

Human Psychology and Prophet Muhammad: Study of the Teachings of Prophet Muhammad Engaging the Human Psychology

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Abstract:

Psychology is directly related to the human mind, thoughts, feelings, characters, and various aspects of human mental life. It plays a vital role in human personality. Islam itself is deeply interested in psychology. The purpose of psychology is to discuss human personality and behaviour. As time passed and with the advancement and classification of knowledge started, hundreds of branches came into existence. As such, one significant aspect of expertise is psychology.

Keywords: Prophet Muhammad (SAW), psychological study, human psychology, prophetic approaches

INTRODUCTION

Man is strangled in the shackles of innumerable personal and social problems, which are an integral part of his existence on the planet Earth. The rapid changes brought about by modernity, globalization, and the explosion of knowledge have significantly impacted human mental and psychological well-being, sparking a growing concern and engagement with psychology. This has led to the increasing popularity of psychology as a field of study. The American Psychological Association has even named the decade from 2000 to 2010 the 'Human Behaviour' decade (Freedheim & Weiner, n.d.)

• **Psychology Etymologically**

Psychology, etymologically, means the science of the soul; that is, "psyche" means "breath, spirit, soul", and "logia" means "study of" or "research. To define Islamic Psychology, it is better to employ the Quranic term "Nafs" rather than psychology derived from Greek. It was Imam al Ghazali who first branded this branch of knowledge as "*Ilm an-Nafs*" or "*Ilm al Muamlaat*", the study of mind or study of behaviour. (AM, 2021).

In the Islamic realm, Ghazali was the first person to talk about psychology as علم النفس. His famous work, *Ihya Uloom al Din* Ghazali, deals with his understanding of human psychology. In the *Ihya'*, Ghazali explains his doctrine of the heart (al-qalb) by explaining that it has two meanings. According to him, the first meaning of the heart is the special flesh, pinelike in shape, positioned on the left side of the breast and has within it a hollow cavity. In that cavity, there is black blood, the source and origin of the spirit (ruh). This kind of heart is found in beasts, and it is even found in a dead body. It is a subject studied by medical doctors. (Che & Sa'ari, n.d.) (Ill et al., n.d.)

• **Spirit and Nafs**

Concerning the other two terms, spirit (al-ruh) and soul (al-nafs), he says that the spirit and the soul also have two meanings. The first meaning of the spirit is a subtle substance, the source of which is the cavity

of the human heart, and it spreads using the arteries to the other parts of the body... Its coursing is in the body, and the flowing of the lights of life and the five senses from it to the limbs resembles the emanation of light from a lamp rotated in the corners of a house. It does not reach a part of the house but that is lit by it. Life is comparable to the light on the walls, and the spirit is analogous to the lamp (Che & Sa'ari, n.d.). (Ill et al., n.d.)

• **Psychology and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)**

A common feature of the Prophet's interactions with people was his gradual approach. When a man faces a problem and society is on the verge of some challenges, the experts bombard the solutions and wish to solve the problem or shape and change the human behaviour causing the problem overnight. This goes against the human nature. The Prophet SAW reformed the Arabs according to their psychology. Because of the grave affairs with Arabs, he took the task slowly and gradually. (Atif & Rao, n.d.)

This can be seen in the prohibition of wine in Islam. Arabs were very used to alcohol. They would export and import it. It was in their flesh and blood. Therefore, making alcohol prohibited and *haram* was not a sudden order from the prophet. Alcohol is the scientific name of intoxicating products. The Quran uses the word *Khamr* خمر for this.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ فَقُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِن نَّفْعِهِمَا ۗ وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلِ الْعَفْوَ ۗ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ (Tafsir Ibn Kathir - Volume 01-10 - English, n.d.)

“They ask you ‘O, Prophet’ about intoxicants and gambling. Say, “There is great evil in both, as well as some benefit for people—but the evil outweighs the benefit.”ⁱ

This is the first Quranic injunction about alcohol. Once ‘Umar al-Khattab, Muaz bin Jabal, and a few other companions approached the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) and spoke to him about *khamr* (wine) and *maysir* (gambling – game of chances). They said that these two addictions not only detract people from man's goals but also create financial loss. This verse was revealed as an answer to their query. After the revelation of this ayah, some companions took it very seriously and stopped drinking immediately, while others continued since the ayah does not indicate the wine as *haram* activity.

Next to this a general warning was given to prohibit Muslims from drinking alcohol:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَقْرَبُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنتُمْ سُكَرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَعْلَمُوا مَا تَقُولُونَ

‘O believers! Do not approach prayer while intoxicated until you know what you sayⁱⁱ (Tafsir et al. - Volume 01-10 - English, n.d.)

One day, some of the Prophet's companions were invited to a dinner by Abdul Rehman bin Awf at his home. When dinner was done, they started drinking wine as usual. Meanwhile, maghrib salah time came. Everyone stood up and chose an *imam* from amongst them for the prayer. The imam began reciting the Qur'an, but due to his drunkenness, he misread the Surah. This Quranic verse was revealed following the incident that happened at the house of Abdul Rehman bin Awf. It was the second step against drinking alcohol, and then alcohol was declared specifically unlawful for performing prayers. Some companions stopped drinking alcohol after concluding that if something prevents them from performing prayers, then it would not be a good thing for them to adopt.

