



## Spiritual Poverty in Islam: Strategies to Eliminate It from the Perspective of the Holy Qur'an and Narratives with a Look at Spiritual Health

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### **Abstract**

Man has two stages of existence and two real and material selves, whose humane self is a breath that has been descended from the kingdom of heaven to be the caliph of God on earth. Man's neglect of his spiritual dimension has caused him to forget the truth and originality of his existence, which is the meaning of spiritual poverty. If man can establish a close connection with his real life and with God Almighty, he will move away from spiritual poverty and will achieve true spiritual health and peace. Since man instinctively does not want to be harmed, if the problem of spiritual poverty is fundamentally solved, not only the individual but also the society will be safe from harm. The most important way to get rid of spiritual poverty is to believe in God Almighty and to communicate with Him. And that it is necessary for man to establish a balance between material and spiritual needs and not spend all his efforts to address a specific need in order to achieve the real goal and purpose and to achieve his existential honor and dignity. In fact, strengthening the spiritual aspect will greatly contribute to the health of the body and soul of individuals and ultimately the health of the great human community. The stability and durability of a healthy society, of course, depends on the health of each of its members. The present article deals with the most important strategies for the treatment of spiritual poverty using a descriptive-analytical method and relying on Qur'anic and narrative documents, and its relationship with spiritual health has been investigated. Strategies for its treatment include: self-discovery, remembrance of God, attention to human dignity, returning to the path of divine nature and tending to hereafter, which have been analyzed with the reasons of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

**Keywords:** *Spiritual Poverty; Spiritual Health; Self-Discovery; Solutions to Eliminate Spiritual Poverty; Holy Qur'an*

## 1- Introduction

Spirituality and communication with God Almighty to ensure the health of the soul and purity from moral vices are like health programs to maintain the health of the body and stay safe from disease. If man wants to enjoy the blessings of health, he must not forget his spiritual duty and realize his true value and truth of existence, and step on the path of growth and excellence to achieve the highest levels of perfection. Professor Motahhari considers spirituality as the basis of human growth and development (Motahhari, 2006, vol. 24, p. 458). In other words, human evolution and excellence is in observing the spiritual aspects, in the sense that man is able to use material and spiritual assets properly and can achieve spiritual perfections when he has made significant progress in terms of spirituality; if he forgets his true self, he has forgotten his spiritual dignity and tends to degeneration and corruption and becomes more inferior than any inferiority. The Holy Qur'an says in this regard:

(لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ) (تین: 4-5)

“We have indeed created man in the best of moulds. Then do We abase him (to be (the lowest of the low).” (Tīn: 4-5)

This is a sign of spiritual poverty. In fact, spiritual health makes sense in relation to the spiritual dimension and the heavenly aspect of man and the understanding of his real life. Man calms down when he leans on a firm and steadfast position; but when he relies on something insecure, he is constantly in a state of apprehension and fear, since man belongs completely to God Almighty and has peace of mind as long as he worships God. Therefore, in order to get rid of spiritual poverty, it is necessary for human beings to become familiar with and be aware of the treatment strategies; because the practical application of these strategies causes a deep connection between man and the origin and destination of creation and makes him aware of the precious gem that the Lord of the worlds has deposited in him; this is the same concept of spiritual health, after which it solves many individual and social problems and leads the individual and society to the path of excellence, happiness and closeness to God. Failure to do so is dangerous not only for the human body but also for the soul. The main question in this article is what the solutions to treat spiritual poverty are? What does spiritual poverty have to do with spiritual health?

## 2- Research Background

The following are some of the researches in which the topics related to the subject of the present research have been studied:

Kamfiroozi, Mohammad Hassan, 2015 "Study of the effect of spirituality on various individual dimensions in the organization based on the theories of Martyr Motahhari" This article seeks to examine the effects of spirituality with a new perspective and an Islamic perspective based on the views and ideas of the martyr "Motahhari".

Nemati, Mehdi, 2015, entitled "Study of the meaning of life in modern spirituality" The researcher in this study has stated the most important principles and characteristics of modern spirituality and is trying to define and analyze the meaning of life according to the structure and content of modern spirituality. Amini, Alireza, 2017, thesis "Spiritual health and its indicators from the perspective of the Qur'an" Researcher with the method of thematic interpretation outside the Qur'an while examining the main concepts of research and the principles and dimensions of health, using the Holy Qur'an has studied and extracted the indicators of spiritual health in the dimensions of insight, tendency and behavior in four areas of communication.

