

Psychology from Islamic Perspective: Contributions of Quran to Contemporary Psychologists.

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ABSTRACT: Early Muslims wrote extensively about human nature and called it Ilm-al Nafs or self-knowledge. In many cases, their works seem to be the original ideas for many modern day psychological theories and practices. What is interesting however is that a lot of what the early scholars wrote was blended with Islamic philosophy and religious ideas that are decoded from Qur'an. This paper covers major contributions of Quran to psychology through analyzing the different conceptions of 'self' in Qur'an. It also offers a few recommendations on the indigenization of psychology for Muslim societies interested in seeking the Islamic perspective on human behaviors. According to the Islamic perspective, knowledge is of two types: "revealed" Divine knowledge and material knowledge. Divine knowledge is intuitive, subjectively experienced and leads to a transformation in the individual. In Islam, the science of the self is the foundation of all sciences. As the Prophet said; "He who knows himself knows Allah". The word 'science' is based on the Greek word meaning 'knowledge' or 'to know'. And the simple truth is that Allah is not only the Ultimate Reality but the source of all knowledge. So it is time that we woke up to our valuable heritage and carried the baton of Islamic knowledge from the past, forward into the future, specifically psychology.

INTRODUCTION

There has never been a split/ schism in the Islamic tradition, between religion and science as in the West. Indeed Islamic civilization began to flourish in the 8th century A.D. The Persian and Roman civilizations were in decline and Europe was still in the dark ages. Interestingly it was not until the Renaissance (around the 15th century) that Western scholars had access to the Arabic material, which was then taught at Universities several centuries after the original work had been carried out. Shokosadat Banijamali and Hassan A. (2009) declare that many principles of modern scientific method had already been established by Muslims. For example, the employment of doubt, by Al- Ghazzali, as a prelude to reaching certain knowledge; the founding of the philosophy of history by Ibn Khaldun; medical and surgical advances which formed the basis of medical study in Western institutions for several centuries- contributions of Razi (called Rhazes in the west), Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Abul-Qasim (Abucassis), the mathematical concepts of algebra, zero, cipheras espoused by the likes of al- Khayyam, and al- Biruni. This is named Muslim scholars made some contribution. Pp. 16- 22. It is significant that the West rarely acknowledges the great debt it owes Islamic scholarship in English schools for example, we are taught about Roman civilization/ Ancient Egypt, but never the Islamic civilization and contributions to knowledge. It goes without saying that Islam has a major responsibility for human being's salvation. Indeed the scientists considered it their religious duty to pursue such knowledge. It is interesting to note that the first words revealed to the Prophet (PBUH) pertained to the importance of knowledge: not just for a small elite but for all people. "Read in the Name of your Lord, Who created or Creates man from a clot. Read and your Lord is the Most Bounteous. Who teaches by the pen? Teaches man that which he knew not." (Qur'an; 96: 1-5)

It was with the demise of the Islamic civilization that Muslims lost their lead in science because science and religion are seen as complementary and not contradictory. However, we should not just look sentimentally to past glories but into a determined vision for the future. If we take hold once again of our great Islamic legacy there is no reason why we cannot regain our position in the forefront of science instead of lagging behind in the

manner we are doing today. We are transferring technology from the West now, when the West used to transfer technology and knowledge from the East. Let us move from the backseat to the driver's seat.

In Islam, the science of the 'self' is the foundation of all sciences. As we see that the word 'science' is based on the Greek word meaning 'knowledge' or 'to know'. Allame Hassanzadeh Amoli (2002) declares that the straight path for human beings in their lives is to contemplate their 'self'. Modern psychologists unfortunately are away from the Qur'an notions about 'self'. As the Prophet said, "He who knows himself knows Allah". And the simple truth is that Allah is not only the Ultimate Reality but the source of all knowledge. Pp. 35- 42. So it is time that we woke up to our valuable heritage and carried the baton of Islamic knowledge from the past, forward into the future, specifically psychology.

