



The condition of the heart is in reality the factor which controls a person's conduct. A person who has reformed his heart will never act contrary to the Commands of Allāh ﷻ at any given moment. In every breath of his life he will be mindful of Allāh's Pleasure.

In contrast, a person who has not purified his heart from evil traits will find himself slipping at every step on the path reaching the Pleasure of Allāh ﷻ. So much so that many times his apparent good actions, though they may seem righteous to him and others, will not bear any fruit in the hereafter; rather they will have an adverse effect and lead to the displeasure of Allāh ﷻ.

Take the example of a person performing ṣalāh; his apparent action is good and of piety, but if his heart is not purified from riyā (ostentation), then this very ṣalāh will cause the displeasure of Allāh ﷻ. The ḥadīth of Rasūlullāh ﷺ directs us towards this very fact:

Indeed there is a piece of flesh in the body; if it is sound, then the whole body will be sound and if it is corrupt then the whole body will be corrupt. Indeed it is the heart. (Al-Bukhārī)

Therefore, to tread the path of purification and rid one's self from the evil traits of the heart is very important and necessary. For one to purify his soul and carry out the process of tazkiyah, the following are some essential points:

1. Mujāhadah of carrying out the Commands of Allāh ﷻ

There are two parts to mujāhadah:

a. The carrying out of all farāiḍ and wājibāt, and abstaining from all the ḥarām and makrūh taḥrīmī (prohibitively detested) acts, succinctly summarised as all the compulsory Do's and Don'ts.

b. The performance of optional worships and preferable acts, and to abstain from the makrūh tanzīhī (detestable/not preferable) acts.

The failure to observe any action from the first part is a sin, hence one must exert every effort to carry these out. The struggle in doing so is in essence the true mujāhadah, which is the foundation for spiritual reformation and progress. Ḥaḍrat Thānwī ؒ states:

The gist of tasawwuf is that when the nafs becomes indolent in carrying out the obedience to Allāh ﷻ, then force the nafs to carry out that obedience and when the nafs becomes lazy in abstaining from the disobedience to Allāh ﷻ then force the nafs to stay away from that disobedience; this is what is called mujāhadah. It is through this, a person acquires the connection of Allāh ﷻ and through this a person continually makes progress in his connection with Allāh ﷻ.

Once a person reaches this level of mujāhadah and always remains in obedience to Allāh ﷻ, he is known as a muttaqī and the special friend of Allāh ﷻ for whom Jannah is guaranteed and all that which has been promised by Allāh ﷻ:

Listen, the friends of Allāh shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. Those who have believed

and have become muttaqī servants. For them there is the good news in the worldly life and in the hereafter. (10:62-64)

One should note that as we are humans, we will no doubt falter and make errors. During such moments, one needs to immediately resort to tawbah and repent. This is also part of taqwā. Allāh ﷻ states with regards to His muttaqī servants:

And those who, when they happen to commit a shameful act or wrong themselves, remember Allāh, then, seek forgiveness for their sins. (3:135)

Therefore, as long as a person remains in the cycle of taqwā (abstaining from sins) and tawbah (repentance) he remains a friend of Allāh ﷻ. There is nothing more beloved to Allāh ﷻ than this.

... And my bondsman gains the most closeness to Me through the farā'id... (Al-Bukhārī)

Alongside this obligatory mujāhadah of taqwā and tawbah, a person must make an effort to remain steadfast on the second part of mujāhadah, the performance of as much optional worship as possible and abstain from makrūh tanzīhī (detestable/not preferable) acts. This includes sunnah, mustaḥab and nafl acts. One should be especially particular in adopting as many sunnah acts as possible. This extra struggle will prove extremely beneficial in maintaining and strengthening the stamina to observe all the compulsory Do's and Don'ts. Furthermore, it will enhance one's connection with Allāh ﷻ even more and he will become the beloved of Allāh ﷻ.

...and then he continues to progress in this closeness through nawāfil (optional worships) until I love him. And when I love him, I become his ears with which he hears, and his eyes with which he sees, and his hands with which he grasps, and his feet with which he walks and if he asks from Me, I definitely grant him and if he seeks refuge from Me I grant him refuge... (Al-Bukhārī)

2. Adopt good Company

A crucial element in the reformation of the self is good company. The company of the pious mashāyikh is one of the greatest factors towards soul purification. It is for this reason great emphasis is given to choosing a spiritual guide for one's reformation, as without such a medium it is extremely difficult, if not practically impossible, to reach purification. In this regard, the best company for a person is his spiritual guide, his Shaykh. If the company of one's Shaykh is not available, or if one has yet to appoint a Shaykh for himself, then one should for the time being seek the company of any of the pious mashāyikh. If a person already has a Shaykh, then guidance should be sought from him as to how he should benefit from the company of other mashāyikh, if and when the opportunity arises.

