

ISLAMIC COUNSELING



MENTAL HEALTH SERIES BOOKLET 3

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WHAT IS ISLAMIC COUNSELING?



Ibadah or worship is the ultimate obedience and love for Allah, which is essential in the life of a Muslim and symbolizes the devotion of a slave to his Creator. Akhlaq is the moral character shown in one's dealings with the self and others. The implication of Islamic Counseling is for the counselors to apply these principles to Muslim clients.

Islamic counseling is the treatment of everyday human problems from an Islamic perspective. It is faith-based counseling, in which the basic premise is to understand and address the spiritual elements affecting the client's well-being. Islamic counseling is based primarily on three main components of Islamic teachings: aqidah, ibadah and akhlaq. There are also other essential concepts in Islamic counseling.

Aqidah is the belief that a Muslim must hold dearly and mandates that believers untangle the mysteries of nature not only through science but also by reflecting on the verses of the Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

IS ISLAMIC COUNSELING NEW?

Al-Kindi (d. 866) was one of the earliest Muslim scholars who wrote about depression as a spiritual ailment and used cognitive ways of treatment. Al-Razi (d. 932) described psychological illnesses in detail with their respective treatments and called it *ilaj-al-nafsan*. Al-Balkhi (d. 934) introduced counseling for everyday psychological disorders, and Al Ghazali (d. 1111) wrote extensively about psychological problems originating within the self and prescribed spiritual treatments for the self (*nafs*). Islamic counseling is centuries old, but its awareness has increased in recent decades as secular ways of counseling do not always work with Muslims and other religious groups.

HOW ARE WESTERN AND ISLAMIC COUNSELING DIFFERENT?

Western or mainstream counseling focuses primarily on secular and socio-cultural perspectives of behavior. In contrast, Islamic counseling concentrates on the spiritual aspects based on the Quran and Sunnah. From an Islamic perspective, human thoughts and behaviors are a result of the interactions of the soul (al-nafs), heart (al-qalb), spirit (al-ruh), and intellect (al-aql). They are collectively influenced by our fitrah and make up our personality.



CAN NON-MUSLIM COUNSELORS WORK WITH MUSLIM CLIENTS?

There is a severe shortage of Muslim counselors in the United States. If non-Muslim counselors are educated about the Islamic worldview, the prescribed injunctions for Muslims, and intern with Muslim clients, they can be a great asset to the Muslim community. It is also essential to know that Muslims in the US come from many backgrounds. Their cultures and practices can be different among themselves and often alien to the fundamental beliefs and practices given in the Quran and Sunnah. Graduates of Christian-based counseling programs could be instrumental in working with Muslim clients as they are faith-based counselors. This issue underscores the need for young Muslims to join the counseling profession.

WHAT IS FITRAH?

Fitrah is the natural predisposition of humans to accept the Oneness of God (Tawhid) and obey the guidelines to live as brought down by various prophets throughout the ages. Islamic counseling stresses that nothing can erase human fitrah. Those who have buried it can revive their fitrah through Islamic counseling and improve their psychological well-being.



WHAT IS SOUL?

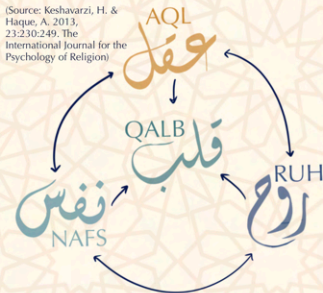
The Qur'an testifies that humans are both body and soul, but the knowledge of the soul given to humans is minimal (Q 17:85).

However, some understanding of the existence of the soul would also lead to some knowledge of the existence of God as the only object of worship (Q 7:172). When humans forget the covenant they made to Allah and disobey His rules, it leads to spiritual distress. Additionally, when one's soul inclines towards fitrah, peace descends upon oneself, a state in the Qur'an called the tranquil soul or nafs al-mutmainnah (Q 89:27). The soul also vacillates between spiritual qualities affirming loyalty to God and, at the same time, is drawn towards lower animal instincts. This fluctuation of the soul is called the nafs al-lawwamah (Q 75:2). It is possible to tame one's animal instincts through knowledge and good works and attain angelic nature. If a person cannot do this, they may appear human but can be cut off from fitrah, thus enticing one's soul to the depths of bestiality. This condition of the soul is called nafs al-ammaraah bissu (Q 12:53).

THE INTERACTION OF NAFS, AQL, RUH, AND QALB

Islamic scholars explained that four aspects of a person signify their spiritual identity. These are the nafs, aql, ruh, and qalb. All of these are intertwined and influence humans in their behaviors. The nafs is like the individual's ego and animalistic side at their lowest untrained level.

In the Islamic perspective, the nafs is not intrinsically evil, meaning that if it learns good habits, it can be of service to the individual. If it learns bad habits, it can be a barrier to one's spiritual growth. The aql is the rational faculty of humans and is home to logic, reason, and acquired intelligence. The ruh is the spirit of humans that, if kept healthy, allows one to live a meaningful and wholesome life. The qalb is the heart where the effects of the other three elements manifest.



THE HEART IS THE KING OF THE BODY

Al-Ghazali wrote that the heart is the king organ of the human body, and all other organs are its slaves. Whatever desires originate in the heart, they are likely to be followed by the other organs. If the heart wants to see something, the eyes will follow orders and see it, which is true for other organs. Although science points to the brain as the ruler, according to Islamic tradition, the heart is the ruler.

However, the knowledge and wisdom in the heart are elaborated by



the functions in the brain.

The outcome of this statement is that a person's training should be at the level of the heart and not of the brain.

In his famous book, *Diseases of the Heart (Amradh al Qalb)*, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), a renowned medieval Islamic scholar, wrote that the heart has significance in Islam because it is considered the body's leader and it is only through the purification of the heart that various other organs can become pure; otherwise, they may remain corrupted. Many other highly eminent Muslim scholars have the same opinion about the heart as the seat of the mind (Al-Nawawi, d. 1277) and as an organ of understanding (Ibn Kathir, d. 1373). Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) wrote that to know one's heart is obligatory for every Muslim.

