

## **The Necessity of Controlling the Imagination to Acquire a Sound Heart**

### **How Does Controlling the Imagination Lead to the Soundness of the Heart? How Can We Control Our Imagination?**

Most of us live more in our imagination than in reality. Imagination is a wondrous realm that, without us realizing it, directly affects the soundness of the heart and our destiny. It is a powerful and limitless faculty that follows no specific rules. This faculty is one of the most important aspects of the soul. The importance of it is more than the faculty of sense perception but lower than estimative faculty and intellectual faculty.

Imagination is the mental picture and review of what we have previously perceived and experienced through our senses—like imagining the taste of a delicious meal we ate yesterday, recalling the scent of a favorite perfume, or even sometimes imagined songs get stuck in our minds. Even if we do not currently have access to these things, if we have the will to visualize them, we can. Then we can take pleasure of recalling them.

So far, we have only defined imagination generally, but we have not discussed its vital role in the soundness of the heart. Does the soundness of the heart or purity of the soul really depend on our imagination? How can everyday imagination determine whether our heart feels good or bad?

First, we need to understand the position of imagination among other faculties of the soul. We perceive sensory forms through sensory tools like the eyes, ears, and mouth—these are the gateways to our heart. Our imagination then uses these

sensory forms to create mental images. But it does not stop there; imagination is like the kitchen of the soul. It cooks various immaterial ingredients—gathered through sight, hearing, and other senses—and prepares different mental "dishes" for other faculties of the soul. The estimative, intellective, and supra-rational faculties are hungry. So they are eager to consume whatever imagination prepares. All other faculties feed on the outputs of our imagination. Simply put, our imaginations are the key determinants of the soundness of the heart. If our imaginations are poisoned, our hearts become poisoned and sick. Understanding this relationship between imaginations and the heart clarifies why controlling the imagination is essential: If our imaginations are not pure, the soundness of the heart is at risk, and after some time, our heart's life may cease. Controlling the imagination is not easy but is full of interesting challenges.

### **The Origin of Controlling the Imagination**

We stated that the soundness of the heart is tied to imagination. Therefore, any wise person who cares about their bliss will struggle to control their imaginations in order to maintain the soundness of their heart. If we are asked how to clean up a river polluted by urban waste, the best answer is: stopping the sources of pollution. This way, it would not be polluted again, but rather it would gradually clean itself. In other words, we must prevent water pollution because cleaning up the river solves the problem temporarily. Someone who cares about the soundness of the heart and is aware of the role that imaginations play in determining it will first focus on the root cause problem and solve it. Seeing how our imagination is like a kitchen where the nourishment for our soul is prepared, it is logical that if we

aspire to regulate our imaginations, we should initially focus on improving the quality and nature of the food we are feeding our souls. The crucial point is that the raw materials for this magical kitchen of imagination come from our sensory experiences. Everything we see, hear, and every bite we take, impact our soul and provide the raw materials for our imagination. The most fundamental and effective way to control our imagination is to ensure that the raw materials we provide are healthy. The more we are careful about what we see, hear and eat, the more controlled our imaginations will be; consequently, the soundness of the heart is assured. The opposite is also true: Watching bad things such as movies or pictures containing inappropriate content, listening to whatever considered a sin such as listening to backbiting or certain types of music, and eating forbidden foods all send corrupt raw materials to the kitchen of our imagination. As a result, our hearts become sick due to these poisoned imaginations. Just as a person controls their eating to be healthy, they must also have discipline and a plan for keeping their heart sound.

Controlling the imagination requires us to be careful about what we see, hear, and eat because they affect our hearts. We should avoid looking at or watching everything, listening to everything and eating everything. As a result, our imagination will become pure, gradually our hearts become pure, and we reach a higher state of humanity and spirituality. Conversely, when we do not control our imagination, it becomes impure and as a result, spiritual death of the heart happens. In such a case, it can suffocate the heart and drag us down to lower, animalistic, or vegetative states.

For instance, we must be careful what kind of music we listen to; music is like food and directly impacts the soundness of the heart or soul. Music should distance us from wicked and tainted thoughts, rather than polluting our imagination. Similarly, we must be careful about what we read. Not every book or magazine is worth reading. Fictional stories, such as romantic novels, crime stories, and fairy tales can make us obsessed with imagination and fantasy and lead us astray. Consuming negative news or spending hours on various websites and social media can act like whirlpools that pull our imagination under, so we need to be mindful of this. When controlling the imagination, we must also watch what we eat as it impacts our imagination. Beyond the fact that consuming forbidden food shapes forbidden imagination, the nature of what we eat also influences the quality of our imagination. For example, foods that have a cooling effect on the body are not particularly beneficial for elevated imagination; however, the choice of food should be tailored to each individual, as what may be harmful for one person could be beneficial for another. What is clear is that individuals must manage their nutrition to control their thoughts and maintain the soundness of the heart. Each person should consult with a specialist in this field to choose a dietary approach.

### **The Effects of Controlling the Imagination**

Controlling the imagination directly leads to our well-being in this world and the hereafter. Let us explore this connection.

## **The Relationship Between Controlling the Imagination and Worldly Happiness**

Our mind and heart determine how we react to what happens around us. In other words, our happiness or misery depends on how we imagine events. For example, losing a loved one is very painful in reality, but in imagination, one can envision their loved one in Heaven and soothe their sadness. Or a parent whose child struggles with math might envision their child excelling in art, which can help ease their worries.

Anyone learning and striving for controlling the imagination can free themselves from anxiety, sorrow, worry, and unrest, turning hell into heaven. Heaven is a place of security and peace—there is no fire in it. The heart must get rid of worries and intrusive thoughts to reach soundness and peace, and controlling the imagination makes this possible. As a result, the mind is freed from worries and negative thoughts.

An uncontrolled imagination is like a bird stuck in mind. To help the bird to fly, we must first clean and wash the wings, then feed it so that it become strong enough to fly. Controlling the imagination changes our life —we become happy and peaceful. We get better sleep, attain presence of the heart in prayer, and live in harmony with God. When the heart and imagination are purified, we will have a heart connection with God.

## **The Relationship Between Controlling the Imagination and Well-Being in the Hereafter**

As we stated, how our hearts feel today reflects our state in the grave and hereafter. If someone has an unsound heart in this world, they will be born sick into the *Barzakh*. Such a person will be in pain and receive a punishment in the *Barzakh* and hereafter, in his eternal life, and will have a defective and sick soul. Moreover, such a person will also feel sad and anxious or will experience fleeting happiness and sadness in this world. Controlling the imagination is one of the most vital responsibilities for achieving true bliss.

Being born healthy into the *Barzakh* involves interconnected stages: healthy food leads to healthy imagination; healthy imagination leads to the soundness of the heart. If we have a sound heart, we will do good deeds, and good deeds lead to a healthy birth into the hereafter.

Thus, controlling the imagination is the foundation for a healthy birth into the *Barzakh* and eternal bliss.