Yavari, Soheila 2016, thesis: A Study of Religious Spirituality and Modern Spirituality, Identity of Criteria, Functions. In this research, by carefully analyzing the basics of religious spirituality and

modern spirituality, the researcher has given a relatively comprehensive picture of the distinct identities of the two and that religious spirituality believes in rationality, revelation, the existence of God, hereafter, Sharī'a, moderation and epistemology. While modern spirituality denies the hereafter, denying God as a deity, anti-Sharia, irrational, non-existent, humanist.

Therefore, no independent research has been done to explain spiritual poverty and its treatment strategies and its relationship with spiritual health.

### **3- Theoretical Foundations of Research**

In order to be more aware of the relationship between "spiritual poverty" and spiritual health and achieving its meaning, we first refer to the definition of the word spirituality from the perspective of Islamic thinkers and then explain spiritual health and its relationship with spiritual poverty.

#### **3-1. Spirituality from the perspective of Islamic thinkers**

Islamic thinkers have various definitions of spirituality, the most important of which are discussed below:

Imam Khomeini (RA) interpreted the unseen world and transcendental material truths as spiritual matters, saying: "There are many verses in the Holy Qur'an about spiritual matters, that is, the humane aspect that is from the unseen world" (Imam Khomeini, 2000, vol. 4: 183).

According to Allameh Tabataba'i, the esoteric path and spiritual life of man is a series of real realities outside the reality of nature and the material world and he believes: the inner world, which is the place and homeland of spiritual life, is a much more original, realistic and vast world. It is from the world of matter and sense (Tabataba'i, 1975: 51). On the other hand, human nature is formed in order to seek truth and esoteric dimension and to understand the meaning of life.

Martyr Motahhari considers spirituality as a kind of innate feeling and tendency of man to immaterial matters such as science and knowledge, moral goodness, beauty, holiness and worship, which is the distinguishing feature of man and other beings (Motahhari, 2001: 76).

#### **3-2. Spiritual health**

One of the dimensions of human existence, in addition to the physical and material dimension, has a spiritual and heavenly dimension, and his health includes physical health and mental and spiritual health. Spiritual health in medical terms has a materialistic approach in that it can be used to help patients physically, but in non-medical terms or semantic medicine is a process that in addition to being used in physical therapy, it can be useful in the psychological treatment of patients.

Some believe that spiritual health refers to having a sense of acceptance, positive feeling, morality, and a sense of positive interaction with a ruling and superior holy power, others, and oneself, which is obtained through a dynamic and harmonious process of cognition, emotion, action, and consequences. (Mesbah et al, 2014, p. 13)

Spiritual health is one of the important dimensions of health in human beings, which is characterized by a harmonious relationship, a feeling of close connection with oneself, God, society and the environment. It is the only force that harmonizes the physical, mental and social dimensions and is necessary to adapt to the patient. (Ja'fari Zadeh, 2011, p. 21)

In fact, spiritual health is the fourth pillar of health and is of great importance. This type of health, in addition to being able to serve physical health and mental and social health, has a great impact on creating a healthy person and his spiritual growth and development. When the soul, heart and spirit of man are healthy, spiritual health is achieved. If the human heart and soul were healthy, other parts of the

human body would be affected and follow the healthy path, and if it became ill and damaged, other parts would also be damaged, and the path of human growth and excellence would be difficult.

### **3-3. Spiritual health and its relationship with spiritual poverty**

Health in humans means health against disease and does not only include the human body; it also includes all dimensions: physical, mental, social and spiritual. Although until a few centuries ago the field of health was limited to the physical, mental and social issues of man, but about half of the last century, the World Health Organization argue that another dimension, i.e. spiritual health, is one of three other areas of health that need to be defined alongside health. In a way that health in other areas requires spiritual health.

### **3-4. Spiritual health from the perspective of Qur'an**

Man achieves spiritual health when he knows his place in the universe and his relationship with his Creator and Lord. He has a correct view to worldly life and understands its relationship with eternal life well, and constantly focus on eternal life. (Hemmat Banari, 2010, p. 5)

The need to discuss spiritual health becomes more apparent when it is observed that many mental illnesses and even physical problems result from a lack of spirituality and spiritual health; in other words, one of the main areas of mental illness and problems and its physical and social effects is the feeling of emptiness and futility, and this feeling is due to the lack of spiritual dimension of health in people or the same spiritual poverty, so getting rid of spiritual poverty requires spiritual health. In fact, spiritual health is the opposite of spiritual poverty.

