

## SOUNDNESS OF THE HEART: AN ANALYSIS OF THE UNIQUE QUALITIES OF THE *QALB SALĪM*

Abu Bakr Sirajuddin Cook  
Almiraj Sufi and Islamic Study Centre, Australia  
E-mail: [sirajuddin@almirajsuficentre.org.au](mailto:sirajuddin@almirajsuficentre.org.au)

Salih Yucel  
Charles Sturt University, Australia  
E-mail: [syucel@csu.edu.au](mailto:syucel@csu.edu.au)

**Abstract:** Within Islam, the topic of the heart (*qalb*) occupies an important place. In order to understand the breadth and depth of this topic, it is necessary to understand its intricacies. The Qur’ān, the Ḥadīth, and scholarly interpretations detail the potentialities that, to varying degrees, lie dormant within each and every individual. The heart is described as being able to be pure and to find peace while equally being able to be darkened and rust. The *qalb* is mentioned frequently throughout the sacred texts of Islam. This article examines the notion of *qalb salīm*, mentioned twice within the Qur’ān, both times with regard to the Prophet Ibrahim. Firstly, the importance of *qalb* will be elaborated. Secondly, an examination of the *qalb salīm* within the major Qur’ānic commentaries (*tafsīr*), particularly Sufi exegesis, is examined. Thirdly, related ḥadīth literature is analyzed. An attempt is made to understand the soundness of a sound heart. The analysis in this article will highlight the qualities associated with the *qalb salīm*. While a comprehensive analysis of the notion of *qalb salīm* is beyond the scope of this article, an attempt is made to open further discussion on this important concept and address the dearth of currently available academic literature.

**Keywords:** Sound heart; *qalb salīm*; certainty; *yaqīn*; contentment; *riqā*; nearness; *qurb*.

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## Introduction

The Qur'ān makes frequent and varied references to the heart (*qalb*). The Qur'ān states that the heart can be veiled (6: 25), locked (47: 24), deviated (3: 8), agitated (79: 8), hardened (6: 43), diseased (8: 49), and sealed (2: 7) just as it can have wisdom (22: 46), goodness (8:70), faith (58: 22), softness (39: 23), humbleness (2: 74), assurance (8: 10), strength (18: 14), and be engaged in (57: 16) and find satisfaction in (13: 28) the remembrance of Allah. The frequent mentioning highlights the importance placed on the heart within Islam and the variance in terminology highlights the importance of understanding the distinction between the qualities and degrees that the heart may be placed in. This article will focus on one such quality of the heart, namely a “sound heart” (*qalb salim*). In attempting to understand what it is to have a sound heart, this article will examine the importance of the heart within Islam, include a linguistic analysis of *qalb* and *salim*, explore the two explicit mentions of a sound heart within the Qur'ān, survey the commentary literature to understand the traditional elaborations on this concept, furnish these understandings with the Ḥadīth literature, and see what, if any, depth can be added with analogous reasoning.

The importance of the heart (*qalb*) within Islam has long been acknowledged in both traditional and academic works. The Prophet Muhammad said, “Allah does not look at your bodies or your (outward) forms; rather He looks at your hearts,”<sup>1</sup> placing a direct connection between the state of the individual's heart and the worship they perform. It is widely recognized that “the Qur'ān assigns a clearly epistemic and intellectual function to the heart”<sup>2</sup> and “the seat of belief, unanimously agreed upon by all Muslim scholars, is the heart.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, unlike traditional medical perspectives, within Islam the heart is not considered to be merely a pump. An examination of the Qur'ānic verses and Ḥadīth “reveals that all of the heart's attributes and roles, whether positive or negative, are primarily and directly

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<sup>1</sup> Abū al-Ḥusayn Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattāb (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 2007), 6542.

<sup>2</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, “Reason and Rationality in the Qur'ān,” *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Muslim-Catholic Forum* (The Baptism Site, Jordan 2011), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Mehmet Yavuz Seker, “A Map of the Divine Faculty: The Concept of *Qalb* (Heart) in Classical and Contemporary Islamic Scholarship” (PhD Thesis, Australian Catholic University, 2012), 14.

connected with its capacity to understand and perceive,”<sup>4</sup> such that the heart is understood as “being the centre of knowledge, perception, cognition and belief.”<sup>5</sup> Understanding the heart’s function also involves understanding the sources from which it gains perception and knowledge. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d.505/1111) states,

The heart then is like the reservoir and knowledge like water. The five external senses are like streams. Knowledge may possibly be conducted to the heart by means of the streams of the senses and the consideration of things observed until it is thus filled with knowledge. It is also possible to stop these streams from it by solitude and retirement and averting the eyes from seeing, and then to resolve in the depths of the heart upon purifying it and taking away from it the layers of coverings until the fountain of knowledge bursts forth from within it.<sup>6</sup>