WHAT DOES THE QURAN SAY ABOUT THE HEART?

Al-qalb, or the heart, appears at least 137 times in the Quran and in various Hadith of the Prophet ﷺ. Both sacred sources mention the word heart in different contexts. The Arabic word qalb is derived from the root word qalaba, which means to transform. Thus, the heart refers to something that changes quickly. Many different conditions of the Qalb are mentioned in the Quran. For example, arrogant heart (40:35), blind heart (17:46), contended heart (13:28), crooked heart (3:71), empty heart (24:45), hardened heart (2:74), rusted heart (83:14), sealed heart (11:74), sinful heart (2:283), hypocritical heart (27:14), trembling heart (9:2), etc. Islamic scholars have explained the meaning of the various types of hearts. In the Islamic context, many factors can influence the heart, starting with God Himself, His angels, Satan and his companions, other humans, and the person's environment.

THOSE WHO BELIEVE, AND WHOSE HEARTS FIND THEIR REST IN
THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD -



QUR'AN
13:28

FOR, VERILY, IN THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD [MEN'S] HEARTS
DO FIND THEIR REST

ISLAMIC COUNSELING: M. ASHRAF ALI THANVI (1864-1943)

(Note: The brief write-up below for both Thanvi and Balkhi is an injustice to the volumes of their writings on spiritual counseling but should give an idea to the reader of how they viewed and practiced counseling from Islamic perspectives.)

Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, an Islamic scholar in preindependence India, wrote more than 800 manuscripts on human nature, spiritual disorders, and counseling. His writings were about the interaction of the heart (qalb), soul (nafs), and intellect (aql) and how the development of spirituality and cleansing of the soul can prevent and overcome psychological disorders. Thanvi classified psychological disorders as organic or functional and believed that while

organic disorders need medicine, functional disorders can benefit from Islamic counseling because functional disorders arise from spiritual diseases of the heart. Thanvi also wrote about the constructive and destructive forces in the individual and how they are learned earlier in life, primarily through parental training, and emphasized that one can unlearn and relearn the thoughts and behaviors towards shaping a healthy personality.



TYPES AND DISEASES OF THE SPIRITUAL HEART

Thanvi described the diseases of the spiritual heart diseases under shubahat (doubtful) and shahawat (bodily desires). Shubahat arise from Satan's promptings, showing humans the love of this transient world when the scriptures reveal the path to nourish one's heart and the way to the Hereafter. Shahawat are desires that relent towards excesses in physical pleasures. When the heart strives to satisfy these urges, it may become diseased in the process.

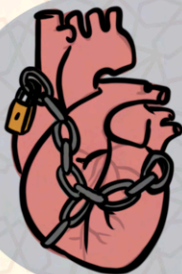
In his book, Amelioration of Heart, Thanvi discusses 15 types of hearts mentioned in the Quran with their interpretations. For purposes of brevity, only five are given here.



The hardened heart: “Then, after that, your hearts were hardened and became stones or even worse in hardness” (2:74). Thanvi explains that a human heart is like the earth. When the earth is not cultivated for a long time, and a person does not toil on it, it becomes hard and stops producing because it has not been worked on. Similarly, the heart is hardened when the individual neglects one's spiritual needs. Elaborating on this point, the Quran adds that water erupts from some rocks that tremble with the fear of its Lord, but when human hearts become hardened, they can exceed the hardness of a rock, such that the stones shy from the hardness of a human heart.

The rusted heart: “No indeed! Their hearts are rusted heart with what they have done.” (83-14) The evil deeds of humans and their sins make their hearts rusted. A hadith mentions that when a person commits an evil act, a black spot is created in the heart but is removed if the person repents. However, if the sins are repeated, the black spot keeps increasing and engulfs the entire heart. The Quran also asserts that for those who hide God's oneness, their hearts are rusted (2:273).





The sealed heart: “After him, we sent other messengers to their people, and the messengers came to them with clear proofs. But the people would not believe in what they had rejected before. This is how We seal the hearts of the transgressors.” (Q 10:74) The sealing of the hearts is for those who keep repeatedly sinning to the point that their hearts are entirely blackened and are not attracted to do anything good. It is also true for those who deny God’s existence. Due to their continued persistence in it, the heart loses its ability to see the truth.

The mindful heart: The mindful hearts are those hearts that ask God to keep them on the straight path. The opposite is the unmindful heart, also mentioned in the Quran. “They have hearts they do not understand with, eyes do not see with, and ears they do not hear. They are like cattle, even less guided. Such people are entirely heedless” (9:179), referring to the five senses of humans and they are yet unable to note the signs of nature. The exegesis explains that the animals are better as they come to their master when called but humans are often unable to use their spiritual capabilities as they have lost them because of their corrupt hearts.



The contented heart: “In the zikr (remembrance) of Allah, do hearts find peace” (13:280). The contented heart remembers God because nothing else, including wealth, name, or fame, can give true peace to humans. Similarly, the blessed or guided heart is mentioned in the Quran. It refers to the heart that is free from associating others with God. A guided heart is filled with the Sunnah or observance of the traditions of the Prophet ﷺ.

Thanvi explained that a person with a good heart would sit on the prayer mat calmly as a child sits on the mother's lap, but the one whose heart is crooked will find it hard to sit patiently on the prayer mat. Hasan al-Basri (d. 1327), a Muslim theologian, also wrote about the signs of an ailing heart, such as, a) when a person continues to sin with a hope to repent, b) to learn but not act on what is known, c) has a lack of sincerity, d) to eat and not say thanks, and e) to bury the dead and not take a lesson from it.

