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# Spiritual Poverty in Islam (1): Its Harms from the Perspective of the Holy Qur'an and Hadiths

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## Abstract

The current era, despite the many advances in communication, technology, scientific and economic development that has taken place in it, not only has not brought security and mental and spiritual peace for human beings; rather, it has added to the mental pressures, worries, anxieties, and inseparable material and worldly attachments. Some people in this period have neglected their origin and have become confused. If a person neglects the spiritual dimension of his existence and forgets the truth of his existence and his originality, he will suffer from spiritual poverty. Spiritual poverty with its harmful damages has many adverse effects on the spiritual life of man and causes anxiety, worry and stress for him and endangers his mental and psychological security. According to the teachings of religion and Islam, the source of all these psychological anomalies and disturbed memories is cutting off from God Almighty and unbelief. Some people spend all their purpose and motivation on physical affairs and they are unaware of their spiritual knowledge and spiritual dimension. This means that if a person does not communicate with his Creator, he will experience turmoil in his life, inner worries and mental illnesses. The present article, using a descriptive-analytical method and relying on Qur'anic and narrative documents, while explaining the concept of spiritual poverty, has analyzed its most important harms. The research findings indicate that the most important harms of spiritual poverty include: feelings of emptiness and depression, aimlessness and meaninglessness, anxiety, despair and hopelessness and torment in the hereafter.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Poverty; Anxiety; Harms of Spiritual Poverty; Islam; Emptiness and Depression; Holy Qur'an

#### 1. Introduction

One of the dimensions of human existence, in addition to its physical dimension, is its spiritual and religious dimension, which the Holy Qur'an also refers to:

"When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him." (Hijr: 29)

Among creatures, man has a special heavenly originality and dignity that originates from the same divine spirit and has caused God to create all the phenomena of the earth for him;

"It is He Who hath created for you all things that are on earth." (Baqarah: 29)

Ayatollah  $Jaw\bar{a}d\bar{\imath}$   $\bar{A}mul\bar{\imath}$  states: The real spiritual life of man, in other words, the humanity of man and the originality of his existence depend on his soul; not his body, because physically many creatures are common with man and even more beautiful than him in the body; but they are deprived of the honor and dignity of human existence ( $Jaw\bar{a}d\bar{\imath}$   $\bar{A}mul\bar{\imath}$ , 2016: 83). If the truth of human existence is ignored or diminished in human existence, the humane value of human beings will be decreased and his life will become more material and animal. The lowest rank of the spiritual dimension of man is the placement in the purified body, which is one of the obstacles to the breath of the divine spirit. In this rank, the spiritual dimension has been degraded so much that it has almost neglected its main position and forgotten where his real home is, and it is a sign of spiritual poverty. In introducing such people, the Qur'an says:

"They are only like cattle." (Furqān: 44)

According to Hakimi, the real life of man is that it provides the grounds for the growth and prosperity of human gifts for him. Anything that prevents a person from the great goals of life does not add anything to human humanity, and It deprives man of the great goals of life, does not add anything to man's humanity, and deprives him of reaching great destinations, and is a factor for real destruction and death" (Hakimi, 2001, vol. 3: p. 432). Therefore, in the real death of man, he forgets his originality, dignity and divine nature and targets the world and material things for himself, and because the world is limited and the human soul is unlimited, his needs will not be met.

The spiritual treasures hidden in human existence cannot be acquired by material means. Mental health will not be achieved until spiritual growth and excellence are achieved and in addition to human morality, belief traits such as faith and piety are flourished in people (Bostani, 1996: 178).

In a narration, Imam Ali (AS) says: "One of the calamities and misfortunes is financial poverty, and more severe and higher than financial poverty is the disease of the body that a person has been disabled and sick, and more severe and worse than the disease of the body is the disease of the soul that a person has a mental illness" (Tamīmī Amidī, 1987: p. 200). In fact, just as the body becomes sick, so the heart and soul become sick, and just as physical therapy must be sought, so must the soul. In view of what has been said, in fact, obtaining material things and worldly affairs increases the thirst and need of man and makes him suffer perdition and misguidance. This great and dangerous poverty is spiritual poverty.

