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# Health and Illness from an Islamic Perspective

MAJED A. ASHY

**ABSTRACT:** The Islamic understanding of the human self, its purpose and functions has a great effect on Muslims' understanding of themselves and on Islamic culture. Islamic psychology is a field that examines the Islamic perspective on health and illness and compares it to the Western perspective. The purpose of this paper is to introduce readers to the Islamic understanding of the self, its functions, and purpose, and to contrast it with Western theories about the self. It also aims at understanding Islamic definitions of health and illness and Islamic understanding of treatment.

Little research has been done in the West about Islamic perspectives on human psychology. Islamic psychology is a field that is growing in the Islamic world, aiming at integrating the findings of Western psychology within Islamic views. These efforts have been going on for decades but here, perhaps for the first time. Islamic Psychology is introduced as a new field. Islamic psychology is needed because it helps in examining the Islamic understanding of human psychology and in studying the Islamic world, taking into consideration cultural, historical, and social factors. Islamic psychology also helps reduce the information gap that separates the West and Islam. It opens opportunities for discussion and cooperation between Western and Muslim psychologists, thus enhancing global understanding and cooperation.

## *Islamic interest in psychology*

Islamic interest in understanding human psychology is as old as Islamic culture itself (Rabie, 1993). The historical origins of this interest may be traced back to the eighth century and to two important developments.

*The Quran and Islamic interest in psychology.* The Arab world before Islam was comprised of separate tribes in Arabia with little interest in philosophical or scientific inquiry (Rabie, 1993; Nagati, 1982). "The emergence of Islam and the revelation of the Holy Quran to prophet Mohammad (Pbh) brought

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about several major changes in the Arabic culture, psychology and society” (Rabie, 1993). The Quran discussed issues that were new to the Arabic intellectual agenda, such as the nature of God and the self, the mind, the purpose of life, human motivation and emotion, social problems such as poverty and injustice, and other similar issues. These discussions encouraged Arabic scholars to think about these issues and to formulate a clear understanding of them (Rabie, 1993; Nagati, 1982; Farokh, 1972).

The Quran stressed the importance of logical thinking and of breaking away from old traditions that had been accepted blindly (Quran, 2:164; Quran, 7: 179). To persuade the listener of its truth, the Quran used several logical and philosophical methods that required a certain level of philosophical and psychological understanding on the part of the listener, whether to argue for or against the message (Quran, 21: 22; Quran, 23: 91; Rabie, 1993).

In addition, the Quran dwelt on the organization of the universe as a challenge to those who believed that the universe was created by chance (Quran, 24: 5). In this style the Quran also directed attention toward the organization of everything in the universe, including psyche and mind (Quran, 53: 20–21). Thus, by examining the structure, function, and organization of the totality of human existence it became possible to prove the existence and the wisdom of Allah (Al Gesir, 1961).

The Quran also introduced behavioral, social, economical and political perspectives that required much understanding and adaptation in the Arab world, which in turn created new conditions that affected the Arabic ways of thinking. For example, Islam prohibited alcohol, gambling, premarital and extramarital sexual relationships, and stated new laws that govern marriage, the economy, and every aspect of human behavior, ranging from eating and drinking to political relations. As a result, Arabs discovered that they needed to develop more understanding for themselves in order to leave the old way of life and adapt to the new one (Rabie, 1993).

*Translation and Islamic interest in psychology.* Beginning in the eighth century, Muslims started the process of translating books from other cultures, mainly from the Greek. Rabie (1993) summarizes the causes of this interest in translation—the new conditions that Islam created in the Islamic society led Muslims to develop needs, goals, hopes, responsibilities, problems, and moral issues that encouraged them to look at other cultures which had passed through similar experiences as sources for knowledge. Muslims also felt that the military, political, and economic power they achieved should be accompanied with scientific knowledge and intellectual maturity for this power to be used appropriately. In addition, Muslims needed to advance in science and philosophy so as to be competitive with the superpowers of the time and scientific and logical bases for their faith in order to strengthen their faith and argue with people from other faiths. With the expansion of the Islamic em-

pire, Muslims came into contact with different cultures which required more understanding so that they could co-exist and cooperate. Muslims also needed to learn new scientific methods in order to do things required by religion or circumstance, such as knowing the right times for praying. They also needed to develop new medical methods to deal with new diseases. The developing economic, political, and social conditions gave Muslims the opportunities to pursue knowledge and understanding and the presence of leaders in the Islamic empire who were interested in science and would spend a lot of money on the process of translation, encouraging cross-cultural learning. Finally, with the expansion of the Islamic empire, the Arabic language started to become the main language of many cultures which required that books be translated into Arabic to reach the scholars.

Muslims translated only books in the fields of medicine, science, mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and psychology. They did not translate books in religion or poetry because they felt that their own resources in these areas were more than adequate (Rabie, 1993).

