

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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Tazkiyyah (Purification) of the Soul

Every Muslim has to take care of his or her soul. He or she must purify it and keep it in a healthy state. This is especially important in the midst of the busy life of today and the many temptations and distractions that surround us. The heart gets affected by these happenings and becomes stained. According to a *Hadith* of Rasulullah (*Salla Allahu alaihi wasallam*) the heart becomes rusty as iron becomes rusty. When the heart rusts the *Nafs* follows and in becomes engulfed with dirt.

Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*) commanded and urged us to purify ourselves. He says: “And by the soul, and the One who made it in the best form. He inspired it with its (instincts of) evil and piety. He indeed succeeds who purifies it. And he fails who corrupts it!”

The meaning of *Tazkiyatun-Nafis* (purification of the soul.) Rasulullah (*Salla Allahu alaihi wasallam*) explained in a comprehensive phrase in one of his *Hadith* what is meant by purification of the soul. He said: “There are three things whoever does them he will find the taste of *Iman*; he who worships Allah alone – for there is no god other than Him; and happily pays his *Zakat* and purifies his *Nafs*. A man said: How does one purify his *Nafs* O Messenger of Allah? He said: By knowing that Allah is with him wherever he is.’

It is when one becomes aware of the continuous presence of Allah with him that one becomes keen to do what is true and correct and avoid what is false and wrong. This is obvious because if one is in the presence of other people he is keen to show the good side of him – so what about the one feels that Allah is looking at him?

There is no doubt that success in this life and in the hereafter depends on the purification of the soul from the things that tarnish and dirty it. The greatest things that defile the soul are *Kufr* and *Shirk*. The greatest thing that causes the purification of the soul is *Tawheed* Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*.)

Ibn Kathir, may Allah have mercy upon him, said regarding the words of Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*): “and woe to the *Mushrikeen* (those who ascribe partners to Allah.) Who do not pay the *Zakat*; and who are disbelievers in the Hereafter.” He said: What is meant by *Zakat* here is the purification of the soul from the vile qualities – and the most crucial form of purification is purification from *Shirk*.

Other things that defile the soul in addition to *Kufr* and *Shirk* include *Nifaq*, *Riya'*, doubts, fearing other than Allah, pride and arrogance, following one's whims, greed, stinginess, cowardice, hatred, envy, anger, love of the life of the world and so on.

It is by knowing the things that defile the soul that one knows the things which purify it.

Purifying the soul can be achieved by following two essential steps:

- a) Purifying it from the dirt and diseases.
- b) Elevating and developing it by enriching it with good moral qualities. This is what is called in Islamic terms emptying and refilling it – emptying it from the bad qualities and refilling it with the good ones.

I have already mentioned the vile and despicable qualities such as *Shirk*, *Riya'*, *Nifaq*, etc.

The good qualities include *Tawheed*, *Ikhlas*, patience, *Tawkul*, penitence, gratitude, fear and hope, good conduct with people and so on.

It is very important for one to know his bad and unpleasant qualities and their causes so that one can rid himself from them. The first step in treating any disease is to discover it and then know their causes. Without this knowledge there could be no treatment. One might not realise his own defects and bad traits; and for this he needs an outsider, a sincere and trustworthy person to point out to them and advise him accordingly. One should not be arrogant and refuse to accept advice. It is true that criticism is painful and no one likes to be criticised; however, it is better to swallow it- though it is bitter- rather than continue in error and later suffer the consequences. It is for this reason that some of *as-Salaf as-Salih* used to say: May Allah have mercy upon a person who gave us the gift of showing us our faults.”

In order that a person may have some control over his *Nafs* as a measure to purify it, he needs to deal with it in accordance with a plan that is based on three points:

1- The first point is to uphold justice against it when it is in the wrong and not to seek to free it from responsibility when it is not the case. Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*) says: “O you who believe! Be upholders of justice - witnesses for Allah, even though against (the interest of) your selves or the parents and the kin.”

2- One should not seek to take revenge for one’s *Nafs* because it might seem to one that it has been wronged when it. If it is truly has been wronged then one should remember the words of Allah (*Subhanahu wa ta'ala*): “And verily, whosoever shows patience and forgives that would truly be from the things recommended by Allah.”

3- One should not trust his *Nafs* most of the time. He should rather maintain accusing it. If one does not hold it in accusation, it will destroy one.

In a tradition of *Abu Hafs Al-Haddad*: He said: “Whoever does not accuse himself all the time, disagree with it and force it to do the things which it dislikes– then he is deceived. Whoever looks at it admiring some of its qualities, he has destroyed it.

As for the means which enable one to attain purification of one’s soul these include:

1- Ridding it from its vile qualities - which I have mentioned some of them such as *Riya’*, conceit, greed and so on.

2- Adorning it with good moral qualities such as *Ikhlas*, penitence, patience, fear of Allah, humility and so on.

3- Doing *Ibadah* properly and increasing in it. The aim of all acts of worship, *Salat*, *Zakat*, fasting, Hajj is to purify the soul.

4- Reading the Qur’an and reflecting upon it because the Qur’an removes the rust from the heart and when the heart is clean, the *Nafs* progresses and flourishes.

5- Repentance, *Istighfar* and *Dhikr* in general.