emotional life, a place where ideas are conceived, intention are made and resolutions are reached. For example, if the heart instructs the hands not to accept an offer, or he legs not to move an inch, one would see these organs complying with the instructions accordingly. However, in whichever situation, the army performs either of the two functions in man. The function could either be productive to self or one which could lead to

self-destruction. This simply means that the heart controls and dictates to the body actions to be exhibited.

In recognition of the position of the heart in man's life, this paper is meant to buttress the need for man to always re-examine the heart as it is the pivot and the major fulcrum on which human feelings and actions formed and realised. Functionally, this would awaken man's consciousness as to whether or not; truly, he has deviated from his original status. It is apposite to construe that man was created blank and endowed with a purified heart which distinguishes between truthfulness and falsehood and could as such embrace the right path.

The above position is highly indispensable because as a result of viscosity of time and changes, man was sent down to the earth and subjected to test. From then, many among men gradually derailed from their originality. This was on account of their enslavement by the devil which dictates into their heart wrongful suggestions and eventually inspires them to offensive acts exhibited from time to time. More significantly, this self assessment would enable man emancipate themselves from the yoke of the devil. To buttress the originality of man, the prophet

(SAW) in Muslim (2007) says: "I have created all My slaves *lunafâ'* (with the inclination to worship Allah alone), but the devils come to them and turn them away from their religion (true path). They forbid to them that which I have permitted to them, and they tell them to associate others with Me for which I have not sent down". Similarly, in Bukhari (1997), prophet (SAW) says: "Every child is born on *A1-Fitrah* with a true faith of Islamic Monotheism (i.e. to worship none but Allah Alone)]...?"

The Chronicle of Human Action.

The annals of human action could be dated back to the primordial period of the history of man. During this period, there was an exhibition of offer and acceptance. This scenario transpired between God Almighty the creator of all being who offered the spirit of trust to the heavens, the Earth and the Mountains. For fear of inability to uphold the trust, they all rejected the offer. Man being ignorant and unjust, consented to the deal. The Glorious Qur'an affirms this in the following verse. "We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it;- He was indeed unjust and foolish"; (The Quran: 33:72)

In relation to the above, offer of trust by Allah to man, the following prophetic tradition narrated by Hudhaifa shows that when this trust was offered to man, it descended into nowhere among the organs of the body except the heart of man. The Hadith narrated in Bukhari (1997) says: "The Prophet told us that Al-Amanah (the trust or moral responsibility or honesty, and all the duties which Allah has ordained) descended in the roots of men's hearts (from Allah) and then they learned it from the Qur'an and then they learned it from the Prophet's Sunna. The Prophet (SAW) further told us how that Al-Amanah will be taken away. He said: "Man will go to sleep during which Al-Amanah will be taken away from his heart and only its trace will remain in his heart like the trace of a dark spot; then man will go to sleep, during which Al-Amanah will decrease still further, so that its trace will resemble the trace of blister as when an ember is dropped on one's foot which would make it swell, and one would see it swollen but there would be nothing inside.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the heart is the custodian of the trust given to man, it is therefore considered as the principal organ in man. This reveals the reason why all issues of great importance are being referred to it

Human Heart on Feelings and Actions

The heart of a living human being at whichever point or whichever time, passes through one emotional feelings or the other. These feelings are sometimes translated into actions be it utterances or deeds. Human feelings and actions are categorized into two namely the favourable feelings/deeds and the destructive feelings/actions. In the following Qur'anic verse Allah says: "Whoever works righteousness benefits his own soul; whoever works evil, it is against his own soul: nor is thy Lord ever unjust [in the least] to His Servants" (The Qur'an, 41:46).

