

What Are the Types of Hearts in the Quran and What Does This Classification Signify?

Types of Hearts in the Quran Based on Existential Potentials

How does God view humanity? What does He consider as the essence of human dignity? Why does the Quran sometimes liken some people to stones and others to animals, even lower than animals? Is the aim of God in using such terms to insult the character of people, or is there another purpose? What are the types of hearts in the Quran, and why does the Quran categorize people based on their hearts?

Have you ever noticed the kinds of criteria used in the modern world to classify and value individuals and human societies? Black and white, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, developed countries and third-world countries. None of these classifications take into account the inherent dignity of people. Instead, they view humans as mere objects, with their dignity tied to outward achievements, and the wealthier or more accomplished they are, the more "valuable" they are. However, this should not be surprising. When human identity is based on illusory and untrue criteria and the true essence of humanity is ignored, such classifications and value judgments are inevitable. But we are not concerned with these classifications. What matters to us is God's view of humanity. God's perspective on humans is comprehensive and eternal, not a short-term, worldly one. In God's classification, external appearance has no place. Therefore, sometimes the value of a poorly educated black person in the third world is much higher in the sight of God than an

educated white person from the first world because God is not deceived by outward appearances; He looks at the inward state of human beings.

The true essence of a human being is their heart. Apart from the heart, all other possessions are temporary. Rational work, studies, learning, sensory, and imaginal experiences—everything we interact with in the world—serve as tools for shaping the heart. The heart or soul is the immaterial aspect of our existence and is the only thing that remains after death. In the Hereafter, everyone will be judged and valued based on their heart. Just as one can assess the prenatal conditions of a baby based on their physical state, in the Hereafter, one can understand how a person spent their life and what they have acquired by looking at their heart. This is true not only in the Hereafter, but also in this world, as a person's behaviors and lifestyle often reflect what is happening in their heart. In the following, we will introduce the types of hearts in the Quran, which represent God's classification of human beings.

Types of Hearts in the Quran

God divides people into two general groups in the Quran: true believers and *fasiqs*. According to God, only the first group, true believers, truly possess a "human heart" and can truly and without exaggeration be called "human." These are individuals who have reached the ultimate *ma'rifa* of the self, recognized their true Beloved (God), discovered the purpose of creation, and aligned all aspects of their lives with this purpose. This group is distinguished by four main traits: faith, righteous deeds, advising the truth, and advising patience, which we have discussed in detail in the topic of loss (*khusran*). Apart from this group, others are afflicted with *fisq* and

deviation from the Straight Path. Although they may appear human on the outside, their inward self is distorted and no longer truly human.

The Quran also classifies the second group into different levels, based on the structure of their inward self and heart. Excluding the "human heart," as discussed, the other types of hearts in the Quran include: the stone heart, the harder-than-stone heart, the vegetative heart, the animal heart, and the satanic heart. It is important to note that, as mentioned, the heart refers to the inward self of a person; in fact, the true essence of a person is their heart or soul, and every person is equivalent to their heart; it is not that the heart is a separate element from a human being. Let us now explore the characteristics of each of these types of hearts and why they are addressed in such a way.

The Stone Heart

One of the types of hearts in the Quran is the heart that is at the lowest level of existential potential, corresponding to the inanimate realm. These hearts are likened to stones by God: "Then your hearts became hardened after that, so they became like stones" ¹. Stones are generally known for their hardness and impenetrability. With this comparison, which is not merely a metaphor but also a standard of evaluation, God is revealing the value of certain individuals. Stones are not inherently bad; they are God's creation and have value in their own right. God's use of this analogy is not meant to insult anyone. It means that the worth of some people is precisely at this level; they are worth no more than a stone and lack

¹. Quran, 2:74

human value. A stone heart emerges when the inanimate dimension prevails. Individuals who excessively love inanimate perfections such as houses, cars, money, gold, clothes, household items, and similar things – to the extent that acquiring these becomes their main life priority – gradually distance themselves from their human inward self and heart, developing a stone or inanimate heart.

