

Brief Introduction to *Tazkiyah* – Purification of the Heart

Every human being has some good and some evil in them in varying proportions, which is exhibited as *Nafs* - meaning self or personality. We all have problems like arrogance, lying, cheating, being jealous, backbiting etc. These are basic moral shortcomings that all human beings have. Those people, who want to make their personality better, try to get rid of these diseases of the heart.

Developing a positive personality is a difficult, time-consuming and long-term exercise. It does not have a quick-fix solution such as reciting some extra prayers or supplicating a given number of times.

Such an effort is a lifelong journey.

Once we decide to embark on this wonderful journey of self-transformation, we need to understand a little bit about our destination and the road we need to take.

What journey are we embarking on?

Every journey has a name, some cases it is a road trip, other times it is a vacation, it could be a pilgrimage or a safari trip... So what is the name of this journey?

There are many names but in Islamic terminology, the most common term used is *Tazkiyah*.

Tazkiyah originally meant pruning a plant – to remove what is harmful for its growth.

When this term is used for human personality, it means to beautify it and to remove from it all evil tendencies and spiritual diseases that are obstacles in its positive development and ultimately in getting Allah's pleasure.

In Islam, the ultimate objective of religion and *shariah* (Islamic law) and the real purpose of raising prophets from among mankind was performing and teaching *tazkiyah*.

Literally the term encompasses two meanings:

1. To cleanse and purify from pollutants,
2. To improve and develop towards the height of perfection.

Technically it conveys the sense of checking oneself from erroneous tendencies and beliefs and turning them to the path of virtue and piety (fear of God's displeasure) and developing it to attain the stage of perfection.

[The word *zakat* (alms tax) comes from the same Arabic root word, since *zakat* purifies an individual's wealth by recognition of Allah (swt)'s right over a portion of it. It finds its origin in the Qur'anic command to: "Take *sadaqah* (charity) from their property in order to purify and sanctify them" (Surah *At-Taubah*: Verse 103)].

What is the Destination?

Jannah (Paradise)

What are the check points / Road marks of the journey?

Journey of the Heart

يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ
إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

“The day when wealth and children will not benefit anyone except he who will come to Allah with a *Qalb-e-Saleem* (a sound heart).”
(Surah Ash Shu’ara 26: Verses 88-89)

This is the spectrum:

Black Heart (worst) ———> Sound Heart (best)

By doing *tazkiyah* – we work towards making our heart *Saleem* (sound).

Journey of the Soul:

Nafs Al Ammara → *Nafs Al Lawwamah* → *Nafs Al Mutma’innah*

These are the three stages of development of the ‘*nafs*’ or the human soul / self; our aim is to get to the highest stage:

1) *Nafs Al Ammara*: That which is prone to evil and if not checked and controlled, will lead to eternal damnation (aka, Hell fire).

Described in Qur’an, Surah Yusuf 12: Verse 53

وَمَا أُبْرِئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

.....Surely man’s *nafs* (soul/inner self) often incites to evil

2) *Nafs Al Lawwamah*: That which feels consciousness of evil, and resists it, asks for Allah’s grace and pardon after repentance and tries to amend. (Basically if you feel bad after doing something bad, you’re in this stage)

Surah Al Qiyamah 75: Verse 2

وَلَا أُفْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ

And I swear by the self-reproaching *nafs*

3) *Nafs Al Mutma'innah*: The highest stage of all, when the soul achieves full rest and satisfaction after '*aql* (intellect) has checked our evil tendencies. In this stage a person's *taqwa* (consciousness of Allah) is at its peak. He (or she) is essentially an example to society.

Surah Al Fajr 89: Verse 27-30

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ

ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً

فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي

وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

O content soul, come back to your Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing
So, enter among My (special) servants
And enter My Paradise

Why is it important to go through this journey of *Tazkiyah*?

Our Top 10 reasons:

- 1) Don't want to burn in Hell
- 2) Want to see Allah (swt) (in Paradise)
- 3) Want palaces underneath which rivers flow (Paradise)
- 4) Want eternal pleasure
- 5) Be friends with the greatest humans on earth!

(Muhammad PBUH, 'Isa, Musa, Ibrahim, Suleiman (PBUT) and all the Prophets – Maryam (as), Bibi Asiyah & Bibi Hajar – the Sahabas (Umar, Abu Bakr, Uthman, Ali, Khadija, Aisha, Umme Salamah, Fatimah, Hamzah, Mus'ab bin Umayr, Abu Dhar, Bilal, Zubair (May Allah be pleased with them all)

- 6) Peace and strength to deal with any situation (in this world)
- 7) Help change society for the better
- 8) Become more loved (By Allah, parents, friends, colleagues, the person you meet on the street even!)
- 9) Obey our Lord and be thankful to Him
- 10) Who doesn't want to change for the better?