If a person cannot find the company of the mashāyikh, then he should seek any other good company. If one is unable to find any pious company, he should seek someone who is more superior to him in religion and piety. Muftī Shafi' ؒ used to state, 'Is not the local muadhhdhin more

pious than yourself?’ So if mashāyikh are not available then one should go and benefit from at least any level of good company, as this will also benefit a person. If one cannot even find such company, then, at the least, one should avoid every form of bad company. Bad company can take different forms beyond the literal sense, and includes all activities that cause heedlessness of the hereafter.

When taking benefit from one’s Shaykh a person should be mindful of the etiquettes. It is also important to understand that an important aspect in benefitting from the Shaykh, is regularly informing him of one’s spiritual condition and following his guidance. Merely attending the Shaykh’s gatherings without due consideration of informing and following the Shaykh’s guidance cannot lead a person to gain spiritual rectification. When a person does not inform the Shaykh of his spiritual condition or does not follow the guidance given, then the Shaykh may become less inclined towards him. A similitude is that of a doctor attending to a patient with eagerness and concern. However, the doctor will subsequently lose inclination if he sees the patient not following his instruction or not attending the appointments to update on his medical condition. Similar will be the Shaykh’s outlook regarding the spiritual patient who exhibits no concern or a relaxed attitude regarding his spiritual purification.

3. Dhikr

A person needs to make every effort to reach the ultimate level of Dhikr, which is the Dhikr of the

heart, i.e. when the heart is aware of Allāh ﷻ all the time. Ḥaḍrat Mawlānā Yūsuf Ludhyānwī ﷺ used to state that one should make such an effort in the aspect of Dhikr that the kayfiyah (quality/feeling) of Dhikr overpowers every feeling and inclination of the heart. However, to reach this level one needs to start with verbal Dhikr. In this regard the following are essential:

a. Ma‘mūlāt – prescribed practices given by the Shaykh.

b. Tasbīhāt:

- 100 x First kalimah, third kalimah or both,
- 100 x Istighfār,
- 300 x Ṣalāt ‘alan-Nabī ﷺ.

c. Masnūn ad‘iyah – supplications taught by Rasūllullāh ﷺ for different occasions.

d. Recitation of the Qur’ān: This is the best form of Dhikr, and the following is recommended for beginners:

- Recite Sūrah Yāsīn daily in the morning,
- Recite Sūrah As-Sajdah and Sūrah Al-Mulk between maghrib and sleeping,
- Recite a portion from the Qur’ān, beginning from Sūrah Al-Fātiḥah. Ideally, it should be one juz’ daily for those who are not Ḥāfiẓ, and three juz’ for those who are. However, if this proves difficult, then at least make a point of starting with some amount of recitation daily, no matter how less.

e. Ṣalāh – With the five times farḍ ṣalāh, make a practice of performing extra optional prayers as much as possible.

4. Du‘ā

A person cannot do anything and cannot achieve anything without the help and assistance of Allāh ﷻ. Seeking Allāh’s help will make this seemingly difficult task of spiritual reformation easy. Allāh ﷻ states:

When My servants ask you about Me, then (tell them that) I am near. I respond to the call of one when he calls Me... (2:186)

A Final Note

For one to succeed, a person needs to first and foremost make a commitment and a firm resolution to tread the path to purification. After this, it is important to stipulate a fixed time for the daily and weekly practices one needs to carry out. One of the main factors for our failure is that we do not set a fixed time for our daily practices. If we analyse carefully the successes we have achieved in life, then it will be due to the fact that we had allocated a time for it. Take the example of a student wanting to study a subject. If he did not have the facility of the school timetable it will be difficult to cover the subject in one year. Setting a fixed time ensures that the subject is covered in a smooth manner. Similarly, setting a timetable for ourselves will be instrumental in achieving our goal of spiritual rectification. May Allāh ﷻ grant us all the tawfiq and make us from His chosen friends. Āmīn.

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A Brief Guide To Tazkiyah



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