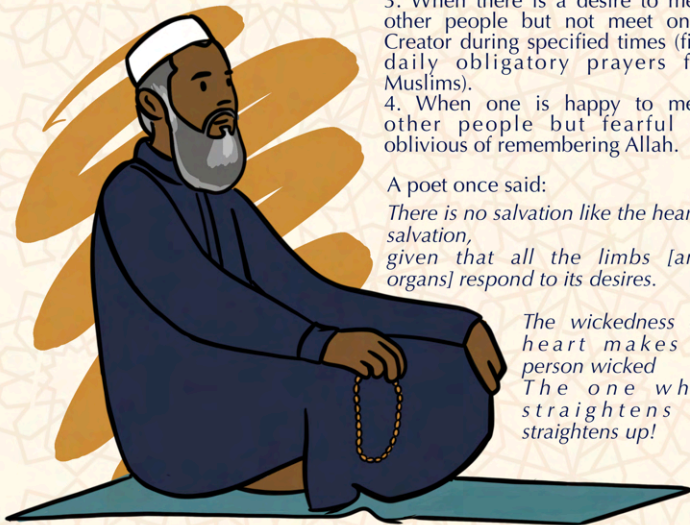
Ibn Qayyim (d. 1350), a medieval Islamic theologian, writes that there are four signs of a diseased heart:

1. When a person gives more importance to worldly things, for example, one is obsessed with a house in this world but oblivious about building a home in the Hereafter. Similarly, when seeking reputation in this world but forgetful about reputation in the Hereafter.
2. When a person cannot cry in front of Allah, especially with a heart that cries from repentance. It is from crying that the sins are forgiven, and the hearts are cleansed.
3. When there is a desire to meet other people but not meet one's Creator during specified times (five daily obligatory prayers for Muslims).
4. When one is happy to meet other people but fearful or oblivious of remembering Allah.

A poet once said:

*There is no salvation like the heart's salvation,
given that all the limbs [and organs] respond to its desires.*

*The wickedness of heart makes a person wicked
The one who straightens it straightens up!*



COUNSELING OBJECTIVES

Thanvi used Islamic counseling with the following objectives for his clients:

1. Develop an insight into the dynamics of heart, soul, and intellect. He emphasized that understanding to balance these three supernatural elements is essential for the heart's purification.

2. Develop self-will and effort to achieve good moral character. It is only through these personal qualities that improvement in the client's conditions is possible. Thanvi reminded that it is not the religious rituals but enhanced knowledge, thoughts, and actions that make a difference in the client.

3. Understand both the overt and covert divine laws (sharia) because gaining overt knowledge alone is insufficient for change. Only through the hidden meanings can one attain higher realities and improve one's psychological state.

4. Change both thoughts and actions. Thanvi reminded that finding peace should not be the objective because it is not in one's hands to find peace.

However, if one can change one's thinking and do righteous actions by following the traditions of the Prophet ﷺ, peace will automatically follow.

5. Stay in touch with the counselor until the problems are resolved. (Note: Thanvi also developed ethical standards for the counselors.)

AQL



RUH



QALB



COUNSELING METHODS

Thanvi's methods were grounded in spiritual psychology, and some of his methods are used today in modern counseling. Some of his approaches were culture-specific.



Client-centered approach: Thanvi's writings focused on each client's unique problems. He worked with them individually or in groups that discussed common issues. Thanvi took up each imperfection of the client separately and guided them toward a cure. He expected the client to meditate on the nature of one's weakness and the suggested therapy.



Directive approach: Thanvi asked his clients to repeat what they had learned and counsel them based on cultural expectations. He always recommended his clients read written materials beforehand and not move ahead unless the concepts were clear.



Reading and communication: Thanvi gave reading materials and texts of different scholars on the struggles between the heart and soul. He recommended that clients read the scriptures and make supplications from the Quran and Sunnah. He asked his clients to keep a diary of thoughts, write their thoughts freely on a paper, follow the counselor's advice, and communicate regularly with letters.



Complete faith in the counselor and perseverance in treatment. Thanvi emphasized that the clients should have full confidence in their counselor and persevere in the cure to see a positive outcome. Additionally, the client was at liberty to end the sessions if not satisfied with the counselor. Thanvi did not set time limits with his clients, as every case could be unique, and he dealt with some cases for years.



Muraqaba (Mindfulness): Muraqaba is a way to develop in-depth insight into one's spiritual heart and relationship with Allah. It helps one understand one's surroundings, eliminate base characters, and create positive ones. In Muraqaba, one can see that the thoughts are circular and can negatively influence one's thinking.

What not to expect from counseling:

Thanvi explained to his clients that they should not expect miracles or *Kashf* (inner knowledge or vision of Allah) from the counselor. They would also not gain salvation in *Qiyamah* (Judgment Day). The cultural context for this is that many people in the Subcontinent would have such expectations from their spiritual counselors. Thanvi emphasized that therapy is no magic, and religious chants cannot yield direct material benefits.

Whispers and Obsessions:

Whispers or *waswasa* in Arabic arise in the heart by themselves and are unintentional. However, creating self-thoughts is an obsession and a sinful act. Automatic thoughts, which are heavily used in CBT, are also discussed by Thanvi, and he asked that although challenging, they should be ignored. One should engage in some productive work. Narrating a hadith, Thanvi points out that God has forgiven those thoughts that occur but are not acted upon.

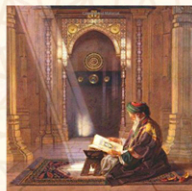


Moral approach. Thanvi asked his clients to repent from all sins as a condition for peace. He emphasized that repeating the same sins and dealing negatively with others will never open the doors of peace, like the Quran declares, "Leave all sins, open and secret" (6:120). He asked his clients to remember their sins and wrongdoings and reminded that the rewards come from facing difficulties patiently. He also reminded that the problems and calamities are tests of faith and the challenges in life decrease arrogance, and helplessness takes us closer to Allah.

