

## **The Living Heart: The Heart That Beats**

### **First Step in Becoming a Human**

#### **What Is a Living Heart, and What Are Its Signs?**

Have you ever heard the music of life? Perhaps by facing this question, you are reminded of the sound of a babbling brook, the rustling of leaves in the wind, or the melody of birds. There is no doubt that all of these sounds are pleasant to the ear. But none of these pleasing sounds are the music of the living heart. Have you ever heard the sound of a fetus's heartbeat? He has not yet set foot in this world, but the continuous beating of his small heart ignites a passion for life in the hearts of all who listen. It is a melody with the rhythm of life that reaches the ear from a small heart. Upon hearing this sound, we certainly know that the fetus is alive. In fact, a living heart is the sign that we are alive.

We all know that one of the first signs of life is a person's heartbeat; each beat helps him to continue on his path in the journey of life. And if, for any reason, the heart stops beating, nothing awaits him but death and the end of his physical life. This physical life is closely connected to our soul's life, but the soul also has life. The living heart is also referred to as wakefulness,<sup>1</sup> the awakening of the heart, and the like. In this article, we aim to discuss the concept of the 'living heart' and its signs. It should be noted that in this lesson, we mean the spiritual heart whose vitality and wakefulness determine the spiritual well-being of a human being.

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<sup>1</sup>. *Yaqzah*

## The Characteristic of a Living Heart

In medicine, there is a specific definition for what it means to have a living heart, but what does the living heart mean from a spiritual perspective? Let us look to our physical state for the answer. From a physical point of view, a healthy heart is the one that beats regularly and circulates blood to all organs without any failure. This kind of heart does not have diseases such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, valve disorders, and other similar issues. Simply put, this heart does not disable its owner.

With this description, the other side of the coin becomes clear. The spiritual heart becomes alive and vital when it can overcome numbness through *ma'rifa* and starts beating or its beautiful spiritual life. After this, everything is totally different. All existence sends a message to the owner of this awakened heart and invites him to eternal happiness. When the heart awakens, the ears hear the truth and the eyes are astonished by the unseen. It seems that the awakening of the heart means removing the veils of habit and mundane routines. Without a living heart, we only experience a cold and dull existence. It is a pity that many hearts come to this world but never get the opportunity to experience true life and beating.

Other signs of a living heart include belief in the unseen realm, inner peace, happiness, and enjoying prayers and solitude with Almighty God. How exciting and meaningful life becomes with these qualities! When someone believes in the unseen realm, he sees the world and the hereafter from their Creator's perspective. Then he sees the world as an opportunity to build and enrich his life after death. The realm of the hereafter becomes his ultimate goal. The one with a living heart lives so peacefully and happily that no small or big event in this world can make

him angry or depressed. Depression and anger are two widespread qualities in our time. The joy of prayer and feeling connected to God is like a phone needing a charge – it is something we need to do regularly to stay connected. Just like our phones need power, our awakened hearts need to be recharged too, and that recharging comes from connecting with our Creator.

So far we have learned that a living heart is crucial for our spiritual well-being. But the big question is, how can we actually have a living heart?

### **How Can We Awaken Our Hearts?**

The process of nurturing a living heart is one of the most crucial steps and even the first one in spiritual awakening. Having a living heart is actually a special blessing that is bestowed upon worthy individuals by Almighty God. It seems that we need to cultivate certain qualities within ourselves in order to be worthy of acquiring a dynamic, awakened, and living heart. In other words, without preparation, we cannot embrace this noble goal: “You must be all love to be worthy of the beloved.”<sup>2</sup>

We must have enough determination and honesty to let go of the undesirable traits that we have been trapped in for years and live like a real human being. We should consider ourselves as servants of God and not neglect seeking the intercession of the infallible Imams (PBUT). In short, we should fill our hearts with God to acquire His attributes and names. This way, we can become similar to God and manifest His attributes.

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<sup>2</sup>. Rumi. *Divan of Shams*. Poem No. 2131.

At first glance, having a truly living heart might seem challenging and tiring, but in reality, it is not. That is because our movement towards the living heart is aligned with our *fitrah* and the purpose of our creation; it is the only path that is fully compatible with our soul. All we need is to change our lifestyle. Changing our thoughts, relationships, decisions, and behaviors is necessary for walking the path of achieving a living heart. As this *Hadith Qudsi* puts it, “And if he draws near to Me a hand's span, I draw near to him an arm's length; if he draws near to Me an arm's length, I draw near to him a fathom's length. And if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed.”<sup>3</sup> Striving for a living heart is a valuable effort that will benefit us the most; if we neglect it, we will deprive ourselves of the pleasure of living a truly human life, and this means an irreparable loss.

In this lesson, we began by defining a healthy physical heart, and then explored the concept of the living spiritual heart, along with some of its key signs. We also discussed various approaches to cultivating a vibrant living heart. These included seeking the intercession of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, identifying and overcoming negative personal traits, and consciously changing our thoughts, relationships, decisions, and behaviors.

Do you have any other suggestions for how to cultivate and sustain a truly living spiritual heart? What other techniques or practices have you found helpful for preserving the vitality and genuineness of a true human life?

We'd be interested to hear any additional insights or advice you may have on this topic.

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<sup>3</sup>. Muhaddith Nuri. *Mustadrak al-wasa'il*. vol. 5, p. 298.