

What Is Meant by the Purity of the Soul, and How Can One's Heart Attain This State?

Purity of the Soul: The Prerequisite for Growth and Acquisition of Spiritual Asset

As we learned in previous lessons, the most important part of our existence—the part that endures beyond death—is our heart and soul. To have a healthy life, both in this world and the hereafter, our hearts require assets. The greater our inner and spiritual asset, the happier and more at peace we will be in this world, and the more blessed and closer to God and the Household of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon them) we will be in the hereafter. But what exactly is asset?

An asset is what gives depth and value to our existence as we strive to attain it. People usually assess themselves based on physical and material assets, such as beauty and physical strength, or on estimative and imaginal assets, such as status and fame, or at best, they may define their value through intellectual accomplishments, such as academic degrees and scientific knowledge. However, none of these constitute authentic assets, nor do they determine a person's true value. A person's true worth lies in their heart, for the heart is the dwelling place of God.

In reality, what defines our humanity is the heart's ability to be a center of happiness, peace, and divine presence. Among all the vessels of existence, only the heart has the capacity to embrace God and the infinite. Given this, our primary concern should be to keep our hearts pure and healthy, as a heart is meant to be filled with God's presence and must be free from all impurities and defilements.

God enables our journey toward perfection only when our hearts have the capacity and are prepared to receive and undergo transformation. Otherwise, no matter how many years we spend in the presence of great religious scholars and moral teachers, the profound change we seek will not occur within us. In such cases, all we gain is an accumulation of knowledge that merely occupies our minds and intellects without bringing about any change in our hearts. The result of this is a hardened heart.

Those who amass large amounts of information in their minds but lack a true desire for becoming and spiritual maturity eventually lose even the little inner asset they once had. Some may even completely deviate from the path of truth. Therefore, before acquiring knowledge, it is crucial to first prepare our hearts to receive and undergo transformation. The prerequisite for this reception is purity of the soul and heart.

Purity is not merely about physical cleanliness; rather, it consists of two levels: external purity and internal purity. External purity means keeping the body and clothing free from physical impurities, as prescribed in Islamic jurisprudence and religious decrees. Internal purity, however, refers to cleansing the soul from all inner impurities. In essence, purification should begin with the body and material dimension, then extend to the imaginal, estimative, and intellective faculties, so that our rational thinking is sound and our intellective insights can guide the heart.

In this lesson, we will discuss the concept of purity of the soul and explore the factors that contribute to the heart's growth and the acquisition of spiritual asset.

Recognizing and Avoiding Sins: The Most Important Step Toward Purity of the Soul

Contrary to popular belief, embarking on the journey toward eternity does not require performing extraordinary and remarkable deeds. Rather, the guidance of religious scholars primarily emphasizes refraining from many actions. In other words, the first and most crucial priority is avoiding forbidden (*Haram*) and sinful acts, while performing good deeds takes a secondary role.

Sin is like a toxin. Just as consuming contaminated food poisons the body, and prevents it from gaining strength even with the most nutritious meals, sin taints and weakens the soul, hindering its growth and acquisition of spiritual asset. If years of worship, prayer, supplication, and pilgrimage have failed to bring us joy and peace; if, despite studying spiritual teachings, listening to religious lessons, performing recommended (*Mustahabb*) and righteous deeds, we still struggle with inner sadness and depression, finding no joy in our worship, then it indicates that we have, knowingly or unknowingly, committed sins that have weighed down our soul and hindered its elevation.

Wise individuals who seek to advance rapidly on the path of manifesting God's attributes and acquiring spiritual ranks focus more on avoiding sin than merely multiplying acts of worship. Sin is like a hole in a ship—it has the ability to sink even the greatest assets and treasures to the depths of the sea. Therefore, before anything else, we must strive to recognize sins and distance ourselves from them before pursuing good deeds. In this regard, the first step is identifying and avoiding external sins. Among these, abstaining from forbidden earnings is the most critical. Forbidden earnings lead to forbidden thoughts and polytheistic inclinations,

preventing the heart from acquiring spiritual assets and drawing closer to the Truth. Consuming forbidden earnings not only destroys all spiritual achievements but can even lead a person to the point of opposing the Imam of his time. A striking example is Shimar, who, despite having a strong religious background, ultimately strayed entirely from the right path ¹.

The next stage is recognizing and abandoning internal sins of the heart. These sins are far more dangerous than external sins. Purity of the heart does not simply mean avoiding gambling, alcohol, or theft. While these sins are indeed serious and must be avoided, what is even more important is ensuring that our hearts remain free from moral vices such as jealousy, arrogance, hypersensitivity, miserliness, resentment, and anger. Purging the soul of these internal impurities is much more challenging than refraining from external sins, and if left unchecked, they can entrap a person in suffering for centuries in Hell. We must conduct ourselves in all aspects of life in a way that preserves our inner purity and prevents our hearts from being tainted. For instance, if we suspect that owning a luxury car or attaining a high academic degree could foster arrogance or make us look down on others, it might be wiser to refrain from pursuing them.

Organizing the Wishes: Another Step Toward Purity of the Soul

It is not only sins that taint the soul and invite Satan in; rather, any form of preoccupation with things other than God, engaging in frivolous and meaningless

¹. Shimar Ibn Dhil Jawshan, the third person cursed in this section of *Ziyarat Ashura*, was once a staunch follower of Imam 'Ali and even fought against Mu'awiyah in the Battle of Siffin; however, he too succumbed to Satan and followed his low desires. (See Ali Asghar Azizi Tehrani, *Torch of Perpetual Guidance: An Exposé on Ziyarat Ashura*, section 11.

pursuits, and neglecting the purpose for which we have been created all contribute to the contamination of the soul. Our soul, through love and devotion, can either attain purity or absorb impurities. Therefore, it is crucial to be mindful of what—or whom—we give our hearts to. From God’s perspective, anything that diverts our love and devotion away from Him, the Household of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon them), and striving (*jihad*) in His cause, taints our hearts ². True purity of the soul is achieved when we distance ourselves from anything unworthy of being our beloved.

In this lesson, we discussed the importance of the purity of the soul and its role in spiritual growth and acquisition of assets. We emphasized that the most critical aspect of achieving purity of the soul is recognizing and avoiding sin. Additionally, we explored how carefully organizing the wishes plays a vital role in acquiring the purity of the soul.

². Quran, 9:24