## **4- Strategies for Treating the Harms of Spiritual Poverty**

One needs useful solutions to get out of spiritual poverty and achieve spiritual health. The most important solutions can be mentioned as follows:

### **4-1. Self-discovery**

One of the most important ways to treat spiritual poverty is to find yourself and return to yourself. Self-discovery means knowing my true and real human being. Explaining the meaning of self-discovery and self-knowledge, Motahhari writes: Man should understand his real position in the world of creation; to know that it is not purely earthly, there is a ray of the divine spirit in him; and that he can surpass the angels in knowledge. (Motahhari, 1992, vol. 2, p. 285)

The most valuable thing for human beings is the same heavenly spirit, which has been interpreted as self in some positions. Imam Ṣādiq (AS) says: "I place the price of the precious soul on his Lord." (Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 75, p. 135) A person needs to value his soul as much as he values his body; because the most exquisite truths, which is his true self, are within man. According to Motahhari, when a person knows his single soul and is not alien to his true self, he becomes aware of the unseen world and the heaven. Because man is a heavenly soul, his gender is the gender of greatness. "When a person feels a heavenly self, he does not submit to humiliation, weakness and vulgarity." (Motahhari, 1998: 83) But whoever suppresses his humane personality and spiritual honor, as a result, pursues animal desires and carnal desires and violates his humane and spiritual values, as Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (AS) says: "Whoever has the dignity of the soul and his soul is valuable to him, his lusts and carnal desires will be humiliated with him." (Tamimi Amadi, 1407 AH, vol. 2, p. 213)

A person who is oblivious to the knowledge of his inner and outer world and does not evaluate what he is and his inner and outer possibilities and talents and does not pay attention to his origin and end, can never be stable in his thoughts, tendencies and actions and he never enjoy peace. A conscious person

can take firm and healthy steps on the path of health and security. Unaware, intoxicated, and playful man does not see the realities inside and outside himself. (Salarifar, 2011, p. 169) When man came out of negligence and achieved a degree of self-knowledge and then his existential knowledge, he puts himself at his disposal and surrenders to Him. God also takes the hand of this servant and puts him on the path of perfection and happiness.

When a person feels dignity and honor in his true self, he no longer suffers from spiritual poverty. Man needs to know the high values of his existence in order to be aware and find his true dignity. Motahhari writes in this regard: When they want to lead man to the highest human values, they turn him to a kind of introspection to discover the truth of their existence, then find their existential dignity. (Motahhari, 1993: 371).

As long as the spiritual dimension of man is not considered, known and satisfied, desire in the whole human being causes anxiety and distress. Peace and contentment can be achieved in the human body and spiritual health can be obtained only when he returns to his origin and does God's commands properly.

#### 4-2. Remembrance of God

One of the most important ways to cure spiritual poverty is the remembrance of God, which helps a person to get rid of neglect of his truth. Just as God considers God-forgetfulness a necessity of self-forgetfulness, so the remembrance of God prevents the forgetting of the truth of human existence. In fact, the remembrance of God Almighty prevents spiritual poverty and human neglect of oneself. As the Holy Qur'an says:

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ (بقره: ١٥٢)

“Then do ye remember Me; I will remember you.” (Baqarah: 152)

If one believes in God well and knows that all he has is from God, he will never forget Him and will not be afflicted with spiritual poverty; for God Almighty is the perfect cause and creative of man, and the perfect cause of every being precedes his existence. Therefore, it is impossible for him to find himself and not become alienated from himself without knowing and finding the cause, originator and creator. (Motahhari, 2006, vol. 16, p. 578) When man believes in God with all his being and moves towards him with constant remembrance, he can be freed from the abyss of spiritual poverty and not be caught in the earthly body; because he has realized his existential originality and has been connected to the eternal divine source.

Man's life is dependent on the life of his heart, and the life of the heart is dependent on the remembrance of God, and when the remembrance of God is removed from the heart of man, so is his true life. It is narrated from the Messenger of God that he said: "Hearts are revived by the remembrance of God and hearts die by forgetting the remembrance of God." (Khansari, 1981, vol. 2, p. 415) In fact, the relationship with God Almighty to ensure the health of the soul and purity from moral vices is like health programs to maintain the health of the body and stay safe from disease. If a person wants to enjoy the blessings of health and not be infected with moral diseases, he must always remember God Almighty and not neglect him and not forget his spiritual duty.

