

Hardening of the Heart

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The Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam informed us in a very famous tradition, commonly quoted with reference to halal and haram, about the importance of the heart. He said :

"There is in the body a clump of flesh - if it becomes good, the whole body becomes good and if it becomes bad, the whole body becomes bad. And indeed it is the heart."

[The hadith in full :- Bukhary, Volume 1, Book 2, Number 49: Narrated An-Nu'man bin Bashir: I heard Allah's Apostle saying, 'Both legal and illegal things are evident but in between them there are doubtful (suspicious) things and most of the people have no knowledge about them . **So whoever saves himself from these suspicious things saves his religion and his honor. And whoever indulges in these suspicious things is like a shepherd who grazes (his animals) near the Hima (private pasture) of someone else and at any moment he is liable to get in it .** (O people!) Beware! Every king has a Hima and the Hima of Allah on the earth is His illegal (forbidden) things. Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart.]

He said that after explaining that the halal is clear and that the haram is clear and that between them are obscure areas, not known to most people. However, *what protects a person from the haram and ensures that he remains in the halal is knowledge* ; but beyond knowledge, it is the state of the heart. *If the heart is good, then it makes use of the knowledge and it avoids what is prohibited. If the heart is bad, then the knowledge is of no benefit to it and it will indulge in what is prohibited.*

The Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi Wa sallam, on the last pilgrimage, informed his Companions and the nations of Muslims to come, that there is no favour or no special place of the Arab over the non-Arab; nor is there any favour or special position of White over Black, but that *favour in the sight of Allah, is with those who fear Him, those who have taqwa.* After bearing witness to that, he said that "*Taqwa is in the heart.*"

In these statements and other similar statements, we find stress being placed on the *heart* - that the heart is the part of the body, which Allah has favoured over all other parts. It is the *place of iman*. Had there been in the body another part that were nearer to Allah, taqwa would have been placed there because iman is the most valuable thing that a human being can have. There is nothing more valuable. It is the determination ultimately of those who have belief in Allah - those who have accepted the message and who have chosen Paradise over Hell. It is the distinction of those who have belief and those who have disbelief.

The value of iman is more than all of the things of this world. This is why the Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam said that for ALLAH to guide by your hands a single person to Islam is worth more than anything in this world. For you to help someone to find iman is worth more than any of the things in this world.

The heart is the place by which the correctness of deeds is judged. The Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam said : " *Deeds are judged according to the intention.*" ***The place of the intention is not on the lips. It is in the heart .***

[The hadith in full:- Bukhary, Volume 1, Book 2, Number 51: Narrated 'Umar bin Al-Khattab: Allah's Apostle said, "The reward of deeds depends upon the intention and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So whoever emigrated for Allah and His Apostle, then his emigration was for Allah and His Apostle. And whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration was for what he emigrated for."]

Our deeds - what we do externally - are judged ultimately by the states of our hearts. These are good deeds. Evil deeds are evil, but these good deeds are in reference to those that we perceive to be a part and parcel of righteousness. ***Allah will inspect the hearts to determine whether they are truly acts of righteousness.***

The Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam had informed us that the first 3 people who would be cast into the Hell Fire are people who were involved in what everybody considers great acts of righteousness. They are the scholar who taught knowledge; the wealthy person who gave from his wealth in charity and the martyr who gave his life fighting in the path of God.

The Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu 'Alayhi Wa sallam, in an authentic narration, said that they would be among the first groups of people thrown into Hell because the scholar, when he taught the knowledge that Allah gave him, did not do so for the sake of Allah. He taught so that people would praise him, saying what a great scholar he is and how knowledgeable he is. Allah will say to him: "You received your praise, what you sought in that world. But there will be nothing for you in the next." So he will be drawn off on his face and thrown into Hell.

Similarly the rich individual - the philanthropist, who was generous with his wealth. He gave and people praised his generosity, but Allah will say, "You did it for the praise and you were praised. There was no sincerity there; it was not for the sake of Allah. You did it for as long as people appreciated it, but when people did not pay you mind, you were not generous anymore. Your generosity was conditional; it was not really for the sake of Allah." So that individual will be drawn off on his face and thrown into Hell.

And the martyr - the one whom we all assumed had died fii-sabilillah. We would think that his place in Paradise is guaranteed. But Allah will say: "You fought so people would say, 'How brave this one is! How strong and courageous he was!'" People said it; they praised him, but he did not do it for the sake of Allah, so he will be drawn off on his face and thrown into Hell.

This is all telling us that ultimately , *even the highest of deeds can be of no avail if the hearts are sick ; if the hearts are corrupt* . So the place of the heart should, in our minds, occupy great attention. We have to spend much of our time observing, being aware of the state of our heart. When the Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam described Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, explaining to the people his status over the rest of them, he said, " *He does not surpass you by performing more prayers and fasts - there are among you those who pray and fast more - but by something which deeply has embedded itself in his heart... Iman in his heart* ." That was where his superiority laid.

So there is no other faculty in the human body and existence that a believer should more concerned about. We have to make sure that this faculty is functioning as Allah wishes it to function. We should be greatly concerned about it. The Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam used to make dua often, beginning: " *I seek refuge in you, O Allah, from knowledge that does not benefit and from a heart which does not fear*".

The Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam had a *very soft heart*. He treated people gently. His wives said that they could not recall an incident where he hit them or scolded them harshly. He was known for his gentleness. And Allah confirmed that this quality is an essential quality.

Allah said in the Quran, Surah Ali-Imran (3:159), " *Due to Allah's mercy, you are gentle with them. Had you been severe and harsh hearted, they would have fled from around you.* "

This was the quality of the Prophets and this is the characteristic that all those who seek to guide others to Allah must have. As it was essential for the Prophets, it is essential for us. It is essential for those who seek knowledge; it is essential for all people. It is essential for parents, with regard to their children.

Softness of the heart is something that we cannot spend too much time on.

With regards to children, Al-Aqra Ibn Habis was visited by the Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu ' Alayhi Wa sallam. The Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam lifted one of his children and placed the child on his lap. He kissed the child out of the kindness and softness of his heart towards the child. Al-Aqra said, "I have 10 other children and I have not kissed a single one of them." This was a point of pride, manhood - that one is not soft, that one is tough. The Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam said to him, "Can I help it if Allah has removed mercy from your heart?" He went on to say, " *And whoever is not merciful will not receive mercy* ."

So it is essential that parents show mercy to their children. And if we look at a home where a father is kind and merciful with his children, we find a home that is full of happiness and joy.

Mercy is something that we cannot live without.

The reality for those seeking knowledge - as it is compulsory for us to seek knowledge of the Deen - is that if there is not, along with that knowledge, a soft heart, then we cannot taste the beauty of that knowledge. As Hassan Al-Basri had said, " *If*

a man seeks knowledge, it will appear in his face, hands and tongue and in his humility to Allah ."