The Split between Western Science and Religion

The reasons for this actually lie in the Renaissance period of Western history many centuries ago when the church was seen to be an obstacle to scientific advancement. The ideas of philosophers and scientists were banned from publication and discussion; e.g. Galileo who observed through the new invention of the telescope that the earth moves around the sun and the sun does not move around the earth, as though at the time, was labeled a heretic by the church and placed under house arrest. His views were considered contradictory to Christian teaching. Bruno who publicly stated such ideas was interrogated by the Inquisition and then punished by burning to death at the stake. The result of this repression and persecution by religious authorities was a split between science and church. But ultimately, science was victorious over the church because the evidence of its rational observation and experimentation just became too compelling. As a consequence, all religion became associated with being backward, superstitious, and regressive, and so secularism which was a rejection of religion became associated with being rational, liberated and progressive. Even hundreds of years after the conflict between church and science, the effect on the Western psyche is still very apparent. This is why the secular discourse still remains the only acceptable discourse. It is important to give this historical perspective as it helps us to understand why it is so difficult to bring any religious or spiritual meaning to science nowadays and of course to a particular field psychology.

Types of Knowledge

According to the Islamic perspective, knowledge is of two types: 'Revealed' Divine knowledge and 'Material' knowledge. 'Divine knowledge' is intuitive, subjectively experienced and leads to a transformation in the individual. 'Material knowledge' is what is generally considered to be objective and is experienced more as a process of accumulating information. There is a difference in transformation and information. For example, in today's Universities information is collected in the head but one can walk in and out of University with the only difference being a change in age and perceived status but not as a human being. 'Divine knowledge' and 'material knowledge' though are not necessarily contradictory; they reflect the co-existence of the two different (but not opposing) dimensions; the spiritual dimension and the physical dimension. Mohamadosman Nejati (2008) clarifies that in Qur'an (2: 56), (12: 94) it is also distinguished as 'the sensible knowledge' and 'the supra- sensible knowledge'. Pp. 177- 186

Islam and Notions of 'Self'

Banijama S. and Ahadi H. (2009) remark that in Islam there are different concepts of self or Nafs. It can be summarized in two basic points; Striving for 'self' for unification with the Divine, and striving for 'self' for equilibrium within physical instincts. Both spiritual and physical possibilities are thus optimized. Pp. 39- 40. We see such notions in different Ayes of Quran; Aleomran 3: 145, An'am 6: 70, Anbia 21: 35, Vashams 91: 7-8. It is interesting to note that the Human Being is considered to be the meeting point of these two different dimensions. The Arabic word for such a meeting point is Barzakh interspace: Spiritual + (Barzakh) Physical. In the light of this Islamic perspective, any efforts to gain an understanding of the 'self' require a study of the spiritual aspect of the 'self'. Knowledge of the 'self' and what it means to be human, in modern times however is not so much the domain of religion as the domain of the field of psychology. Allame Hassanzadeh Amoli (2002) says that the knowledge of the 'self' is the main source/ key of the treasures of the angles. P. 59 In today's secular age, the field of psychology is in a way the new theology, and therapists and psychologists are the priests of this age. The irony is that the word 'psychology' is based on the Greek word psyche, meaning 'soul', or, 'spirit'. Psychology therefore means study of the 'soul'. However it is now anything but, and indeed the idea of a soul or spiritual nature are not even acknowledged in mainstream psychology. This attitude of rejecting the spiritual can be traced to the implicit assumptions of Western psychology rooted in secularism which arose out of a negation of religion or spiritual experience. Instead, within Western psychology, a fragmented view of man is presented. In trying to gain a deeper understanding of human nature, Western psychological theories have tended to focus only on one aspect of the 'self', e.g. psychoanalysis focuses on the unconscious, cognitive psychology focuses on thoughts, and behavioral psychology focuses on behavior. No doubt, important insights have been gained, yet no model is truly comprehensive in itself. To me, most Western psychotherapies are

limited at both ends of the spectrum; they ignore individual spirituality, and they ignore the effects of socio-political factors on the lives of the clients. Banijama S. and Ahadi H(2009) illustrate that fundamental questions relating to man's existence e.g. where we have come from, what our purpose is in life, What happens after we die cannot be addressed even by the more sophisticated approaches in mainstream psychology. Pp.113-116. So really how much knowledge of the 'self' they have, and how deep is their understanding of human psychology. Even very 'new' more integrated therapies which try to include more than one aspect of the self are limited, as they too ignore a dimension of the self which many people regard as central to being human; the spiritual dimension.