ISLAMIC COUNSELING

Abu Zaid Al-Balkhi (850-934)

Abu Zayd al-Balkhi (d. 934) introduced Islamic counseling in his book, *Sustenance for Bodies and Souls*. He believed that faulty thinking is the main reason behind psychological disorders and offered cognitive therapies with spiritual approaches. He said that no human is saved from feelings of distress, anger, sadness, etc., and people differ in their responses to these symptoms. He also pointed out that because humans are made of both body and soul, they should know that an unhealthy soul could lead to an unhappy life.



Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's
SUSTENANCE OF THE SOUL
THE COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOR THERAPY OF A NINTH-CENTURY PROGRAM

MALIK BADRI

What makes the soul unhealthy?



Symptoms like anger, fear, depression, and obsession can cause the self (nafs) to become sick. Three things that can cause psychological disorders are:

- **Qiwah (forces):** an individual's positive and negative inner characteristics, understanding, and memory.
- **Akhalaq (manners):** an individual's positive and negative manners like generosity, chastity, and forgiveness.
- **Temporary symptoms:** A person's anger, fear, sadness, and obsessions.

How can we restore psychological health?

Balkhi believed that as illnesses of the body can be treated with physical things, like food and medicine, the self (nafs) can be treated by thought modification. When upset, one's thoughts are mixed with passions, and one cannot think clearly. Therefore, external help like talking to others can help. Also, internal help, like cognitive strategies, can be very practical. He asked that counselors talk about psychological symptoms in a similar way as physicians talk about physical symptoms, their nature, and how to treat them.

Balkhi described four psychological disorders and their treatment.



Anger (*Ghadab*)



Fears and Phobias
(*Fazaa'*)



Sadness and
Depression (*Jazaa'*)



Obsession (*Wiswas
al-Sadr*)

Anger

In addition to seeking help from counselors, Balkhi recommended an internal self-treatment approach, which involves thought modification and relaxation techniques. He asked clients to reflect on the feelings of guilt and remorse of people whose anger caused uncontrollable aggression and harm. He also recommended using positive thinking, like reflecting on the virtues of patience and forgiveness and remembering that gentleness and overlooking minor mistakes of others would fill the hearts of others with genuine love and mercy. It is essential to focus on the wrong deeds rather than the person, which would sympathize with the person's weaknesses. One should ask oneself whether they committed the same mistakes in one's past. Then one may find it unjustifiable to punish others for a fault they may have committed themselves. Also, reminding oneself of the wrongdoer's good characteristics can reduce negative feelings towards others.

Phobias

Here also, Balkhi recommended thought modification and encouraged the clients to gradually train their senses by cumulative exposure to the feared object (*reyadat al-nafs*). He differentiated between a fearful personality (*tabea'*) that is difficult to change versus phobias that can be changed through counseling. He asked his clients to:

- Realize that most fears are exaggerated, far from reality, and not harmful and cautioned that if one allows fear to become severe, it will prevent overcoming it.
- Think of phobias like the fog, which seem non-porous, but when the person walks through it, one realizes that it is made of thin air.
- Get the client into the feared situation to realize that it is not frightening and recommend modeling or learning from the experience of others.
- Invoke anger against one's phobia by appealing to one's pride, rebuking the soul for being scared, and telling oneself that being so panicky is not the respected behavior but of those with a weak disposition.

Depression

Balkhi wrote that no one should ever aspire to rid oneself of all anxieties and sadness as this condition is granted only to those entering paradise. He recommended the treatment of non-biological depression from trained counselors who will raise the client's morale and heal sadness. Instilling optimistic thinking, the counselor may point out that life in this world is not the abode of perpetual joy. When one looks around, one would be convinced that everyone had similar experiences in their lives, so our losses should not cause much sorrow. Instead, one should think of any pleasures as gifts that should be enjoyed with delight. The person should be grateful to God for saving them from a potentially greater mishap. Since the soul was spared from death, there still is a future to make up for what was lost. The client can survey one's own and other experiences and would realize that all sorrows will diminish and are destined to be forgotten with time. This thinking will bring comfort or happiness.



Obsessions



Balkhi wrote in the ninth century that obsessions can be an inherited predisposition or result from negative experiences. He recommended that externally, one should engage in work and spend time improving the well-being of others. To avoid internal whisperings, one should also refresh oneself with food and drink, listen to songs and music, delightful landscape, etc. A sincere friend or relative with whom the person can talk and get advice to overcome pessimistic thinking might also help. Internally, as

soon as negative thoughts start, the client should recollect healthy thoughts from the past. Whether the thoughts are due to body chemicals or works of Satan, one should not succumb but fight with mental strategies. One should reason that if the thoughts were real, people around would also react to inner whispers, but if they do not, the thought must be unreal. When a person learns that obsessions are rooted in their temperament and are not dangerous, they should learn to live with them.

SIX-STEP COUNSELING MODEL BY AL-GHAZALI

Al-Ghazali, in his famous book Ihya Uloom Ad-Deen suggested the following six-step method of treatment:



Musharata (Shart or stipulation) to make a contract or an agreement with oneself toward meeting the identified goals.



Muraqabah (Raqaq or guard) or reflection over one's actions.



Muhasabah (Hisab or an ongoing self-account) of one's actions.



Muqabah (Raqaqah or punish) or consequence oneself for failing to keep up with the self-agreement or contract.



Mujahadah (Jihad or strive) to overcome the desire of the lower nafs.



Muataba (Atab or repent) or regret for making an error and vowing not to make the same mistake(s).

Al-Ghazali's emphasis is on keeping a watchful eye on one's thoughts and behaviors to ensure the success of the self-contract. He explained that one could view one's life as a 'business,' which can bring gain or loss depending on one's conduct in relation to the six steps. The more conscious one is, and applies these steps in one's daily life, the more positive gains one can make in the overall quality of the nafs.

Details on Islamic counseling can be found in two articles: 1. Outlining a Psychotherapy Model for Enhancing Muslim Mental Health within an Islamic Context by Keshavarzi, H. & Haque, A. (2013), *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 23: 230-249 and 2. Haque, A. & Keshavarzi, H. (2014). Integrating indigenous healing methods in therapy: Muslim beliefs and practices. *International Journal of Culture and Mental Health*. 7:3, 297-314.