The opposite is true - *that nothing corrupts knowledge and da'wa more than the harshness of the heart* . Where hearts have become hardened, the knowledge is of no benefit to the individual, nor can that individual benefit others with it. Softness of the heart is the characteristic of true Muslims. If it becomes absent, then a person's life is filled with distress and discomfort. This is the promise of Allah. Those who lack hearts that are soft will lead woeful lives. As Allah said in Surah Az-Zumar (39:22), "*Woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of Allah.*" They are in obvious misguidance. Woe to those whose hearts hear the Quran and they do not become fearful and humbled as a result of it. Woe to those whose eyes are reminded of the Words of Allah, but they do not weep in fear of Him. Woe to those who are reminded of the Warnings of Allah and they do not humble themselves to His Words.

It is a curse to have a hardened heart and it is a blessing to have a soft heart . Those with hardened hearts suffer in this life, even though they may have all of the trappings of this life. What seems to be an enjoyable life is empty - it is filled with loneliness. They cannot find peace of mind and of heart because their hearts are hardened to Allah ... to belief in Allah, to submission to Allah.

That is why Allah said, "*Whoever turns away from my remembrance will have a wretched life* ." [Quran, Surah Ta-Ha 20:124 : "... Whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgement."] It is only with the remembrance of Allah that hearts find rest. [Quran, Surah Al-Ra'd 13:28 : "**Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah: for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction** ."]

What is most beneficial in this life is a soft heart. We should strive to achieve it because everything else would be meaningless and useless if we do not have softened hearts. How do we achieve this?

It is not a secret. It is not something known only to a few, handed down in special sessions and gatherings. As the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam said, "*I have left you on a clear white plain, whose day is like its night. Anyone who deviates from it is destroyed* ." The way of the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam clarifies for us how to achieve a soft heart.

The First Method — *Du`aa or Supplication*

The first method is dua or supplication. *Nothing softens the heart more than asking Allah to soften it and make it merciful* . This is the promise of the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam when he said, "Call on Allah being certain that your prayer will be answered, but know at the same time that Allah will not answer the prayer of a heart which is negligent."

Dua will soften the heart and Allah is the One who will soften the heart. Our dua to Him will be answered, but we have to believe it. If we just raise our hands and ask, "O

Allah, soften my heart!" and not really ask from the heart, it is just something we said — and we could have said ANYTHING else! ***If we call on Allah SINCERELY, He will soften the heart. "Call on Me and I will answer you ."***

[Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah 2:186 : "When my servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close to them: I respond to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me; let them also, with a will, listen to My call and believe in Me: that they may walk in the right way"]

If we consider the many examples that we have from the lives of the Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi wa sallam and his companions, they would show us that it is Allah who can change the hearts.

Let us consider ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab. His attitude towards the Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi wa sallam and Islam was so harsh that he set out one day to kill the Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi Wa sallam. He was fed up with the efforts of Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi wa sallam to spread Islam that he felt he had to take it in his hands to finish this. He strapped on his sword and set out. On his way, he met another companion who told him to check on his own sister before seeing the Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi Wa sallam. He was surprised and went to his sister’s house, virtually tearing down the door. He slapped her and her husband until blood came from her face. He then stopped and looked at what he had caused.

On his way in, he had heard something from the Quran and it had touched him, but his anger did not allow it a chance to settle in his heart. But when he struck his sister and saw the blood, it stopped him for a minute. What he had heard before touched his heart. He asked what was being read before and some of the Quran was read for him. And he changed.

That was enough to turn him upside down. This was ‘Umar! On another occasion, the other companions saw him laughing and then crying; one after the other. They asked what had caused that to happen to him. He said. "I remember that in the days of Jahiliyya, I used to have this idol made of dates. One day, I became so hungry that I ate a piece of it. And then, I cried when I remembered digging a hole and burying my daughter. Whilst I was putting her in, she reached up and brushed dirt from my beard." And he had buried her alive. That was the practice — those who felt it was a dishonour to have a daughter killed them. That was how hard his heart was — how hard his heart had become, to bury his daughter alive.

But his heart changed. Changed so much that ‘Umar, when he used to lead the prayers, would be so choked up with tears that people from way back in the third row could hear him crying. This was Umar, a man who was so harsh, so powerful... a courageous individual... but with the acceptance of Islam, his heart was turned around.

So we should do as the Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi wa sallam advised us — ***to go to Allah and call on him to give us softened hearts and we should seek refuge*** as the Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi wa sallam had from the heart without fear. And in the same dua, he also sought refuge from the eyes that do not become full with tears; eyes which never cry.

The Second Way — ***Remember Death***

The second way is that we remember the Hereafter, to remember our death. The one thing that we are one hundred per cent certain of — even if we have some doubt as to whether there is really a God; even if we wrongly wonder if what we are practising is really the truth when there are so many other people doing so many other things — is that we are going to die.

But our lives are such that we become so occupied with the things of this life that we forget that we are going to die. As Allah said, the gathering of wealth has deluded them to the realities of life and they only come awake when they end up in their graves. [*At-Takathur 102: "The mutual rivalry for piling up (the good things of this world) diverts you (from the more serious things), until ye visit the graves. But nay, ye soon shall know the reality... "*] This is a fearful statement, that we should live lives unconscious of our deaths and thereby be lost in trivialities, things that are really ultimately not going to benefit us in the next life.

Consequently, Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu ‘Alayhi wa sallam had said, "I used to forbid you from visiting the graves in the early part of Islam. But now I command you to visit them because they serve to remind you of the next life."

[" I [once] had forbidden you from visiting graves, [and I now enjoin] you to do so, so that the visit may serve as a beneficial reminder."(*related by Muslim and others*)]

[*Al-Haakim's version : "... for [such visits] soften the heart, bring tears to the eyes, and serve as a reminder of the Hereafter, [but be careful] not to speak forbidden expressions [i.e. while visiting]. "*(*Sahih al-Jaami' 4584*)

To go to the graveyard, reflecting on the state of those in the grave (not necessarily of your relatives alone). As the Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi wa sallam said, "The grave is either a garden from the gardens of Paradise or a hole from the holes of Hell Fire." There are people in the graves who are calling out for help but there is no one to help. When Munkar and Nakir come and ask them, "Who is your Lord?", "What is your religion?", "Who was the Prophet that was sent to you?", they will be unable to answer!

[*Volume 2, Book 23, Number 422: Narrated Anas: The Prophet said, "When a human being is laid in his grave and his companions return and he even hears their foot steps, two angels come to him and make him sit and ask him: What did you use to say about this man, Muhammad ? He will say: I testify that he is Allah's slave and His Apostle. Then it will be said to him, 'Look at your place in the Hell-Fire. Allah has given you a place in Paradise instead of it.' " The Prophet added, "The dead person will see both his places. But a non-believer or a hypocrite will say to the angels, 'I do not know, but I used to say what the people used to say! It will be said to him, 'Neither did you know nor did you take the guidance (by reciting the Quran).' Then he will be hit with an iron hammer between his two ears, and he will cry and that cry will be heard by whatever approaches him except human beings and jinns."*]

This is not something we can memorise in preparation for the questions, because it is not a matter of not knowing, but that we will be incapable of answering as part of the degradation of that life. We know that the answer is the key for the next life, but we cannot use the key. We don't have access to it because it never entered our hearts in this life. If it did not enter our hearts in this life that Allah is our Lord and that Muhammad is our Prophet and that Islam is our religion, then that knowledge will not benefit us in the next life.