Al-Ghazālī can be understood to be advocating for the implementation of practices that result in the purification of the external data that feeds into the heart so that the perception that wells up within it is equally purified. For this, “Sufi psychology stresses the need to nourish and develop the heart” such that the “one whose heart is open is wiser, more compassionate and more understanding than one whose heart is closed.”<sup>7</sup> The centrality of the heart (*qalb*) within Islam is such that the practice of “Islam where the heart is not understood is composed merely of dry form”<sup>8</sup> and “the heart’s being understood implies understanding of the spirit of Islam.”<sup>9</sup> Given the Qur’ān contains a multitude of references to types and qualities of the heart, it becomes important to understand the meaning of each. Much has been made within Islamic literature of the importance, types, qualities, and constituent parts of the heart. One of the earliest to write extensively on this topic was al-Ḥākim al-Tirmīdhī (d.255/869), whose work *Bayān al-Farq bayn al-Ṣadr wa al-Qalb wa al-Fu’ad wa al-Lubb* “presents a Sufi psychological system concerned with the interaction of the heart (*qalb*) and the self (*nafs*),” details the differentiation of the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.,” 51.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>6</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Wonders of the Heart*, trans. Walter James Skellie (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2007), 67.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Frager, *Heart, Self, & Soul* (Wheaton: Quest Books, 1999), 21-22.

<sup>8</sup> Seker, “A Map of the Divine Faculty,” 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 3.

parts of the heart, namely the breast (*sadr*), the heart (*qalb*), the inner heart (*fu'ād*), and the kernel or innermost consciousness (*lubb*).<sup>10</sup> Thus, the importance of the heart as an organ of understanding and comprehension is well documented within Islamic literature.

Against the background of the importance of the heart (*qalb*) within Islam, there is a lacuna regarding explicit studies on the qualities and kinds of hearts mentioned within the Qur'ān. Rather than compare and contrast the qualities and kinds of hearts, this article will focus on developing an understanding of the sound heart (*qalb salim*). Aside from brief mentions of the sound heart (*qalb salim*) within the existing literature, such as the major Qur'ānic commentaries (*tafsīr*), particularly Sufi exegesis, there has not been a focused study of this material. Without being comprehensive, this article modestly addresses this gap in the existing literature by drawing together some of the available materials mentioning the sound heart (*qalb salim*) in an attempt to understand some of the unique qualities of this type of heart (*qalb*).

### **Word Conjugations for the *Qalb Salim***

An important aspect of understanding Arabic is delving into the word roots. The Arabic for heart (*qalb*) comes from the root *q-l-b*. The term *qalb* “comes from the root ‘to turn’ or ‘to revolve’”<sup>11</sup> and denotes “turning something inside out, inverting and transforming.”<sup>12</sup> The literal meaning of “turning something inside out or upside down, inverting, transforming” denotes “the organ that enables blood circulation throughout the body.”<sup>13</sup> Yet, for an organ to be associated with, possess, and develop the range of qualities associated with it within the Qur'ān, the heart must be understood as more than a mere pump. The traditional depiction of a love heart has the tip pointed toward the ground, indicating that it is most frequently orientated towards earthly intentions. A corresponding turning of this point, away from these earthly intentions, moves towards a greater openness, culminating in incremental epistemological shifts towards the ontic reality of Oneness (*tawhīd*). In “turning” the blood through

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<sup>10</sup> Nicholar Heer, “Introduction to A Treatise on the Heart,” in *Three Early Sufi Texts* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2009), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Frager, *Heart, Self, & Soul*, 24.

<sup>12</sup> Seker, “A Map of the Divine Faculty,” 28.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

the body, the heart impacts the entirety of an individual's being and can be seen as the symbolic centre of the individual. The increasing openness towards, and acceptance of, the underlying Oneness as the heart approaches the quality of being a sound heart runs contrary to Seker's assertion that "‘*aql* and *qalb* as being synonymous."<sup>14</sup> The intellect ('*aql*) literally means 'that which fetters' in that it aims to limit by means of reason, whereas the heart (*qalb*) has a limitless quality as it turns towards the Absoluteness of Allah.

The Arabic for sound (*salīm*) comes from the root *s-l-m*. The Arabic word *salīm* "means to submit in obedience, make peace, accept a judgment, be free of every kind of visible and hidden danger and illness, and slavery."<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, *salīm* shares the same root as the words *taslimiyya* (submission) and *salām* (peace).<sup>16</sup> The acceptance of judgement is a submission to the ontic reality of Oneness, which the heart is beckoned towards, and it is in this that the heart finds peace in that it knows that the source of every occurrence within perceived multiplicity is Allah. From the same root comes the Divine Name *al-Salām*, the Flawless. Regarding the individual's share in this Divine Name, al-Ghazālī states the one who can be considered flawless "is one whose essence is free from defect, whose attributes escape imperfection, and whose actions are untarnished by evil."<sup>17</sup> While al-Ghazālī states that Allah is the only one who is properly qualified by these attributes, the one with a sound heart is a "servant whose heart is free from deceit, hatred, envy, and evil intent" such that their "limbs are unblemished by sins and forbidden actions."<sup>18</sup>