The complete prohibition of alcohol was the final step, following a period of mental and psychological preparation for the believers.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رِجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَفْلَحُونَ

Believers! Intoxicants, games of chance, idolatrous sacrifices at altars, and divining arrows are all abominations, the handiwork of Satan. So turn wholly away from it that you may attain to true successⁱⁱⁱ.

Khamr خمر refers to anything that impairs the intellect. This includes all types of intoxicants, whether

consumed as a drink, inhaled, smoked, or ingested in any other form; anything that clouds a person's judgment is classified as an intoxicant. When under the influence, individuals cannot differentiate between right and wrong, posing a risk to themselves and others. This is why there are laws against driving under the influence. A true believer avoids intoxicants.

The term 'maysir' (مَيْسِر) in verse refers to gambling, but its broader meaning encompasses any game of chance or betting where people gain wealth. This includes lotteries. An individual who engages in maysir is unable to be generous or pious. Islam encourages us to be kind to others, considerate, and exceptionally friendly, exhibiting exemplary behaviour. In maysir, we aim to take someone else's money, winning by causing harm to another.

Psychological Problems:

• Inferiority complex:

One of the individuals' numerous psychological challenges is the 'inferiority complex.' This feeling of seeing oneself as lesser and inferior to others demoralizes self-esteem. It places the affected person at risk of developing various psychological issues, such as jealousy and more.

Adler (1870-1937) was an Austrian doctor and psychotherapist who first gave the theory of the Inferiority Complex in humans. He concluded that all infants feel inferiority and hopelessness as they begin to experience the world. These early experiences, such as the need to gain the parents' attention, shape the child's unconscious, fictive goals. They give the child a need to strive towards rectifying that inferiority — a need to compensate for weakness by developing other strengths (Bell, n.d.; Goodall & Culpin, 1936). This sense of being less than others can also emerge as a psychological problem called jealousy. It makes one hate others for their success and achievements. They burn inside, and this fire eats their souls up. Islam is the first religion to identify jealousy as a life-threatening problem and asked believers to seek the refuge of Allah from the evil effects of jealousy.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ

Moreover, from the evil of an envier when he envies.^{iv}

Alder provides solutions to this psychological problem called 'inferiority complex' by saying that one should not compare oneself to others and should try to correct the imperfections and so on. These solutions are incomplete and defective. (نَبِيٌّ-اَكْرَمٌ-بَطُورٌ-مَاهِرٌ-نَفْسِيَّاتٍ n.d.) Prophet Muhammad PBUH declared and issued a universal ordinance in the famous speech of his farewell Hajj, also known as *Hajjat ul Widaa*:

Remember! An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, a non-Arab over an Arabic, a red over a black, and a black over a red, except for piety (Jafar et al., 2021).

This assertion of human equality dispels any self-doubt and significantly boosts self-esteem. The criterion for determining one's superiority over others is based on their righteousness and righteous actions. This pursuit of virtuous deeds has profound and wide-ranging impacts on society.

• Depression, Anxiety and Suicidal Thoughts: Diet and Lifestyle Modifications

When a person faces disappointment and failure in life, he is anxious and depressed. These disappointments surface due to superficial expectations in most cases. Modern society has put unbearable pressure on young minds for success and achievements. Therefore, we are left with individuals who are frustrated, hopeless, anxious and depressed. Depression and anxiety are not something new and modern. They have existed since the existence of humanity. Man, when he fails to achieve what he intended to achieve, becomes upset. When this wave of hopelessness continues, it turns into a psychological problem. This pressure of handling things and societal force has become inevitable, given today's circumstances.

One of the major branches of modern medicine and treatments is clinical psychology. Recent data shows that India has the highest rate of suicides in the world, 12.4 per 100000.^v According to a National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report released in April, 1.71 lakh people died by suicide in India.^{vi} Studies show that 50-90 per cent of these suicide committers were facing depression and mental health disorders.^{vii viii} The question is, what pushes a man to commit this extreme action of taking his life? The answer is disappointment. When the world ahead is entirely of darkness, without a single ray of hope, man sees no reason to live more. The focus of prophetic teachings is the purification of the heart and soul. As per the prophet's instruction, anything in excess is harmful to the human body and soul. He even guided his followers to eat in moderation to stay healthy. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) emphasized moderation in all aspects of life, including eating. He advised against overeating and filling the stomach, as it could lead to health issues and hinder spiritual development.

