

## **Who Is a Human Being? What Are the Characteristics and Criteria for a Human Heart?**

### **Who Is a Human Being, and What Are the Criteria for a True Human According to the Quran?**

Who is a human being? Perhaps we have never reflected on this question because most of us, by default, consider ourselves human and expect to be treated according to the criteria and values of humanity. However, this rule may only apply to matters concerning the material world, which are evaluated based on observable and objective criteria, and in such a world, all of us may be named human. But the definition and characteristics of a human being—what it truly means to be human—are seen very differently from the perspective of the One who created us.

God has endowed us with certain qualities and expects our behavior to align with our potential. In reality, He defines us as eternal beings with infinite needs and a True Beloved, not as material and limited beings whose concerns, hopes, and decisions are confined to the material world and the sensory and animalistic matters. Upon closer inspection, we see that our expectations of the phenomena around us follow the same rule: for example, simply being beautiful or moving fast is not enough for a racing car to be considered a racing car. A racing car earns its title only when it demonstrates high-speed capability and agility—when it meets the standards and requirements of the title assigned to it.

As we learned in previous lessons, we, as human beings, possess five types of characters: stone-like, lower than stone, animal-like, lower than animal, and human-like. But God considers us true humans only when we move toward the purpose of creation and our true place. From God's perspective, by having other characters, even though we may have the outward appearance of humans, without fulfilling our divine purpose, we are in a state of loss because we have not chosen the right path and have confined ourselves to the material world, despite having infinite needs and desires. Just as we do not consider a child who wears a school uniform but spends their time on non-educational activities to be a true student, a person with a human appearance is not necessarily a true human. Certainly, a definition of human beings that does not clearly specify the criteria for humanity, the path, the destination, and eternity will not lead us to an understanding of our true essence or answer the question of “Who is the human being?”

### **Attaining a Human Heart**

Our concerns and desires determine the nature of our inner being and the category we belong to. To answer the question “Who is a human being?”, we need to let go of our materialistic and stereotypical definitions of humanity. In reality, God categorizes us based on our hearts, and we only attain true humanity when we correctly choose our Deity and Beloved. Our True Beloved is the one who brings peace to our essential dimension, that is, our human dimension. If our heart is constantly drawn toward the inanimate, vegetative, animal, and intellective desires, it means we have drifted away from the purpose of our creation and infinite human *fitrah* (innate nature). Our soul has been fed with sensory, estimative, imaginal, or

intellective matters to the point that it no longer feels the need to seek its true nourishment, the Absolute Perfection—Allah.

As we discussed in previous lessons, our sensory, estimative, imaginal, and intellective activities are not the essence of our being and are only useful in the womb of the world. They are merely tools that guide our human or supra-rational dimension to their True Beloved. These activities are only means that help us on our way to eternity and ensure our healthy birth into the Hereafter. When we enter the Hereafter, we will not take with us our body, beauty, social status, academic degrees, or intelligence. Our only possession in the Hereafter will be our heart, which we have shaped through our priorities and attachments in this world. The heart that aligns with our human dignity and harbors the most love for our True Beloved, Allah, i.e., the Absolute Perfection, is the most similar to a human heart, showing “What is a human being?”

### **Criteria for a True Human Being**

By now, we understood the definition of a human heart and the direction it should take. However, according to the Quran, a human heart possesses certain criteria that elevate it from a state of loss:

- **Faith**

From God's perspective, we are only truly human when we know our True Deity. We must understand that, as the noblest creation of God, we have been endowed with a Divine and Infinite Spirit. Our human perfection is not found in wealth, beauty, children, career, or academic achievements. We

can only acquire human inward through our similarity to Allah and reaching the Absolute and Infinite Perfection. In fact, we are a true believer only if we know our True Deity and understand where we came from, where we are and where we will go. In other words, a believer is one who moves towards their purpose of creation through acquiring *ma'rifa* (profound knowledge).

- **Righteous Deeds**

However, attaining *ma'rifa* and acquiring assets is not possible without performing righteous deeds and of course, not every deed is accepted. How many people do you know who have achieved something remarkable without practicing or training? Likewise, to resemble Allah, we must engage in righteous deeds—those that makes similarity to Him within us. A righteous deed is one that has been specified by our Creator, Allah, to guide us toward our true place. If faith is combined with righteous deeds, God will guide us through this very faith [1]. Just as we do not use any software or tools to enhance our computer system or factory equipment, not every action can lead us to our purpose of creation. For an action to connect us to Allah, it must align with our *fitrah*, or true self, be maintained in moderation and consistency, and stem from a sincere desire.

- **Enjoining the Truth**

We discussed earlier that not every deed is righteous or becomes our asset. The criterion for evaluating our actions is their quality and alignment with the truth. In fact, the truth serves as a standard for measuring our deeds—deeds based on truth are accepted, while those that deviate from truth are

wasted and destroyed. A goldsmith, for example, will only buy gold from us if it is indeed gold. Similarly, if our actions do not align with the truth, they are of no value. This is why true humans care for one another, encouraging each other to follow the truth and avoid the loss of deeds.

- **Enjoining Patience**

Acquiring *ma'rifa* and turning actions into assets is impossible without patience and perseverance. Only when we persist in our deeds can we attain *ma'rifa*. If we seek a human essence, we must also positively influence our society and encourage others towards the truth and patience.

Thus, through the criteria for recognizing a human inner reality, the Quran clearly determines “Who is a human being?” That is, to understand whether we possess a human inner reality, we do not need divine vision or mystical experiences. By examining the criteria for humanity and the peace and joy derived from reaching our True Beloved, we can clearly discern our human inner reality.

In this lesson, we answered the question “Who is a human being?”. God created us as eternal beings with an innate attraction to the Infinite and Absolute Perfection. Among the various types of character, God only considers a person to be truly human when they possess faith, righteous deeds, and encourage others toward the truth and patience. Only then can we consider ourselves human being and possess a human heart, in alignment with the human criteria God has set for us.

How familiar are you with the Quranic criteria for answering the question “Who is a human being?” How do you perceive your inner reality? Do you consider yourself to have a true human heart?

#### References

[1]. Quran, 10:9