On the other hand all Muslims should be excellent psychologists. Allame Hassanzade Amoli (2010) remarks that our whole life is based on knowing the answers to these basic questions; Wherever you go, from remote villages to modern cities, practicing Muslims will be able to tell that we are on a journey; Before we were born we were with Allah, and all souls bore witness that Allah is their Lord (7:172) Our purpose in this life is to worship Allah (51:56) After death we will be raised up and according to our deeds in this lifetime we will be rewarded or punished. (101:5-8). Pp. 10-15

Importance of developing Islamic Psychology

From an Islamic perspective, any truly comprehensive psychology can only develop out of a very different set of assumptions. In effect a different paradigm of knowledge is required, so that a genuine 'study of the soul' can take place and a 'genuine psychology', (remember the word psychology means study of the soul), which addresses all aspects of the self can emerge. Sama Yaqoob(2010) cites that this is why I believe that it is very important that Muslims define and develop Islamic psychology based on the Qur'an, which Muslims regard as the most reliable source of knowledge possible, as it is from Allah who created us and therefore knows absolutely everything about us. Other knowledge may give us 'glimpses' of truths about ourselves as researchers continually discover what Allah has created. Pp. 125- 35 However, human theories remain limited as they lack the overall picture; they have a very narrow context. For no matter how intelligent scientists are, they will always be limited and fallible and subject to the time and culture they live in. And while they might try to address details of specific problems, they do not have answers for the most basic of questions people face regarding the meaning and purpose of life.

Qur'anic psychotropic is also developed as one the branch of Islamic psychology. Qur'an is basically used for guiding human beings and it ensures their salvation. As Mohamadosman Nejati (2008) illustrates that the different ways of education for people are cleared in Qur'an. It also introduces the specific security via tranquility and the security of 'self' (2: 112), (13; 28) pp. 364- 372

He also comments that the major contributions of Quran to psychology is presented through analyzing the different conceptions of 'self' in Qur'an together with the differing influences of the self (both internal and external). The modern knowledge can be integrated into notions of the 'self', based on Islamic principles, so that a creative synthesis may be possible of the two different bodies of knowledge. This also indicates implications for the therapeutic interventions. Cognitive, Behavioral, affective aspects of the 'self' are acknowledged as is the validity of drawing on techniques (as opposed to overall rationale or implicit metaphysics) of various Western psychological approaches. Ibid. Pp. 170-79 So we see it emphasizes the unification of the different aspects of the 'self' via the spiritual aspect. In this spirituality underlies and has the capacity to influence all aspects of the 'self'. The aim and method of Islamic psychology, then, is not fragmentation but unification; acknowledging and returning man to his original state of wholeness.

Amber Haque (2004) illustrates that from an Islamic point of view, human beings are not simply physical beings; complex animals. They have another dimension to them, their spirituality, which links them to Allah. In the Quranic account of creation, following the breathing of Allah's spirit into Adam, Allah commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, "and We told the angels, 'Prostrate to Adam' and they prostrated" (Quran 7:11). The angels were in effect prostrating before the Divine mystery within Adam, and acknowledging that he was Allah's representative; Khalifa in Arabic, i.e. a station which even they as sinless beings had not been accorded. Pp. 120-26.