However, the ultimate goal of every reasonable person should be exhibition of favourable deeds at all time. In Islam, for an act to be favourable no matter how good it is, it has to be done with utmost sincerity. This is a reflection of the following Qur'anic verse which says: "And they have been commanded no more than this: To worship Allah, offering Him sincere devotion, being true [in faith];" (The Qur'an, 98:5). The sincerity or otherwise of an action is known in the heart, while the knowledge of it is known to Allah alone. The Qur'an says: "Say (O Muhammad) whether you hide what is in your breast or reveals it, Allah knows it, and He knows what is in the heavens

and what is in the earth. Allah is able to do all things” (The Qur’an, 3:29). “And whether you keep your talk secret or disclose it, verily, He is the Knower of what is in the breast (of men)” (The Qur’an, 67:13). The crucial role of the heart in human action is further stressed in the above quotation.

In the same vein, Prophet gives a list of traditions reinforcing the significance of the heart and its purity in appraising the favourability and acceptance of an action or otherwise. Prophet (SAW) in Bukhari (1997) says: “There is a piece of flesh in the body, if it becomes good (reformed), the whole body becomes good, but if it gets spoilt, the whole body gets spoilt, and that is the heart”. “Allah does not look at your forms or your wealth rather He looks at your deeds and your hearts.” (Ibn Majah, 2007)

“The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So whoever emigrates for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration will be for what he emigrated for.” (Bukhari, 1997). “I am the least in need of a partner. Whoever does any deed in which he associates someone else with Me, I will reject him and his deed” (Muslim, 2007)

Similarly, due to an action exhibited, the heart no doubt is left with an inscription which could be either constructive or destructive. In the following prophetic traditions, the impacts of laughing and as well sins committed by a servant in his heart are expounded. The hadith Ibn Majah in (2007) says: “Do not laugh a lot, for laughing a lot deadens the heart.” In (Ibn. Majah, 2007) prophet says: “When the believer: commits sin, a black spot appears ;on his heart. If he repents and gives up that sin and seeks forgiveness, his heart will be polished. But if (the sin) increases (the black spot) increases. That is the *Ran* that Allah mentions in His Book: “Nay! But on their hearts is the *Ran* (covering of sins and evil deeds) which they used to earn.” In Muslim (2007), prophet (SAW) says: “Allah, the Mighty and Sublime, said: If My slave thinks of doing a good deed and does not do it, I will write it down as one good deed. If he does it, I will write it down for him between ten and seven-hundred fold. If he thinks of doing a bad deed and does not do it, I will not write it down, and if he does it, I will write it down as one bad deed.”.

In addition, excessive talk devoid of remembrance of Allah equally hardens the heart (Tirmidhi, 2007). All these illustrations call

for the need for self re-examination in order to regain the originality of the state of the heart (state of purity). The following Qur'anic verse stresses the need for total commitment and dedication to Allah. "Guard strictly your [habit of] prayers, especially the Middle Prayer; and stand before Allah in a devout [frame of mind]" (The Quran, 2:238). Zaid bin Arqam related that they were used to speaking to one another during the prayer; but after the above verse was revealed, speaking in prayer was forbidden. Prophet therefore enjoins Muslims to observe prayer in the best manner (Muslim, 2007).

To attain a state of commitment and dedication of heart to Allah in prayer, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) cautions against looking hither and thither as this gives the devil, a portion of the prayer time meant to be dedicated to Allah (Bukhari, 1997). At a certain period, Prophet (SAW) ordered that the clothe worn by him during prayer should be replaced with a plain thick sheet of cloth. This was because the former has printed mark which distracts his attention in prayer. This demonstrates the significance of concentration of the heart to Allah in prayer (Bukhari, 1997). In the following prophetic tradition in Tirmidhi, (2007), prophet (SAW) says: "Call upon Allah while being certain of being answered and

Allah does not respond to a supplication from the heart of one heedless and occupied by play". The above clearly shows that the heart is very significant in the course of communicating with Allah. This is to ensure that man attains a considerable level of purity of the heart. Devotion to Allah brings succour to the mind, while the otherwise leads to fear and lack of contentment (The Quran, 13:28 & Ibn. Majah, 2007).

