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Criterion for a Sound Heart and Its Relation to the Imam of the Time (PBUH)

The Ontological Criterion for a Sound Heart and the Imam of the Time (Peace Be Upon Him)

In daily life, we use different tools to measure the world around us. We use a scale for weight, a clock for time, and a mirror to check how we look. All of these reflect one basic principle: Wherever there is a measure, there must also be evaluation. The world is not just a random series of events. Limits, quantities, and precise proportions play an important role in how it works. It is this measurability that makes judgment and evaluation possible.

If we extend this logic beyond the physical world, a profound question arises: Is the human being—not just our physical bodies, but also our inward self—subject to this kind of assessment? The answer is an ontological reality, not just a moral ideal. A being who lives in a deeply measurable world will also be measured at a spiritual level. Because of this, human beings constantly face evaluation. In this framework, “self-reckoning” is not just a nice ethical advice; it is the vital practice of looking inward, rather than outward, and reviewing our spiritual path before our final outcomes are permanently fixed.

However, self-reckoning is impossible without a standard. A scale without numbers cannot show weight, and a dirty mirror cannot show our true image. To assess the inner self, we need a mīzān (scale): a divine standard that can separate right from wrong, growth from decay, and goodness

from corruption. The Quran presents this final standard of judgment as "truth": "And the weighing on that Day is the truth" [1]. The main question, then, is how "truth" becomes more than an abstract idea and turns into a practical criterion for daily life, one that shows our real relationship with the truth.

We run into a bit of a problem with how we figure things out here: If "truth" is supposed to be our measuring stick, how do we actually "measure" and "understand" this truth in practice? We need a way to do this so that our inner evaluations do not just turn into personal opinions, justifications, or self-deception.

To avoid getting stuck in our own subjective views, our measuring stick needs to have a couple of key qualities: It should give us ma'rifa (show us the way), and guide us as well (allow us to follow it and correct our path if we stray).

Such a measuring stick becomes complete when it can be referenced to the "guardian of truth." This means the axis of guidance should be a point where truth becomes clearer, more comparable, and easier to follow.

This is where the connection between measuring things and the "heart," and subsequently, the relationship between human being and the Imam of our Time (May Allah hasten his advent), become meaningful. Because if the ultimate place of measurement within a person is the heart, then what needs to be measured is the heart's relationship with the truth and the axis of guidance.

The Logic of Measurement in the System of Creation

The universe is a system of measure, meaning everything within it has a defined quantity, limit, and specific proportions. Therefore, measurement in this view is not something added on or just agreed upon; it arises directly from the structure of creation itself. When things are placed within their determined measure and scope, the ability to evaluate them naturally becomes a necessary part of that structure.

Human beings are no exception. Because the created order is measurable, the human being—as a being blessed with free will and responsibility—is even more deeply bound to evaluation. Free choice brings both the risk of error and the brilliant possibility of spiritual growth. Here, self-accounting becomes a rational necessity. We must continuously examine the direction of our lives so that our mistakes do not harden into permanent deviation. In this regard, the statement of Imam al-Kāẓim (Peace be upon him) is understandable when he emphasized on self-reckoning: “Is not of us the one who did not reckon himself every day” [2]. That is to say, we must bring our lives into line with the logic that governs the cosmos—the logic of specific measures, proportions, and limits

The Standard of Truth in Assessing the Inward State

What exactly is the criterion for this inner assessment? Just as we use a mirror to correct our outward appearance, evaluating our inner reality without a clear standard easily devolves into guesswork and illusion. Therefore, the world of the soul desperately requires a reliable yardstick.

The Quran says that, on the Day of Judgment, the true standard is the “**truth**.” This matters because it means people will not be judged based on personal likes, dislikes, or outside pressure, but according to a fixed and real standard.

But there is still one more step: The “truth” must also become something we can actually use in everyday life. Otherwise, people might call their own choices “truth” and use that to justify them. So talking about truth naturally leads us to the idea of the **source of guidance**, a place where truth is not just a word, but a real way to tell right from wrong and to correct ourselves.

This is where the main discussion begins. If truth is the standard, then we need to ask: Which part of us is most in tune with that truth, where does real judgment actually come from, and what is the exact criterion for a sound heart?

The Sound Heart: The True Core of Human Truth

A person’s truth is revealed in their heart. This means that all the different parts of who we are – from our basic desires to our thoughts and decisions – only become our core identity when they are centered in the inner self, which we call the “heart.” So the heart is not just another part of us alongside others. It is the core where our directions, attachments, and choices are finally shaped. Because of this, the ultimate judgment of a person will focus on this central core of their being. When evaluating a person spiritually, outward factors like age, gender, educational achievements, or even the sheer volume of outward worship are not the final criteria. This is not because they lack value, but because their true worth depends entirely on whether they have deeply penetrated the heart. We can perform abundant outward actions without them taking

root at the center of our being. Therefore, the soundness of the heart is the foundational issue of human existence. Its corruption or righteousness dictates the fate of our entire being.

