

# **A Discourse On The Meaning Of Disease Of Heart**

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**Article**

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### **A Discourse On The Meaning Of Disease Of Heart**

**From Al-Mizan, An Exegesis Of The Qur'an, Chapter 5, Verses 51-54**

**Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i**

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The phrase: ***"in whose hearts is a disease"***(5:52), clearly says that hearts become diseased; conversely it shows that they also may be healthy, because health and disease are opposite each other; if one is found in a subject, inevitably that subject is capable of accepting its opposite, like blindness and eye-sight. Don't you see that a wall is not called sick because it does not accept the attribute of healthiness?

In all places where Allah ascribes disease to hearts, He describes such conditions and attributes of hearts, which prove that they have gone out of straight nature and deviated from right path. For example:

***And when the hypocrites and those in whose hearts was a disease began to say: "Allah and His Messenger did not promise us (victory) but only to deceive"(33: 12)***

***When the hypocrites and those in whose hearts was disease said: "Their religion has deceived these (Muslims)"(8:49)***

***So that He may make what the Satan casts a trial for those in whose hearts is disease and those whose hearts are hard (22:53)***

apart from other verses. In short, heart's disease means its involvement with a sort of suspicion and doubt that pollutes the faith in Allah and removes confidence in His signs; it blends faith with polytheism. That is why such a heart experiences such conditions, and such a man commits such deeds as have affinity with disbelief in Allah and rejection of his communications.

Conversely, heart's health and freedom from disease means it's being steadfast in straight nature and its adherence to the right path; it leads man to sincerity in monotheistic belief and reliance on Allah, discarding all things to which his low desires are attracted. Allah says:

***The day on which neither property will avail, nor sons, except him who comes to Allah with a heart free (from evil), (26:88–89)***

It is evident from above that those in whose hearts is a disease are other than the hypocrites, as the Qur'anic expression in so many places shows: the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease. It is because the hypocrites are those who believed with their tongues and their hearts did not believe, while total disbelief is the death of the heart, not a disease. Allah says:

***Is he who was dead then we raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people, (6: 122).***

***Only those accept who listen; and (as to) the dead Allah will raise them, (6:36).***

Obviously, the heart's disease, in Qur'anic expression, **means the doubt and suspicion that overwhelms man's perception regarding Allah and His signs, which makes the heart unable to adhere to a religious belief.**

Thus, those in whose hearts is a disease are the people of weak faith who listen to every loud-mouthed person; and like a weather-cock turn with winds; this phrase does not refer to the hypocrites who pretended to believe and kept their disbelief hidden, caring for their worldly interests, in order that they might get benefits from the believers – through their manifested belief – and from the disbelievers through their hidden disbelief.

Of course, sometimes the Qur'an calls them hypocrites analytically, because both groups in their inner selves are devoid of faith. It is separate from using the phrase: those in whose hearts is a disease, for those whom are unbelievers pretending to believe. Allah says:

***Announce to the hypocrites that they shall have a painful chastisement, those who take the unbelievers for guardians rather than believers. Do they seek honour from them? Then surely all honour is for Allah. And indeed He has revealed to you in the Book that when you hear Allah's communications disbelieved in and mocked at, do not sit with them until they enter into some other discourse; surely then you would be like them; surely Allah will gather together the hypocrites and the unbelievers all in Hell. (4: 138–140)***

As for the words of Allah in the chapter of "The Cow":

And there are some people who say: "***We believe in Allah and in the last day***"; ***while they are not at all believers... There is a disease in their hearts, so Allah added to their disease ... . And when it is said to them: "Believe as the people have believed", they say: "Shall we believe as the fools have believed?" ... (2:8–13)***; it goes on describing their double-facedness up to verse 20; and it gives a picture of their hearts' journey from doubt in truth to its denial; and declares that in the beginning they were diseased because they wrongfully claimed to be believers while they were in doubt and had not

believed yet; so Allah added to their disease, until they perished because they disbelieved in truth and mocked it.