Concepts of 'Fitra'

An important concept relating to the concept of human nature from an Islamic perspective is 'Fitra'. It refers to the primordial state of man; his natural condition and disposition. The optimistic view of human nature is rooted in this concept. Mohammad Osman Nejati (2008) states that Islam posits the natural state of man is a positive and 'good' state; one in submission to Allah. This is related to the idea that all souls made a pledge with Allah before earthly existence, acknowledging Him as their Lord (Quran, 7:172). Even before we were born, or were conceived, our souls met with Allah. The spiritual aspect of every human has therefore already experienced the 'Divine'. Pp. 350- 60 The defining experience of man in the Islamic perspective then is not his physical aspect, but his spiritual aspect. This spiritual aspect of man is what the Qur'an, along with all spiritual traditions, appeals to. Charles C. Morris(1979) comments that if early childhood experiences are considered to

impact strongly on an individual's life (even if only unconsciously) as suggested by Freud, the impact of such an experience going back to a time even earlier, of course would be fundamental. According to an Islamic point of view this explains the instinct in all individuals for right and wrong, although in some it may be buried more deeply than others. Pp. 120-45

Spiritual or religious experience is therefore more a form of recognition than discovery. This is exemplified in the (Quran,7;157);"He the Prophet enjoins on them that which they themselves sense as right, and forbids them that which they themselves sense as wrong". The religious emphasis is thus more on the inner experience than an externally imposed experience a part of us already knows the truth. Due to the initial experience of union with Allah, a part of the individual seeks that union again. This quest is often begun with a search for the meaning of life. According to the Quran, the eternal aspect of each individual, the soul, is on a journey and passes through various stages in life. The end point of this journey though, as was the beginning, is Allah."And now you have returned to Us alone, as We created you at first, leaving behind all that we bestowed on you". (6:94)

Journey of 'self'

It is clear to us when we view our lives from the Islamic perspective; our time here on earth is actually only a small part of our ultimate destiny. The Prophet (PBUH) described this life as a mere drop of water as compared to a whole ocean. Yet, most of us focus the majority of our energy and time on things related only to this life ;whether it be our education, our jobs, aiming to reach a certain status, having big bank accounts, wearing the right clothes etc... we rarely step back and think where we have come from, and ultimately where we are all going to.

Islam has its own definition of progress encompassing both spiritual progress of man affecting his psychological and social state, and material progress; the harnessing of resources and skills development, which is also very much encouraged in Islam. Allame Hassanzade Amoli (2002) remarks the philosophy of creation is that Allah is going to present Himself on the earth. Pp. 132- 135The important thing to remember here is that for the last few centuries the Western definition of 'progress' has really only related to material, technical progress. It is only now being acknowledged, even within Western academic and scientific circles that the West has paid a heavy price in social terms for this material success. It has been learning in a slow and painful manner that material progress in itself cannot ensure social progress. It may help alleviate certain problems but not solve them completely. And if not pursued in a cautious and conscious manner, the rise in technology itself can be a source of social problems.

Carl G. Jung(1966)remarks that I dealt first hand with the many social and psychological problems people experience in England which was considered among the most developed and 'progressive' countries in the world. Social cohesion has been eroded and the family unit has disintegrated. Cases of anxiety and depression have increased at alarming rates. The irony is that I am actually being approached by mainstream psychology services in England to provide 'spiritual therapy' even within the National Health Service. Pp. 167-188 so this shows the limitations of the standard psychological therapies; they are simply not adequate in dealing with the severe problems society is facing. So we see that the results of a scientific experiment on the part of the West are not enough for guarantying the human being's happiness. It is necessary to take the best and beneficial aspects of Western technology, but from the basis of a firm Islamic foundation and perspective. In this way we should avoid repetition of some of the West's mistakes of material progress at the expense of social progress. There is no reason why we cannot have the best of both.

Spirituality

Islam (Arabic: Al-Islam) is a monotheistic religion originating with the teachings of Muhammad, a 7th century Arab religious and political figure. It is the second-largest religion in the world today, with an estimated 1.4 billion adherents spread across the globe known as Muslims. Linguistically, Islam means 'submission', referring to the total surrender of one's self to Allah (Arabic) (Allah), and a Muslim is 'one who submits (to Allah)'.