### Synonyms in the Qur'ān

It is important to note the precision of language within the Qur'ān. Specific words and turns of phrases are used with varying repetitions throughout the text. Even phrases with equivalent referents, due to the Qur'ānic language's precision, emphasize different aspects of that referent. For instance, when the addressee is "O mankind" or "O children of Adam" the intended referent in both cases is humanity, yet the former involves an immediacy and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, trans. David B. Burrell and Nazih Daher (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1992), 61.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

directness, whereas the latter includes an indirectness through a shared ancestry. Al-Hākim al-Tirmīdhī “argues against the existence of synonyms,” showing that “one lexical term cannot have multiple meanings” and that each term “must be distinct entities and cannot represent different aspects of a single entity.”<sup>19</sup> More than a strictly linguistic activity, “the idea of the non-existence of true synonyms is an idea that later became a part of *Ḥanafī Uṣūl* (legal methodology).”<sup>20</sup> Al-Hākim al-Tirmīdhī was of the view that “the content of individual words refers to separate experiences or functions of man’s internal spiritual organs.”<sup>21</sup> Softening this view, namely that “there are no true synonyms according to al-Tirmīdhī,”<sup>22</sup> and admitting that there are similar referents without exact equivalence, there remains an importance in understanding the differences between specific terms with similar referents. These differences might be more differences in degree rather than kind. Nevertheless, it becomes important to understand the qualities of a sound heart (*qalb salīm*) so that it can be differentiated from the other types/qualities of hearts mentioned in the Qur’ān.

### **The Qur’ānic References to and the *Tafsīr* of the *Qalb Salīm***

The term *qalb salīm* occurs twice within the Qur’ān. The first occurrence refers to the day of judgement, stating “the day whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail, but only he [will prosper] that brings to Allah a sound heart” (26: 88-89). The second occurrence refers to the Prophet Ibrahim’s interaction with the idol worshippers, stating “behold he [Ibrahim] approached his Lord with a sound heart” (37: 84). Read in conjunction and with an awareness of context, it becomes apparent from these verses that the quality of a sound heart (*qalb salīm*) pertains to benefits both in the herenow and in the hereafter. Both verses mention an approach to Allah, indicating that nearness (*qurb*) is an element of the *qalb salīm*.

Nearness with regard to Allah is not to be understood as an increase in physical nearness, for the Qur’ān states that Allah is closer

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<sup>19</sup> Aiyub Palmer, *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam: al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi's Theory of Wilāya and the Reemissioning of the Sunni Caliphate* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 122.

<sup>20</sup> Palmer, *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam*, 123n. 42.

<sup>21</sup> Bernd Radtke and John O’Kane, *The Concept of Sainthood in Early Islamic Mysticism* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>22</sup> Palmer, *Sainthood and Authority in Early Islam*, 123.

than our jugular veins (50: 16). Allah’s closeness to an individual is constant, whereas the individual’s awareness of this closeness varies according to their state (*ḥāl*) and station (*maqām*). The nearness of the individual to Allah is dependent on the awareness of Allah’s nearness to the individual. This is brought about through epistemological shifts towards an increased understanding of the ontological reality of Allah’s Oneness (*tawḥīd*). Ibn ‘Ajība (d. 1224/1809) states, “for the novices, nearness is largely through obedience; for the aspirants, it comes through spiritual combat; for those advanced in the way, through contemplative vision”, whereas its antonym distance (*bu‘d*) “is first from grace, then from following the path, and then from realization.”<sup>23</sup> This process of increasing nearness is described in a ḥadīth *qudsī* which states, “My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *nawāfil* (praying or doing extra deeds besides what is obligatory) till I love him, so I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks.”<sup>24</sup> The outcome of this incremental increase in nearness is Allah’s love and corresponds with an epistemological blurring of multiplicity towards an affirmation of the ontological reality of Allah’s Oneness.

A traditional point of departure for understanding concepts within the Qur’ān is the commentary literature (*tafsīr*). The Qur’ānic commentaries predominantly describe a *qalb salīm* by traits that it does not possess. For instance, a *qalb salīm* is “a heart free from any blemish,”<sup>25</sup> “free from ignorance and vice and moral depravity,”<sup>26</sup> “does not follow carnal soul desires,”<sup>27</sup> and free “from idolatry and hypocrisy.”<sup>28</sup> It is “a heart free of sins and love for this worldly life; it is also said that it means: a heart free of hatred for the Companions of

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad Ibn ‘Ajība, *The Book of Ascension to the Essential Truths of Sufism*, trans. Mohamed Fouad Aresmouk and Michael Abdurrahman Fitzgerald (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011), 59.

<sup>24</sup> Muḥammad b. Ismā‘il al-Mughīrah al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Muhammad M. Khan (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 1997), 6502.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn ‘Abbās, *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās*, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2008), 590.

<sup>26</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, Vol. 24 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 145.

<sup>27</sup> Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-Ishārat*, Vol. 3 (Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-Miṣriyya li al-Kitāb, 2000), 15.

<sup>28</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, trans. Feras Hamza (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2008), 348.

the Prophet”<sup>29</sup> and “one who is preserved from innovations (*bida*’), who commits his affairs to God and who is content with God’s decree (*qadar*).”<sup>30</sup> One who possesses a *qalb salim* is “in a state of self-surrender (*mustaslim*), having committed his affairs to his Lord, resorting [to Him] through his innermost secret (*sirr*) in every situation,”<sup>31</sup> and “pleased with every condition.”<sup>32</sup> Al-Qushayri (d. 465/1074) stated, “the hearts of the ecstasies (*qulūb al-wājidīn*) remain ever prostrating (*sājida*) on the carpet of nearness”<sup>33</sup> and “a sound heart is completely focused on returning to God.”<sup>34</sup> Al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) stated the “jurists (*usūliyyūn*) said the meaning of sound heart refers to whoever lives and dies with a purified heart which has no stains of disobedience, polytheism (*shirk*), deceits, hatred, or jealousy.”<sup>35</sup> Al-Samarqandī (d.373/983) mentioned, “there are three indications of the *qalb salim*: it does not annoy or harm anyone, it is not annoyed or harmed by anyone, and it does not expect anything from anyone even if they do anything good.”<sup>36</sup> ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (d. 1166) commented that the sound heart does not expect any punishment or reward, nor does it act for reward or to avoid punishment, rather it acts only to please God in every action or deed.<sup>37</sup> Ismail Haqqī Bursevi (d. 1725) stated, “nothing in the world confuses a sound heart.”<sup>38</sup> This has continued within modern understanding that describes a *qalb salim* as “a heart that is pure and unaffected by the moral ills that affect others” and “is a personal condition which is free from bad characteristics that are both