If the heart is the center of assessment and the criterion for assessing the truth, a “sound heart” is one that can clearly see, accept, and follow the truth. But to recognize truth without falling into self-justification, the heart must connect with an “axis of guidance.” This axis is an external measure that rescues us from our own illusions. Consequently, a sound heart depends on the depth of its relationship with the Imam of the Age (Peace be upon him) as the axis of guidance. This vital relationship functions as the ultimate criterion for a sound heart, serving as the basis for discernment, correction, and steadfastness.

The famous hadith, “Whoever dies without knowing the Imam of his time, he dies the death of ignorance” [3], speaks directly to this. This “knowledge” is not about memorizing historical dates or lineage. True recognition forms a living relationship, one that regulates our life’s direction as well as daily decisions, and brings us closer to the axis of truth. Being disconnected from the Imam of the Time (May Allah hasten his advent) leaves the heart vulnerable to false standards and unstable judgments.

So according to this idea, a sound heart means being strongly connected to the Imam of the Age (Peace be upon him). This connection makes the heart’s connection to the truth something we can actually check and fix, rather than just a claim.

A vital result of this relationship is salvation from the “hell of the soul (nafs).” We do not just receive the consequences of our actions, rather, we actively build our inner state. As the soul drifts further from the truth, anxiety, inner turmoil, and conflict grow, acting like a fire within. Conversely, when the soul draws closer to reality and finds peace, the conditions are set for this

inner fire to be extinguished. Connecting with the Imam is not just adding an external habit to our routine; it actively reshapes our inner configuration, moving the inward self from severe agitation to pure reassurance.

Similarly, intercession (*shafā'a*) is not just a ceremonial VIP privilege; it has a structural, spiritual reality. Intercession works when a person has built the capacity to receive it. Companionship with the friend of God, the Imam of the Time, creates receptivity of truth in the heart. If someone completely distances themselves from the axis of guidance in this world, they may reproduce that exact spiritual distance in the Hereafter, rendering them unable to accept intercession.

Furthermore, the Imam of the Age acts as a spiritual “mirror.” Just as a physical mirror saves us from visual illusions, the axis of guidance protects our inward state from deep self-deception. By looking to the Imam as the living criterion for a sound heart and the axis of guidance, we can see exactly where we stand, what false ideas we have mistaken for truth, and where we desperately need correction.

So connecting with the Imam of the Age (May Allah hasten his advent) becomes more than just a feeling of affection; it becomes a tool for evaluating ourselves and making corrections. That is, having a right relationship with the Imam of the Time (Peace be upon him) does not just stop us from corruption, it also helps us move forward. Therefore, a sound heart is not just about being free from corruption. It is also about having the capacity to reach higher spiritual statuses.

The Human Being's True Asset and the Sound Heart

A person's true spiritual assets is not a scattered collection of outward deeds or moral high grounds. It is measured by how deeply those excellences have settled into the heart to form a

genuine identity. The soundness of the heart is the exact point where “doing” transforms into “being” as one’s assets.

This explains the stark historical difference between figures like Hurr and Zubayr. The issue was not their past resumes; it was the hidden quality of their inner state, that is, the assets of the heart. Sometimes, a life-altering jolt reveals what is truly hidden in the heart, exposing the real criteria behind a person’s choices.

Therefore, the Quran identifies a ‘sound heart’ as the ultimate standard: “The Day when neither wealth nor children will be of any benefit. Only those who come before Allah with a pure heart” [4]. Thus, a sound heart is the ultimate takeaway from this discussion; it is the basis for judgment, the key to intercession, and what truly constitutes a person’s assets.

The universe is built on precise measures, and human beings are judged within that very order. Our true worth is measured by the truth, but the core of this assessment lies within our heart, as that is where our truth resides. From this perspective, our relationship with the Imam of our Age (May Allah hasten his advent) is so crucial. This is because the soundness of our hearts depends on how well we know, connect with, and follow our Imam. This connection serves multiple vital purposes: It prevents inner corruption, extinguishes the fires of the soul, opens the door to intercession, and paves the way for acquiring spiritual assets and achieving spiritual elevation. Ultimately, what endures of a person and determines their true value is not merely the accumulation of outward deeds, but the soundness of their heart.

References

[1]. Quran 7:8

[2]. Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, vol. 4, p. 191.

[3]. Rizvi, Sayyid Muhammad. "*Hadith: Whoever Dies Without Imam.*" [Al-Islam.org](https://al-islam.org/hadith-whoever-dies-without-imam-sayyid-muhammad-rizvi), <https://al-islam.org/hadith-whoever-dies-without-imam-sayyid-muhammad-rizvi>. Accessed 1 June 2026.

[4]. Quran 26:88-89