

# Purification of the Self

The Quran mentions four responsibilities of the Prophet, one being the purification of the believers. (*Al Baqarah*, 2:129)

The fact that this is set forth in the scriptures underlines the importance of purification. It is, therefore, essential for believers to give the first priority to the purification of the self in their lives.

Purification (*Tazkiyah*) covers a number of Islamic imperatives: purifying oneself of the temptations of the self and Satan; refraining from negative reaction when faced with unpleasant experiences caused by others; and remaining resistant to such temptations that cause man to deviate from the straight path etc.

*Tazkiyah* literally means growth, one example of which can be seen in a tree. A tree is the result of the growth of a seed. When a seed finds a favourable environment, it starts growing till it becomes a green, verdant tree. The same is true of the purification of man. In this sense *tazkiyah* also conveys intellectual development.

God has created man with great potential and this potential of the human personality is actualized by *tazkiyah*. In this sense it would be right to call it the building of the human personality on a divine foundation.

Man has been created by God with an upright nature. But it happens that various weaknesses and temptations cloud the essential upright nature. Man ought to make unremitting efforts to keep himself away from them.

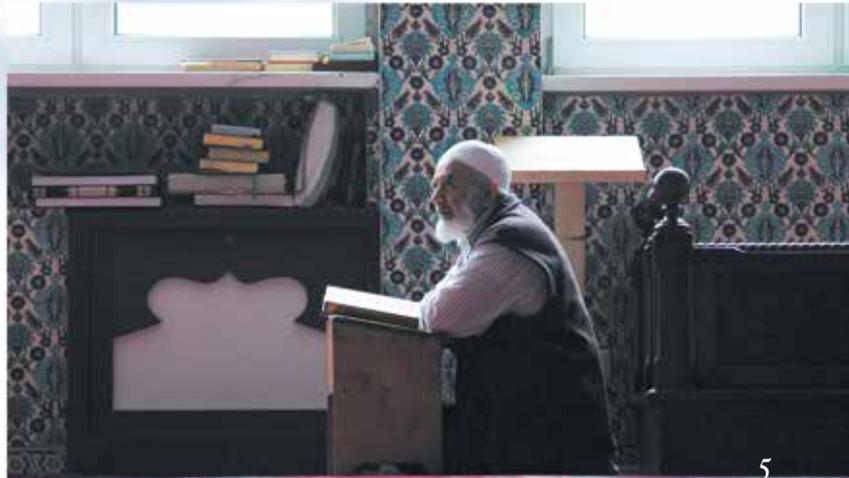
The task of the Prophet was to make people aware of this principle of purification and lead them towards attaining it.

The Prophet directly helped his companions perform the task of *tazkiyah*. For later generations the performance of the Prophet's task has to be done following the reports of his example. On the subject of self-purification, complete records of the Prophet's sayings and deeds and the sayings and deeds of the Prophet's companions have been preserved in the books of *seerah* (the Prophet's biography) and later generations should feel themselves duty bound to seek guidance from these records. Those also can do so directly, while those who cannot read themselves may be assisted by Islamic scholars.

Reformers should emphasize on the importance of *tazkiyah* and caution people about the dangers in neglecting this duty.

The Quran declares:

**“Tazkiyah alone can lead one to Heaven.”**  
(*Ta Ha*, 20:76)



## The Method of *Tazkiyah*

Many attempts have been made to describe several methods of *tazkiyah*. Lists of these methods, have also been prepared. But the truth is that there is no list that can be prepared for the method of *tazkiyah*. This is because no list, however long it may be, can be a complete list. No list can cover all the methods of *tazkiyah*, and later experiences will prove that the “long” list was also an incomplete list.

The truth is that *tazkiyah* is not related to any list but is rather related to man’s own will and intention. If a man was indeed serious about *tazkiyah* and he wants to attain his *tazkiyah* honestly, he would certainly succeed in this. But if man is not totally serious about it and he is not eager about attaining *tazkiyah*, then no amount of writing or speeches will suffice for his purification.

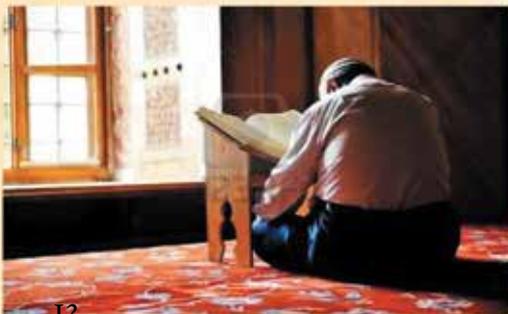
It is a unique quality of man that he is able to find justification for every mistake of his. He is always able to find beautiful words to portray his faults as virtues and his mistakes as right actions. This being so no reformer or well-wisher can bring about the *tazkiyah* of a person with such an attitude. To attain *tazkiyah*, we must take a conscious decision about attaining

*tazkiyah*. This decision should be so firm that one remains steadfast true to it and makes no excuses to default on it.

What is required for *tazkiyah* is will power. This should be so strong that it remains unaffected by any temptation or any fear of damage to worldly interests.

The will must be resistant to any form of pressure. One who aims at purification should be willing to do whatever religion requires him to do, whatever the cost at the practical and psychological levels.

This is a tough step to take but one must be willing to do so because the reward of *tazkiyah* is paradise itself. The price of failure is also very high as the only abode in the hereafter apart from heaven is the everlasting torment of hell.



## Mind-based not Heart-based



Study the last part of the third chapter (*Al Imran*, verse 190 onwards) of the Quran which exhorts people of understanding to reflect on the signs in the creation of the heavens and the earth in order to appreciate their Lord. Through these signs, you will learn the Creation Plan of God, you will discover heaven and hell, and you will realize the importance of the Prophet, in short, all those things which are related directly or indirectly to *tazkiyah*. In these verses of the Quran, the realization of God is linked with pondering over the universe. In other words, *tazkiyah*, according to the Quran, is based on the mind and not on the heart. In this connection the word 'heart' is used in the Quran and the Hadith in the literary sense and not in the physical sense. In later times, Muslims came under the influence of the Sufis, who believed in the concept of *tazkiyah* based on the heart.

According to this concept, it came to be accepted that the human heart was the treasure house of all divine realities. It was believed that one could reach this treasure house through meditation and then one would attain *tazkiyah*. But

this concept of heart-based *tazkiyah* was not derived from the Quran. It was in fact derived from history. This concept of heart-based spirituality had its origin in ancient times and people introduced it into Islam.

Modern science has provided the scientific foundation by which Islamic *tazkiyah*, based on the mind, can once again be revived. Modern research has proved that the human heart functions only as a pump for the circulation of the blood. The heart has no capacity to think. The mind does have an impact on the heart, for example, when it gets stressed it can impact the functioning of the heart. But that does not imply that any thinking activity is done by the heart. To ascribe any thinking ability to the heart flies in the face of accepted scientific evidence.

The mind alone possesses the capacity to think. All human actions come into existence through thinking and attaining the state of *tazkiyah* is no exception. *Tazkiyah* is achieved at the level of the mind, rather than any strivings at the level of the heart. For the attainment of *tazkiyah*, paying attention to the heart is as useful as paying attention to one's nails or hair or anything else.