*Muslim philosophers and scientists.* Several Muslim scientists were interested in human psychology, but few chose to write books. The scientists who chose to do so contributed significantly to Islamic culture, and to other cultures as well through translation. The major figures here were Al Kindus (801–866), Al Faraby (872–950), Alsafa Brothers (9th century), Avicenna (980–1037), Al Gazali (1058–1111), and Ibn Rushd (1126–1198). Their contributions ultimately provided a framework with a special Islamic character in a theory of human behavior that has survived to this day.

### *The basic principles of Islamic psychology*

*The religious principles.* The Islamic understanding of health and illness must be understood in the context of religious conceptualization. Tawhid, or unity, is the primary and dominant principle in Islam. “Unity is a world view and a mode of comprehension, a substratum upon which Islamic sciences in general, and medicine in particular, rests. Unity as a method perceives the cosmos as a dynamic, integrated and a purposeful whole. It is a method of integration and means of becoming whole and realizing the profound oneness of all creation. Every aspect of Islamic thought and action rotates around the doctrine of unity, which Islam seeks to realize in a human being in his inward and outward life” (Khan, 1986). This principle starts with belief in the unity of Allah: there is only one God (Quran, 112). This is followed by unity of purpose of the cosmos—Ibadah, or worship—and unity of the human community in this purpose (Quran, Gen). Worshiping in Islam is defined as any Amal-Salih, or constructive work (Khan, 1986). Thus, unity of all aspects of personality and of society constitute major religious goals in Islam.

*Philosophical principles.* Muslim scientists employed several philosophical principles as the bases for their psychological, scientific, and philosophical pursuit (Al Gesir, 1961; Saliba, 1981; Rayan, 1976). These principles are:

*The "Happening" principle:* This principle states that the universe, including humans, is always changing from one form and state to another. Thus the universe did not and does not have an eternal state. It either emerged at a certain point in time from nothing or it existed eternally. According to the chain of causation there should be a cause for the existence of the universe and its movement. The universe could not have made itself exist because this means that it existed before its existence, a clear absurdity. The cause of the universe that is perfect in itself, does not require a cause for itself, and is eternal is God (Al Gesir, 1961).

Muslim scientists applied this philosophical principle to human existence and behavior (Al Gesir, 1961). Humans did not make themselves; in the chain of causation they depend on an eternal sufficient cause which is Allah. "Do they think that they were created from nothing and without a cause or do they think that they created themselves?" (Quran).

*Logic and imagination principle:* Muslim scientists argued that the human ability to imagine is limited, but the inability to imagine something does not mean that it is impossible to be (Al Gesir 1961). For example, physical science proves that there are sound waves that travel faster than a hundred thousand cycles per second. Can we close our eyes and imagine a hundred thousand cycles per second? Since we cannot, the claim is made that there are logical and scientific facts that cannot be imagined yet are true. The material of our imagination is said to consist of images we see through the external senses. Thus we cannot imagine things that are not made of these materials. Muslim scientists used these principles to prove that logically the matter of the universe was created from nothing but because of the limits of our imagination we cannot imagine that. They also argued that people who deny the presence of the self are indulging in the mistake of trying to imagine the self and give it form, which they cannot do and finally then attempt to deny its existence, which is logically possible (Al Gesir, 1961).

*The principle of organization:* This principle states that there is organization in the universe and that the universe functions lawfully. Its laws are biological, physical, psychological, social, political. Such organization can exist by chance, but when we consider the mathematical probability of its existing by chance, we find it is all but impossible (Al Gesir, 1961). Muslim scientists believed that there is wisdom in this organization and they used the recognition of this organization as a way to know the qualities of Allah. They also followed this principle in concluding that the human psyche and behavior have organization and function according to certain laws.

*The moral principle.* Muslim philosophers and scientists argued that virtue and morality are the bases of human happiness. They classified virtues into

pairs of opposites and posited moderate behavior, justice, and balance as middle grounds between opposites. For example, Al Kindus (Rabie, 1993; Mosa, 1982) classified virtues into two types, psychological virtues and social virtues. The psychological ones are wisdom, courage, and moderation in desires. The social virtues fall under the effects of justice and balance or moderation. Thus, Al Kindus offers the example of the virtue of courage, in the middle between extreme fear and extreme risk-taking. Muslim scientists built a number of theories on these moral principles to explain physical, psychological and social diseases. They advised that balance in the amount of movement leads to health. Too little or too much movement leads to diseases and can itself be a sign of disease. The same applies to too much or too little crying, too much or too little eating, too much or too little sex, too much or too little worry, and so on.

They also believed that the moral principles of an individual can be modified through modification of behavior (Rabie, 1961). It is not only true that moral principles affect behavior but that behavior inculcates moral principles.