Some believe that the remembrance of God brings peace to man until the spiritual needs of man are not satisfied, desire causes anxiety and tension throughout his existence; peace of mind arises in human beings only when he comes to his origin; that is, he returns to God and enters the path of His worthy servants. (Salarifar, 2011: 136) A person who is unaware of knowing his outer and inner world and does not evaluate what he is and his inner and outer talents and does not pay attention to his origin and end, can never be stable and calm in thought, tends and actions.

### 4-3. Attention to human dignity

One of the important ways to treat spiritual poverty is to pay attention to human dignity. Dignity is a divine gift that distinguishes man from other beings and makes him superior to the universe. The Holy Qur'an says in this regard:

(وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ...) (اسراء: 70)

“We have honored the sons of Adam.” (‘Isrā’: 70)

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) says: “Nothing is more precious to God than man. They asked the Prophet, even the angels? He said: “Yes, because angels are compelled like the sun and the moon, but man is created free.” (Majlisī, 1403 AH: vol. 75, p. 273)

Ayatollah *Jawādī Āmulī* considers man's inherent dignity as his highest existential capital, and says: Man can flourish or lose this highest existential capital. Man, spiritually and instinctively, tends towards dignity and hates lowliness and ignorance, and man's perfection is that his dignity grows and he stays away from lowly affairs. (*Jawādī Āmulī*, 1990: p. 42)

In other words, a person who pays attention to the spiritual and heavenly aspects, seeks the value and dignity of his soul in freedom and revival of humanity, has found himself and will not suffer from spiritual poverty.

The most valuable thing for human beings is the heavenly spirit, which has been interpreted as self in some positions. Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) says: “I place the price of the precious soul on his Lord.” (*Majlisī*, 1403 AH, vol. 75, p. 135) As much as a person values his body, he must also value his soul, because the most exquisite truths, which is his true self, are inside man. “Man becomes aware of the world of the unseen and the heaven when he knows his single soul and is not alien to his true self. Because man is a heavenly soul, his gender is the gender of greatness. “When a person feels a heavenly self, he does not submit to humiliation, weakness and vulgarity.” (Motahhari, 1998: 83) But whoever suppresses his humane personality and spiritual honor, as a result, pursues animal and carnal desires and violates his humane and spiritual values, as Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (AS) says: “Whoever has the dignity of the soul and his soul is valuable to him, his lusts and carnal desires will be humiliated with him.” (Tamimi Amadi, 1407 AH, vol. 2, p. 213)

When a person feels dignity and honor in his true self, he no longer suffers from spiritual poverty. Man needs to know his own sublime values in order to be aware and find his true dignity. Motahhari writes in this regard: When they want to lead man to the highest human values, they turn him to a kind of introspection to discover the truth of their existence, then they find their existential dignity. (Motahhari, 1993: 371)

### 4-4. Return to the path of divine nature (harmony with nature)

One of the most important ways to treat and cure spiritual poverty is to be in harmony with nature. Nature is one of the main assets and the best way that God benefits man from this great blessing and always instructs man to maintain this God-seeking nature. “The most important danger for man is to forget his truth and nature; as the most important means of salvation for him is to find his truth and know his heart well and identify all imports and separate the merciful and real memories from the carnal and evil ones and seeks to purify the soul with a specific criterion for each ” (*Jawādī Āmulī*, 2013: 113).

The contemporary commentator considers the solution of the great problem of spiritual poverty and self-destruction as a return to the path of divine nature and writes: “It is necessary for man to save theoretical intellect in order to save himself from self-destruction in the realm of thought and in his field of action he should be led by practical reason in order to achieve human logic on the one hand, and to be free from fallacy in the light of theoretical reason, and on the other hand, to start a great jihad with the

blessing of practical reason." (*Jawādī Āmulī*, 2014: 317) If man realizes his existential dignity and recognizes it correctly and becomes aware of his dignity, he can be saved from the clutches of spiritual poverty and he does not limit his honor to the material world and appearances. Another scholar considers that the liberation from spiritual poverty requires serious will and determination and believes that man should return to the path of nature and know himself as he deserves and find the lost humanity, make himself human and balance between the material and spiritual dimension of one's existence. (Falsafi, 2003: 35) God created man with a pure, God-seeking nature, as the Holy Qur'an says:

(فَطَرَتَ اللَّهُ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا) (روم: 30)

“The nature in which Allah has made mankind.” (Rūm: 30)