PURIFICATION OF THE HEART

As there are spiritual diseases of the heart, there are also treatments that can bring peace to the ailing heart and make a connection with Allah. A believer should be first aware of the diverse types of diseases of the heart and realize that they can prevent one's spiritual growth. The unobservable diseases of the heart start with a seed that has the potential of growing like cancer, engulfing the entire heart. The analogy is that a dormant element in the heart can damage the soul and eventually destroy it if nurtured and allowed to grow. Different scholars have explained various illnesses of the heart with their respective treatments. The following is a compilation of diseases of the heart listed in alphabetical order. **An Islamically oriented counselor would benefit from this knowledge and can use these strategies in working with their spiritually-oriented clients.** The letters describing the ailments of heart are in this easy to remember format: A3, B, D3, E, F3, H2, M, N, O, R, U2, V, W.

Anger

According to a hadith, a man asked the Prophet ﷺ, "What is the worst thing that one incurs from Allah?" And the Prophet ﷺ said, "His wrath." The man asked, "How do we avoid it?" The Prophet ﷺ said, "Do not become angry." Various hadith show a correlation between what a person does and what he receives from God. If one wishes not to incur the wrath of God, then one should not be wrathful to the people unjustly.



Scholars suggest two cures for anger. First, one should remember that there is goodness in patience and humility. Second, one should keep in mind that nothing takes place without God's permission and things that put us in difficulties are nothing but a test from God. The Prophet ﷺ said a strong man is not the one who can physically defeat others but the one who can control oneself when angry.



The Prophet ﷺ also advised that if one becomes angry, one should sit down, and if sitting does not bring anger down, one should lie down. If these steps do not help, one should perform ablution and pray. Another suggestion is to show goodwill to the one with whom one is angry. The bottom line is to overcome one's own emotions of anger.



Arrogance

The Prophet ﷺ warned that “No one will enter Paradise who has an atom’s weight of arrogance in their heart.” There are different types of arrogance. The first is when a person considers themselves superior to others. In this regard, Imam al-Ghazali said that “People of knowledge are in greater danger of arrogance than anyone else” because their knowledge may lead them to feelings of superiority. The second type is arrogance displayed in a person who shows contempt for others for any reason. The third type is related to one’s lineage. The Quran declares that only a person’s taqwa distinguishes one from others. One is also encouraged to study the personalities of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ, who showed utmost humility. Persons boastful of their beauty should realize that beauty is fleeting, and those who are arrogant

about their wealth may know that there are wealthier persons than them.

Aversion Toward Death

An aversion or antipathy toward death is also a disease of the heart because it takes one away from the ultimate reality that everyone will die. A believer is reminded to look at death as mercy from God because one is taken from a life full of difficulties and challenges into peace and freedom. This does not mean that one should desire death because life itself is a great blessing. However, the person remembering death is spiritually elevated in some ways, like finding contentment and motivation to do good deeds. Those heedless of death have no compunction in doing wrong and are spiritually weakened.





nor should women mock other women, for it may be that they are better than them. And do not taunt one another nor insult each other with nicknames.” (Q 49:11)

Blameworthy Modesty

Although hard on the soul, humbleness is one of the secrets of success. It is said, “Among the noblest things of this world is a rich man who is humble.” While modesty is praiseworthy, not denouncing what is wrong is blameworthy. This modesty results in meekness when one needs to be forthright and courageous. One should condemn things that are condemnable regardless of who did it. If tyranny is not stopped, it will continue to ruin the world.

Derision

Derision or ridiculing other people can also harm the spiritual heart. Even laughter and amusement at the expense of the dignity of others is inappropriate. Ali ibn Abi Talib said, “Do not belittle anyone, for he may be a saint of God.” The Quran declares, “O you who believe, do not let people mock another people; for it may be that they are better than them;



Displeasure with Blame

Some people may get angry or displeased when blamed for an act, whether one had done it or not. While this is natural, such fear could be overcome by believing that no harm can touch a human except Allah’s permission. However, it is prudent to be careful not to hurt others. One should be responsible and take precautions to not be put under any such conditions. Fear of blame could often arise when neglectful of one’s religious obligations.

Displeasure with life's trials

The negative attitude toward life's trials stems from denying God's decrees. We cannot choose what befalls us, but we can choose our responses to the difficulties in life. God-conscious people are patient with afflictions and trials. According to Islamic beliefs, everything that happens to a person falls into one of the four categories:

- Help a person move closer to God if the response is right.
- It is possible that even though one dislikes the trial, it may be suitable for the person.
- It may be that what one loves could be bad for them.
- As a trial, what has come to us has God's will and purpose.

When a person is tested with a trial one considers onerous, one should think that:

- It could have been worse.
- It was in worldly matters and not in spiritual ones.
- It came in the finite world and not the infinite one.



Envy (Jealousy)

Envy or hasad is a severe disease that is often considered the root of all diseases of the heart. Envy originated from Satan when he refused to obey Allah when commanded to bow down before Adam. According to the Prophet ﷺ, envy consumes virtuous deeds like fire destroys dry wood. Envy or questioning someone else's blessings is like questioning God's decisions. This is what makes envy forbidden. Envy is permissible in two cases. The first is from a wealthy person who spends on noble causes, and the second is



from someone who is knowledgeable and shares it with others. These kinds of envy may encourage the person to try to achieve positive qualities and benefit others.

In the case of jealousy of another person's wealth, the cure is to consciously oppose one's impulse to have more wealth. Allah praises those who resist the unrestricted desires of their souls and promises them Paradise (Q 79:40). The envier is encouraged to do something that will benefit the envied person. For example, give that person a gift, do a favor or pray that he gets more in this world and the Hereafter. This will gain the pleasure of Allah. Another recommended treatment is knowing that holding envy harms oneself as it degrades one's soul.