Islamic understanding of human psychology is derived, then, from four main sources: revealed religion, philosophy, scientific observations and experimentation, and morality. Knowledge deriving from these resources should not be in states of contradiction. If contradiction arises, it would be due to one or more of these reasons: 1) a misunderstanding of the meaning of the revealed religion, 2) a mistake in the logical process, 3) overestimating the significance of a scientific finding, or 4) going to extremes in moral decisions or behavior (Al Gesir, 1961).

### *The self in Islamic psychology*

*Definition of the self.* Muslim scientists, such as Avicenna (Rabie, 1993) did not separate the self from the body. Avicenna argued that bodies are of two types, natural and artificial. Natural bodies are those that exist without the creation of man such as iron and wood. Artificial bodies are those that man makes, such as a chair or a table. Artificial bodies consist of natural bodies, much as the chair consists of wood. Human bodies are natural bodies because man did not make them.

Avicenna theorized that any body has two levels of perfection. The first perfection of the body is "to take the form of what it meant to be." For example, wood has to take the shape of a chair in order for it to be a chair. If we take a piece of wood and make it in the form of a pen we cannot say that it is a chair. The second perfection of a body is "to do its function in the best way." In order for a knife to be called a knife it must cut; in order for a chair to be a chair it must be possible to sit on it. The first perfection leads to the second perfection of the body. A chair that is well formed in a shape of a chair will do its function best. Thus, the first perfection of the human body is to take the

form of a human, and the second perfection of the human body is to do its functions in the best way. Avicenna defined the self as "the first perfection of a natural mechanical body which does the functions of life" (Rabie, 1993). He asked: Can we separate the image of a biological body from the body? The self, according to him, takes its first perfection in the first perfection of the body and its second perfection in doing its functions in the best way. Thus, the body and the self are interdependent and directly affect each other.

We cannot imagine the self because the material of our imagination is derived from the external senses, but we can examine and observe the functions of the self, which range from nutrition to language. For example, for the body to survive it needs nutrition. The self through such functions as thinking, moving, and speaking can satisfy this requirement for survival. Thus the self needs the body for its existence and for its expression and the body needs the self for its guidance. The functions of the body and of the self cannot be separated.

*Proofs for the existence of the self.* Muslim scientists used several proofs for the existence of the self. Avicenna argued that our sense of the continuity of the "I" proves that the self is not the body, because the body always changes, but our sense of the "I" does not. He also argued that physical bodies such as rocks do not move unless an external physical force is applied to them, but human bodies move because of an internal force which means that they are not merely physical bodies. He also argued that the unity of human behavior over time implies that there is a core that connects all of the person together. Another argument was that we sense beauty and ugliness or good and evil which cannot be functions of physical entities (Rabie, 1993; Nagar, 1979).

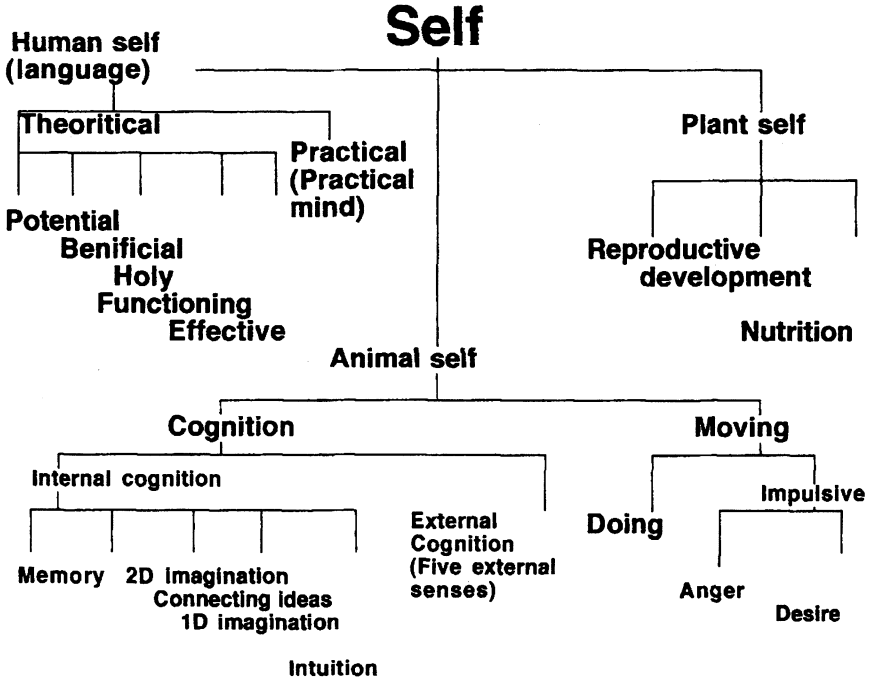
*The functions of the self.* Muslim scientists concluded that the self cannot be seen or imagined and that we can just detect its functions. These functions appear in human behavior and biology. They also believed that the self is not fragmented and does not consist of parts but only of different functions (Rabie, 1993). The self, they explain, is like a man who has three jobs, say in business, dancing, and building homes. It is the same man doing each of these functions at different times. Thus the self performs different functions, but it is unified.