The Heart on Search for Knowledge, Divine Inspirations and Devilish Ideas

Being the principal organ in man, the heart is endowed with a list of ability which includes the ability to learn and acquire knowledge, or attain certain level of divine inspiration. All these are efforts to assist man towards a return to his original status (state of purity). Negatively, the heart is also prone to incursion of some devilish ideas which on the other hand scares it from the attainment of its initial state of purity. Evidence abounds on the above assertion. For example, in the Glorious Qur'an, Allah made reference to some organs of the body which He endowed man with in order to assist him in acquisition of knowledge. "Do they not then earnestly seek to understand the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up by them?" (The Quran 47:24). "It is

He Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when ye knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affections: that ye may give thanks [to Allah]" The Qur'an, 16:78) "But He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him something of His spirit. And He gave you [the faculties of] hearing and sight and feeling [and understanding]: little thanks do ye give! (The Qur'an, 32 : 9). "Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts [and minds] may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts (The Quran, 22:46).

The above verse highlights three main organs as very key to acquisition of knowledge. The heart is the pivot of all the identified organs. To prepare the heart of the Noble prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.) for divine inspiration, his heart was dissected and cleaned with the purest of water (Zamzam) and in replacement filled with wisdom. The following Hadith in Bukhari, (1997) further attests to the above: "While I was lying in Al-Ha [tm or Al- Hijr, suddenly someone came to me and cut open my body from here to here." I asked Al-Jārud who was by my side, "What does he mean?" He said, "It means from his throat to his pubic

area," or said, "From the top of the chest." The Prophet, further said, "He then took out my heart. Then a golden tray full of Belief was brought to me and my heart was washed and was filled (with Belief) and then returned to its original place".

The following prophetic tradition further clarifies the significance of the heart of the messengers in acquisition of knowledge or divine inspiration. The hadith in Bukhari (1997) says: "Three persons (i.e. angels) came to the Prophet before he was divinely inspired (as a Messenger), while he was sleeping in Al-Masjid-al-Haram. The first (of the three angels) said, "Which of) them is he?" The second said, "He is the best of them." The last of them said, "Take the best one." That was all that happened: then, and he did not see them till they came at another night and he perceived their presence with his heart, for the eyes of the Prophet; were closed when he was asleep, but his heart was not asleep. This is characteristic of all the Prophets: Their eyes sleep but their hearts do not sleep. Then Jibril (Gabriel) took charge of the Prophet and ascended along with him to the heaven".

Because of the significance of the heart in appreciating ideas and understanding of issues, the divine message as stressed in the

Qur'an is addressed to man's heart. The Qur'an says: "O mankind! there hath come to you a direction from your Lord and a healing for the [diseases] in your hearts, and for those who believe, a guidance and a Mercy. Q: (10: 57). Verily in this is a Message for any that has a heart and understanding or who gives ear and earnestly witnesses [the truth] (The Qur'an, 50:37)

In the archive of events which transpired between Adam and the devil in paradise, the Glorious Qur'an affirms the work of the devil as the one who whisper devilish ideas into man's heart. These devilish ideas consequently set man apart from his creator. The Qur'an says: "But Satan whispered evil to him: he said, "O Adam! shall I lead thee to the Tree of Eternity and to a kingdom that never decays?" In the result, they both ate of the tree, and so their nakedness appeared to them: they began to sew together, for their covering, leaves from the Garden: thus did Adam disobey his Lord, and allow himself to be seduced (The Qur'an, 20:120-121).

In the following prophetic tradition, Prophet Muhammad confirms the existence of the devil in each individual. The Hadith in Muslim (2007) says: "There is no one among you but Allah has appointed a companion for

him from among the jinn' They said: 'Even you, O Messenger of Allah?' He said: ' Even me, but Allah helped me with him, and he became Muslim".

This devil does nothing except engagement in devilish inspirations into man's heart. It is on this premise that the Glorious Qur'an, God Almighty warns man against the devil and enjoins man to seek refuge in Him against it. Verily Satan is an enemy to you: so treat him as an enemy. He only invites his adherents that they may become Companions of the Blazing Fire (The Qur'an, 31:6).