كُلُوا مِنْ طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَلَا تَطْغَوْا فِيهِ فَيَحِلَّ عَلَيْكُمْ غَضَبِي ۖ وَمَنْ يَحِلَّ عَلَيْهِ غَضَبِي فَقَدْ هَوَىٰ

Eat of the pure things that We have provided for you, and do not exceed limits in that, or My wrath will become inevitable for you. Moreover, he on whom My wrath comes due is destroyed.^{ix}

The Prophet (pbuh) followed this principle by eating in thirds and not overindulging. The Quran also warns against excessiveness in eating and drinking, promoting a balanced and mindful approach to consumption. Modern science has also identified Binge-eating Disorder as one of the factors leading to suicide. Careless eating causes high levels of cholesterol, and according to one research, lipid profile also plays a role in increasing suicidal tendencies as high levels of cholesterol are a reason for mood disorders.^x

الْكَافِرُ يَأْكُلُ فِي سَبْعَةِ أَمْعَاءٍ وَالْمُؤْمِنُ يَأْكُلُ فِي مَعَىٰ وَاحِدٍ

The unbeliever eats with seven intestines, and the believer eats with one intestine.^{xi}

The unbeliever, a person who does not believe in the Hereafter, usually has no compelling philosophical reason to restrict his or her food intake. Therefore, they tend to eat seven times as much food as their body needs. Even many Muslims overeat in this manner. The way to break such a habit of overeating is by gradually eating less and less until the body becomes accustomed to eating a moderate amount of food.

إِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ شَبِيعًا فِي الدُّنْيَا أَطْوَلُهُمْ جُوعًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

Verily, the people who ate to their fill the most in this world will be the hungriest on the Day of Resurrection.^{xii}

The teachings of the Prophet, among many others, offer guidance on maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Embracing such a lifestyle fosters peace and helps prevent diseases. Addressing the underlying issues related to eating habits is fundamental to achieving a stress-free life. Food, sleep, exercise and other lifestyle components create a personality closer to the Islamic perspective of man. Therefore, the Prophet has guided us about these matters very clearly so that the focus is on the purification of the soul and contributing to a healthy society.

• **Supplications to attune one to the Creator**

Moreover, he taught us supplications that condition our thought processes to believe in Allah and seek His refuge. This gives believers psychological strength and saves them from despair and disappointment.

اللهم إني أعوذ بك من الهم والحزن، والعجز والكسل، والجبن والبخل، وضلع الدين، وغلبة الرجال

O Allah, I seek refuge in you from grief and sadness, from weakness and laziness, from miserliness and cowardice, from being overcome by debt and overpowered by men^{xiii}.

Names with Good Connotation

He believed having good and meaningful names was necessary due to his understanding of human psychology. Throughout his Seerah, there are numerous instances where he altered someone's name if it had a negative connotation.

انه ذُكِرَ عند رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم رجل يقال له: شهاب، فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: بل أنت هشام

A person named Shahab came to the Prophet; the Prophet said: "You are not Shahab, your Hisham."^{xiv} Shahab means burning flame, while Hisham means generous. This illustrates how carefully he understood and managed the psychology of his peers. An individual's name is the word they hear most frequently. Due to environmental and social influences, Arabs traditionally had a harsh disposition and often chose similarly tough-sounding names. The Prophet addressed this by changing these names to those with positive meanings, influencing their psychology and subconscious mind over time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the teachings of Prophet Muhammad provide a holistic framework that intricately engages with various dimensions of human psychology, reflecting a deep awareness of emotional, cognitive, and social aspects of human life. His guidance not only fosters spiritual growth but also offers practical strategies for managing emotions, building resilience, and promoting well-being. The Prophet's emphasis on virtues such as compassion, gratitude, patience, and forgiveness mirrors modern psychological concepts like emotional intelligence, mindfulness, and positive psychology, which are known to enhance mental health and life satisfaction.

Furthermore, his teachings recognize the importance of self-reflection and accountability, encouraging individuals to understand their inner selves, regulate their emotions, and seek continuous personal growth. His focus on community and social relationships also underscores the human need for connection, belonging, and support, which are crucial for psychological well-being.

Prophet Muhammad's approach to dealing with stress, anxiety, and interpersonal conflicts reveals a profound understanding of the human psyche. His emphasis on balanced living—both materially and spiritually—addresses the psychological need for equilibrium in life, advocating neither extreme asceticism nor indulgence. The principles of fairness, justice, and equality in his teachings promote a sense of security and mental peace within a community, reflecting an acute awareness of the psychological effects of social justice and harmony.

By engaging with human psychology on multiple levels—individual, interpersonal, and societal—his teachings offer timeless solutions to many psychological challenges faced in modern times. This investigation highlights the relevance of Prophet Muhammad's wisdom in enhancing mental health and human flourishing, making his guidance a valuable resource for both spiritual and psychological well-being.

ⁱ AlBaqarah:219

ⁱⁱ AlNisa:43

ⁱⁱⁱ AlMaida:90

^{iv} AlFalaq:05

^v <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-sees-highest-suicides-in-the-world-12-4-per-1-00-000-national-data-6082407#>

^{vi} ibid

^{vii} ibid

^{viii} <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/magazines/panache/between-the-lines/one-suicide-attempt-every-3-seconds-india-needs-to-make-first-aid-for-mental-health-non-negotiable/articleshow/64823188.cms>

^{ix} Taha:81

^x <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7830691/>

^{xi} Sahih al Bukhari:5079

^{xii} Ibn e Majah:3351

^{xiii} Sahih al Bukhari:2679

^{xiv} Sahih al Bukhari: Bab al Adab

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