Avicenna (Rabie, 1993) summarized Islamic understanding of the self (see Figure 1). He wrote that humans have three levels of self. The first is the one humans share with plants, which he called the plant self. The second humans share with animals, the animal self. The third level is specific to humans alone, the human self. Each self has different functions that cooperate with other functions.

*The abilities and functions of the self.* The plant self has three abilities, nurturing, development, and reproduction. The animal self has two major

FIGURE 1

The Functions of the Self According to Avicenna



abilities, moving and cognition. Moving in turn is of two types, impulsive moving and doing moving. Impulsive moving is itself of two types, impulsive-desire moving, such as sexual assaults, and impulsive-aggressive moving, such as hitting. The doing moving ability, such as in building a house, is not impulsive. The cognitive depends for its function on external cognition, through the external senses, such as seeing and hearing, and on internal cognition, through the internal senses, memory, imagination first-degree, imagination second-degree, connecting ideas, and intuition. Memory is for the cognition of the past, which can be voluntary or involuntary, while intuition is for the prediction of the future. Imagination first-degree consists of the images formed in the mind about concrete objects in the world. Imagination second-degree comprises images formed in the mind out of the images of first-degree imagination. Thus, the image of a tree that can be imagined and the image of a bird are first-degree images. The image of a flying tree is a second-degree image. Connecting ideas is the process by which information coming from the senses works to form an image of a concrete object, as the red color of an apple, its odor, its round shape, and its taste all form the apple image.

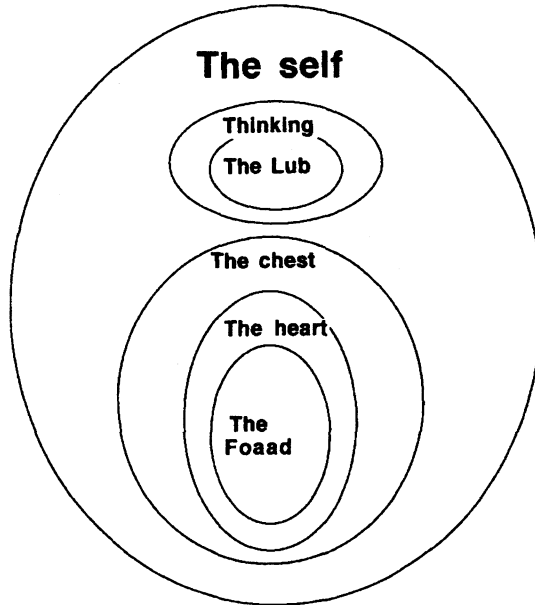


The human self has two main abilities, the practical and knowledge. The practical ability is attached to that function of the mind which is the practical mind. Knowledge is the product of the theoretical mind, which goes into stages of development. The first stage of the theoretical mind is the potential mind, a mind that has the potential to think but is not engaged in doing so, as for example the mind of the infant. The second stage is the basic theoretical mind, which is the mind that develops the basic "given" principles, such as the fact that every effect has a cause and that any object is bigger than its parts. The third stage of the theoretical mind is the functioning mind, which uses the "given" principles in order to form more complicated ones. The fourth stage is the beneficial mind, which learns from other minds. The fifth stage is the effective mind, which according to Avicenna is a universal mind that is not human but has the potential to be human. He called it the separated mind. The beneficial mind comes in contact with this separated universal mind in the moment of insight. The effective mind pulls the human mind toward it in the same way that a flower pulls the butterfly. When the beneficial mind seeks knowledge and wisdom it comes closer to the effective mind; when it does not, it goes away from it. According to Avicenna very few people reach the stage of unification of the beneficial and the effective minds. He used this understanding to explain the state of the Sufis. Cognition, as he explains it, can be effected through one of four methods: logic, which is the method of the philosopher; experimentation, which is the method of the scientist; direct cognition, which is the method of the Sufi, and revelation, which is the method of the prophet (Rabie, 1993). The last stage of the theoretical mind is the holy mind, which is a human mind that only a few people chosen by Allah can reach. This mind is in contact with the angels' mind or the divine mind; this is the mind of the prophets (Rabie, 1993).