The meaning of nature is that God created man in a special way that his nature is inclined to perfections, the principle and source of all of which can be said to be knowledge and connection with the Creator of the universe; that is, if they do not create obstacles to his natural growth, he will take the path that is intrinsic to it, to reach the goal of knowing God and communicating with Him." (Sane'i, 2003: 35)

In fact, man enjoys a God-seeking nature, a fact that is not derived from the material and physical dimension; rather, it originates from the depths of human existence. "So man with this spiritual dimension and this hidden nature, at the same time, has instincts, emotions, interactions, feelings, desires, motives and sensual and psychological qualities." (*Miṣbāḥ Yazdī*, 2006: 160) and can use this spiritual capital created by God, or walk the path of perfection and happiness and achieve his true self or forget his humane truth and suffer from spiritual poverty.

One of the contemporaries writes that if man always remembers God and considers Him an observer and witness of his deeds at every moment, he will not deviate from the main path of his life. Such a person will not do anything that separates him from his human nature. Thus, turning away from human nature means self-alienation, which is also caused by alienation from God. (Nasri, 2006: 300)

#### 4-5. Tend to Hereafter

One of the ways to achieve spiritual health is tend to hereafter and afterlife. Believing in a world other than the material world and that this world is in the presence of God and God is the witness and observer of human actions gives man comfort and gives him such peace that he cannot be compared to anything. Imam Ali (AS) says: "Whoever remembers the long journey to the Hereafter prepares himself." (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Wisdom 280) Man, by believing in resurrection, realizes that he is an eternal being and will never be perished; rather, he belongs to God and returns to Him. By believing in the resurrection, a person understands his value and position; because human life is not limited to this mortal world and is a prelude to the Hereafter. God says in the Qur'an from human tongue:

« إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ. » (بقره: 156)

“To Allah We belong, and to Him is our return” (Baqarah: 156)

In fact, the verses of the Holy Qur'an, in order to eliminate spiritual poverty, lead human beings to believing in resurrection and invite them to think about the universe.

If man knows himself, then he knows the origin of the world; he also believes in the resurrection and sees eternal life more than anything and is attached to it; and knows the path between the beginning and the end. (*Jawādī Āmulī*, 2013: p. 74) Such a person is not indifferent to his life and death and knows where he came from and where he is going. He is aware of the dignity of his soul and does not forget his true position.

Remembering death and believing in the resurrection is the only guarantee of happiness, prosperity and security of human societies from the point of view of a believer. Whenever a person believes that the record of his deeds will be preserved and he will finally be punished in the court of

justice of God, the feeling of responsibility and fear of fate will prevent him from any sin and moral corruption, and the hope for a bright future will bring him peace and tranquility and it will put an end to mental illness and despair. As a result, the worries and anxieties resulting from human deviations and his increasing crimes will be reduced. (Ghorbani, 2014, p. 219)

## Conclusions

1. Man's spirituality originates from the spiritual dimension because man and animal are similar in physicality; but man has been honored because of his spiritual and heavenly dimension. The spiritual dimension of man has the acceptance of happiness and cruelty, and this is what has made man the noblest of creatures and has forced him to think in the matter of creation.

2- The heavenly and spiritual dimension of human existence is unlimited and seeks happiness, perfection, growth and excellence, and is not satisfied with material and fleeting worldly affairs, and attaining material things not only does not quench his thirst, but also adds his thirst. And this is a sign of spiritual poverty.

3 - Man before the disease enters his heart and soul and covers his existence, it is necessary to apply the necessary precautions and special care. In other words, a person who has a healthy heart and soul, the rest of his organs are spiritually healthy, and if he is sick, the rest of the organs will be spiritually sick. There is an inverse relationship between spiritual health and spiritual poverty. That is, the greater the spiritual health of individuals, the less the manifestation of spiritual poverty.

4- The solutions to cure spiritual poverty are: self-discovery, remembrance of God Almighty, attention to human dignity, return to the path of divine nature and believing in the resurrection. As long as the spiritual dimension of man is considered, recognized and satisfied, spiritual and psychological security is achieved and desire in the whole human being causes spiritual peace and health. Peace and contentment appear in the human body only when he returns to his origin and establishes a spiritual connection with the real life and God Almighty. Each of these ways causes man to know his inner talents and existential values and to try to exploit them and to establish a connection with the source of existence and his Creator. As a result, he achieves peace of mind, security and satisfaction in life.

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