So we are encouraged to visit the graves and on that basis, this is not unique to men, for the benefits that come from visiting the graves is not unique to men. This is why some scholars argue that visiting the graves is not prohibited to women, but that it is the *frequent* visits that are prohibited, due to the sensitivity of their nature. Hence not regular visits, but to go from time to time as they need the reminder just as men need the reminder.

Allah describes those, in the Quran, who when they reflect on the Hereafter, are affected. It affects them in the nights. "***They slept little in the night and in the hours before dawn, they were found seeking Allah's forgiveness . They wake up in the night with the remembrance of the life to come — the trials of the grave and the Judgement to come. These lead them to get up from their beds at a time when sleep is so sweet .***

Brothers and sisters, let us reflect on that life to come. Let us reflect on the process after death; the process in dying itself — how the souls are taken from the bodies of believers, as the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam said, "like water dropping from the spout of a bucket; but for the disbelievers, "like silk being drawn over thorns", tearing away. That soul that fears Allah is taken in the next life up into the Heavens and the angels of the Heavens will praise it. It will return to that body and a Garden from Paradise will be opened up to it and it will lie in that state till Resurrection. But for those whose hearts have hardened towards the remembrance of Allah, the soul will be barred entrance into the Heavens. It will be thrown back into the body. Their evil deeds will come before them as a horrible creature and they will suffer torments. A window from Hell will be open and the heat will be over them until Resurrection.

And what happens on the Resurrection, when we stand before Allah and answer for each and every deed that we have done, when nothing escapes Allah, when the things that we have in this life will be of no benefit to us. The only thing that will benefit us is to stand before Allah with a healthy heart.

The third way by which we can soften our hearts is the *Quran* itself. Allah states in the Quran, Al-Hadid, 57:16, "***Has not the time come for those who believe for their hearts to fear Allah when they hear the Quran*** (dhikrullah here is in reference to the Quran) and what truth there is in it, so that they not be like those who received the Scripture before, but in the passage of time, their hearts became hard. And most of them are corrupt."

If we reflect on the Quran, it has the power to soften our hearts. Allah said, about the jinn who heard the Quran, "Indeed we heard an amazing Quran; it guides us to Allah and we believe in it and we will set not partners besides Allah." [See Quran, Surah al-Ahqaf 46:29-32]

Allah goes on to describe the righteous, "And if *they (this is amongst the Christians)* hear what was revealed to the Messenger, you will see their eyes welling up with tears because of what they know of the truth of what has been brought." This was the case of the ruler of Ethiopia. When Muslims sought refuge there and they recited a portion of the Quran, they saw his eyes fill with tears.

This is how we should be. When we hear the Quran, we should reflect on the meanings. The Quran should not become for us a replacement for pop songs that we used to hear before. People buy recordings of their favourite reciters for the beauty of their voice... The listening of the Quran has become more of a musical thing. We are entertained by that music, so much so that when the reciter is reading, we hear people in the background going, "Allah! Allah! Allah!" People making statements in the background as though it were a pop show! This is not the Quran... Allah tells us, "***Will they not reflect on the meanings ?***"

The Quran is a Book of Guidance and it is in the reflection on the meaning of the Quran that we benefit, for it is very important for us to re-assess how we are dealing with the Quran. We should be reading it regularly, not only leaving it until Ramadhan. We reflect on it... not reading it Ramadhan so we can finish the whole Book and say we finished the Quran in Ramadhan. It really does not matter if we don't finish the Quran in Ramadhan. For most of the Prophet's Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam life, he did not finish the whole Quran in Ramadhan. Most of the companions did not finish the reading of the Quran in Ramadhan. Today, for us, Ramadhan is not complete unless we read the whole Quran in Ramadhan. We hire reciters to recite the Quran at 99 miles an hour so much so that even Arabic-speaking people cannot figure out where in the Quran the reciter is!

This has become the precedence — finishing the Quran in Ramadhan and if you can finish it twice, even better! But this is not what the Quran is for. ***The Quran is for reflection, so that when we hear it, as Allah says of the believers who hear the Quran recited, goose bumps come over their skins. It touches them and causes their heart to tremble .***

[Quran Az-Zumar 39:23 : Allah has revealed (from time to time) the most beautiful Message in the form of a Book, consistent with itself, yet repeating (its teaching in various aspects): ***the skins of those who fear their Lord tremble threat; then their skins and hearts do soften to the remembrance of Allah .***]

If when we listen to the Quran, we don't find this reaction of tears coming to our eyes, then we should make ourselves cry. Force ourselves to cry because we need to respond to the Quran in this way. If we don't, we are lost! This is the Word of Allah, the only preserved Word of all the revelations that were given from Adam till now. This is the word of God preserved.

We should read the Quran believing this is Allah speaking to us , because that is what it is. It is Allah talking to us directly. Every time he tells us something about the Jews, we should not (merely) take it as a piece of information, that the Jews are this and that the Jews are that. No! Whenever Allah tells us something about the Jews, we should see in it as a warning to ourselves — that we don't become like them. When Allah said, "... ghairil maghdoobi 'alayhim wa la-ddaalleen..." in Surah Al-Fatiha, the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam explained that al-maghdoob 'alayhim are the Jews and that ad-daalleen are the Christians. Those with whom Allah is angry are the Jews and those who have gone astray are the Christians. ***Allah is angry with the Jews because they KNOW the truth and they don't act on it*** . "Call people to righteousness and you forget yourselves." They changed the Book. The Christians are without knowledge; they are lost. They think that God is a man!

This is a warning to us. Every time we recite these verses, Allah is warning us not to be like them — we have the truth, we have the Scripture, but we are not acting according to them. ***If we do not seek knowledge, if we do not find out what it is Allah wants from us, then we are lost*** . Every time we read the "... ghairil maghdoobi 'alayhim wa la-ddaalleen...", it should touch us. We should reflect on it and it should touch us.

There are so many verses throughout the Quran which remind us of the Hereafter, that remind us of the signs of the Day of Judgement. It is enough for us to open any part of the Quran to read about them. In virtually every chapter of the Quran Allah addresses the next life . ***It is linked to our second point of visiting the graves and remembering the Hereafter*** . The Quran speaks about the life to come and to reflect on it.