Allah says "Say: I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of Mankind, The King [or Ruler] of Mankind, The god [or judge] of Mankind, From the mischief of the Whisperer [of Evil], who withdraws [after his whisper], [The same] who whispers into the hearts of Mankind, Among Jinns and among men (The Qur'an, 112:1-6).

The following traditions of the Noble prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.), shows how the devil instills in man's heart, villainous ideas. It was narrated from Anas that the Prophet was with one of his wives, and a man passed by him. He called him and he came, and he said: "O so-and-so, this is my wife, so-and-so." He said: "O Messenger of Allah, if I were to be suspicious about anyone, I would not be

suspicious about you." The Messenger of Allah said: "The Shaytan flows through man like blood" (Muslim, 2007).

It was narrated in Muslim (2007) from 'Ali bin Husain that Safiyyah bint Huyayy said: "The Prophet was observing I'tikâf and I came to visit him one night. I spoke to him, then I got up to go back, and he got up with me to send me back." Her home was in the house of Usamah bin Zaid. Two men of the Ansâr passed by, and when they saw the Prophet, they hurried up. The Prophet said: "Wait; this is Safiyyah bint Huyayy." They said: "Subhân-Allâh, O Messenger of Allah!" He said: "The Shaytan flows through man like blood, and I was afraid that he might instill some evil (or something) in your hearts".

The Sick Heart and the Sound one

The heart was originally created by the creator as an untainted organ (full of submission to the creator). After subjection to test in this world, it struggles between maintaining its virtuous state and flawless status. It is on this premise that at any point in time, the heart is either sick or sound. Understanding this would enable man liberate himself from the clutches of the devil thereby rediscovering his originality. As to the sick heart, it is characterized by a number of signs. The

peak of all signs is that which denies the existence of the creator or associate partner with Him. Such heart is consequently subjected to a state of bewilderment and consternation on account of its belief. (The Qur'an, 3:153, 8:12 & 33:26). Other closer signs include the heart which exhibits arrogance, (The Qur'an, 40:35 & Q: (39:72), hypocrisy; maintains state of serenity when sin is committed, finds comfort in disobedience of Allah, promotes evils, dislikes truth or heed not to admonition. (The Qur'an, 9:67). The heart enslaved to its whims and caprices and immersed in worldly desires is no doubt a sick heart (The Qur'an, 28:50 & 45: 23). As a result of all these, their minds remain sealed and eventually prevented them from realizing their original status (The Qur'an 7:179 & 2:10).

A sound heart is directly the opposite of the sick one. It is the heart which believes in Allah (The Qur'an, 58: 22), worships Him sincerely (The Qur'an, (98:5), finds solace in His remembrance (The Qur'an, 13:28) and relies on Him (The Qur'an, 3:172-173) in all matters. Appreciating the blessings of Allah (Tirmidhi, 2007), repulsing devilish thought, (The Qur'an 7:201), inclining to absolution and exhibiting remorsefulness when engrossed in sins (The Qur'an 3:135), and upholding the spirit of

humbleness and humility (The Qur'an, 57:16) are all signs of a sound heart. A purified heart enjoins good, forbids evil (The Qur'an, 9: 71), trembles and tremors when Allah's name or sign is being discussed, and subdues its whims and caprices (The Qur'an 79:40-41) but consents to the dictates of Allah and His prophet. Connecting from the above, understanding the typology of the heart would enable man to escape from the bondage of the devil thereby realising soundness of mind which is originally the true state of the heart.

A sound heart is that which constantly remembers Allah, regrets when unable to exhibit an act of obligation or virtuous conduct, admonishes others to embrace the spirit of repentance and find solace in prayer. A sick mind gives credence to materialism above spirituality, dislikes truth and remembrance of Allah and associates with people of evil mind (Solahuddeen, 2015).