Fantasizing

Fantasies are wrongful thinking and diseases of the heart. For example, thinking about the faults of others



without clear evidence. The Prophet ﷺ said, "There is a tree in Paradise reserved for one whose own faults preoccupied him from considering the faults of others."



Fear of Poverty

Fear of poverty is equivalent to harboring a negative opinion about God, who has revealed that Satan threatens you with poverty and commands immorality. But God promises you His forgiveness and bounties (Q 2:268). A person under irrational fears is also more vulnerable to transgressing laws and engaging in illegal acts. The cure for fear of poverty is working hard and having positive expectations from God. Islam promotes that a giving hand is better than a hand that takes from others.



Fraud

Fraud is making something useless or defective seem beneficial or making something terrible appear to be good. One of the most widely transmitted hadith in the Islamic tradition is the Prophet ﷺ saying, “Whoever defrauds us is not one of us.” A cure for fraud is to be honest about one’s faults and believe in Allah that barakah comes from Him.

Hatred of the World

The Prophet ﷺ prohibited hatred of the world. He said, “Do not curse the world, for Allah created the world, and it is a means to reach God’s knowledge.” He created everything in this world and subjugated its resources for our diligent use. What is censured is loving things that are sinful or lead to sins and adoring the short-lived aspects of the world that can repress spiritual yearning. The love of the world is praised or blamed based on what good or harm it brings to someone.

If the love of this world leads to a diseased heart—such as greediness and arrogance—then it is blameworthy. It is praiseworthy if it leads to spiritual elevation and healing of the heart. Hatred of things that corrupt the soul is not harmful. For example, it is essential to hate corruption, evil, disbelief, etc., and everything Allah made impermissible.

Heedlessness

Heedlessness about deen is not knowing or neglectful to what is essential in life than material goods. It also refers to being heedless of the divine purpose, accountability, resurrection, and judgment in the Hereafter. A Muslim cannot ignore what Allah has commanded because this would digress from spirituality and result in various forms of distress. The cure for heedlessness. The first is repentance and seeking forgiveness (istighfar) at least 70 or 100 times a day and is connected to accounting for one’s everyday needs. The second is to visit the righteous people (al-Salihin), including the living and the dead. Visiting graves reminds death and the Hereafter and protects against heedlessness. The third cure is to invoke benedictions on the Prophet ﷺ. The Quran says, “O you who believe, invoke benedictions upon [the Prophet ﷺ] and salutations of peace (Q 33:56).

Many scholars have attested that prayers of blessings upon the Prophet purify the soul. The fourth cure is the recitation of the Quran with reflection because it awakens the heart.

Miserliness

Miserliness can be of at least two types. One relates to the rights due to Allah and the second to the duties towards His creation. For example, one can be a miser or neglectful in their mandatory duties (ritual prayers and Zakat) and second in their obligation to support their family, relatives, and other in the community. A miser person may cling to their wealth, not realizing that spending money in the way of God purifies one's capital and, ultimately, one's soul. The treatment for miserliness is realizing that it is a blessing of Allah, and there is a part in it for those who are less fortunate. Scholars ask that we reflect that just as people climb to the heights of affluence and do not share with the needy, death awaits them without invitation. If one shares one's wealth, it could help those in dire need.



Negative Thoughts

Negative thoughts arise from forming a wrong opinion about others and could be baseless assumptions or suspicions. It could also be harmful to one's spiritual health and humanity. Suspicion in the heart, without sharing with others, is like backbiting in the heart or *ghibat'l-qalb*. Doubts about someone's character are not forbidden if they are based on clear wrongdoing to the victim, reason, and observable evidence.



Ostentation

Ostentation is flaunting one's wealth or qualities to impress others. When the person seeks praise from others, one has swerved from the path of religion, where it is essential to realize that all source of goodness comes from Allah. Ostentation may also bring dislike, scorn, and humiliation from other people, but they may never say it. It is better to veil one's actions from other people's eyes. When ostentation occurs, it is recommended that one recite *Istighfar* or forgiveness from Allah.

Relying on someone other than Allah

Relying on, fearing, or wanting anyone for help other than God goes against the principles of Islam and can be equivalent to shirk, which is a major sin. Such behaviors prove a lack of belief and trust in Allah. The believer must always keep in mind that Allah alone provides relief. While seeking assistance in our work is fine, the faith of a Muslim must be that nothing can be achieved or get done without the will of Allah. Muslims are encouraged to supplicate Allah for big things and small things.

Ungratefulness

Being ungrateful for our blessings is also a disease of the heart. The blessings to us are beyond numeration and come to us in all forms. What we can see and touch by way of material goods, like food, clothing, shelter, etc., and what we do not always see, like sound health, safety, friendship, etc., are all gifts from Allah. While we cannot count our blessings, we must be grateful for them. Gratitude to Allah protects one from having the benefits taken away.

Unrestrained Glances

Staring and gazing without restraint is also disobedience to Allah and a disease of the heart. The Quran declares, "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that is more purifying. Indeed, Allah is aware of what they do. And say to the believing women they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty (24:30-31).

Sinful acts may start by looking at obscene things and lead to an act of sin. What is asked here is not to look at the opposite gender or anyone else except the spouse with lust or sexual desire. The criteria for this are repeated and continuous gaze. A believer should be aware of the Islamic rulings on glances.



Vanity

Vanity is a sense of superiority. The person with this disease is usually impressed with oneself, admiring one's talents, possessions, looks, and status, and considers others lower than themselves. These feelings invite illness in the heart. A believer knows that all success comes from God's blessings. The best way to watch out against vanity is to know at every moment that God is watching. All acts and thoughts of a person are recorded by the angels for which one must give account on the Day of Judgment. Another way to avoid vanity is to embrace one's imperfections and be grateful for what one has because the price of vanity can be very high.