The fourth way for us to soften our hearts is ***by way of good deeds. Righteous deeds done sincerely for Allah will soften our hearts*** . In the initial stages, maybe we can't see how it softens our hearts, but we have to stick with it and believe. As the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam told us, that ***the slave of Allah does not come closer to Him except by doing the deeds that He has made compulsory for him*** . The compulsory deeds — the 5 daily prayers, the fast, etc. While praying, sometimes we wonder, "Where is the benefit? Where is the change?" The point is that if we keep working at it, there will be benefit. We may not see it immediately. It is something that becomes cumulative, like a person growing. They can hardly wait till they are going to be big and they put a mark on the wall, wondering when they are going to get up there. They cannot perceive themselves growing because it is something accumulating within them.

Similarly, righteous deeds... and the first of the righteous deeds are the one that God commands. It is a mistake to go to the things that He did not command us to do and to put all our focus on these areas and leave the primary things that He commanded us to do. If we have not established 5 times daily prayers on time, then it does not matter whatever else we do. It is useless. This is the foundation — if we cannot do what Allah has commanded us to do, has demanded of us, then how can we please Him in anything else? Then, for us, pleasing God is according to ourselves — what is pleasing to us will please God. This is not pleasing God. We have to remember that the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam told us, " ***The Hell Fire is veiled by the***

things that are pleasing to us and Paradise is veiled by the things that we do not like
."

"Things that we do not like" are not necessarily those things that are evil, but those that our own nafs does not like because they require work and effort. We like the easy way. So we would like not to pray and if someone were to tell us that it is not necessary to pray, we would say "Alhamdulillah!" This is our nature — we would be happy with that. However, we should be sad because we can only pray in this life and in the next, we have no chance to pray anymore. This is where prayer will benefit us, because in the next life, we will want to pray. We will beg Allah. Allah describes those who come before him for judgement: when they see their deeds and they know that they have put themselves in Hell. What will they do? Will they argue with Allah and ask why He has put them in Hell? No, they will ask Allah for another chance to go back and do what Allah has told them to do and more. [see Surah Al-A'raf 7:53] But Allah will know that they are lying for they would do the same if sent back. For if Allah were to send us back, He will not send us back with the knowledge that we have then. He would send us back just as we were before.

Prayer is for OUR benefit. When we pray, we are not benefiting Allah. If every human being on this earth prayed, it would not increase or benefit Allah in any way, just as if nobody prayed, it would not decrease or affect Allah in any way. **Prayer is for OURSELVES**. That is why the Prophet used to say, "Bilal, give us ease by giving the call to prayer." Prayer was considered a time of pleasure but for us it is a burden. The sooner we finish, the better so we can get on with our lives. That is a mistake... Our hearts have become hard.

Allah describes the Jews: after all the signs that were given to them, with the passage of time, their hearts became hard. Our hearts have become hard. We have accepted Islam, we are awakened to Islam and we start to practise Islam, but time has passed and our hearts have become hardened.

[Quran, Surah Al-Hadid 57:16 : "Has not the time arrived for the Believers that their hearts in all humility should engage in the remembrance of Allah and of the Truth which has been revealed to them, and that they should not become like those to whom was given The Book aforetime, but long ages passed over them and their hearts grew hard? For many among them are rebellious transgressors."]

Prayer is not something that is pleasurable to us, but we have to keep striving and recognise that this is natural. **Iman increases and decreases. The heart hardens and we fight against it and it softens... it is a continual struggle until we die**. We just pray that we die with hearts that are soft and fearful. We have to keep struggling and it is in that struggle that ultimately we do taste iman; that we do taste what the salah was prescribed for; what the remembrance of Allah should mean in our lives. The Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam describes **those who receive the shade of Allah's throne on the day when there is no shade: the one who remembers Allah and cries. His heart is soft.**

[Bukhary, Volume 8, Book 76, Number 486: Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said Allah will give shade to seven (types of people) under His Shade (on the Day of

Resurrection). (one of them will be) a person who remembers Allah and his eyes are then flooded with tears.]

[Bukhary, Volume 1, Book 11, Number 629: Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "Allah will give shade, to seven, on the Day when there will be no shade but His. (These seven persons are) a just ruler, a youth who has been brought up in the worship of Allah (i.e. worships Allah sincerely from childhood), a man whose heart is attached to the mosques (i.e. to pray the compulsory prayers in the mosque in congregation), two persons who love each other only for Allah's sake and they meet and part in Allah's cause only, a man who refuses the call of a charming woman of noble birth for illicit intercourse with her and says: I am afraid of Allah, a man who gives charitable gifts so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given (i.e. nobody knows how much he has given in charity), and a person who remembers Allah in seclusion and his eyes are then flooded with tears ."]

So we should not shy away from good deeds for they will help to soften our hearts. The Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi wa sallam had said that ***greeting our brothers or sisters with a smiling face is sadaqa*** . Nothing should be too small for us: no good deed is so trivial that we scorn at it. We should strive to do every good deed.

But we ***should begin with the things Allah has made compulsory*** . We should establish the salah as Allah prescribed it; we have to establish our zakah as it is supposed to be given; we have to fast as it is supposed to be done and the hajj and umrah if we are able. These fundamentals have to be established for the sake of Allah; they provide the foundation for the softening of the heart. As we continue to do these acts and voluntary versions of these acts, we come closer and closer to Allah, until Allah says He becomes the eyes with which we see, where we see only the things that Allah wants us to see. We avoid the things that Allah does not want us to see; we turn away from them; we don't enjoy them. We only touch the things Allah wants us to touch; we only take what Allah wants us to take; we only go to places that Allah wants us to go... If we turn to Allah and we call on Him He will answer our prayer. This is the promise of the Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi Wa sallam.

So my brothers and sisters, I ask you and myself to remember our hearts; to reflect on the state of our hearts. Whenever we have a moment, question: what state are we in? to work on our hearts until we have succeeded in softening them, by the mercy and the grace of Allah. We begin that process by turning to Allah. In our next prayer tonight, let us turn back to Allah and beg him sincerely to soften our hearts and when we do so, if we are sincere, our hearts will begin to soften. It is the promise of Rasulullah Sallallahu ‘Alayhi Wa sallam. We should read the Quran and do as much as we can of righteous deeds. We should reflect on the next life by visiting the graves and by reading the verses addressing them; by reading the statements of the Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi wa sallam about the next life. We should do these things and strive to soften our hearts. As I said before, if after doing them we cannot find softness in our hearts, then we need to make ourselves cry. We need to force ourselves to cry because until we can let go and let loose those feeling within ourselves, then the hearts cannot become soft.

So I pray and I ask Allah to give us all soft hearts, hearts that are filled with mercy for the creating of Allah, our children, our parents, our brothers and sisters in Islam ...

even those towards people who are not Muslims. I ask Allah to put in our hearts softness towards them in the sense that it would guide us to carry the message to them as we should. I ask Allah to give us success to turn back to the Quran, to read it regularly, seeking understanding and guidance from it and I ask Allah to give us soft hearts.