Allah has explained that the heart's disease, like that of the body, sometimes goes on increasing until it becomes deeprooted and chronic and ends in perdition; it happens when harmful things are taken or done – which in this case is disobedience of Allah. Allah says:

***There is a disease in their hearts, so Allah added to their disease (2: 10)***

***And whenever a chapter is revealed... And as for those in whose hearts is a disease, it adds uncleanness to their uncleanness and they die while they are unbelievers. Do they not see that they are tried once or twice in every year, yet they do not turn (to Allah) nor do they mind? (9: 124-6).***

***Then Allah comments in a general way: Then evil was the end of those who did evil, because they rejected the signs of Allah and used to mock them (30: 10).***

***Allah then says that the cure of this disease is to believe in Him; as He says in a general way.... their Lord will guide them by their faith (10:9).***

***Also He says: To Him do ascend the good words; and the good deed, lifts them up; (35: 10)***

Therefore, if a heart patient wants to cure his disease, he must repent and return to Allah; in other words, he must believe in Him and must practise good thought and good deed, as the above mentioned verse alludes to it:

***. . . yet they do not turn (to Allah) nor do they mind (9: 126).***

Allah has revealed a comprehensive statement on this subject in the chapter of "Women":

***O you who believe! Do not take the unbelievers for friends rather than the believers; do you desire that you should give to Allah a manifest proof against yourselves? Surely the hypocrites are in the lowest stage of the Fire, and you shall not find a helper for them; except those who repent and amend and hold fast to Allah and are sincere in their religion to Allah; these are with the believers, and Allah will grant the believers a mighty reward (4: 144-6).***

It has been explained that it means returning to Allah with belief, remaining steadfast on it and adhering to the Book and the Sunnah, and being sincere in all this.

***QUR'AN: O you who believe! Whoever of you turns back from his religion... (5:54)***

Al-Irtidad (الإرتداد) literally means to turn back. In Muslims' terminology, turning back from religion means apostasy, forsaking belief for disbelief, no matter whether that belief was preceded by disbelief or not.

If an unbeliever accepts Islam and then apostatizes, he is called **murtadd milli**; if a born Muslim turns back from Islam, he is called **murtadd fitri**. This terminology is either laid down by the shari'ah or by the Muslims themselves.

It may appear at the first glance that the turning back in this verse denotes the terminological meaning in which the Muslims use this word. As such the verse will have no connection with the preceding verses. It would be an independent verse showing that Allah might dispense with belief of one people replacing it with that of the others. But this likelihood is removed, when one meditates on this and the preceding verses. The verse in fact makes the believers remember that Allah has power that He should be worshipped in His earth, and He will soon bring there a people who would not turn back from His religion; they would adhere to it to the end. He says:

***...therefore if these disbelieve in it, We have (already) entrusted with it a people who are not disbelievers in it (6:89)***

***...and whoever disbelieves, then surely Allah is Self-sufficient (independent) of the worlds (3:97)***

***...If you disbelieved, you and those on earth all together, most surely Allah is Self-sufficient, Praised (14:8).***

Such a sublime position does not demand more than paying attention to the basic theme, i.e., appraising them that Allah would bring a community of believers who would not turn back from His religion. The other attributes that they shall love Allah and He shall love them, and that they will be lowly before the believers and mighty against the unbelievers, etc. are additional characteristics that have been described here keeping in view additional requirements of context and condition.

Looking at it from another angle, we realize that the said attributes are not without some connection with the theme of the preceding verses regarding befriending the Jews and the Christians rather than the believers. Taking them as friends rather than the believers, shows a certain inclination of heart towards them, a connection of love and affinity; and how could such a polluted heart contain the love of Allah – as Allah says:

***Allah has not made for any man two hearts within him... (33:4).***

This friendship would lead the believer to become lowly before the disbelievers and mighty against the believers and show haughtiness before them, as Allah says:

***... Do they seek honour from them? Then surely all honour is for Allah (4: 139).***

Another concomitant of this friendship is that they would show laxity in fighting against those disbelievers and would shrink from jihad; they would not have any patience if they were deprived of any comfort in the way of Allah, nor would they be ready to cut off all social contacts with them. But Allah says:

***O you who believe! Do not take My enemy and your enemy for friends: would you offer them love while they deny what has come to you of the truth... If you go forth fighting in My path and seeking My pleasure, would you manifest love to them? ... (60: 1).***

Further Allah says: Indeed, there is for you a good example in Ibrahim and those with him when they said to their people:

***"Surely we dissociate from you and from what you worship other than Allah; we renounce you, and enmity and hatred have appeared between us and you forever until you believe in Allah alone"(60:4).***

Likewise, **irtidad**, in its literal meaning, or by analytical process, is applicable to befriending the disbelievers, as Allah has said in the preceding verse: and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them. Also He has said [in this context]:

***... and whoever does this, he shall have nothing (to do) with Allah... (3:28)***

***... surely then you would be like them... (4: 140).***

The above discussion shows that the verse has some connection with the preceding ones; and it makes it clear that Allah's religion does not need such people who are prone to fall into the pit of disobedience and befriend the Jews and the Christians, because hypocrisy has crept into their community, and now it contains a lot of people with diseased hearts. They sell religion for worldly benefits, and covet the fallacious honour and transient influence rather than the honour and power, which are reserved for Allah, His Messenger, and the believers. They do not care for the real felicity, which covers life of this world as well as that of the next.