Muslims believe that Allah revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad and that Muhammad is Allah's final prophet. The Qur'an and the traditions of Muhammad are regarded as the fundamental sources of Islam. Muslims do not regard Muhammad as the founder of a new religion but as the restorer of the original monotheistic faith of Adam, Ibrahim and other prophets whose messages had become corrupted over time (or according to some authorities only misinterpreted). So Islam is an Abrahamic religion, the Unity (Tohid).

ShokohosadatBanijamali and Hassan Ahadi(2009) cite that Islam is not only a faith, but also a culture. Being the faith of a quarter of humanity, one can find a diversity of cultures, peoples who adhere to Islam, and the areas they inhabit, all of which make Islam a global culture. Pp. 2- 10Today, Muslims may be found throughout the world, particularly in the Middle East and North, West and East Africa. Some of the most populous majority-Muslim countries are in South and Southeast Asia. Other concentrations are found in Central Asia. Only about 20 percent of Muslims originate from Arab countries. Islam is the second largest religion after

Christianity in many European countries, such as France, which has the largest Muslim population in Western Europe, and the United Kingdom.

Concepts of 'Nafs'

Of particular interest in the model of the self is the concept of 'Nafs' – the Arabic word used in the Qur'an and translated as 'self' or 'soul'. Due to the different possible states of the 'self', different types of 'Nafs' have been described in the Qur'an. From the Islamic point of view Nafs can be good or evil as it can be pulled toward higher potentials of the self or lower potentials of the self (Quran, 95:14-16). Earthly existence is about choice – which way will we go? Again the idea of the journey of the self is important. Mohammad Osmannejati (2008) remarks we are capable of choosing various paths; some which are consistent with Islamic aim in life – Union with the creator, and others which are not. The point is that the self is always in a dynamic flux – the same person experiences different states within themselves at different times. Three important states of the self-mentioned in the Quran include; Nafs -e- Ammara, Nafs -e- Lawwama and Nafs -e- Mutmainnah. Pp. 320-26

Nafs-e- Ammara (the commanding or lower self) Quran 12:53. This self is prone to the lower aspects of the self, representing the negative drives in man. It can be viewed as analogous to the Freudian concept of 'id' e.g. 'I want to do it now... I don't care if it's right or wrong'.

Nafs-e- Lawwama (The self-reproaching self) Quran 75:2. This state corresponds to the self when it becomes aware of wrong-doing and feels remorse. A parallel between the Freudian concept of 'superego' and Nafs Lawwama may be drawn. The feeling of "I shouldn't have done that" or "why did I do that – I wish I hadn't..."

Nafs-e- Mutmainnah (The peaceful self) Quran 89:27-28 this is the state of inner peace and happiness, when you feel satisfied and content in yourself. This is the state that we are aiming to achieve. In order to achieve the state of tranquility and peace one has to activate the remorseful self (e.g. through sincere repentance) and control the lower commanding 'self' (through self-discipline).

Importance of Balance and Boundaries in Islam

Mohammad Osmannejati (2008) states the idea of balancing the different aspects of the 'self'; physical and spiritual is very important in Islam. One should not go to the extreme of emphasizing one aspect of the self at the expense of the other. Pp. 327-29 Exhortation to seek a balance in satisfying both body and soul is found in the Quran: "But seek the abode of the hereafter in that which Allah has given you and neglect not your portion of the world, and be kind even as God has been kind to you and seek not corruption in the Earth....." (Quran 28:77) We can place Islam's attitude to physical appetites on a continuum where it lies in between the extremes of suppression and overindulgence.

Continuum of Attitudes to Physical Instincts

The extremity of suppression is condemned; "Who has forbidden the beautiful and good things which Allah has bestowed?" (Quran.7:32). For example, the relationship of attraction between men and women is sanctified, not viewed as a moral compromise, but a blessing, elevated to the rank of the signs of Allah himself. "And among His signs is this, that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you love and mercy. Verily in that are indeed signs for people who reflect." (Quran 30:21). Also "Allah has created for your enjoyment everything on earth". (Quran 2:29)

In Islam physical aspects of man are not only legitimated, but man is encouraged to enjoy them. Mohamadosman Nejati (2008) says that the major purpose of natural instinct is to generate a family and to develop human beings' society. Pp. 49- 54 as it is said in Qur'an (4: 1), (42; 11). In the light of this, the secular, e.g. Freud's view of religion as repressive of natural instincts is clearly not universally applicable. The extremity of over indulgence however is also warned against. Eat and drink without excess, for Allah loves not those given to excess" (Quran: 7: 31) In this way boundaries are set up to ensure moderation. Removal of boundaries and unlimited indulgence may appear attractive at first. However they inevitably lead to an imbalance, the result being an unhealthy state as opposed to a healthy and fulfilled one.