Recognizing the harms of spiritual poverty and being aware of its effects on one's life, has made man aware and think deeply of his high position and not suffer from despair, depression, anxiety and falling into the valley of error. The main question in this article is what the meaning of spiritual poverty is? What harm does spiritual poverty do to the individual and society?

## 2. Research Background

Some of the researches that are similar to this research in the field of the present study are as follow:

Abdollahi Abed, Samad, 2011, "Spiritual factors of increasing poverty and decreasing poverty in the Qur'an and hadiths." In this article, the researcher has dealt with the spiritual factors of increasing poverty and decreasing poverty in order to enjoy divine blessings or the reason that cause their loss. It has been concluded that God Almighty has endowed all beings with divine blessings. If this blessing is used optimally in its place, it will lead to the growth of blessings, and if it is used in the opposite direction, it will have the opposite result.

Ardakani, Ehsan, 2013, "The crisis of contemporary human nihilism and the meaning of life in the view of the Qur'an." In this article, the principles and foundations of the meaning of life from the perspective of the Qur'an are discussed based on the interpretive views of Ayatollah *Jawādī Āmulī*.

Izadi, A'zam, 2012. What has been obtained from this study is the perception of poverty from the Islamic point of view, which can be well understood by expressing the bad effects of poverty and offering solutions such as zakat and khums to eliminate it and praying for poverty and justifying poverty from the effective Mustahab in the development of sustenance, and if great people have chosen to live like this in worldly life, no doubt it is a life that avoids the ill effects of poverty.

Shamsabadi, Fereshteh, 2012, thesis: "Poverty of spirituality, the cause of the fall of human dignity." In this research, the researcher pursues several main goals, which are: cognition of man from both divine and material perspectives, spirituality vacuity, valuable position of spirituality and factors that promote spirituality, which are also criticized: the title of the thesis does not correspond to its text. Instead of spiritual poverty, it has examined the crisis of spirituality, it has not studied the words of spirituality poverty, and has not examined the poverty of spirituality in the Our'an and hadiths.

Therefore, the present study is completely different from previous researches in this respect.

#### 3- Theoretical Foundations of Research

In order to be more aware of the concept of "spiritual poverty" and achieve its meaning, first define the words poverty and spirituality and then refer to the views of Islamic thinkers in relation to spiritual poverty, then a comprehensive concept of spiritual poverty is provided. In the following, its damages are explained.

#### 3-1. Poverty

Poverty (Faqr) has been derived from ( $Fiq\bar{a}r$ ), which means the vertebrae of the spine. ( $Far\bar{a}h\bar{i}d\bar{i}$ , 1410 AH, vol. 5, p. 150) which include the spinal cord ( $Turayh\bar{i}$ , 1416 AH, vol. 3: p. 418). Some other scholars have taken it to mean breaking, splitting or damaging a part of a member or other ( $Ibn\ F\bar{a}ris$ , 1404 AH, vol. 4: p. 443). In fact, the great calamity and misfortune that causes a person to break his back (and this failure means the breaking of the spine) is called ( $F\bar{a}qirah$ ), and 'poor' means one whose back is broken" ( $Far\bar{a}h\bar{i}d\bar{i}$ , 1410 AH, vol. 5: p. 150).

Hakimi writes that poverty is "not having the things that a person needs in life, and the incompleteness or scarcity of the possibilities on which the flourishing of a person's ability and the emergence of his talents depends" (Hakimi, 2001, vol. 4: p. 400)

The existence of the essential human need exists in all directions as long as it exists in the world. As God Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an:

"O ye men! It is ye that have need of Allah. but Allah is the One Free of all wants, worthy of all praise."