Wantonness

Wantonness is an insatiable desire to have more. The treatment for such illness is fasting and reflecting on one's ending and the life hereafter. A fasting person should believe that too much food harms the spiritual heart, and reflection on death will sober the thoughts of wanting more. It is easy for a person with endless desires to transgress the rights of others. Scholars say that the love of this world encrusts the heart and a dedication to the material world restricts one's spiritual growth. There is no prohibition on laughter but a reminder that only amusement in life can numb the spiritual self.

(Note: While there are many books on Purification of the Heart, Shaikh Hamza Yusuf describes Imam Mawlud's writings in detail.)

Spiritual treatment for the heart

A comprehensive treatment of the illnesses of the heart requires a person to fast, do nightly prayers, observe silence, and reflect in private. To achieve this, one must prohibit oneself from things prohibited in Islam. While a Muslim must be aware of Islamic rulings on everyday matters, one must also be cautious about the potential for excesses in spiritual practices. For example, one cannot deprive oneself of sleep to affect one's health. Spiritual prescriptions are designed to control the soul's desires and not be controlled by them. Reflecting on the attributes of Allah by pondering over the meanings of each of His divine names can also be a great source of knowledge and

blessings. The scholars also speak of the importance of keeping good company. It is undesirable to take someone as a friend whose company will not improve us spiritually. When it comes to worldly possessions, it is good to associate with people who have lesser means because the company of wealthy people leads a person to want more for which there is no end.



ARE WESTERN APPROACHES IN COUNSELING USEFUL?

It is crucial to know that many western approaches are compatible with Islam and were started by Muslim scholars. See, for example, Contributions of Early Muslim Scholars to Psychology by Haque (2004), Journal of Religion and Health, 43, 45-58. While the counselors use western approaches in therapies, it is essential to know and integrate the belief systems of Muslim clients to have a more favorable outcome in counseling. The field of Islamic counseling and psychology was dormant for centuries but is making a comeback in many parts of the world. See, for instance, Islamic Psychology Around the Globe by Haque and Rothman (2021), International Association of Islamic Psychology.



Islamic Supplications (Duas)

In Islamic belief, supplication or dua is an act of worship and brings the person closer to God, who answers our prayers (Q 2:186). Muslims commonly use Supplications, which can be a part of Islamic counseling. An essential consideration in making dua is that the person should not associate or believe that anyone other than Allah can give what we want. Also, purity of income and other factors are conditions for accepting our prayers.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MOST COMPASSIONATE, THE MOST MERCIFUL.

ادْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً

Call on your Lord humbly and secretly... (Al-Araaf, 7:55)

The following duas from Quran and Hadith are taken from Munajat-e-Maqbul (The Accepted Whispers) compiled by Mawlana Ashraf Ali Thanvi and drew from Al-Hizb al-Azam (The Great Prayer Book) by Mulla Ali-al-Qari (d. 1602).



اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْعَجْزِ وَالْكَسَلِ وَالْجُبْنِ وَالْهَرَمِ، وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ فِتْنَةِ الْمَحْيَا وَالْمَمَاتِ، وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْقَبْرِ

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 from being overpowered by other people.

رَبَّنَا لَا تَزَعْ قُلُوبَنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْتَنَا وَهَبْ لَنَا مِنْ لَدُنْكَ رَحْمَةً إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ

Our Lord, do not let our hearts swerve after You have guided us and grant us mercy from Your presence. Indeed, you are the most generous Grantor.

رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنْفُسَنَا وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

Our Lord, we have wronged our souls. And if you do not forgive us and grant us mercy, we shall certainly be among the losers.

يَا مُقَلِّبَ الْقُلُوبِ ثَبِّتْ قَلْبِي عَلَى دِينِكَ

O Allah, the Turner of hearts, keep our hearts turned to your obedience.

رَبِّ أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ هَمَزَاتِ الشَّيَاطِينِ وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ رَبَّ أَنْ يَحْضُرُونِ

My Lord, I seek refuge with You from the promptings of the Shaitan, and I seek refuge with You, my Lord, even from their coming near me.

اللَّهُمَّ قِنِي شَرَّ نَفْسِي وَأَعِزِّمْ لِي عَلَيَّ أَرْشِدَ أَمْرِي

O Allah, protect me from the evil of my self and give me the determination to do what is most right in my affairs.

اللَّهُمَّ رَحِمَتَكَ أَرْجُو فَلَا تَكِلْنِي إِلَى نَفْسِي طَرْفَةَ عَيْنٍ وَأَصْلِحْ لِي شَأْنِي كُلَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ

O the Living the Eternal, I beg through Your mercy. Set all my affairs aright and do not leave me under the control of my ego (nafs) for even the blink of an eye.

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ إِيمَانًا يُبَاسِرُ قَلْبِي، وَيَقِينًا صَادِقًا حَتَّى أَعْلَمَ أَنَّهُ لِيُصِيبَنِي إِلَّا مَا كَتَبْتَ لِي، وَرِضَى مِنَ الْمَعِيشَةِ بِمَا قَسَمْتَ لِي

O Allah, I beg you for the faith that settles deep in my heart, a true conviction so that I understand that nothing can afflict me beyond what you have decreed for me, and satisfaction with the provision which You have apportioned for me.

اللَّهُمَّ طَهِّرْ قَلْبِي مِنَ النِّفَاقِ، وَعَمَلِي مِنَ الرِّيَاءِ، وَلِسَانِي مِنَ الْكُذْبِ، وَعَيْنِي مِنَ الْخِيَانَةِ فَإِنَّكَ تَعْلَمُ خَائِنَةَ الْأَعْيُنِ وَمَاتَخَفِي الصُّدُورُ

O Allah, purify my heart from hypocrisy, my deeds from ostentation and pretension, my tongue from lies, and my eyes from wrongful glances. You know what the eyes deceptively glance at and what the hearts conceal.