Salvation in the Hereafter or Retribution in the Last Day

The journey begins with the heart so shall it end with the heart. At the beginning, the trust given to man by Allah led to the coming of man into this ephemeral world. The heart being the receiver and custodian of this trust when it was given shall at the end account for

it usage on the day of resurrection. To this effect, in the Glorious Qur'an, Allah says: "The Day whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail, But only he [will prosper] that brings to Allah a sound heart;" (The Qur'an, 26: 88-89). Prophet also corroborates the above assertion as he affirms that people will resurrected (and judged) according to their intentions" (Ibn Majah, 2007).

Admittance to paradise as illustrated in many prophetic traditions would be on account of realization of the originality of the state of the heart (soundness of the heart). The following evidences further corroborate the above. Prophet (SAW) in (Muslim, 2007) says: "No one in whose heart is faith the weight of a mustard-seed will enter the Fire".

In Bukhari (1997), "Anas said I heard the Prophet. saying, "On the Day of Resurrection, I will intercede and say, 'O my Lord! Admit into Paradise (even) those who have Faith equal to a mustard seed in their hearts.' Such people will enter Paradise, and then I will say, ('O Allah) admit into Paradise (even) those who have the least amount of Faith in their hearts.' Anas then said: As if I were just now looking at the fingers of Allah's Messenger"

By implication it means the heart which sincerely relies in Allah. The day of resurrection is a day of revelation of secrets of the heart. As paradise is meant for people of sound heart, so is the hell the abode of the ill-hearted people. The following are some relevant quotations substantiating the above.

When Allah gathers the people on the Day of Judgment - a Day in which there is no doubt in - a caller will call out: 'Whoever committed Shirk in any of his deeds he did for Allah - then let him seek his reward from other than Allah. For indeed Allah is the most free of the partners from any need of Shirk' (Tirmidhi, 2007). "Whoever seeks knowledge to contend with the scholars, or to use it to argue with the fools, and to have the people's faces turn towards him, then he shall be admitted to the Fire.." (Tirmidhi, 2007). "...and no one in whose heart is arrogance the weight of a mustard-seed will enter Paradise." (Muslim vol. 1, no. 265, pp 178-179). "Whoever seeks knowledge that should be sought seeking the Face of Allah, but he only seeks it for the sake of some worldly gain, he will not smell the Arf of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection." Meaning, its fragrance (Abu Dawud, 2008).

In one of his traditions, prophet made it clear that the first sets of people to be judged

on the Day of Resurrection are three. The first of them is a man who shall claim to have fought for the sake of Allah and died in His course. The second shall be a man who shall claim to have acquired knowledge and taught others, for the sake of Allah while the third person shall be a rich man who shall claim to have spent his wealth for the sake of Allah. On this Day, the knower of secrets of the heart (Allah) shall unveil the secretes in their hearts (intention) one after the other. As to the one who claims to have fought for the sake of Allah and died in His course, Allah will declare him as a liar as the real motive was for people to regard him as a brave fighter and it was said. Allah will expose the scholar and tag him as a liar who acquired knowledge so that he would be considered as a scholar and good reciter of the Glorious Qur'an. Similarly the rich man shall also be called a liar for spending his wealth so that he could be hailed for the generosity. Each of them shall be dragged on their faces and thrown into the Fire (Nasai, 2007).

Conclusion

All the issues discussed in the paper centres on the belief that originally man was created with an untainted, clean and purified heart. This is the heart which recognises Allah

as the creator and gives total submission to Him alone. In order to reward man accordingly, this trust of recognition of Allah and need to worship Him was placed in human heart. This is the reason why reference is made to it in everything in life. The extent to which man is able to realise the need to be master of the mind and not enslaved to it would determine his ability to achieve self realisation. This is because man is surrounded with a lot of temptation purposely to corrupt the state of the heart thereby rendering it insignificant in life.

Recommendations

1) To enable man attain his originality, (the state of purification of the heart), man must always put at the back of his mind the fact that the whole test of life is geared towards the heart.

2) Man must therefore be resolute to always engage in self assessment from time to time.

3) Man must be ready to reprimand himself whenever he falls below real expectation so that he could experience the peace of mind known by a purified heart.

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