

Handwritten text in Arabic script, likely a manuscript. The text is arranged in several lines, with some words in red ink (rubrication) and others in black ink. The script is dense and characteristic of medieval Islamic manuscripts.

# John of Apamea

III- The three levels of moral growth in the *DS*

**Topic:** The three levels of moral growth in John of Apamea's *Dialogue on the Soul*

*Somaticity*

*Psychicality*

*Pneumaticity*

**Aim:** Show that healing the vicious passions drives moral growth

# Outline

## **1. General Considerations on Moral Growth and Virtue in the DS**

- A. Scriptural foundation of the three levels*
- B. The Trajectory of Moral Growth*
- C. Virtue and Vice in the DS*

## **2. The Characteristics of the Initial Levels of Moral Growth**

- A. The Conduct of demons and the Somatics*
- B. Growing out of the somatic level*

### 3. The Characteristics of the Psychological Level

- A. *“The virtuous conduct of the outer person”*
- B. *“Approaching wisdom”*
- C. *Imperfection at the Psychological Level*
- D. *Growing out of the psychological level*
- E. *The purity of the soul*

## **4. The Characteristics of the Pneumatic Level**

- A. From virtuous deeds to knowledge*
- B. Intimacy with God*
- C. By grace only*

**Conclusion**

**General Conclusion**

# 1. General Considerations on Moral Growth and Virtue in the *DS*

# A. Scriptural foundation of the three levels

**Somatics:** 1 Cor 3:3 “For as yet you are in the flesh. For while there are among you envy and contentions and divisions, are you not somatic, and walking in the flesh?”

**Psychicals:** 1 Cor 2:14 “For the man who is psychical receives not spiritual things, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them, because they are judged by the Spirit” (8);

**Pneumatics:** 1 Cor 2:15 “The pneumatic man judges everything, while he is not judged by anyone” (7).

## B. The Trajectory of Moral Growth

- The three levels are successive and progressive

*“A few are brought near the pneumatic conduct, a small number to the psychical, and the whole world to the somatic.” (66)*

- Progression from vice to virtue,  
from error to truth,  
from the visible to the invisible,  
from deeds to knowledge.

## C. Virtue and Vice in the *DS*

- God “*has placed virtue in us at the creation of our soul.*” (50)
- Vicious passions stir up the soul because of the soul’s “*association with the body.*” (14)
- Vicious Passions are extrinsic to the soul as Scars and Wounds on the body. (44)
- Virtue and vice as moral orientations (“Turning towards”)

## D. Moral Growth as Revealing the Eclipsed Virtue

*“Just as when the sun rises, if there are dense clouds and dark fog in the air, these become hindrances for its light to be seen by us, the habits and evil upbringing in which a person is brought up hinder the virtue of his soul from being seen in his person. [...] Just as when the clouds and dark fog roll away from the middle [of the sky], the brightness of the sun becomes fully visible on earth, similarly, if evil habits are removed from the person, the soul’s whole virtue easily becomes visible in him.” (50)*

## **2. The Characteristics of the Initial Levels of Moral Growth**

## A. The Conduct of demons and the Somatics

*“Those whose whole intelligence errs in evil thoughts, if they love to put them into action, they stand in the conduct of demons. Those whose whole intelligence meditates upon evil things, if they do not love executing their stirrings [...], they are somatics.” (13)*

## B. Growing out of the somatic level

- Striving against evil thoughts and the passions of the body.

*“If one strives against the evil of his thoughts, and he does not abandon his mind to his stirrings, and he constrains himself with bonds, and does not accomplish their will, this one [...] is close to the psychical degree.” (13)*

# 3. The Characteristics of the Psychical Level

## A. “The virtuous conduct of the outer person”

- *“Unfamiliarity with gluttony and drunkenness, or with curses or insults, or with the pleasure of his flesh, because [the person] is glorifying God with the words of his mouth.” (8)*
- *“Chastity, giving to the poor, self-emptying, endurance against afflictions, acts of justice, caring for the needy.” (48)*

## B. “Approaching wisdom”

- Psychicals are persons “*whose intelligence practices learning*” (59), who have the desire to learn and to study the sciences (14).

## C. Imperfection at the Psychological Level

- They feel superior to those who commit evil deeds or are “*inferior to them in visible deeds*”(21);
- “*The whole glory prepared for him from the abundant goodness of God in the world to come, he supposes that he receives it because of his deeds, and not from the treasury of God’s mercy.*”  
(8-9)

- They are proud and see all those who disagree with them as errant and inferior to them (21);
- They deem their knowledge to be the only truth and their wisdom universal (59).
- The root of such presumption of superiority and perfection is a lack of “perception of what is greater” (21).

## D. Growing out of the psychical level

- This level is unique in experiencing the compunction of the soul and the tears of penance (16).
- Two tasks: *First, “the self-emptying of the desire for money. After the self-emptying of the love of money, necessarily follows the self-emptying of the passion of the desire for praise” (6).*

## E. The purity of the soul

- This is the state of the soul after successfully completing the psychical level

*“The person exists in the virtue of the intelligence, in humility and patience, in calm and understanding, in the joy of his hope, in the wakefulness of virtuous reflections, and in consummate affection for God and human beings...” (6)*

- The purity of the soul is “when [one] has struggled against, and defeated, all evil passions” (6).
- It is “the completion of the whole conduct with which God commands the person to conduct himself *in this life*.” (6)

# 4. The Characteristics of the Pneumatic Level

## A. From virtuous deeds to knowledge

- *“If a person is elevated above the activity of virtuous deeds in his knowledge, he is no longer in the psychical order, but in the pneumatic, because he has turned towards the knowledge of the nature of the soul.”(66)*
- True virtue comes from knowledge

## B. Intimacy with God

- The pneumatic person *“is a beloved son who is freed from everything belonging to this world. He begins to become a sharer in the Mysteries of God, because he will have a participation with God in his knowledge. He will enjoy a companionship with God through the revelation of mysteries.”*  
(6-7)

## C. By grace only

- *“The pneumatic conduct is not for nature to seek because that which is given to human beings in the Other World is outside nature.” (24)*
- *This order “is called pneumatic, not because it is truly perfected in the spirit here [in this world]. This is not given until the New World.” (60).*

# Conclusion

- Virtue is the ontological state of the soul.
- One need only remove the obstacles to its manifestation by healing from one's vicious passions.
- By doing so, one grows morally towards the purity of the soul.

# General Conclusion

- Diversity within the Syriac tradition
- John of Apamea as the pioneer of the study of psychology in Syriac Christianity
- The need for a “vice ethics” to complement modern virtue ethics.