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<sup>29</sup> Ibn ‘Abbās, *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās*, 476.

<sup>30</sup> Sahl b. ‘Abd Allah al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, trans. Annabel Keeler (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011), 143.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>32</sup> Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqaīq al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Ilmiyya, 2001), 80.

<sup>33</sup> al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-Ishārāt*, Vol. 1, 69.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, 235.

<sup>35</sup> al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, Vol. 26, 145.

<sup>36</sup> Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-Ulum*, Vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilmiyya, 1993), 476.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Tafsīr al-Jīlānī*, Vol. 3 (Quetta: al-Maktaba al-Ma’rūfiyya, 2010), 368.

<sup>38</sup> Ismail Haqqī Bursevi, *Rūḥ al-Bayān*, Vol. 6 (Istanbul: Maṭba‘at al-Uthmāniyya, 1330 H), 287-288.

personally and socially dangerous”<sup>39</sup> meaning “the heart which is submitted to God and which is at peace with religion, is a sound heart.”<sup>40</sup> Consistent across these descriptions, at times implicitly, is that “the very basis for *qalb salim* is a strong grasp of *tawhīd* (the oneness of Allah),”<sup>41</sup> as al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) stated explicitly “the sound heart is the one which meets with God without associating any partner with him.”<sup>42</sup> Bursevi commented, “A sound heart is on its natural disposition (*fiṭra*).”<sup>43</sup> However, amongst these commentaries is the description of a *qalb salim* by the traits it lacks. In doing so, these commentary descriptions of a *qalb salim* do not explicitly describe what is particularly “sound” about a sound heart.

There have been some attempts to positively describe the sound heart. Al-Sulamī comments:

“Some said soundness means coming to this world with soundness [without any sin], living in this world with soundness, leaving this world with soundness [having repented for all major and minor sins], and meeting with God with soundness ... [It is] pleased with every condition.”<sup>44</sup>

“Pleased with every condition” is a quality of contentment (*riḍā*). Contentment is to “leave the choice to God in all that He has planned and brought about” while being “without criticism for what comes from God.”<sup>45</sup> It is closely related to submission (*taslīm*), which is to “serenely relinquish your self-direction and choice to the flow of divine decree.”<sup>46</sup> The contrary quality involves worry and displeasure with the condition that Allah has placed the individual in and this leads away from the development of a sound heart, as Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah (d. 709/1309) states, “if you see a person who wakes up in the morning worried about his provisions, know that this person is far removed from God.”<sup>47</sup> The embodiment of this is seen through the

<sup>39</sup> Dindin Solahudin, “The Workshop for Morality: The Islamic Creativity of Pesantren Daarut Tauhid in Bandung, Java” (Masters Thesis, Australian National University, 2008), 81.

<sup>40</sup> Seker, “A Map of the Divine Faculty,” 94-95.

<sup>41</sup> Solahudin, “The Workshop for Morality,” 81.

<sup>42</sup> al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqaīq al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 2, 80.

<sup>43</sup> Bursevi, *Ruḥ al-Bayan*, 287-288.

<sup>44</sup> al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqaīq al-Tafsīr*, 80.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn ‘Ajība, *The Book of Ascension*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah, *Taj al-‘Arūs: al-Ḥāwī li Tabdhīb al-Nufūs*, trans. in Sherman A. Jackson, *Sufism for Non-Sufis?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 86

individual's action, for "a *qalb salim* has to possess faith which turns out to be the most beautiful character traits in one's behaviour."<sup>48</sup> Another verse of the Qur'an explains that these character traits can be found in the example of the Prophet Muhammad, stating "ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day" (33: 21). Aisha stated, "the character of the Messenger of Allah was the Qur'an"<sup>49</sup> and this can be understood as the embodiment, and thus enactment, of the teachings of the Qur'an, chief amongst which is the affirmation of Allah's Oneness (*tawḥīd*). While these Qur'anic commentaries give an indication of what a *qalb salim* looks like, they do not explicitly discuss how the soundness of a heart ensures that it is free of such vices or how it is able to affirm the Oneness of Allah.

### **Aḥādīth on the *Qalb Salim***

Like the Qur'an, the Ḥadīth literature has much to say about the heart. Of particular pertinence to this discussion is the Prophet Muhammad's statement, "in the body there is a piece of flesh which, if it is sound, the entire body will be sound, but if it is corrupt, the entire body is corrupt, verily it is the heart."<sup>50</sup> This Ḥadīth indicates that there is reciprocity between the body and the heart and that the heart's soundness is equally reflected within the soundness of the body. This does not necessarily refer to physical health benefits rather in that the heart is an organ of perception, likewise the body is an organ of action, indicating that the soundness of the heart is reflected in the soundness of an individual's actions.