(Fātir: 15)

# 3-2. Spirituality

Spirituality has been explained in Persian dictionaries as follows: "Spiritual, attributed to meaning, this word includes real, intrinsic, esoteric and spiritual meanings, as opposed to material and apparent. The meaning is known only by the heart" (Dehkhoda, 1998: vol. 2).

# 3-2-1. Technical Meaning of Spirituality

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 than the world of matter and sense (Tabataba'i, 1975: 51). On the other hand, human nature is formed to seek the truth and the 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, sanctity and worship that is the difference between man and other creatures (Motahhari, 2001: 76).

He also considers spirituality as the basis of human growth and development (Ibid, 2006, vol. 24: p. 458). It means that the evolution and excellence of man is in the observance of spiritual aspects in the sense that man sometimes has the ability to properly use material and spiritual assets and achieves spiritual perfection that he has made significant spiritual progress.

Spiritual poverty can be divided into two categories: desirable and undesirable:

#### 3-2-2. Types of spiritual poverty

Spiritual poverty has two aspects, one positive and good and the other negative and bad.

## The positive and desirable aspect of spiritual poverty

It is the feeling of man's constant need for God Almighty and his inability to know God fully; the more a person grows spiritually, the more he needs God. The same poverty that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is proud of, which is mentioned in his speech: "O God! Make me rich by poverty and do not make me poor by being deprived of yourself" (*Majlisī*, 1403 AH, vol. 69: p. 30).

#### **Negative and unpleasant spiritual poverty**

If man forgets the spiritual dimension of his existence due to sin and negligence, he will suffer from spiritual poverty. The researcher's research is on this negative and undesirable dimension of spiritual poverty. In a narration, Imam Bāqir (AS) is quoted as saying: "There is no poverty like spiritual poverty and no wealth like spiritual wealth" (Ibid, vol. 75, p. 16). In this article, negative and unpleasant spiritual poverty is considered.

## 3-3. Spiritual poverty from the perspective of Muslim thinkers

Muslim thinkers have offered different definitions of spiritual poverty. Some believe that spiritual poverty, in addition to being present and permanent, does not disappear with the attainment of material possibilities, but constantly increases with the increase of physical wealth. And its reactions and effects on human existence are revealed and finally throws him into the abyss of insatiability and extravagance and does not bring him out of it (Hakimi, 2001, vol. 3: p. 476). In fact, material possibilities are a means to achieve the real goal, which is the apparent richness.

Regarding spiritual poverty, Motahhari states: "Spiritual poverty, such as poverty in education and literature, is less perceptible to individuals." A person who is deprived of social etiquette, human morality and proper social upbringing does not realize his shortcomings in this regard, especially if his ugly morals have penetrated his soul and become inner" (Motahhari, 2001: p. 575).

Another group believes that just as the human body needs proper nutrition, so the human soul needs proper nutrition. If there is a shortcoming in the nutrition of the soul or for some reason the proper food does not reach the soul, the heart, soul and psyche of man will be in poverty. Such poverty is due to several factors, including worldliness, greed, avidity and rapacity (Hosseini, 2002: 33). So whenever a person does not find healthy and suitable nutrition for his spiritual and heavenly dimension, he walks in the valley of spiritual poverty.

In a hadith Imam Hassan Mujtabā (AS) refers to spiritual poverty and said: "It is strange for those who think about their rations and foods, but do not bother themselves to think about their rationales and learnings; so they avoid the foods that harm the health of their stomach (their body) but they keep in their heart (in their heart and inside) any thoughts and things that cause their death" (*Majlisī*, 1403 AH, vol. 1: p. 218).

Most people in the present age have turned their attention more to the elimination of material poverty and have stopped paying attention to spiritual poverty; because the suffering of material poverty is felt more for others, unlike spiritual poverty, in which one feels less harm and its consequences.

If man's relationship with God is weakened, his relationship with material things and worldly affairs will be strengthened. That is, instead of using himself in the service of the guidance of religion, he uses it to serve his carnal desires and is deprived of the real benefit of religion (Taherzadeh, 2010: 80). This lack of benefit of man Leads to suffering, despair, destruction and misguidance.