اللَّهُمَّ فَارِجَ الْهَمِّ، كَاشِفَ الْغَمِّ، مُجِيبَ دَعْوَةِ الْمُضْطَرِّينَ، رَحْمَنَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَرَحِيمَهُمَا، أَنْتَ تَرْحَمُنِي فَارْحَمْنِي بِرَحْمَةٍ تُغْنِينِي بِهَا عَنِ رَحْمَةِ مَنْ سِوَاكَ

O Allah, the Soother of worry, the Remover of grief, the Grantor of the dua of the helpless, the Giver of mercy and compassion in the world, and the Hereafter, You alone can have true mercy on me. So, show such mercy to me that will totally free me from the need for others' mercy.



اللَّهُمَّ خَلَقْتَ نَفْسِي وَأَنْتَ تَوَفَّاهَا . لَكَ مَمَاتُهَا وَ مَحْيَاهَا . إِنْ أَحْيَيْتَهَا
فَاحْفَظْهَا، وَإِنْ أَمَتَهَا فَاغْفِرْ لَهَا . اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ الْعَافِيَةَ

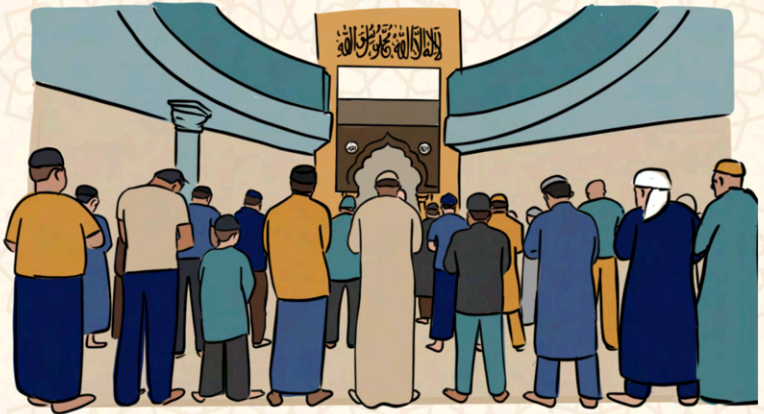
O Allah, You are the one who created my soul, and You are the One Who takes it back. Its death and life are in Your control. If You keep it alive, then protect it. And if You give it death, then grant it forgiveness. O Allah, I beg for afiyah (comfort).

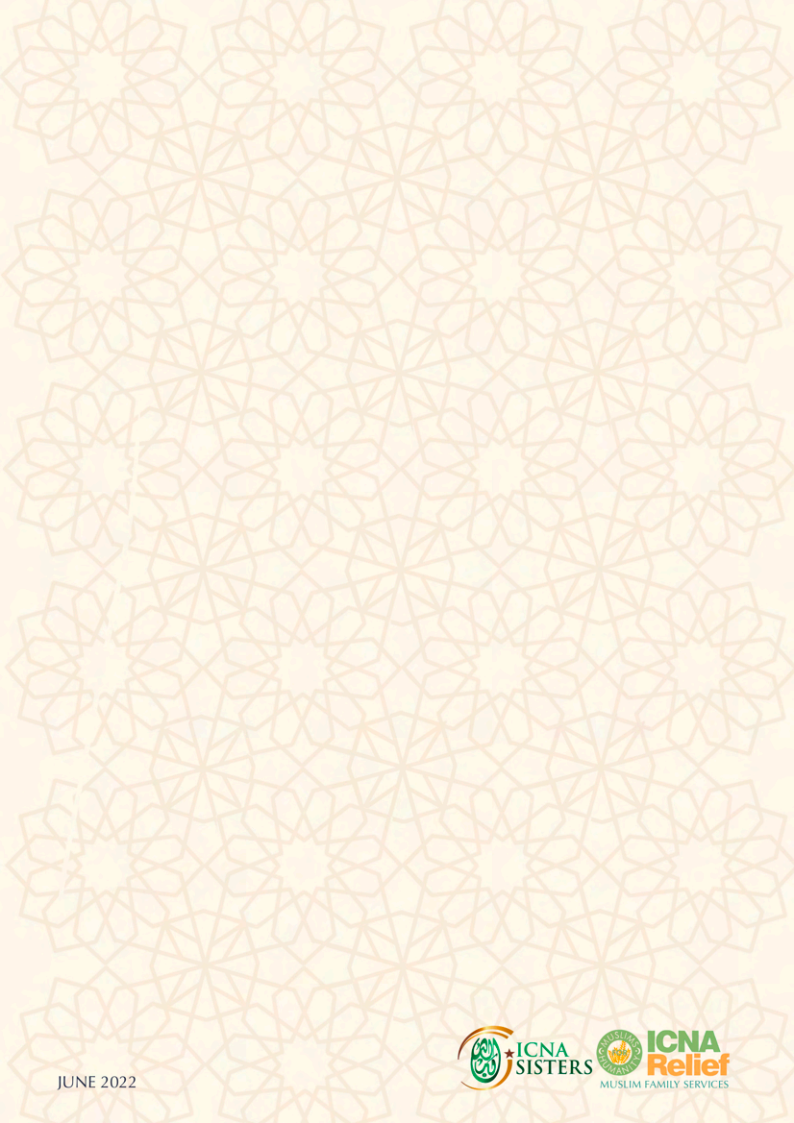
اللَّهُمَّ آتِ نَفْسِي تَقْوَاهَا، وَزَكِّهَا أَنْتَ خَيْرُ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا، أَنْتَ وَلِيِّهَا وَمَوْلَاهَا

O Allah, bestow on my soul, its taqwa. Purify it, for You are the best of those who can purify it. You alone are its guardian and master.

اللَّهُمَّ افْتَحْ أَقْفَالَ قُلُوبِنَا بِذِكْرِكَ، وَأَتِمِّمْ عَلَيْنَا نِعْمَتَكَ مِنْ فَضْلِكَ، وَاجْعَلْنَا مِنْ عِبَادِكَ الصَّالِحِينَ

O Allah, open our hearts with Your remembrance, complete Your blessings on us through Your Grace, and make us among Your pious servants.





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