The soundness of action, welling up from a heart free of polytheism (*shirk*), can be seen to be the result of these actions embodying and affirming the Oneness of Allah (*tawḥīd*) in correspondence with a *qalb salim*. This culminates in an epistemological blurring of lines, as described in the ḥadīth *qudsī* "My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *nawāfil* (praying or doing extra deeds besides what is obligatory) till I love him, so I become his sense of hearing with which he hears, and his sense of sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips,

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<sup>48</sup> Solahudin, "The Workshop for Morality," 85.

<sup>49</sup> Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad b. Shu'ayb b. 'Alī al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 2007), 1602.

<sup>50</sup> Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4094.

and his leg with which he walks.”<sup>51</sup> Acknowledgement of Allah as the source, the Prophet Muhammad would frequently make an oath “by the One Who turns the hearts (*muqallib*)...”<sup>52</sup> and implore Allah for his need in this manner, such as “O Changer of the hearts (*muqallibal qulūb*), strengthen my heart upon Your religion.”<sup>53</sup> The strengthening of the heart, as opposed to any other organ, can be seen to indicate the centrality and primacy of the heart with regard to the other organs and limbs of the body. The Prophet also indicated for the permissibility of supplicating for a *qalb salīm*, petitioning Allah with “I ask You for a sound heart and a truthful tongue”<sup>54</sup> and again “I ask You for a truthful tongue and a sound heart.”<sup>55</sup>

### The “Soundness” of the *Qalb Salīm*

Another way of attempting to gain a deeper understanding of a *qalb salīm* is by way of analogy. Drawing a correspondence between the “soundness” of a sound heart and that of a sound argument opens the way for another level of understanding. In its most simple definition, “a sound argument is a valid argument with true premises,” where “a valid argument is an argument such that if the premises are true then the conclusion must be true.”<sup>56</sup> Sound arguments are important because “if the argument is sound, then we know we can have a very high level of confidence in the (definite) truth of the conclusion.”<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, “sound arguments expand our knowledge and increase our understanding”, and for this reason “developing the ability to recognize sound arguments is so important.”<sup>58</sup> If the soundness of an argument and the soundness of a heart have a type of congruence, then the premises of the heart can be understood as being the sense data, in that the premises are input of an argument and the streams of the senses are the input of the

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<sup>51</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 6502.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 7391.

<sup>53</sup> Abū ‘Isā Muḥammad b. ‘Isā al-Tirmīdhī, *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmīdhī*, trans. Abu Khaliyl (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 2007), 2140.

<sup>54</sup> al-Nasā‘ī, *Sunan al-Nasā‘ī*, 1305.

<sup>55</sup> al-Tirmīdhī, *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmīdhī*, 3407.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Tomassi, *Logic* (London: Routledge, 1999), 5.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Cogan, *Critical Thinking: Step by Step* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998), 79.

<sup>58</sup> William Hughes and Jonathan Lavery, *Critical Thinking 4<sup>th</sup> Edition: An Introduction to the Basic Skills* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2004), 23.

heart. Similarly, the conclusion, being the output of an argument, is likened to the actions that stem from the heart. The description of sound reasoning being “a rational faculty which follows the Law is well-guided and ‘sound’ (*salim*)”<sup>59</sup> correlates with the commentary literature describing the sound heart as “one who is preserved from innovations (*bida*), who commits his affairs to God and who is content with God’s decree (*qadar*)”<sup>60</sup> as both emphasize an unwavering commitment to the Divine law and decree. Seen in this light, Ibn ‘Arabī’s (d. 638/1240) comment, “in the case of him whose reason is ‘sound’ (*salim*), that is, he who is not overcome by any obfuscation deriving from imagination and reflection, an obfuscation which would corrupt his consideration”<sup>61</sup> recalls “a heart free from any blemish,”<sup>62</sup> free “of any doubt or the like,”<sup>63</sup> free “from idolatry and hypocrisy,”<sup>64</sup> and “in a state of self-surrender (*mustaslim*), having committed his affairs to his Lord,”<sup>65</sup> drawing a strong likeness between a sound argument and a sound heart. From this perspective, there is a correlation between the soundness of an argument and the soundness of the heart.

It is possible to see the use of analogous reasoning between a sound argument and a sound heart to have been utilized within the work of Ibn ‘Arabī. Ibn ‘Arabī stated:

“Two ways lead to knowledge of God. There is no third way ... The first way is the way of unveiling [*kashf*]. It is an incontrovertible knowledge which ... receives no obfuscations ... The second way is the way of reflection and reasoning (*istidlāl*) through rational demonstration (*burhān ‘aqlī*). This way is lower than the first way, since he who bases his consideration upon proof can be visited by obfuscations.”<sup>66</sup>

The precedence given to the knowledge that wells up within the heart by Ibn ‘Arabī is reminiscent of al-Ghazālī’s statement to “resolve in the depths of the heart upon purifying it and taking away from it the layers of coverings until the fountain of knowledge bursts

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<sup>59</sup> William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 179.

<sup>60</sup> al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 143.