Self-Development

The notion of balance in Islam has implications for the important area of self-development. Western psychology conceptualizes self-indulgence as removal of moral restrictions on people so that they are not 'repressed'. According to Charles Morris (1979) Freudian religious belief is a pathological symptom and sign of arrested development leading to neurosis. In this way the removal or 'transgression' of those boundaries limiting free expression of physical drives is encouraged. However no real notion of a 'healthy' ideal is suggested. Pp. 130 150 This Freudian approach to mental health of 'absence of pathology' is reflected within the tradition of western medicine as a whole. This can be seen to be a rather limiting approach, however. A model at best aimed at 'absence of disease' offers no contribution to the important area of self-development, as

it is unable to define positive mental health. The Islamic model however, would advocate seeking to establish equilibrium within the physical aspects, so that they are neither denied nor over indulged. The notion of moderation in the Islamic perspective is very much related to concepts of ideal states, balance, adopting the middle way and justice in Islam. Thus we have appointed you a middle nation, that you may be witnesses for mankind. (Quran 2:413)

Indeed, the Arabic word 'Wasata' in the Quran, translated here as 'middle' has been translated in differing English translations as 'just and best' (Hilali and Khan) and 'golden mean' (Maududi's commentary translated by Akbar). In this way one word conveys many interrelated concepts. Justice is the consequence of following the middle way, and it is one of the main characteristics of the middle way. According to Shokohosadat Banijamali and Hassan Ahadi (2009) the adoption of the 'middle way' in the Islamic perspective is thus both a means and aim of self-development and fulfillment. By taking the middle path we will achieve the ideal state and the ideal state itself is the 'middle' or balanced state. Pp.39- 41 In this way, boundaries (determined by Allah) are not viewed as simply limiting the human self, but as providing parameters within which ultimate inner balance and development can take place. As Muslims we can appreciate the perfection in the balance and limits Allah has placed in creation. If the earth was even slightly closer to the sun, everything would be burnt, and if the earth was even slightly further from the sun, it would be too cold to sustain life. But where Allah has placed it is just right for living things to grow. It is amazing when we discover the beauty, the intricacy and harmony that Allah has placed in the natural system from cosmology to biology to physics. In the same way the beliefs and practices of Islam provide people with the perfect balance. Islam provides the perfect context for optimum growth and development as it is from Allah who has placed such beauty and order in everything else. He has placed it within us, in our 'Fitra'. When we go beyond the correct limits, we commit an injustice, and ultimately it is an injustice to ourselves; we only betray ourselves in the end; "O Mankind! Your rebellion is only against yourselves!" (Quran 10:23). But because we have free will we can choose not to live in this perfect balance within ourselves and with the rest of creation.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, for too long the Qura'nic contribution to knowledge of the 'self' and its application/ implications for positive mental health development has not been recognized or explored fully. It would consciously develop a new field of study of Islamic Psychology involving theoretical integration of Islamic notions of the 'self' with current western models of psychology. This theoretical framework should be applied in developing a practical 'Islamic Counseling' approach with its own distinct processes and techniques because Islam has a major responsibility for human being's salvation and then the scientists considered it their religious duty to pursue such knowledge. It is vivid that Contributions of Qur'an to Contemporary Psychologists will benefit not only Muslims but all people and Islam came as a mercy to the whole of mankind. And so Muslim scientists and practitioners we need to be pro-active, not reactive. At last we must sow the seeds now for a firm foundation and Insha'Allah they will flourish, even if not in our own lifetime but in future generations.

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