AsSalamu Alaykum

Hardening of the Heart II

Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips

Transcript of a lecture, Darul Arqam, Singapore

The Prophet Muhammad informed us in a very famous tradition, commonly quoted with reference to halal and haram, about the importance of the heart. He said:

"There is in the body a clump of flesh - if it becomes good, the whole body becomes good and if it becomes bad, the whole body becomes bad. And indeed it is the heart."

[The hadith in full :- Bukhary, Volume 1, Book 2, Number 49: Narrated An-Nu'man bin Bashir: I heard Allah's Apostle saying, *'Both legal and illegal things are evident but in between them there are doubtful (suspicious) things and most of the people have no knowledge about them. So whoever saves himself from these suspicious things saves his religion and his honor. And whoever indulges in these suspicious things is like a shepherd who grazes (his animals) near the Hima (private pasture) of someone else and at any moment he is liable to get in it. (O people!) Beware! Every king has a Hima and the Hima of Allah on the earth is His illegal (forbidden) things. Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart.'*]

He said that after explaining that the halal is clear and that the haram is clear and that between them are obscure areas, not known to most people. However, what protects a person from the haram and ensures that he remains in the halal is knowledge; but beyond knowledge, it is the state of the heart. If the heart is good, then it makes use of the knowledge and it avoids what is prohibited. If the heart is bad, then the knowledge is of no benefit to it and it will indulge in what is prohibited.

The Prophet , on the last pilgrimage, informed his Companions and the nations of Muslims to come, that there is no favour or no special place of the Arab over the non-Arab; nor is there any favour or special position of White over Black, but that favour in the sight of Allah, is with those who fear Him, those who have taqwa. After bearing witness to that, he said that "Taqwa is in the heart."

In these statements and other similar statements, we find stress being placed on the heart - that the heart is the part of the body, which Allah has favoured over all other parts. It is the place of iman. Had there been in the body another part that were nearer to Allah, taqwa would have been placed there because iman is the most valuable thing that a human being can have. There is nothing more valuable. It is the determination ultimately of those who have belief in Allah - those who have accepted the message and who have chosen Paradise over Hell. It is the distinction of those who have belief and those who have disbelief.

The value of iman is more than all of the things of this world. This is why the Prophet Muhammad said that for ALLAH to guide by your hands a single person to Islam is

worth more than anything in this world. For you to help someone to find iman is worth more than any of the things in this world.

The heart is the place by which the correctness of deeds is judged. The Prophet Muhammad said: *"Deeds are judged according to the intention."* The place of the intention is not on the lips. It is in the heart. [The hadith in full:- Bukhary, Volume 1, Book 2, Number 51: Narrated 'Umar bin Al-Khattab: Allah's Apostle said, *"The reward of deeds depends upon the intention and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So whoever emigrated for Allah and His Apostle, then his emigration was for Allah and His Apostle. And whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration was for what he emigrated for."*]

Our deeds - what we do externally - are judged ultimately by the states of our hearts. These are good deeds. Evil deeds are evil, but these good deeds are in reference to those that we perceive to be a part and parcel of righteousness. Allah will inspect the hearts to determine whether they are truly acts of righteousness.

The Prophet Muhammad had informed us that the first 3 people who would be cast into the Hell Fire are people who were involved in what everybody considers great acts of righteousness. They are the scholar who taught knowledge; the wealthy person who gave from his wealth in charity and the martyr who gave his life fighting in the path of God.

The Prophet Muhammad, in an authentic narration, said that they would be among the first groups of people thrown into Hell because the scholar, when he taught the knowledge that Allah gave him, did not do so for the sake of Allah. He taught so that people would praise him, saying what a great scholar he is and how knowledgeable he is. Allah will say to him: "You received your praise, what you sought in that world. But there will be nothing for you in the next." So he will be drawn off on his face and thrown into Hell.

Similarly the rich individual - the philanthropist, who was generous with his wealth. He gave and people praised his generosity, but Allah will say, "You did it for the praise and you were praised. There was no sincerity there; it was not for the sake of Allah. You did it for as long as people appreciated it, but when people did not pay you mind, you were not generous anymore. Your generosity was conditional; it was not really for the sake of Allah." So that individual will be drawn off on his face and thrown into Hell.

And the martyr - the one whom we all assumed had died fii-sabilillah. We would think that his place in Paradise is guaranteed. But Allah will say: "You fought so people would say, 'How brave this one is! How strong and courageous he was!'" People said it; they praised him, but he did not do it for the sake of Allah, so he will be drawn off on his face and thrown into Hell.

This is all telling us that ultimately, even the highest of deeds can be of no avail if the hearts are sick; if the hearts are corrupt. So the place of the heart should, in our minds occupy great attention. We have to spend much of our time observing, being aware of the state of our heart. When the Prophet Muhammad described Abu Bakr As-Siddiq,

explaining to the people his status over the rest of them, he said, "He does not surpass you by performing more prayers and fasts - there are among you those who pray and fast more - but by something which deeply has embedded itself in his heart: Iman in his heart." That was where his superiority laid.

So there is no other faculty in the human body and existence that a believer should more concerned about. We have to make sure that this faculty is functioning as Allah wishes it to function. We should be greatly concerned about it. The Prophet used to make dua often, beginning: "I seek refuge in you, O Allah, from knowledge that does not benefit and from a heart which does not fear".

The Prophet Muhammad had a very soft heart. He treated people gently. His wives said that they could not recall an incident where he hit them or scolded them harshly. He was known for his gentleness. And Allah confirmed that this quality is an essential quality.

Allah said in the Quran, Surah Ali-Imran (3:159), **"Due to Allah's mercy, you are gentle with them. Had you been severe and harsh hearted, they would have fled from around you."**

This was the quality of the Prophets and this is the characteristic that all those who seek to guide others to Allah must have. As it was essential for the Prophets, it is essential for us. It is essential for those who seek knowledge; it is essential for all people. It is essential for parents, with regard to their children.

Softness of the heart is something that we cannot spend too much time on.

With regards to children, Al-Aqra Ibn Habis was visited by the Prophet Muhammad . The Prophet lifted one of his children and placed the child on his lap. He kissed the child out of the kindness and softness of his heart towards the child. Al-Aqra said, "I have 10 other children and I have not kissed a single one of them." This was a point of pride, manhood - that one is not soft, that one is tough. The Prophet said to him, "Can I help it if Allah has removed mercy from your heart?" He went on to say, "And whoever is not merciful will not receive mercy."

So it is essential that parents show mercy to their children. And if we look at a home where a father is kind and merciful with his children, we find a home that is full of happiness and joy.

Mercy is something that we cannot live without.

The reality for those seeking knowledge - as it is compulsory for us to seek knowledge of the Deen - is that if there is not, along with that knowledge, a soft heart, then we cannot taste the beauty of that knowledge. As Hassan Al-Basri had said, "If a man seeks knowledge, it will appear in his face, hands and tongue and in his humility to Allah."

