



Fighting The Ills of the Heart

By Abdullah bin Hamid Ali

The well-being of the heart and intentions has to be the most important aim of all Muslims. Allah says,

‘The day that neither wealth nor sons will be of any benefit except for he who comes to Allah with a pure heart.’

[Shu’ara 26: 89]

And the Prophet (pbuh) said,

‘Verily in the body is a morsel of flesh. When it is healthy, the whole body is healthy. And when it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. Verily it is the heart.’

Bukhari and Muslim

Imam Abu Hamid Al-Ghazzali (died 505 AH) lists amongst the chief ills of the heart in his book, *Bidayat I-Hidaayah* (The Beginning of Guidance), three things:

- Envy (hasad)
- Self amazement (‘ujb) and
- Self-display (riya)

There are other ills like, anger, hate, resentment, arrogance, pride, greed, avarice, eagerness, worry, anxiety, and a score of others. But by mastering the three listed above, overcoming all the others become even easier.

What one must understand is that overcoming the ills of the heart demands that one gains a deeper understanding of the divine decree (qadar). Tranquility, harmony, and peace in one’s life are directly

related to not questioning Allah's wisdom in decreeing a particular event. By not questioning His wisdom in anything removes one from being on par with Satan and spares one from a similar fate as his. For it was merely that he questioned Allah's wisdom that he was damned to the eternal abode of chastisement.

'He (Allah) said: O Iblis! What kept you from prostrating to what I created with my (own) hands? Are you haughty? Or are you one of the high (and mighty) ones?' (Iblis) said: *"I am better than him: You created me from fire, and him you created from clay."*

[Sad 38: 75-76]

Close consideration of this makes it clear that *Iblis* was actually questioning Allah's wisdom. It is as if he was saying to Him,

"I'm better than him because of my make-up. So if there was anyone worthy of being prostrated to, it would be me. And why can't *You* see that?"

Upon this Allah said,

"Then get you out from here for you are rejected, accursed. And my curse shall be on you until the Day of Judgment."

In this account we can see that Satan was afflicted by all three of the chief ills of the heart. His *self-amazement* led to his desire to be made an object of God's boast. So he wanted to *show off* the traits by which God made him superior to the angels. But when he was presented with one the Creator praised even above him, his *conceit* was manifested. And he became *envious* of Adam for having been made higher than him before Allah.

Envy is sign that one questions Allah's wisdom, since if Allah has given favor to another over you and you are envious, you are not content with His divine decree.

Conceit is also a sign that one questions Allah's wisdom, since if Allah gives favor to you over another, you are not content that Allah brought into existence one that is apparently of a lesser state than you.

And *self-display* is a sign that one questions the Creator's wisdom, since one does not suffice to seek *Allah's* satisfaction and approval of one's deeds. Rather, one associates the creation in what Allah should have no associate in.

The Cure for These Ills

Imam Al-Harith ibn Asad Al-Muhasibi (died 243 AH) – may Allah be pleased with him, says in his book, *Risalat al-Mustarshidin* (Message to those Seeking Maturity):

“The source of the heart’s corruption is the abandonment of taking a reckoning of the soul and deluding one’s self by having high hopes. So if you seek the well-being of your heart, then take pause with [your] desire and [your] thoughts. Then [once you’re aware] carry out what is [done solely] for Allah. And leave off what [is done] for another’s sake. And seek assistance in restricting the scope of [your] hopes by the constant reminder of death.”

[pp. 110-111: Dar al-Salam 1409/1988]

So fight *envy* by limiting the number of things you hope for. That way you won’t be bothered when you see someone with something you desire to have but don’t have. And there will always be someone who has something you don’t have but want.

And help to limit the number of things you hope to have by constantly reminding yourself that death could be near. You could die within the next hour.

‘Truly he succeeds who purifies it. And he fails that corrupts it.’

[Shams 91: 9-10]