<sup>61</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 169.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn ‘Abbās, *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbas*, 590.

<sup>63</sup> al-Suyūṭī and al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, 426.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>65</sup> al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 165.

<sup>66</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 169.

forth from within it.”<sup>67</sup> Both al-Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Arabī view the heart as being capable of soundness that cannot be achieved by knowledge derived from reason. Ibn ‘Arabī defines sound knowledge as “a sound knowledge concerning which he has no doubt and no disquiet, neither from himself, nor from anyone who is before him or present in his thoughts.”<sup>68</sup> Soundness of knowledge, whether through argument or heart, is not open to doubt and brings with it certainty (*yaqīn*). The purification of the sense-data mentioned by al-Ghazālī becomes necessary because it is utilized by reason informed by bias, as has been acknowledged “contemporary rational faculties can certainly not be described as wholesome and ‘sound’ (*salīm*), since they are governed by the prejudices and presuppositions of a scientific and materialistic age.”<sup>69</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī delineates that the certainty (*yaqīn*) that corresponds to the soundness of knowledge has a specific source. He states:

When the knowledges—by which I mean the known things—becomes manifest through their essences to knowledge, and when knowledge perceives them as they are in their essences, this is sound knowledge and complete perception within which, as a matter of course, there is no obfuscation.”<sup>70</sup>

Ibn ‘Arabī can be seen to state that the soundness of knowledge, which arises in a sound heart (*qalb salīm*), involves a correspondence between soundness in comprehension of the sense data, their processing of it, and the actions that arise from them as a result of it.

The soundness of the comprehension of sense data, rather than the soundness of the sense data, is a point that Ibn ‘Arabī highlights. Ibn ‘Arabī stated:

“There are six things which perceive: hearing, sight, smell, touch, taste, and reason. Each of them—except reason—perceives things incontrovertibly (*darūri*). They are never mistaken in the things which normally become related to them.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Wonders of the Heart*, 67.

<sup>68</sup> William C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 384.

<sup>69</sup> Chittick, *The Sufī Path of Knowledge*, 242.

<sup>70</sup> Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 348.

<sup>71</sup> Chittick, *The Sufī Path of Knowledge*, 160.

He emphasized this point numerous times, having stated “that which judges misses the mark, not sense perception”<sup>72</sup> and “the error belongs only to that which passes judgement.”<sup>73</sup> The sound of knowledge that arises within a sound heart has, from the truthfulness of the sense data, true premises. This is on condition that this sense data is not diverted by the judgement of reason. In this way, abstaining from judgement that arises to the rational faculty is like “taking away from it the layers of coverings”<sup>74</sup> which may stunt the development of a sound heart.

### **Ibrahim and the *Qalb Salīm***

It is interesting to note that both mentions of a sound heart (*qalb salīm*) within the Qur’ān are made with reference to Prophet Ibrahim. In Sura al-Shu’rā’ (the Poets), after detailing Prophet Moses’ engagement with Pharaoh, the submission of Pharaoh’s magicians to “the Lord of Moses and Aaron” (26: 47), and the subsequent migration of the Israelites from Egypt, the chapter then turns to Prophet Ibrahim’s engagement with the idolaters who were only following their ancestors in the worship of idols. In Sura al-Ṣaffāt (Those Ranging in Ranks), after detailing a cosmographic description and some eschatological concerns, describing elements of Heaven and Hell, Prophet Noah’s calling to his people, the chapter then turns to the Prophet Ibrahim, stating “verily among those who followed his [Noah’s] Way was Ibrahim” (37: 83), and the subsequent engagement with his father and the idol worshippers. In both instances the Prophet Ibrahim, who is both described as possessing a sound heart and mentions the benefit of possessing a sound heart, is placed in contradistinction with those who worship idols.

The connection between the Prophet Ibrahim and the *qalb salīm* has been acknowledged by previous writers. In his *tafsīr*, al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209) explains the sound heart as being connected to the spiritual station of Prophet Ibrahim.<sup>75</sup> For Ibn ‘Āshūr (d. 1973), the *qalb salīm* consists of all types of good character and all attributes of

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>74</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Wonders of the Heart*, 67.

<sup>75</sup> Ruzbahān al-Baqlī, *‘Arāis al-Bayān fī Ḥaqāiq al-Qur’an*, Vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Ālamiyya, 1971), 50-51.

the Prophet Ibrahim.<sup>76</sup> With both mentions of a sound heart occurring within the Qurʾān occurring with relation to the Prophet Ibrahim there is an important connection between the heart of Prophet Ibrahim and the sound heart. Ibn ʿArabī described a spiritual station of those individuals who are upon the heart of Ibrahim. Describing those who have hearts like the Prophet Ibrahim, Ibn ʿArabī stated “they have no ugly conjecture—or rather, they have no conjecture, since they are a folk of sound knowledge.”<sup>77</sup> The lack of conjecture arises as a result of their soundness, soundness of thought and action arising from possessing a sound heart. Ibn ʿArabī further stated:

Their experiential place is a safety from every suspicion and doubt. God has removed rancour from their chests in this world, and the people are safe from any bad opinion on their part, as they have no opinion; no, they have no opinion, because they are people of true knowledge, as opinion occurs in those who have no information about something.<sup>78</sup>

Opinion, based on conjecture, is open to doubt. The certainty (*yaqīn*) that arises within a sound heart has no doubt, just as there is no doubt in the certainty that arises from a sound argument.