The opposite is true - that nothing corrupts knowledge and da'wa more than the harshness of the heart. Where hearts have become hardened, the knowledge is of no benefit to the individual, nor can that individual benefit others with it. Softness of the

heart is the characteristic of true Muslims. If it becomes absent, then a person's life is filled with distress and discomfort. This is the promise of Allah. Those who lack hearts that are soft will lead woeful lives. As Allah said in Surah Az-Zumar (39:22), **"Woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of Allah."** They are in obvious misguidance. Woe to those whose hearts hear the Quran and they do not become fearful and humbled as a result of it. Woe to those whose eyes are reminded of the Words of Allah, but they do not weep in fear of Him. Woe to those who are reminded of the Warnings of Allah and they do not humble themselves to His Words.

It is a curse to have a hardened heart and it is a blessing to have a soft heart. Those with hardened hearts suffer in this life, even though they may have all of the trappings of this life. What seems to be an enjoyable life is empty - it is filled with loneliness. They cannot find peace of mind and of heart because their hearts are hardened to Allah to belief in Allah, to submission to Allah.

That is why Allah said, **"Whoever turns away from my remembrance will have a wretched life."** [Quran, Surah Ta-Ha 20:124 : **"Whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgement."**] [It is only with the remembrance of Allah that hearts find rest. [Quran, Surah Al-Ra'd 13:28 : **"Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah: for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction."**]

What is most beneficial in this life is a soft heart. We should strive to achieve it because everything else would be meaningless and useless if we do not have softened hearts. How do we achieve this?

It is not a secret. It is not something known only to a few, handed down in special sessions and gatherings. As the Prophet said, *"I have left you on a clear white plain, whose day is like its night. Anyone who deviates from it is destroyed."* The way of the Prophet clarifies for us how to achieve a soft heart.

The First Method: Du`aa or Supplication

The first method is dua or supplication. Nothing softens the heart more than asking Allah to soften it and make it merciful. This is the promise of the Prophet (SAAS) when he said, *"Call on Allah being certain that your prayer will be answered, but know at the same time that Allah will not answer the prayer of a heart which is negligent."*

Dua will soften the heart and Allah is the One who will soften the heart. Our dua to Him will be answered, but we have to believe it. If we just raise our hands and ask, "O Allah, soften my heart!" and not really ask from the heart, it is just something we said - and we could have said ANYTHING else! If we call on Allah SINCERELY, He will soften the heart. **"Call on Me and I will answer you."**

[Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah 2:186 : **"When my servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close to them: I respond to the prayer of every suppliant when he**

callesth on Me; let them also, with a will, listen to My call and believe in Me: that they may walk in the right way"]

If we consider the many examples that we have from the lives of the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam and his companions, they would show us that it is Allah who can change the hearts.

Let us consider 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab. His attitude towards the Prophet Sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam and Islam was so harsh that he set out one day to kill the Prophet. He was fed up with the efforts of Prophet to spread Islam that he felt he had to take it in his hands to finish this. He strapped on his sword and set out. On his way, he met another companion who told him to check on his own sister before seeing the Prophet. He was surprised and went to his sister's house, virtually tearing down the door. He slapped her and her husband until blood came from her face. He then stopped and looked at what he had caused.

On his way in, he had heard something from the Quran and it had touched him, but his anger did not allow it a chance to settle in his heart. But when he struck his sister and saw the blood, it stopped him for a minute. What he had heard before touched his heart. He asked what was being read before and some of the Quran was read for him. And he changed.

That was enough to turn him upside down. This was 'Umar ! On another occasion, the other companions saw him laughing and then crying; one after the other. They asked what had caused that to happen to him. He said. "I remember that in the days of Jahiliyya, I used to have this idol made of dates. One day, I became so hungry that I ate a piece of it. And then, I cried when I remembered digging a hole and burying my daughter. Whilst I was putting her in, she reached up and brushed dirt from my beard." And he had buried her alive. That was the practice those who felt it was a dishonour to have a daughter killed them. That was how hard his heart was. How hard his heart had become, to bury his daughter alive.

But his heart changed. Changed so much that 'Umar , when he used to lead the prayers, would be so choked up with tears that people from way back in the third row could hear him crying. This was Umar, a man who was so harsh, so powerful, a courageous individual, but with the acceptance of Islam, his heart was turned around.

So we should do as the Prophet advised us to go to Allah and call on him to give us softened hearts and we should seek refuge as the Prophet had from the heart without fear. And in the same dua, he also sought refuge from the eyes that do not become full with tears; eyes which never cry.

The Second Way — Remember Death

The second way is that we remember the Hereafter, to remember our death. The one thing that we are one hundred per cent certain of — even if we have some doubt as to whether there is really a God; even if we wrongly wonder if what we are practising is really the truth when there are so many other people doing so many other things — is that we are going to die.

But our lives are such that we become so occupied with the things of this life that we forget that we are going to die. As Allah said, the gathering of wealth has deluded them to the realities of life and they only come awake when they end up in their graves. [At-Takathur 102: **"The mutual rivalry for piling up (the good things of this world) diverts you (from the more serious things), until ye visit the graves. But nay, ye soon shall know the reality..."**] This is a fearful statement, that we should live lives unconscious of our deaths and thereby be lost in trivialities, things that are really ultimately not going to benefit us in the next life.

Consequently, Prophet Muhammad Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam had said, *"I used to forbid you from visiting the graves in the early part of Islam. But now I command you to visit them because they serve to remind you of the next life."*

"I [once] had forbidden you from visiting graves, [and I now enjoin] you to do so, so that the visit may serve as a beneficial reminder." (related by Muslim and others)]

[Al-Haakim's version : *"... for [such visits] soften the heart, bring tears to the eyes, and serve as a reminder of the Hereafter, [but be careful] not to speak forbidden expressions [i.e. while visiting]."* (Sahih al-Jaami' 4584)]

To go to the graveyard, reflecting on the state of those in the grave (not necessarily of your relatives alone). As the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam said, *"The grave is either a garden from the gardens of Paradise or a hole from the holes of Hell Fire." There are people in the graves who are calling out for help but there is no one to help. When Munkar and Nakir come and ask them, "Who is your Lord?", "What is your religion?", "Who was the Prophet that was sent to you?", they will be unable to answer!"*

[Volume 2, Book 23, Number 422: Narrated Anas: The Prophet said, *"When a human being is laid in his grave and his companions return and he even hears their foot steps, two angels come to him and make him sit and ask him: What did you use to say about this man, Muhammad ? He will say: I testify that he is Allah's slave and His Apostle. Then it will be said to him, 'Look at your place in the Hell-Fire. Allah has given you a place in Paradise instead of it.' "* The Prophet added, *"The dead person will see both his places. But a non-believer or a hypocrite will say to the angels, 'I do not know, but I used to say what the people used to say! It will be said to him, 'Neither did you know nor did you take the guidance (by reciting the Quran).' Then he will be hit with an iron hammer between his two ears, and he will cry and that cry will be heard by whatever approaches him except human beings and jinns."*]

This is not something we can memorise in preparation for the questions, because it is not a matter of not knowing, but that we will be incapable of answering as part of the degradation of that life. We know that the answer is the key for the next life, but we cannot use the key. We don't have access to it because it never entered our hearts in this life. If it did not enter our hearts in this life that Allah is our Lord and that Muhammad is our Prophet and that Islam is our religion, then that knowledge will not benefit us in the next life.

