

ACADEMICIANS LIFESTYLE OPINION

## Integrating Islamic Values In Handling Mental And Emotional Well-Being

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By Alizaman D. Gamon and Mariam Saidona Tagoranao

The global burden of mental health disorders has increased steadily during the past decade. Whether mental health is caused by biological factors, life experiences, or family history, it is vital to educate the people that its remedy is available and should be sought after within the domain of religious, ethical, and scientific principles and methods.

The knowledge culture of Islam values the importance of preserving and protecting good mental health and emotional wellbeing as it is viewed as a divine trust that should not be betrayed by man and his civilisation. The Qur'an and the prophetic tradition provide a practical guide to those suffering from emotional distress and aim to lead people to a meaningful quality of life.

When a believer falls ill, he is convinced no disease has no treatment. However, it is quite frustrating to think that the global mental health policies and approaches have fallen short of addressing societal burden as mental health discourse languishes in the shadows due to a reductionist approach instead of embracing a holistic and humanistic approach that the enlightened scientific communities, world leaders, scholars and intellectuals are ready to endorse.

Inspired by addressing the common misconception about mental disorders characterised by troubling thoughts, emotions, behaviour, and relationships with others that may be experienced by anybody in the society, the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), Philippines Office have jointly organised a one-day seminar on a theme "Integrating Islamic Values in Handling Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being".

The event was held on 10 January recently in collaboration with RC-AI Khwarizmi International College Foundation Incorporated (RC-AKIC), Imam Council of the Philippines (ICPI), and Institute of Islamic Studies, University of the Philippines.

The one-day seminar was intended to provide a panoramic intellectual insight that may help participants grasp the epistemological and philosophical roots of the issue from the prophetic and intellectual tradition of Islam.

The chairperson of the seminar, Dr. Alizaman D. Gamon welcomed the invited speakers and participants to the series of intellectual discourses conducted by the International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) East and Southeast Asia and the IIIT Philippines as well as individuals and institutions as partners of the Institute in promoting the integration of knowledge in the Philippines.

Before commencing the online seminar, Dr. Alizaman expressed his appreciation to IIIT East and Southeast Asia for helping IIIT Philippines to make the event a success. He acknowledged the contributions of Prof. Dr. Fauzan Nordin, the Director of IIIT ESEA, and Prof. Emeritus Dato' Wira Dr. Jamil bin Osman, the IIIT Director for Regional Cooperation. He admitted that without their hard work and support, the seminar could not be realised.

In his opening speech, Dr. Alizaman reiterated that the seminar aimed to provide a clear view of the Islamic approaches in dealing with physical, biological, intellectual, and spiritual well-being of modern man, either in the majority or minority Muslim societies that are still relevant in today's world.

He passionately told the participants, particularly the youth, that many western thinkers and intellectuals have affirmed the positive dimensions of the knowledge culture of Islam towards bringing a transformative development of the self, society, and civilisation amid anthropocentric worldview and approaches.

Reflecting on the current condition of Muslim communities in the region, Dr. Alizaman reiterated the fact that majority of the Muslim populace have been educated based on secular education, therefore there is a need to inform others, particularly the observes, that the seminar did not undermine the positive dimensions of western-secular thoughts that may seem following the epistemic and best practices of Islam, particularly its relevance with the world community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

He added that it is vitally significant to inform the Muslim communities to recognise that with the dominant influence of reductionist, materialistic, rationalistic, and mechanical understanding of mental health and the psychology of man, it has resulted into decades of confusion and crisis of knowledge both in western and non-western intellectual traditions.

Dr. Alizaman further pointed out that such confusions and erroneous understanding of man have been responsible for disconnecting the body, the spirit, and the intellect, from the core of the *tawhidic* paradigm, which is the foundation of the unity of knowledge that the Muslim communities should stand together, and uphold its principles and to prove to the rest of world about its relevance in our present societies.

Concerning the Qur'anic and Prophetic Sunnah as well as other intellectual traditions that still adhered to its sources of wisdom like Abrahamic religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, and the like, all have affirmed that man is an intricate and complicated being; his personality, his action, and behaviour cannot be understood by his *aqal* or intellect, mind, by the aspect of his body (*jasad*), senses, and physical, by the aspect of his soul, *nafs*, *qalb* or heart.

We cannot also understand man by the aspect of the senses or by only looking at his *fitrah* or his inherent nature. Any disconnection of these aspects creates a problem in both diagnosis and treatment of people who are dealing with a lot of pressures and challenges in interacting with their selves and the society at large. Therefore, any approach to mental health that is crafted from the perspective of reductionism and materialism, will fall into a tautological or repetitive error.

As we are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the prevalent methodologies in handling the problem of mental health and emotional wellbeing, our invited speakers had reaffirmed the urgency of reclaiming the lost conversation between and amongst great civilisations, religious and intellectual traditions, and cultures who shared the notion of the essence of human existence to a certain degree, particularly the empowerment of his mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being in this given era of religious and cultural pluralism or globalisation.

Dr. Alizaman posed a question to the participants whether the Muslim communities in the Philippines and the rest of the Muslim *ummah* have a profound understanding of the holistic, balanced, and integrated framework of Islam in dealing with the issue of mental health. Sadly, he pointed out that the current Muslim knowledge and practices are very much influenced by secularism and materialistic philosophy.

The IIIT Philippines had invited three local speakers and three international speakers to enlighten the participants on the subject beforehand. The theme of session I is understanding the beliefs and attitudes towards mental health problems held by Muslim communities in the Philippines. Prof. Macrina Morados, the former dean of the Institute of Islamic Studies, of the University of the Philippine Diliman, Prof. Dr. Asnawil Ronsing, the former Dean of the College of King Faisal for Arabic and Asian Studies, Sister Mlara Fatima Muti Mapandi, a member of Psychological Association of the Philippines, shared their thoughts and wisdom on the topic.