Spiritual poverty seems to mean that man does not benefit from understanding the truth of his existence namely he has forgotten himself that leads to neglect of the true origin and destination, which makes him forget God, so that it causes man to turn away from moral virtues, to approach vices and sins, and to remain in the darkness of soil and material things.

Man sometimes loses the path of servitude and longs for worldliness and carnal desires to the point that in his spiritual dimension he is satisfied with the world and carnal desires. Because his divine spirit belongs to a superior place and limits him to worldly things, he still feels empty, depressed, aimless, and sees life as futile.

In this part of the article, the harms of spiritual poverty are discussed so that special care can be applied by recognizing these harms.

## 4- Injuries of Spiritual Poverty

Spiritual poverty and neglect of the heavenly dimension cause dangerous harm to the individual and human society. The most important of them are the following:

# 4-1. Anxiety

As long as the spiritual dimension of man is not considered, known and satisfied, desire in the whole human being causes anxiety and distress.

One of the ominous consequences of mental illness is internal distress and mental disorders. People who suppress their natural desires to achieve material and animal desires, are deprived of comfort and peace, and suffer from depression and anxiety. In fact, the imbalance of inner forces and the disease

of the human soul, causes man to not see comfort, to live in darkness and unhappiness, and despair and worry overwhelm him (Sane'i, 2003: p. 23).

Imam Ṣādiq (AS) says: "O Ali, whoever is overwhelmed by anxiety and worry, comfort will come away from him" (Ibn Bābiwayh, 1413 AH, vol. 4: p. 355).

"Lack of faith in God deprives life of the highest humane concepts and noble values and causes man to lose the sense of his great mission in life as God's successor on earth and he should not have a clear vision on the great goals of life" (Nejati, 2013: p. 347). The Qur'an resembles the state of conflict, anxiety, confusion, and self-destruction that befalls a man without faith to that of a human being who feels as if he has fallen from heaven and the birds snatch him between the heavens and the earth, or the wind blows him away.

"If anyone assigns partners to Allah, he is as if he had fallen from heaven and been snatched up by birds, or the wind had swooped (like a bird on its prey) and thrown him into a far-distant place." (Hajj: 31)

"The fear of the disbelievers is rooted in their polytheism and the peace of the believers is rooted in their faith, because the polytheist has no support and he is ignorant of the secrets of the world and is unaware of it, therefore he is always in fear and terror, it seems that he is left between earth and sky. He is always in the abyss in individual and collective matters, in this world and the hereafter; but the believer, who has surrendered himself to the owner of the universe, is calm" (*Jawādī Āmulī*, 2013, vol. 16: p. 41).

Other thing that causes anxiety, stress, and internal pressures is the lack of clean life. God gives away the anxiety of believers:

"Can he who was dead, to whom We gave life, and a Light whereby he can walk amongst men, be like him who is in the depths of darkness, from which he can never come out? Thus to those without faith their own deeds seem pleasing." ('An'ām: 122)

People who suppress their natural desires to satisfy material and animal desires are deprived of peace, and suffer from depression and anxiety. In fact, the imbalance of the inner forces and the disease of the human soul cause man to not see comfort, to live in darkness and to be overcome by anxiety.

The Holy Qur'an considers the life of those who turn away from the remembrance of God to be hard and accompanied by pressure and anxiety, and says:

"Go thou to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds." (Tāhā: 24)

Imam  $B\bar{a}qir$  (AS) says: "Indeed, the human soul becomes anxious when it does not have a point of reliance and guarantee for its livelihood; but when he can make a living, he calms down and becomes confident" ( $Kulayn\bar{i}$ , 1407 AH, vol. 5: p. 89).