So we are encouraged to visit the graves and on that basis, this is not unique to men, for the benefits that come from visiting the graves is not unique to men. This is why

some scholars argue that visiting the graves is not prohibited to women, but that it is the frequent visits that are prohibited, due to the sensitivity of their nature. Hence not regular visits, but to go from time to time as they need the reminder just as men need the reminder.

Allah describes those, in the Quran, who when they reflect on the Hereafter, are affected. It affects them in the nights. **"They slept little in the night and in the hours before dawn, they were found seeking Allah's forgiveness."** They wake up in the night with the remembrance of the life to come — the trials of the grave and the Judgement to come. These lead them to get up from their beds at a time when sleep is so sweet.

Brothers and sisters, let us reflect on that life to come. Let us reflect on the process after death; the process in dying itself — how the souls are taken from the bodies of believers, as the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam said, *"...like water dropping from the spout of a bucket."*; but for the disbelievers, *"...like silk being drawn over thorns."*, tearing away. That soul that fears Allah is taken in the next life up into the Heavens and the angels of the Heavens will praise it. It will return to that body and a Garden from Paradise will be opened up to it and it will lie in that state till Resurrection. But for those whose hearts have hardened towards the remembrance of Allah, the soul will be barred entrance into the Heavens. It will be thrown back into the body. Their evil deeds will come before them as a horrible creature and they will suffer torments. A widow from Hell will be open and the heat will be over them until Resurrection.

And what happens on the Resurrection, when we stand before Allah and answer for each and every deed that we have done, when nothing escapes Allah, when the things that we have in this life will be of no benefit to us. The only thing that will benefit us is to stand before Allah with a healthy heart.

Methods of Cure: (3) the Qur'an

The third way by which we can soften our hearts is the Quran itself. Allah states in the Quran, Al-Hadid, 57:16, **"Has not the time come for those who believe for their hearts to fear Allah when they hear the Quran (dhikrullah here is in reference to the Quran) and what truth there is in it, so that they not be like those who received the Scripture before, but in the passage of time, their hearts became hard. And most of them are corrupt."**

If we reflect on the Quran, it has the power to soften our hearts. Allah said, about the jinn who heard the Quran, **"Indeed we heard an amazing Quran; it guides us to Allah and we believe in it and we will set not partners besides Allah."** [See Quran, Surah al-Ahqaf 46:29-32]

Allah goes on to describe the righteous, **"And if they (this is amongst the Christians) hear what was revealed to the Messenger, you will see their eyes welling up with tears because of what they know of the truth of what has been brought."** This was the case of the ruler of Ethiopia. When Muslims sought refuge there and they recited a portion of the Quran, they saw his eyes fill with tears.

This is how we should be. When we hear the Quran, we should reflect on the meanings. The Quran should not become for us a replacement for pop songs that we used to hear before. People buy recordings of their favourite reciters for the beauty of their voice... The listening of the Quran has become more of a musical thing. We are entertained by that music, so much so that when the reciter is reading, we hear people in the background going, "Allah! Allah! Allah!" People making statements in the background as though it were a pop show! This is not the Quran... Allah tells us, **"Will they not reflect on the meanings?"**

The Quran is a Book of Guidance and it is in the reflection on the meaning of the Quran that we benefit, for it is very important for us to re-assess how we are dealing with the Quran. We should be reading it regularly, not only leaving it until Ramadhan. We reflect on it... not reading it Ramadhan so we can finish the whole Book and say we finished the Quran in Ramadhan. It really does not matter if we don't finish the Quran in Ramadhan. For most of the Prophet's Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam life, he did not finish the whole Quran in Ramadhan. Most of the companions did not finish the reading of the Quran in Ramadhan. Today, for us, Ramadhan is not complete unless we read the whole Quran in Ramadhan. We hire reciters to recite the Quran at 99 miles an hour so much so that even Arabic-speaking people cannot figure out where in the Quran the reciter is!

This has become the precedence — finishing the Quran in Ramadhan and if you can finish it twice, even better! But this is not what the Quran is for. The Quran is for reflection, so that when we hear it, as Allah says of the believers who hear the Quran recited, goose bumps come over their skins. It touches them and causes their heart to tremble.

[Quran Az-Zumar 39:23 : **Allah has revealed (from time to time) the most beautiful Message in the form of a Book, consistent with itself, yet repeating (its teaching in various aspects): the skins of those who fear their Lord tremble threat; then their skins and hearts do soften to the remembrance of Allah.**]

If when we listen to the Quran, we don't find this reaction of tears coming to our eyes, then we should make ourselves cry. Force ourselves to cry because we need to respond to the Quran in this way. If we don't, we are lost! This is the Word of Allah, the only preserved Word of all the revelations that were given from Adam till now. This is the word of God preserved.

We should read the Quran believing this is Allah speaking to us, because that is what it is. It is Allah talking to us directly. Every time he tells us something about the Jews, we should not (merely) take it as a piece of information, that the Jews are this and that the Jews are that. No! Whenever Allah tells us something about the Jews, we should see in it as a warning to ourselves — that we don't become like them. When Allah said, "... **ghairil maghdoobi 'alayhim wa la-ddaalleen...**" in Surah Al-Fatiha, the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam explained that al-maghdoob 'alayhim are the Jews and that ad-daalleen are the Christians. Those with whom Allah is angry are the Jews and those who have gone astray are the Christians. Allah is angry with the Jews because they KNOW the truth and they don't act on it. "Call people to righteousness and you forget yourselves." They changed the Book. The Christians are without knowledge; they are lost. They think that God is a man!

This is a warning to us. Every time we recite these verses, Allah is warning us not to be like them — we have the truth, we have the Scripture, but we are not acting according to them. If we do not seek knowledge, if we do not find out what it is Allah wants from us, then we are lost. Every time we read the "... **ghairil maghdoobi ‘alayhim wa la-ddaalleen...**", it should touch us. We should reflect on it and it should touch us.

There are so many verses throughout the Quran which remind us of the Hereafter, that remind us of the signs of the Day of Judgement. It is enough for us to open any part of the Quran to read about them. In virtually every chapter of the Quran Allah addresses the next life. It is linked to our second point of visiting the graves and remembering the Hereafter. The Quran speaks about the life to come and to reflect on it.