There is a connection between certainty and submission to Allah. It is recorded that it was the Prophet Ibrahim that named those that submit to Allah as Muslim, supplicating “Our Lord, make of us Muslims, bowing to Thy (will), and of our progeny a people Muslim, bowing to Thy (will)” (2:128). Muslims, literally those who submit, are placed in direct contradistinction to idol worshippers, as seen in both references to the *qalb salīm* in the Qurʾān. Certainty in the enacting of submission to Allah is seen as being of the utmost importance, as the Prophet Muhammad said, “O people, the people are not given anything better in this world than certainty of faith and well-being, so ask Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, for them.”<sup>79</sup> Conjecture arises from the perception of a multitude of possibilities and can, in a way, be likened to polytheism, which arises from the belief in a multitude of objects of worship. “Certainty of faith” in the Oneness

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<sup>76</sup> Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir b. ʿĀshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, Vol. 23 (Tunis: al-Dār Tūnisiyya li al-Nashr, 1984), 137.

<sup>77</sup> Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 373.

<sup>78</sup> Ibn ʿArabī, *The Count*, trans. Eric Winkel (Create Space, 2016), 141.

<sup>79</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal al-Shaybānī, *Musnad Imām Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal*, trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 2012), 38.

of Allah (*tawhīd*) realigns the individual's epistemic outlook, seeing everything in creation as being from Allah, and removes the possibility of conjecture and opinion as everything is relegated back to Allah. This is apparent in verse "We will show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves until verily they know that this is the Truth" (41: 53), where the multiplicity of signs, horizons, and selves are relegated back to the singleness of "the Truth." In this way, the sound heart (*qalb salīm*) can be seen to focus on ontological Oneness (*tawhīd*) as a result of the removal of conjecture and opinion that arises from the perception of multiplicity.

### **A Return to the *Tafsīr* of the *Qalb Salīm***

It is in light of the above understanding of the soundness of a sound heart and its contradistinction to the idol-worshippers within the Qur'ān that it becomes understandable that the Qur'ānic commentaries predominantly describe a *qalb salīm* by traits that it does not possess. The sound heart is "in a state of self-surrender (*mustaslīm*)"<sup>80</sup> and purified from polytheism (*shirk*)<sup>81</sup> by virtue of the *qalb salīm*'s focus on the Oneness of Allah (*tawhīd*), which is the antithesis of idol worship. The Unicity of focus of the *qalb salīm* cannot but be "content with God's decree (*qadar*)"<sup>82</sup> and "pleased with every condition,"<sup>83</sup> because of the knowledge of the source of the decree and conditions within which it finds itself. As a result of this knowledge "a sound heart is completely focused on returning to God,"<sup>84</sup> for the *qalb salīm*, focused on Allah's Oneness, and is aware that "To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return" (2: 156). Described as "a heart free from any blemish,"<sup>85</sup> can be related to being clear of the blemishes of sin as stated by the Prophet Muhammad,

Verily, when the servant commits a sin, a black spot appears upon his heart. When he refrains from it, seeks forgiveness and repents, his heart is polished clean. But if he returns, it increases until it covers his entire heart.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 165.

<sup>81</sup> al-Rāzī, *Mafātīh al-Ghayb*, Vol. 26, 145.

<sup>82</sup> al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 143.

<sup>83</sup> al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāiq al-Tafsīr*, Vol. 2, 80.

<sup>84</sup> al-Qushayrī, *Lata'if al-Isharat*, Vol. 3, 235.

<sup>85</sup> Ibn 'Abbās, *Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās*, 590.

<sup>86</sup> al-Tirmīdhī, *Jāmi' al-Tirmīdhī*, 3334.

With the soundness of the heart being related to the soundness of the body,<sup>87</sup> a consequence is that the individual with a *qalb salīm* is “free from ignorance and vice and moral depravity”<sup>88</sup> and “does not follow carnal soul desires.”<sup>89</sup> That the *qalb salīm* is “a heart free of hatred for the Companions of the Prophet”<sup>90</sup> relates to the Prophet Muhammad’s statement about the Helpers in Medina (*anṣār*) “no one loves them but a believer, and no one hates them but a hypocrite. Whoever loves them, Allah will love him, and whoever hates them, Allah will hate him.”<sup>91</sup> As carriers of the message and methodology of Islam from the Prophet Muhammad, the importance placed on the companions is understandable for rejecting them entails rejecting the aspects of Islam that they are recorded as having transmitted.

Focused as it is on the Oneness of Allah (*tawḥīd*) the *qalb salīm* works within the secondary causes without giving them priority. Relating everything as being from Allah, the possessor of a *qalb salīm* is not mired in the fluctuations of the secondary causes and for this reason, “nothing in the world confuses a sound heart.”<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, by relating everything back to Allah, it is understandable that the possessor of a *qalb salīm* “does not expect anything from anyone even if they do anything good”<sup>93</sup> to the point where they do not expect any punishment or reward<sup>94</sup> as these arise within the secondary causes. From the preceding analysis, it becomes apparent that the soundness of a sound heart arises due to its consistency as a result of focusing on the source of the fluctuations that occur within the secondary causes. The removal of hindrances that give rise to the necessary epistemological shifts that result in a *qalb salīm* make it understandable that most commentators would provide descriptions of a sound heart by the qualities that it does not possess as this aids others in identifying the qualities those qualities that hinder development of a sound heart within themselves.

