

Islam's Approach to Nurturing the Soul

Islam carefully nurtures the souls of the believers by gently yet persistently encouraging us to engage in a number of activities that have a miraculous effect on the spirit, filling the heart with tranquillity and conviction, while enlightening the mind.

The first activity promoted by Islam is **thought**. Independent thought is encouraged in several verses of the Quran. Some Muslim people often hang the Qur'an on the walls of their houses within a decorative cover and elderly people read it from time to time. They assume that the Qur'an protects those who read it from "misfortune and trouble". According to this superstition, they consider the Qur'an a sort of amulet against misfortunes.

The Qur'anic verses, however, inform us that the purpose of the Qur'an's revelation is entirely different from what is mentioned above. For instance, in the 52nd verse of Surah Ibrahim, Allah states: "**This is a communication to be transmitted to mankind so that they can be warned by it and so that they will know that He is One God and so that people of intelligence will pay heed.**" In many other verses, Allah emphasises that one of the most crucial purposes of the Qur'an's revelation is to invite people to ponder.

In Surat al-Mulk, Allah (swt) says, "**He Who created the seven heavens in layers. You will not find any flaw in the creation of the All-Merciful. Look again - do you see any gaps? Then look again and again. Your sight will return to you dazzled and exhausted!**" [TMQ, Al-Mulk 3-4]

In the Qur'an, Allah invites people to reject blindly accepting the beliefs and values society imposes on them and to ponder by pushing aside all the prejudices, taboos and constraints on their minds.

Man must think on how he came into being, what is the purpose of his life, why he will die and what awaits him after death. He must question how he himself and the whole universe came into existence and how they continue to exist. While doing this, he must relieve himself of all constraints and prejudices.

By thinking, while isolating his conscience from all social, ideological and psychological obligations, the person should eventually perceive that the entire universe, including himself, is created by a superior power. Even when he examines his own body or any other thing in nature, he will see an impressive harmony, plan and wisdom at work within its design.

At this point again, the Qur'an guides man. In the Qur'an, Allah guides us as to what we should reflect on and investigate. With the methods of reflection given in the Qur'an, he who has faith in Allah will better perceive Allah's perfection, eternal wisdom, knowledge and power in His creation. When a believing person starts to think in the way shown in the Qur'an, he soon realises that the whole universe is a sign of Allah's power and art, and that, "nature is a work of art, not the artist itself". Every work of art exhibits the exceptional skills of the one who has made it and conveys his messages.

In the Qur'an, people are summoned to contemplate numerous events and objects that clearly testify to the existence and uniqueness of Allah and His attributes. In the Qur'an, all these beings that bear witness are designated as "signs", meaning "tested evidence, absolute knowledge and expression of truth". Therefore, the signs of Allah comprise all the beings in the universe that disclose and communicate the being and attributes of Allah. Those who can observe and remember will see that the entire universe is only composed of the signs of Allah.

Allah (swt) says in Surat Yusuf, **"There is an instruction in their stories for people of intelligence."** (Surah Yusuf: 111)

This, indeed, is the responsibility of mankind; to be able to see the signs of Allah... Thus, such a person will come to know the Creator Who created him and all other things, draw closer to Him, discover the meaning of his existence and his life and so prosper.

In addition to thought, another method used by Islam to nurture the soul and inculcate a culture of goodness and well-being is by encouraging God-consciousness and a healthy fear of Allah. Allah Almighty says, **"O you who believe, have taqwa of Allah with the taqwa due to Him,"** (3:102) and the Almighty says, **"Have taqwa of Allah as much as you are able to."** (64:16) This verse clarifies what is meant by the first verse. Allah Almighty says, **"O you who believe! Have taqwa of Allah, and speak words which hit the mark."** (33:70) And in another verse, Allah Almighty says, **"Whoever has taqwa of Allah, He will give him a way out and provide for him from where he does not expect."** (65:2-3) The Almighty says furthermore, **"If you have taqwa of Allah, He will you discrimination and erase your bad actions from you and forgive you. Allah's favour is indeed immense."** (8:29)

Abu Hurayra said, "It was asked, 'Messenger of Allah, who is the noblest of people?' He replied, **'The one with the most fear of Allah.'** They said, 'This is not what we meant.' He said, 'Yusuf, the Prophet of Allah, son of a Prophet of Allah, son of a Prophet of Allah, son of the Friend of Allah.' They said, 'This is not what we meant either.' He said, **'Is it then about the Arabs that you asking? The best of them in the Time of Ignorance is the best of them in Islam when they have knowledge (of the deen).'**" [Agreed upon]

Allah's Messenger (Saas) said, **"Fear Allah wherever you are; if you follow an evil deed with a good one you will obliterate it; and deal with people with a good disposition."** The Prophet (saas) also said, **"By Him in Whose hand my soul is, you must enjoin what is reputable and forbid what is disreputable, or Allah will certainly soon send punishment from Himself to you. Then you will make supplication and not receive an answer."**

In this respect, Umar ibn `Abdul `Azîz (rahimahullâh) used to say, **"None can reach the station of taqwâ until he possesses neither action nor words that can be exposed to his embarrassment either in this world or the Hereafter."** He was once asked, "When does the worshipper reach the peak of taqwâ? He replied, **"If he put all his thoughts and desires in his heart on a plate and then wandered around in the market, he should not feel ashamed of anything there."** He would frequently say, "The sign of the muttaqî (pious person who fears Allah swt much) is to bridle oneself from speaking just like one in ihrâm bridles himself from speaking."

We ask Allah (swt) to fill our hearts with His love and a healthy fear of His anger, so we may increase our awareness and righteousness and truly nurture our souls and achieve an inner peace and strength that radiates throughout our brings, touching everything in our lives, and filling us with happiness and contention. Ameen.

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