*The stages of the self.* The model of Islamic psychology is essentially derived from the core of Islamic traditions, especially in the analysis of the Nafs—the self—and the means by which it can acquire its purpose, a state of unconditional tranquility. The Quran talks about three states of Nafs, or self. The most unhealthy state of the self is Al-Nafs Al-Ammarah, or the ordering self (Quran, 12:35). This is the state of insensitivity and complete imbalance toward the destructive side of the spectrum. This self is in strong conflict with society and can be seen as the antisocial personality. The next state is one which is out of balance but has both the ability and desire to be in tune; this self is called Al-Nafs Al-Lawwama, or the blaming self (Quran, 75:2). This self develops the function of evaluating itself and has inner conflicts which can be seen in several psychological disorders, such as anxiety disorders. The most tranquil and balanced state of self is Al-Nafs Al-Mutmainna, or the calm peaceful self (Quran, 89:27). This is the ideal to which the self can aspire and as a consequence of this state there is complete harmony within an individual in every realm of functioning. This Islamic understanding of the

## FIGURE 2

### The Areas of the Self According to Islamic Psychology



self can be contrasted with Freud's where there are the id, the ego, and the superego. Islam considers inner conflict as a transitional state while Freud saw it as a basic human condition.

#### *The areas of the self*

*The chest area.* In Islamic psychology the chest area has certain psychological functions and feelings. (See Figure 2.) The chest characteristically has a feeling of narrowness or wideness (Quran, 94: 1; 20: 25, 26; 12, 13). The feelings of terror, arrogance, desire for revenge, and hate occur in the chest area (Quran, 59: 13; 40: 56; 7: 43). Respect is also a feeling in the chest area (Quran, 17: 51). The chest area is the place of needs (Quran, 59: 9). According to Islamic understanding, Satan, a creature of Allah who disobeyed Allah and is the enemy of humanity, tries to seduce humans through suggestions. These suggestions reach humans in the chest area (Quran, 114: 6). The chest is also the place of origin of voluntary actions (Quran, 3: 154). According to Islamic understanding, the signs of the presence of Allah are kept in the chest area of humans and knowing about these signs in life is simply revealing this knowledge that springs from the chest area (Quran, 29:

49). There are some psychological diseases that originate in the chest area, such as extreme sadness and doubt (Quran, 10: 57). In the center of the chest area is the heart.

*The heart.* The core of the Nafs in Islamic psychology is the Qalb—the heart—which is a non-material principle and the essence of the self. Personality in Islamic psychology springs from the union of mind and body. Al-Ghazali discussed the essence of Qalb in his book *Kimya-I-Sadat*, or the alchemy of happiness (Ali, 1977). He wrote that the heart is the point of union between Jism, the body, and Ruh, the spirit. The unity of the heart is one of the main purposes of Islam. Thus, Islam sees personality as consisting of aspects of body and mind, not unlike the present-day thinking of Western psychosomatic medicine.

The heart is the place of faith and revelations from Allah (Quran, 2: 97; 57: 22). It can be blind or sightful and can guide humans into the right direction (Quran, 64: 11). The heart has its diseases, too; it can deviate from the right path (Quran, 18: 28). It can also be surrounded by layers and light cannot pass to it (Quran, 2: 88). The heart can be closed or blocked (Quran, 47: 24), separated from the truth or from others by a barrier (Quran, 7: 100). Every human has only one heart, (Quran, 33: 4), the place of understanding (Quran, 22: 46). The heart can be hard as a rock or empty (Quran, 28: 10). The heart is the place of the memory of Allah (Quran, 18: 28) and peace is a quality of the heart (Quran 13: 29). The heart is the place of extreme terror (Quran, 59:2) and the site of love. In love the hearts of people get unified (Quran, 8: 63).

The heart can be clean of sins and unified, the definition of health in Islam (Quran, 26: 89). The desire for sexual relations outside of marriage stems from the heart (Quran, 33: 32) and hypocrisy and disbelief are diseases of the heart (Quran, 8: 24; 21: 3). In the center of the heart is the "Foaad."

The Foaad is the place of beliefs and of fixed knowledge and is the instrument, in addition to sight and hearing, that humans use to learn (Quran : 16: 78). Deep love originates in the Foaad (Quran, 14: 37), the place where visions of the metaphysical take place (Quran, 53: 12). Suffering in after-life passes to this center (Quran, 104:9).

The Lub in Islamic understanding is the center of thinking. It is the instrument of reflection and learning from experience (Quran, 2: 269). It is also the center of memory (Quran, 39: 9). Nuha is the Lub which is aware of knowledge (Quran, 20: 128).

Another aspect of the human according to Islamic psychology is Rooh, or the vital force. Ibn Sina in his book *Kitab-Ul-Adwiya Qalbiya*, or the book of the heart's medicine (Iran Society, 1956), discusses the role of the vital force in human psychosomatic health. The vital force is a product of the combination of Latif, the subtle particles of the Akhlaat, the primary fluids, and consequently its quantity and quality can be modified with appropriate changes in nutrition, medication, and psycho-emotional factors. An imbalance or dis-

harmony within the vital force is the very beginning of disease, prior to any manifestation of pathology. Thus disease per se begins in the vital force, while functional or structural changes are secondary. The vital force is dynamic, penetrating, and animates every organ and particle of human economy. This vital force can be compared to the libido in Freud.