The verse expounds it by giving information about a future upheaval: If religion suffers from unsteady capricious behaviour of these people of weak faith who prefer love of other than Allah over that of Allah, seek honour near enemies of Allah, show laxity in fighting in His way and fear blames and admonition of His enemies, then certainly soon Allah will bring a people who shall love Him and He shall love them; who shall be lowly before the believers, mighty before the unbelievers, and who shall fight in the way of Allah and shall not fear the censure of any censurer.

Although many exegetes were aware that the verse contains information of a future cataclysm, and spent much time on deciding whom the verse should be applied to; yet they did not take trouble to properly explain its wordings. As a result, they failed to correctly interpret the attributes mentioned in it. Consequently, they treated the divine speech just like a human talk which includes many a loopholes and inaccuracies.

No doubt, the Qur'an uses the same words, which the Arabs did, and construction of its sentences is not different from the usual Arab style – in short, its oratorical system is the same as the Arabs of the time of

revelation were familiar with. Yet it totally differs from other speeches in one aspect: When we speak, no matter whether we are eloquent or not, we base our talk on the meanings we understand, and our understanding is drawn from the social life which we have created through our human social nature. This nature usually passes a judgement in accordance with analogy.

This opens before us the door of inexactitude and inaccuracy. We start saying 'all' in place of 'most', and 'ever-lasting' instead of 'long-lasting'. We take an analogical statement as unconditional truth; we confuse 'rare' with 'non-existent', and 'a little' with 'extinct'. We unreservedly say: This is good, that is bad; this is liked, that is disliked; this is praiseworthy, that is condemnable; this is beneficial, that is harmful; this man is noble, that one is evil, and so on. We give unconditional judgement.

But in reality it is correct only in some conditions, with some assumptions, in view of a few people, in comparison to some things only – but not unreservedly. However, we treat a few contrary situations as non-existent, thus showing a laxity in its perception and the judgement. This concerns those items, which actually exist independently. As for those things of which man is oblivious because of his limited perception of related matters, they are even more numerous. Therefore, whatever man speaks about and about which he assumes some knowledge and perception, is all based on inexactitude in some aspects, and ignorance of others. If we could comprehend the reality and then tried to apply that speech on it, we would find that it was merely a joke. Ponder on it.

This is the condition of human speech, which is based on the knowledge acquired by man. As for the divine speech, it must be above such shortcomings, because Allah encompasses all things in His knowledge; and He says about His speech:

***Most surely it is a decisive word, and it is not a jest (86: 13–14).***

And it guides us how we should explain the divine words without attaching to it any condition when the said words are unrestricted and are not followed by any joint or separate condition; and this is how we should look at the attributes mentioned therein as they point to the underlying reason of the statement. When Allah says: He shall love them, then He shall not dislike them in anything and in any manner – otherwise He would have attached an exception. And when He praises them as being lowly before the believers, it implies that they would be lowly before them because of their belief in Allah, and they would remain lowly in all conditions and in all situations; otherwise it would not be a decisive word.

Of course, there are some attributes ascribed to a large group while in reality it applies to a select band from among them – when both groups are united in a way that justifies such usage. Allah says:

***And certainly We gave the Book and the Wisdom and the Prophecy to the Children of Israel, and We gave them of the goodly things, and We made them excel the nations (45: 16)***

***... He has chosen you and has not laid upon you any hardship in religion... (22:78)***



***You are the best of the nations raised up for the (benefit of) men; you enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong ... (3:110)***

***... that you may be witnesses for the people and the Messenger may be a witness for you. . . (2:143)***

***And the Messenger cried out: "O my Lord! Surely my people have treated this Qur'an as a forsaken thing. (25:30)***

Apart from other verses which describe sociological attributes which are found in individuals and society. Such expressions are not based on any laxity; they are attributes ascribed to a part and the whole, to the society as well as to an individual, because of some relevance. For example, we have a handful of earth containing a gem; now we may say, there is earth in our hand; and equally truthfully it may be said that there is a gem in our hand, and the real purpose is to take that gem.

Now, let us return to our original topic:

***"O you who believe! Whoever of you turns back from his religion" ... (5:54)***

As explained earlier, turning back from religion here means taking the Jews and the Christians for a friend. The verse, like the preceding one, is addressed to the believers. The main theme is to declare that the true religion does not need such people's belief, which is polluted with love of the enemies of Allah. Allah has counted such friendship as disbelief and polytheism, as He has said: and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them. It is because Allah is the Guardian and Helper of His religion, and as an aspect of His help to His religion, He will certainly bring a people who will renounce the enemies of Allah, and love His friends and will not love any except Him.