"Just paying attention to normal needs can cause us anxiety and confusion. Disconnecting from material belongings and flourishing one's sublime spiritual existence through closeness to God and perfection is the only way to achieve far higher mental health. We will achieve complete mental health only when we discover our high spiritual aspect and by connecting with the Creator of the universe, we bring peace and contentment of memory throughout our being" (Salarifar, 2011: p. 135)

# 4-2. Aimlessness and Meaninglessness

Aimlessness and meaninglessness means that in order to get rid of his inner and spiritual pains, man pursues worldly affairs and entertains himself with them and neglects the cure of his inner diseases. When man does not serve God, he loses his purpose and substitutes material goals for divine goals and human values, in which case he becomes aimless and meaningless in life.

Imam Ali (AS) says in a narration: "May God have mercy on the one who knows where he came from and where he is and where he is going" (*Majlisī*, 1403 AH, vol. 58: p. 99). In fact, it is man himself who, by attaching his whole soul and psyche to the world, causes his loss. Religion has come for human beings to give them a religious life and vitality. To get rid of aimlessness, man needs to find the meaning of life and the purpose he must pursue.

A life devoid of meaning and spirituality leads to emptiness. The cause of man's tendency to emptiness and meaninglessness must be sought in the poverty of ideals, the overthrow of values, and the tendency to material things and educational inadequacies.

Lack of purpose and meaning in life is a negative and pathological way of thinking. The writers of the philosophy of absurdity, although their lives are devoid of meaning, nevertheless believe that life should be given meaning and purpose (Nasri, 2011: 204-208).

Man seems to lose his purpose when he does not serve God; and he substitutes worldliness and carnal desires for divine goals and human values; because his divine spirit belongs to a superior place and limits him to worldly things, he still feels emptiness and depression. In this case, he suffers from emptiness and meaninglessness in life. Therefore, the basis and origin of emptiness in life is the lack of spirituality.

## 4-3. Despair

Another harm of spiritual poverty is despair and hopelessness, which overshadows the health of the spiritual and heavenly dimension of man. God says:

"And when evil seizes him he gives himself up to despair!" ('Isrā': 83)

When the infidel and the polytheist is tested with misfortunes and injuries, despair is one of the attributes that is necessary for his spiritual mood; because from his point of view, all events should happen according to his desire. Therefore, when faced with events in the opposite direction of his lust, he experiences nostalgia, anger, and despair of divine mercy, grace, and forgiveness.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says about the fate of those who despair of God's mercy: "God will awaken those who despair of the mercy of God while the darkness of their faces prevails over its whiteness, so they will be told: They are the ones who despair of God's mercy and guidance: thus the person who is afflicted with despair is very hopeless of mercy, blessing and guidance" (Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 2: p. 55).

In fact, the one who has a healthy heart and mind does not despair of divine mercy and grace. When a person adjusts his mental and spiritual process in the direction of God and firmly believes that there is no refuge except in God, even though the world, with all its scope, puts him under pressure and he will be distressed, divine mercy will reach him, and in the shadow of repentance and return to God, he will leave all sorrow and grief.

There are two attractions in man, one is the attraction of the soul which causes him to be drawn to lusts and eventually to his humiliation, and the other is a rational attraction; if one follows lusts is misled

and enslaved, and as a result despairs, and his human character is exposed to fall and disintegration (Hakimi, 2001, vol. 1: pp. 771-772) Therefore, achieving fleeting and material things cannot quench the thirsty soul of man. He needs a God who can free him from troubles and pain and suffering. Therefore, the attachment and stopping at materialism will deprive him of God and as a result he suffers from despair and hopelessness.

The Holy Qur'an says:

"Truly no one despairs of Allah's Soothing Mercy, except those who have no faith." (Yusuf: 87)

In other words, attachment to vain things causes man to become dependent on other than God and to despair of God's grace and mercy.

## 4-4. Absurdity and Depression

When a person pursues worldly affairs in order to get rid of his inner and spiritual pains and entertains himself with them, he neglects the cure of his inner diseases. When man does not serve God, he loses his purpose and substitutes material goals for divine goals and human values, in which case he experiences emptiness and depression in life.