The Animal and Vegetative Hearts

Another type of heart in the Quran corresponds to the animal realm in terms of existential qualities. God likens the owners of these hearts to livestock: "They are like cattle" ². Animals are not lowly beings; they have many virtues. They know their Creator and worship Him in their own way. They are committed to their families, exhibit loyalty, modesty, and kindness, and serve both their own kind and other species. Therefore, when God likens some individuals to animals, He does not intend to insult them; rather, the aim here is also to convey the true worth and value of those individuals. In God's view, the worth of some people is at the level of animals; they have virtues, their virtues are sacred and luminous, and for their dedication to these virtues, they receive divine reward. However, they are not human after all, and engaging in matters such as serving others, responsibility, loyalty, and similar actions does not elevate them to the human status.

Here is the fluent English translation:

². Quran, 7:179

Another type of heart mentioned in the Quran, to which God refers in the continuation of this very verse with the phrase “even less guided”³, are those hearts that are existentially inferior to animals; meaning they lack even the minimal animal attributes. The owners of these hearts, based on the classifications we previously discussed concerning human potentials, possess a status akin to plants. Their preoccupations and interests are limited to vegetative attributes such as physical fitness, food, and outward appearance, with no room in their hearts for higher concerns. The Quran classifies such individuals as having ‘vegetative hearts.’

Alongside the stone, vegetative, animal, and human hearts, which are categorized based on their existential qualities, there are two other types of hearts that almost do not fit into any of these perfections. These hearts are those harder than stone and satanic hearts, whose characteristics we will now describe.

The Heart Harder Than Stone

You might think that nothing could be harder than stone. But you would be mistaken. A human heart has the potential to be harder than stone. God addresses this issue in the Quran: “Or even harder, for some rocks gush rivers; others split, spilling water; while others are humbled in awe of Allah”⁴. However, some human hearts become so hardened that no change is possible within them. This is the true meaning of the hardness of the heart, which was discussed earlier. A heart harder

³. Quran, 7:179

⁴. Qur'an, 2:74

than stone is one in which transformation seems almost impossible, and such individuals have essentially given up on the possibility of redemption.

Here's the fluent English translation:

Hardness of the heart can occur due to the dominance of any type of perfection and is not limited to a specific one. Some, like Qarun and Pharaoh, suffer from hardness of the heart because of their love for material and animalistic perfections, such as hoarding wealth and idolizing status. Others are affected by vegetative perfections like excessive body display and gluttony. And some, even through intellectual perfections, knowledge, and even supra-rational perfections and sacred forms, can experience a hardening of the heart; indeed, this is one of the most dangerous factors. This is because the remembrance of God, which is the most powerful factor for awakening the heart, turns into a mere habit for such individuals and completely loses its efficacy.

The Satanic Heart

The final group in the classification of hearts in the Quran are those whom God refers to as “devilish humans”⁵. These individuals, through their countless sins, fall so low that they leave the protection of God and align with Satan.

If you recall, in our discussion about gaining nearness to God, we mentioned that the entire realm of existence is governed by divine names, and fundamentally, nothing exists in the world except the manifestations of God's names and

⁵. Quran, 6:112

attributes. Even devils are God's creations and manifestations of divine names, but the name of God most prominently manifested in them is '*Al-Muzil*,' meaning 'The Misguider.' These individuals, due to rebellion and succumbing to their base desires, not only lead themselves astray but also mislead others and drag them into destruction. That a human being, as the noblest of creations and one worthy of attaining the status of God's representative, could reach a point of being on par with Satan and, instead of manifesting divine mercy, become a manifestation of misguidance, indicates the profound complexity of the human soul and is a shocking reality that warrants deep contemplation. Nevertheless, even satanic hearts, if exposed to divine light, can transform and find the right path. However, those who develop utter hardness of the heart can never return to the Straight Path. Hardness of the heart is, in fact, the lowest possible state a heart can attain.

What we discussed was a brief overview of the types of hearts in the Quran. In upcoming lessons, we will delve into the characteristics of each type of heart separately.