"then soon Allah will bring a people": Allah has ascribed the bringing to Himself to confirm the meaning of His help to His religion. The context makes it clear that this religion has got a Helper, besides Whom it does not need any helper – and that is Allah Himself. The speech puts the help to religion given by these people vis-à-vis the national help sought by those who love Allah's enemies. Likewise, the word, "people", and mention of their attributes and related verbs in plural show that the people whose appearance is promised, will be a community not one or two individuals.

In other words, it does not say that Allah will bring in every period a person who will love Allah and whom Allah will love, and who will be lowly before believers and mighty before disbelievers, and who will fight in the way of Allah and will not be afraid of the censure of any censurer. Bringing of these people is attributed to Allah. It does not mean that He will create them, because there is no creator except Allah. He has said:

***Allah is the Creator of everything... (39:62).***

Rather this bringing connotes that it is He Who shall arouse them to take the opportunity to help the

religion; and shall enhance their honour by loving them and being loved by them; He will help them in being lowly before His friends and mighty against His enemies, and in fighting in His way and ignoring every censurer's comments. Therefore, their help to the religion is Allah's help to it through them and by means of them. Whether this promise is implemented at once or after sometime is all the same for Allah, although our mind because of its limitation differentiates between nearness and farness.

"He shall love them and they shall love Him": Love is unrestricted with any attribute or adjective; thus this mutual love is for 'person' only without any condition. They love Allah; it follows that they give preference to their Lord over anything else, be it wealth, honour, family, or other such things. They do not love anyone among the enemies of Allah; if they love any one, it is reserved for the friends of Allah because of the love of Allah.

As for His love to them, it means that they are free from every injustice, clean of every spiritual uncleanness, be it disbelief or sin. They attain this cleanness through divine protection, or through divine forgiveness resulting from repentance. It is because Allah does not love any injustice or sin as He says:

***...then surely Allah does not love the unbelievers (3:32)***

***... and Allah does not love the unjust (3:57)***

***...surely He does not love the extravagants (6: 141)***

***...and Allah does not love the mischief-makers (5:64).***

***...Surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits (2: 190)***

***... surely He does not love the proud (16:23)***

***....surely Allah does not love the treacherous (8:58)***

apart from other such verses. These verses condemn all evils. When these evils are removed from man, as Allah's love to him testifies, he will acquire their opposite virtues. After all man cannot be devoid of both characteristics; he must compulsorily adhere to this side or that.

In short, they are the true believers whose belief is not tainted with injustice, and Allah has said:

***Those who believe and do not mix up their faith with injustice, those are they who shall have the security and they are those who go aright (6:82).***

So, they are protected from going astray; and Allah has said:

***... surely Allah does not guide him who leads astray... (16:37).***

Thus, they are under divine protection against every straying and are led by divine guidance onto His straight path. They because of their faith – confirmed by Allah – are guided to following the Messenger

and total submission to him, as they have surrendered totally to Allah. Allah says:

***But no! By your Lord! They do not believe until they make you a judge of that which has become a matter of disagreement among them, and then do not find any straitness in their hearts as to what you have decided and submit with total submission (4:65).***

When they shall reach that stage, then the words of Allah shall be truly applicable to them:

***Say: "If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you" (3:31)***

It also clearly proves that following the Prophet (S) and being loved by Allah are concomitants and inseparable; whoever follows the Prophet, Allah loves him; and Allah does not love anyone unless he is a follower of His Prophet (S).

When they shall follow the Messenger, they will acquire every good, which Allah loves and is pleased with, like piety, justice, magnanimity, patience, reliance on Allah, repentance, cleanness, and other such virtues. Allah says:

***... then surely Allah love the pious (3:76)***

***...surely Allah loves the doers of good (2: 195)***

***... and Allah loves the patient (3: 146)***

***...surely Allah loves those who fight in His way in ranks as if they were a firm and compact wall (61:4)***

***...surely Allah loves those who trust (in Him) (3: 159)***

***... surely Allah loves those who turn much (to Him), and He loves those who purify themselves (2:222),***

apart from other such verses. If you search and ponder on the verses which expound the effects of these qualities and their concomitant virtues, you will come upon a great many good characteristics; and you will find that all lead to the conclusion that the people having those virtues are the heirs who shall inherit the earth, and for them will be the good end of the abode, as the verse under discussion (O you who believe! Whoever of you turns back ...) points to it; and Allah has stated it in a short but comprehensive sentence:

***... and the (good) end is for piety (20: 132).***

We shall explain the underlying theme of this verse in another relevant place, God willing.

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