### *The unconscious and the limits of the mind*

Cognition is divided into two aspects, *Zahir*, the external or conscious, and *Ghaib*, the internal or unconscious. Believing in the presence of *Ghaib* is one of the principles of Islam (Quran, 2:2). *Ghaib* in Islamic psychology is everything outside human consciousness. We see here a similarity between Islamic psychology and Freud's understanding of cognition. Muslim scientists advised that the human mind has limits and it cannot pass beyond these limits and abilities. Thus it is harmful to try to know what the mind was not prepared to know. It is said that the human mind is built out of basic "given" principles. Trying to use these principles to know the metaphysical will not teach us anything; it is as if we were trying to smell colors or touch dreams. The only way to know the metaphysical is through a mind built on principles appropriate to that purpose. A mind trying to find answers for metaphysical questions is seeking its own destruction (Al Gesir, 1961).

The job of the mind is to function in the physical world and reach logical conclusions from what is "apparent." Trying to go beyond the physical world is not the job of the mind. If we want to know something of the metaphysical we need to look at the physical and be satisfied with the areas of light that we can actually see. Many psychological and physical diseases come from the desire to transcend the physical, which means through the destruction of the body and mind which function only in the physical world (Al Gesir, 1961). Muslim scientists concluded that humans need to drop the search for the metaphysical through their minds and be satisfied with the answers given them in revealed religion, philosophy, and science, using their energies and abilities in this physical world in a constructive way, for this is the second perfection of humans, in which they employ those functions that are allowed by their intrinsic formation in the best way. The function of the physical body, of self, and of mind is to work in the physical world and learn from it. There is nothing to be learned apart from the physical world (Al Gesir, 1961). We can see similarities between this conclusion and Adlerian individual psychology.

*Emotion, motivation, and attachment.* Al Kindus (Rabie, 1993; Marhaba, 1985) developed a theory about happiness and sadness. He argued that different people have different love objects. Some people may find happiness in gambling, alcohol, partners, or other objects while others may find happiness in religious objects. And so, he concluded, the choice of a love object is

learned, not inherited. He wrote that sadness results from the loss of the loved object. He suggested that the degree of sadness depends on the degree of attachment to the loved object. He concluded, that those who do not have their love object and those who do are both sad, the former because of not having what they love and the second because of the fear of losing or the actual loss of the loved object. This attachment, he wrote, and the choice of a loved object are learned and developed by habit. He considered strong attachment as a bad habit that we learn. He suggested that we need to develop that degree of attachment that helps us to get our needs in this life without causing us a lot of damage. He also described something much like projection in psychoanalytical theory. He advised that the person observing a fault in another person should know that it is in himself or herself. He suggested that this mechanism of seeing our faults in others helps us know our faults so that we can correct them, a mirroring which helps us know our true condition.

Al Gazali (Madkor, 1962; Rabie, 1993) discussed three main emotions and examined three rules as motives. The emotions are anger, jealousy, and the desire for revenge. Anger is a force that can direct behavior toward destruction when stronger than the power of self-control. The causes of anger are arrogance, self-admiration, excessive joking, sarcasm, and greed. Anger can be reduced when these causes are treated. He offered some suggestions to help control anger, such as changing one's position, as sitting if one is standing, or walking if one is sitting. Another suggestion is to wash and to pray.

Al Gazali also wrote about the repression of emotion, again suggesting Freudian theory. If anger does not find an outlet, it goes to the inside and is condensed in a new form, a desire for revenge. He called this emotion anger when directed to the outside, and desire for revenge when kept inside. The third stage of anger is jealousy, which he defines as the wish to hurt another or take away something good from them. The treatment he suggests is mainly behavioral, such as trying to say good things about those we are angry at or trying in some way to solve the problem. In saying good things about people we may come to love them and if we love them we will say good things about them, and so on.

Finally, he summarized the causes of "evil" behavior as: excessive anger, excessive desire, excessive jealousy, excessive need to "show off," greed for what others possess, lack of patience, love of money and goods, fear of poverty, stinginess, fanaticism, and thinking negatively about the intentions of others.

### *Language in Islamic psychology*

Muslim scientists considered language ability as the highest achievement of the human self (Rabie, 1993). They saw in it the basis of thinking. Muslim scientists such as Ibn Rushd (Rabie, 1993; Shahlan, 1979) did not separate

language ability from human imagination. He wrote that animals have imagination first-degree ability because animals need only to see physical objects, or their images when they are absent, to survive. Animals, he theorized, do have imagination ability, but only from the first degree. Humans need more imagination ability in order to compound images from the physical world in order to make things that are new and useful for survival. Language skills are a result of this imagination ability. He wrote that imagination is the first step toward language. Thus, when humans use language to describe an object they are not really describing the object but rather the image of the object they have in mind.