Imam Ali (AS) says in a narration: "May God have mercy on the one who knows where he came from and where he is going" (*Majlisī*, 1403 AH, vol. 58: p. 99). It is man himself who, by attaching his whole soul and psyche to the world, causes his loss.

A life devoid of meaning and spirituality leads to emptiness. The cause of man's tendency to emptiness and meaninglessness must be sought in the poverty of ideals, the overthrow of values, and the tendency to material things and educational inadequacies (Nasri, 2011: 204-208).

It seems that the mental illnesses and spiritual troubles of human societies and all these worries and depressions can be found in not believing in the purpose of the universe and the philosophy of creation and not having a connection with the Creator of the world and losing the meaning of life. In fact, the basis and origin of emptiness in life is the lack of spirituality. When a person is unaware of the remembrance of God and avoids it, he suffers from psychological depression and anxiety and loses his peace of mind in life.

#### 4-5. The Torment of the Hereafter

The soul or the spirit of man, which is the criterion of the real personality of man and the immortality of man is due to his immortality, is in the level of existence in the horizon above the horizon of matter and materiality. A divine human knows that a man is a combination of body and mind and knows that after his natural death his "soul" is not destroyed, but remains.

God points to the embodiment of good and bad deeds in the afterlife and says:

"On the Day when every soul will be confronted with all the good it has done, and all the evil it has done, it will wish there were a great distance between it and its evil. But Allah cautions you (to fear) Him. And Allah is full of kindness to those that serve Him." ('Āli 'Imrān: 30)

In fact, actions of man are inseparable from him. Righteous deeds are embodied in beautiful forms, and human ugly deeds are embodied in horrible forms and torments.

Imam Ali (AS) says: "His appearance is the face of man, and his heart is the heart of the predatory animal, he does not know the way of guidance to go through it, and he does not know the way

of error and falsehood to avoid it, so he is a dead among the living (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 87, p. 119).

One of the harms of spiritual poverty is the constant suffering of divine torment, which afflicts man forever with constant remorse and regret, and causes him eternal sorrow and grief; because the goal of human creation is to reach perfection and put life in the way of God Almighty, and he traded this existential capital to the insignificant of the world and was satisfied with it, and forgot the Hereafter, and remained in endless torment and this brings humiliation to man.

#### **Conclusions**

According to the present study in the field of spiritual poverty with reference to the verses of the Holy Qur'an and the narrations of the infallible Imams (AS) as well as the views of Muslim thinkers, the following findings are concluded:

- 1. There is a connection between the literal meaning of poverty and the idiomatic meaning of what is in the realm of material poverty and in the realm of spiritual poverty. Poverty is where shortcomings are considered deep-rooted and comprehensive so that they lead to fragility and stagnation.
- 2- Spiritual poverty means that man does not benefit from understanding his existential truth, which leads to the neglect of the true origin and destination. And it causes man to turn away from moral virtues and to approach vices and to remain in the darkness of soil and material things.
- 3- Man has an identity and truth. If a person puts something else instead of the principle of his truth and identity, in fact, he considers animal and evil life as the alternative life of his real self, and he will suffer from non-identity and destruction.
- 4. Spiritual poverty leads to dangerous harms which include: anxiety, aimlessness and meaninglessness, despair and hopelessness, feelings of emptiness and depression. Since man is on his way to the Hereafter and worldly affairs are mortal and unstable, he does not achieve all his desires and goals, as a result of which he suffers from anxiety and depression, and inner abnormalities and diseases that falls into his soul and deprives him of peace of mind.
- 5- Man has many worldly and material goals and aspirations in life, when he achieves them, he again devotes his effort and energy to finding other material goals and pursues life in this way. His inner worry and anxiety will never go away; because man is on his way to the Hereafter and since worldly affairs are mortal and unstable, he cannot achieve all his desires and goals, and as a result, he suffers from sorrow, grief, and anxiety.

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