Methods of Cure: (4) Good Deeds

The fourth way for us to soften our hearts is by way of good deeds. Righteous deeds done sincerely for Allah will soften our hearts. In the initial stages, maybe we can't see how it softens our hearts, but we have to stick with it and believe. As the Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi wa sallam told us, that the slave of Allah does not come closer to Him except by doing the deeds that He has made compulsory for him. The compulsory deeds — the 5 daily prayers, the fast, etc. While praying, sometimes we wonder, "Where is the benefit? Where is the change?" The point is that if we keep working at it, there will be benefit. We may not see it immediately. It is something that becomes cumulative, like a person growing. They can hardly wait till they are going to be big and they put a mark on the wall, wondering when they are going to get up there. They cannot perceive themselves growing because it is something accumulating within them.

Similarly, righteous deeds... and the first of the righteous deeds are the one that God commands. It is a mistake to go to the things that He did not command us to do and to put all our focus on these areas and leave the primary things that He commanded us to do. If we have not established 5 times daily prayers on time, then it does not matter whatever else we do. It is useless. This is the foundation — if we cannot do what Allah has commanded us to do, has demanded of us, then how can we please Him in anything else? Then, for us, pleasing God is according to ourselves — what is pleasing to us will please God. This is not pleasing God. We have to remember that the Prophet Sallallahu ‘Alayhi wa sallam told us, "The Hell Fire is veiled by the things that are pleasing to us and Paradise is veiled by the things that we do not like."

"Things that we do not like" are not necessarily those things that are evil, but those that our own nafs does not like because they require work and effort. We like the easy way. So we would like not to pray and if someone were to tell us that it is not necessary to pray, we would say "Alhamdulillah!" This is our nature — we would be happy with that. However, we should be sad because we can only pray in this life and in the next, we have no chance to pray anymore. This is where prayer will benefit us, because in the next life, we will want to pray. We will beg Allah. Allah describes those who come before him for judgement: when they see their deeds and they know that they have put themselves in Hell. What will they do? Will they argue with Allah and ask why He has put them in Hell? No, they will ask Allah for another chance to go back and do what Allah has told them to do and more. [see Surah Al-A'raf 7:53]

But Allah will know that they are lying for they would do the same if sent back. For if Allah were to send us back, He will not send us back with the knowledge that we have then. He would send us back just as we were before.

Prayer is for OUR benefit. When we pray, we are not benefiting Allah. If every human being on this earth prayed, it would not increase or benefit Allah in any way, just as if nobody prayed, it would not decrease or affect Allah in any way. Prayer is for OURSELVES. That is why the Prophet used to say, "Bilal, give us ease by giving the call to prayer." Prayer was considered a time of pleasure but for us it is a burden. The sooner we finish, the better so we can get on with our lives. That is a mistake... Our hearts have become hard.

Allah describes the Jews: after all the signs that were given to them, with the passage of time, their hearts became hard. Our hearts have become hard. We have accepted Islam, we are awakened to Islam and we start to practise Islam, but time has passed and our hearts have become hardened.

[Quran, Surah Al-Hadid 57:16 : **"Has not the time arrived for the Believers that their hearts in all humility should engage in the remembrance of Allah and of the Truth which has been revealed to them, and that they should not become like those to whom was given The Book aforetime, but long ages passed over them and their hearts grew hard? For many among them are rebellious transgressors."**]

Prayer is not something that is pleasurable to us, but we have to keep striving and recognise that this is natural. Iman increases and decreases. The heart hardens and we fight against it and it softens... it is a continual struggle until we die. We just pray that we die with hearts that are soft and fearful. We have to keep struggling and it is in that struggle that ultimately we do taste iman; that we do taste what the salah was prescribed for; what the remembrance of Allah should mean in our lives. The Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam describes those who receive the shade of Allah's throne on the day when there is no shade: the one who remembers Allah and cries. His heart is soft.

[Bukhary, Volume 8, Book 76, Number 486: Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said *Allah will give shade to seven (types of people) under His Shade (on the Day of Resurrection). (one of them will be) a person who remembers Allah and his eyes are then flooded with tears.*]

[Bukhary, Volume 1, Book 11, Number 629: Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, *"Allah will give shade, to seven, on the Day when there will be no shade but His. (These seven persons are) a just ruler, a youth who has been brought up in the worship of Allah (i.e. worships Allah sincerely from childhood), a man whose heart is attached to the mosques (i.e. to pray the compulsory prayers in the mosque in congregation), two persons who love each other only for Allah's sake and they meet and part in Allah's cause only, a man who refuses the call of a charming woman of noble birth for illicit intercourse with her and says: I am afraid of Allah, a man who gives charitable gifts so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given (i.e. nobody knows how much he has given in charity), and a person who remembers Allah in seclusion and his eyes are then flooded with tears."*]

So we should not shy away from good deeds for they will help to soften our hearts. The Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam had said that greeting our brothers or sisters with a smiling face is sadaqa. Nothing should be too small for us: no good deed is so trivial that we scorn at it. We should strive to do every good deed.

But we should begin with the things Allah has made compulsory. We should establish the salah as Allah prescribed it; we have to establish our zakah as it is supposed to be given; we have to fast as it is supposed to be done and the hajj and umrah if we are able. These fundamentals have to be established for the sake of Allah; they provide the foundation for the softening of the heart. As we continue to do these acts and voluntary versions of these acts, we come closer and closer to Allah, until Allah says He becomes the eyes with which we see, where we see only the things that Allah wants us to see. We avoid the things that Allah does not want us to see; we turn away from them; we don't enjoy them. We only touch the things Allah wants us to touch; we only take what Allah wants us to take; we only go to places that Allah wants us to go... If we turn to Allah and we call on Him He will answer our prayer. This is the promise of the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi Wa sallam.

So my brothers and sisters, I ask you and myself to remember our hearts; to reflect on the state of our hearts. Whenever we have a moment, question: what state are we in? to work on our hearts until we have succeeded in softening them, by the mercy and the grace of Allah. We begin that process by turning to Allah. In our next prayer tonight, let us turn back to Allah and beg him sincerely to soften our hearts and when we do so, if we are sincere, our hearts will begin to soften. It is the promise of Rasulullah Sallallahu 'Alayhi Wa sallam. We should read the Quran and do as much as we can of righteous deeds. We should reflect on the next life by visiting the graves and by reading the verses addressing them; by reading the statements of the Prophet Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa sallam about the next life. We should do these things and strive to soften our hearts. As I said before, if after doing them we cannot find softness in our hearts, then we need to make ourselves cry. We need to force ourselves to cry because until we can let go and let loose those feeling within ourselves, then the hearts cannot become soft.

So I pray and I ask Allah to give us all soft hearts, hearts that are filled with mercy for the creating of Allah, our children, our parents, our brothers and sisters in Islam ... even those towards people who are not Muslims. I ask Allah to put in our hearts softness towards them in the sense that it would guide us to carry the message to them as we should. I ask Allah to give us success to turn back to the Quran, to read it regularly, seeking understanding and guidance from it and I ask Allah to give us soft hearts.