Expressing the self accurately is the major function of language in Islamic understanding and Islam, and Muslim scientists emphasize the importance of avoiding useless speaking. "A man came to the prophet and asked him for one sufficient advice. The prophet (pbh) said: Say that your God is Allah and walk in the straight path. The man asked: From where the most danger may come to me? The prophet touched his tongue and said: This" (Maidani, 1978). The prophet (pbh) also said that most people fall into Hell in the life hereafter because of what they say (Maidani, 1978). These are some examples of the Islamic view of the uses of language which should be considered in trying to understand psychological treatment among Muslims.

Speaking according to Islamic understanding is of two types, that in which one means what one says, such as in describing an emotion or an incident, or that in which one does not mean what one says as when one says things simply out of habit or in joking. The first type consists of four kinds: speaking in which the good that arises out of it is more than the bad, speaking in which the bad that arises out of it is more than the good, speaking in which the good and the bad are equal, and speaking which is neither good nor bad (Maidani, 1978). Muslim scientists advised people to talk only for good purposes, to express themselves, and to avoid talking that might be damaging to society, to relationships, or to the self. In Islamic tradition, listening has more significance than useless talk. A famous Arabic proverb is that "Allah created to us two ears and one tongue, so we listen more than we speak." A like proverb is that "a word you did not say is under your control, and the word you spoke is in control of you." The Quran says that a good word is like a seed that grows to be a tree; the roots of this tree are in earth and the branches are in the sky, and it always gives fruit (Quran, 14:25). This understanding of the purpose of language and its consequences has significance in relations among Muslims and in therapy.

### *General psychological qualities*

According to Islamic understanding, humans were created in a chain of creation reaching up from the "mud" (Quran, 3: 59; 40: 67). Humans are hard-

working and struggling (Quran, 90: 4; 84: 12) and have the resources of language and self-expression (Quran, 55: 4), the ability to learn and to write (Quran, 96: 5). Humans are the most arguing of creatures (Quran, 18: 54) and are weak (Quran, 4: 28). The Quran tells us that humans start doing "evil" when they feel that they are not in need of anything (Quran, 96: 7). Humans also tend to be stingy (Quran, 17: 100), to be worried and scared quickly (Quran, 70: 19), and want results to come quickly (Quran, 17: 11). They deny the good deeds of others toward them (Quran, 11: 11) and follow their illusions and wishes rather than truth (Quran, 53: 23). Finally, humans have been created in the best way and are themselves responsible for their deeds (Quran, 89: 24; 95: 6).

*Temperament.* Mizaj—temperament—is a central principle in Islamic psychosomatic medicine. Kan (1986) reviews this aspect of Islamic psychosomatic medicine. Every being is endowed with the most fitting temperament for the purpose and conditions of its creation, the inherent tendency or predisposition to respond along qualitatively predetermined individual patterns. Temperamental differences are differences of response to identical situations or stimuli. One's temperament is the result of interactions of fluids in the body. There are morphological, physio-chemical, and psychological signs of temperament. Muslim scientists talk about four basic types of temperament, cold, hot, moist, and dry. Subcategories are any conjunction of these temperaments. When one quality dominates, it is said that there is an imbalance. Balance among these qualities is essential for psychological and physical health. For example, hot-tempered individuals are well-built, angry, have a lot of hair, and their excretions have deep color and odor. Types of personalities in Western psychology are similar in principle to these classifications of personality in Islam.

*Dreams.* Muslim scientists and especially Al Kindus (Azmiry, 1963; Ahwani, 1964) wrote several books about dreams. Al Kindus wrote that the self does not sleep and defined sleeping as "abandoning the five external senses." He wrote that we can voluntarily do things in order to sleep, such as being in a quiet dark room. He wrote also that when the external five senses "sleep" the internal senses, such as memory, imagination, and intuition, are the only functioning senses. When the self is free from input from the external senses, it receives input from the internal senses. The imagination second-degree ability starts using images from first-degree imagination and combines them in ways that produce dreams. The self is like a mirror that elements from reality reflect onto. The cleaner the mirror, the clearer the image. A clean self will reflect reality in a clear way. He classifies dreams into four types depending on the clarity of reflection of reality in the self: 1) Prophecy dreams: these are dreams only available to the prophets, in which they can see the future

because they can see facts of the present clearly. 2) Analytical dreams: these are dreams that require analysis of the symbols in order to be understood. A symbol can either go in the direction of the meaning, such as seeing a friend who traveled as a bird flying away, or a symbol can be interpreted in the opposite direction of the surface meaning, such as seeing a rich man as poor. 3) Meaningless dreams: these are the result of excessive mental occupation before sleeping or of physical causes.