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<sup>87</sup> Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4094.

<sup>88</sup> al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb*, Vol. 26, 146.

<sup>89</sup> al-Qushayrī, *Lataif al-Isharat*, Vol. 3, 15.

<sup>90</sup> Ibn ‘Abbās, *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās*, 476.

<sup>91</sup> Muslim Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 237.

<sup>92</sup> Bursevi, *Rūḥ al-Bayan*, 288.

<sup>93</sup> al-Samaraqandī, *Baḥr al-‘Ulūm*, 476.

<sup>94</sup> al-Jilānī, *Tafsīr al-Jilānī*, Vol., 368.

## The Importance of the *Qalb Salīm*

Just as those who possess a sound heart (*qalb salīm*) are free from conjecture and opinion, they are also protected from the burdens that arise from change and fluctuation. The Prophet described the fluctuation as being a consequence of the relationship between the individual and Allah, stating “indeed the hearts are between two of Allah’s fingers, He changes them as He wills.”<sup>95</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī “sees the heart as a place of constant change and fluctuation”,<sup>96</sup> and it is this type of fluctuation described by the Prophet that he feared for his community. Yet, it has been said that “a sound heart is one protected and nurtured.”<sup>97</sup> It is not that those upon a sound heart are necessarily protected from calamities. Rather such individuals look to the source of such events, as Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah commented, “do not stretch out your hand to take from creatures unless you see that the Giver (*al-Mu‘īṭ*) amongst them is your Lord.”<sup>98</sup> In doing so, those upon a sound heart show correct etiquette (*adab*) to Allah, as Prophet Ibrahim did in stating, “when I am ill, it is He who cures me” (26: 80), attributing lack and need to themselves while attributing generosity, the fulfilling of need, and the giving of health to Allah. It is in this sense that “the sound heart is understood to be free of character defects and spiritual blemishes.”<sup>99</sup> It has been stated the universe and the entire creation also, as manifestations of God’s attribute of *Qudrah* (power), can be perceived like a book by the heart. Put differently, that which is to understand and comprehend both the Qur’ān and the ‘book’ of the universe, is the heart.<sup>100</sup>

The heart that may be described as a sound heart (*qalb salīm*), possessing the qualities described within this article and free of the defects mentioned by previous authors, is one that has undergone substantial soteriological development.

Further supporting the description of a sound heart by the qualities that it does not possess, the type of soteriological development undertaken is not to gain qualities. Rather, the type of soteriological development undertaken is seen to be a freeing up of the clutter that comes with giving primacy to the secondary causes.

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<sup>95</sup> al-Tirmīdhī, *Jāmi‘ al-Tirmidhī*, 2140.

<sup>96</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 106.

<sup>97</sup> Hamza Yusuf, *Purification of the Heart* (Mountain View: Sandala, 2012), 181.

<sup>98</sup> Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allah, *Sufi Aphorisms*, trans. Victor Danner (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 50.

<sup>99</sup> Yusuf, *Purification of the Heart*, xiii.

<sup>100</sup> Seker, “A Map of the Divine Faculty,” 52.

The Prophet Muhammad stated, “no child is born except on *al-fiṭra*, and then his parents convert him to Judaism or Christianity or to Magianism.”<sup>101</sup> Al-Ghazālī stated, “the basic primary innate disposition (*fiṭra*) is necessarily a sound heart,”<sup>102</sup> indicating both a correspondence between the sound heart and the innate disposition and that the quality of a sound heart involves returning to this innate disposition, free from the conditioning mentioned by the Prophet Muhammad. ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Alawī al-Ḥaddād (d. 1132/1720) stated:

“To give the call to prayer (*adhān*) in the right ear of a newborn baby, and the *iqāma* in its left ear, to remind the child of its primordial nature (*fiṭra*) according to which God has made people, namely *tawḥīd*.”<sup>103</sup>

This highlights that there is an important link between the human’s innate disposition (*fiṭra*) and the affirmation of Allah’s Oneness (*tawḥīd*), which is also at the core of a sound heart (*qalb salīm*). From this it makes sense to describe the sound heart by the qualities that it does not possess because the development of such a heart involves removing the conditioning imposed on the individual by their society.

### Concluding Remarks

The constant turning of everything back to Allah results in a level of deference to the source of creation that is not mired in the fluctuations within the secondary causes. This results in the development of a range of virtues, such as certainty (*yaqīn*), contentment (*riḍā*), and nearness (*qurb*). Yet, rather than qualify a sound heart (*qalb salīm*) by the virtues it possesses, traditional descriptions have predominantly described it by those qualities that are needed to be removed so as to move the individual closer to their innate disposition. In attempting to understand what it means to have a sound heart, it becomes apparent that this quality of heart, despite being mentioned only twice within the Qur’ān, is both an important quality and deserves greater attention for understanding the expansiveness of the heart within Islam.

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<sup>101</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4775.

<sup>102</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mukhtaṣar Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, trans. Marwan Khalaf (Cyprus: Sophr, 2013), 255.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Alawī al-Ḥaddād, *The Lives of Man*, trans. Mostafa al-Badawi (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1991), 18.

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