Al Faraby (Hashim, 1968) added several theories to the explanation of dreams. He suggested that the imagination ability is connected to psychological tendencies and emotions and tries to satisfy psychological wishes and desires. This ability is creative and thus can form images that are not present in reality but are rather made up of amalgams of images of reality. He wrote also that the three levels of the self, the plant and the animal and the human, give input to the imagination ability. Thus, the plant self which has the function of nutrition may give a direction to the imagination ability to create images of food or drinks and of eating. The animal self may give direction for images of running or anger. The human self may give images of studying or praying. Dreams thus reflect information coming from all of these levels of the self. He wrote also about symbolism in dreams, suggesting that the imagination can replace one image from the first degree, such as the image of a father, by another image, such as that of the governor. This is not unlike Freudian dream theory.

Al Kindus (Rabie, 1993) also developed the theory of "the imagination cycle," in which he tried to differentiate between what the prophets "saw" and hallucinations. He said that the imagination can reach a stage of development in which it can come in contact with the effective mind. The effective mind, which can see the metaphysical world, passes images to the imagination of the beneficial mind. These images are transformed in the beneficial mind into images of things of the physical world. The visual ability receives these images and reflects them to the outside. Then the same visual ability receives these images from the outside as if they were real and passes them on to the imagination. A person believes because of this feedback that the image exists in physical reality. For Al Kindus, this is how the prophet sees things in reality, things which are revealed to him. This theory is not part of religious Islamic belief, but an attempt to explain phenomena so non-believers might understand. Hallucinations differ from this process in that the imagination becomes sick and that one does not receive images from the effective mind but only images made by the imagination, sent to the visual ability, and returned again as if they were real.

Al Faraby also wrote about day-dreaming and creativity (Hashim, 1968). He said that while the individual is awake the imagination is busy receiving images from the physical world and helping the language ability. These two functions absorb all the energy of imagination, but when an individual has an



imagination with an excess of energy, then the extra energy will be used by the imagination to create new images. These images can be seen either as creative or as day-dreaming.

### *Health and illness in Islamic psychology*

*Factors contributing to health and illness.* Shah (1966) summarizes the factors from the Islamic point of view that are important for health. These are: ecological conditions, mental and emotional aspects, sleep and wakefulness, diet and nutrition, physiological movement and rest, and retention and evacuation. Diseases in Islamic tradition are of four types: spiritual, functional, structural, and superficial (Khan, 1986). Spiritual diseases are the most severe, such as schizophrenia. Functional diseases are the disturbances that are manifested in imbalances of temperament. Structural diseases affect the size, number, or form of organs. Superficial diseases are those of the skin or hair and usually they hide an underlying disease.

### *Treatment in Islamic psychology*

Treatment in Islam starts with the unification of knowledge by the Hakim, the wise person or physician. According to Islamic psychology, fragmented knowledge cannot cure but unified knowledge can. The Hakim is the one who can unify knowledge about the problem. The Hakim has to be a believer and a moral human being because the relationship between the Hakim and the sick is part of the treatment. In Islam, treatment can be either through a single remedy or a compound one (Khan, 1968). Some diseases require a compound remedy, such as chemical and psychological. The Quran was used in itself as a treatment for some diseases which were thought to be caused by black magic or evil eye.

For many Muslim scientists the practice of religion is in many ways helpful for health (Al Gesir, 1961). For example, praying five times a day helps to reduce psychological stress and to keep structure and discipline in the life of an individual. It also gives one a chance to express feelings, hopes, needs. It offers both individual and group strength in times of hardships through belief in a powerful God. Fasting, they say, is good for the digestive system and a good practice of self-control. It is an experience close to that of the poor and hungry, which helps in developing empathy. Forbidding sexual intercourse outside marriage is good, obviously, for preventing sexual diseases and for psychological health because forming and breaking relations continually is damaging to the personality and to self-esteem. Not drinking alcohol is good for health and for society. Ablution after intercourse is good for the prevention of sexual diseases. Washing before praying five times a day is good for

health. Thus, these religious practices and others are useful in many ways for health and should be used in the process of health promotion (Al Gesir, 1961).

### Conclusion

Islamic psychology is presented here as a potentially rich new field in psychology. Islamic psychology studies the psyche from an Islamic perspective, reflects the contributions of Muslim scientists to the understanding of human behavior, and examines psychological phenomena in Islamic society, taking into consideration factors unique to society and the individual in Islam. Finally, Islamic psychology has much to offer to facilitate international understanding and cooperation.

Knowledge about the human self and behavior is not the product of a single culture but the result of all human experiences in every human culture. Truth is born in open dialogue, not in isolation.

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