In session II, a keynote lecture was delivered by Prof. Omar H. Kasule Sr., the Secretary-General of the International Institute of Islamic Thought based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Prof. Kasule, as a prominent scholar of Islamic epistemology and medicine, has laid the Qur'anic and epistemological foundation of understanding mental health.

Given the influence of secular thoughts in the discourse of mental health, Prof. Kasule reminded the participants of the urgency to understand the dual nature of human beings: body and mind. He pointed out that contemporary social sciences like psychology, sociology, anthropology, and others have created a dichotomous approach – the physical component and spiritual component towards understanding the psychology of man which eventually led to decades of confusion that afflicted both western and non-western intellectual traditions.

Man as a physical and non-physical being, Prof. Kasule re-iterated the importance of the non-physical part of the human: *nafs*, *qalb*, *ruh*, *aqal*, *naasiyat*, *lubb*, etc in which the contemporary social sciences have failed to understand or undermined its importance in the whole fabric of contemporary social sciences.

Reading from the texts of revealed and non-revealed religions, all have re-affirmed the fact that some aspects of the non-physical components of a man like faith or iman are independent of the physical. Equally important is to have a clear view that man was created from the soil, *tiin*, and *turaab* or the physical component and thus, ensoulment has completed human creation.

The discussion became more engaging when Prof. Kasule connected the concept of *nafs* in dealing with the concept of mental health and emotional well-being. Not to confuse the term *nafs* with other faculties of man, Prof. Kasule clarified that *nafs* is the ruh; *nafs* meaning the human; *nafs* meaning the thinking power (*aqal*), and *nafs* meaning the power of virtue and evil. The three grades of nafs: a tendency to evil (*nafs ammarah*), nafs with a conscience (*nafs lawwamah*), and perfect (*nafs kaamilah*) were also highlighted due to their relevance to the psychology of man.

It is a fact that erroneous knowledge of mental health leads to wrong diagnosis and treatment. It has to be viewed that mental health is not just a problem of the mind. In many cases, mental and emotional disorders are conditions that are purely physical origin like anatomical malfunctions and imbalance of hormones that individuals may experience in varied forms and effects. It is common to all human being that whenever the body feels extreme pain, the entire human system receives the information and thus, causes mental conditions.

It is interesting to note that both classical and contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim medical scientists have commonly equated the problem of the mind can cause physical ailments like extreme anxiety which may result in acidosis, a condition in which there is too much acid in the body fluids. It is the opposite of alkalosis (a condition in which there is too much base in the body fluids).

Such malfunction may cause both physical and psychological causes that less experienced medical practitioners and clinical psychologists may fail to provide a comprehensive diagnosis and treatment. If the problem is untreated at the early stage, it eventually becomes complicated that usually entails psychological problems like violence and self-neglect.

Examining the concept of *nafs* from its inner dimension and its relationship with mental health, Muslim scholars, particularly the genuine *Salaf* and *Salaf* scholars, have clearly shown with clear Quranic evidence and Sunnatic proofs that some mental conditions are from *nafs* themselves and it is independent of physical causes. To validate such a claim has always been an issue that requires scientific or empirical evidence to prove its validity.

Looking at mental health purely from the domain of physical components is problematic by its nature. This has been the view of secular-oriented scholars that often fall into repetitive miscalculations in handling mental health and emotional well-being. Every believer has been reminded of diseases of the heart such as envy (*hasad*), hypocrisy (*nifaq*), waswas, sorrow, and depression. Indeed, the heart of many problems as Imam Al-Ghazali pointed out in his *magnum opus Ithya' ul'um ad-din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) lies on the problem of the heart.

Prof. Kasule in his keynote lecture highlighted the correlation between the issue of mental health and the concept of emotion. He correctly pointed out that emotions are positively contributing towards the health of physical and non-physical components of man as part and parcel of human nature. Maintaining its balance would ensure a healthy life-style and dynamism in faith and knowledge. Whereas, its lack of balance may unnecessarily cause illness and eventually weaken other aspects of human life. The source of positive emotions is the state of pure heart, (*qalbun salim*).

However, man's negative and positive emotions should be understood in a particular context. Anger for no reason is to be viewed as bad emotion which may threaten the established balance in man's system. Anger for Allah's sake, as many people often misunderstand, is good. We can provide a long list of various forms of anger which are aimed to attain the pleasure of Allah swt. Love, for instance, can be either positive or negative. Even good love becomes bad if taken excessively. For example, excessive love towards one's ethnic origin and viewing other cultures as inferior may entail negative emotions and feeling towards others. Thus, many diseases are caused by the failure to maintain balance (*tawazzun*), equilibrium (*itidadal*), and action-reaction (*tadafu'u*).

Prof. Kasule argued that the law of balance in lifestyle (*tawazzun/ittizaan*) can be attained through the following steps: first, man should clearly understand that he was created in the best measure (*ahsani taqwim*) and throughout his physical and spiritual journey, he needs to be trained to learn to be balanced by knowing his duties (*wajib*), objectives, basic principles, etc.

Life in its entirety could be compared with walking on a rope that man needs to be conscious and consistent in fulfilling the rights and needs of his body and spirit amid this challenging state of confusion and ignorance. Second, balance in dealing in wealth is the obligation of both individuals and society at large. The physical and spiritual condition of every individual and society is closely related to the manner how wealth is managed in conformity with the principle of the shari'ah (*maqasid al shariah*). Third, balance in *ibadat* and justice (*adl*). Fourth, a balance between individual and society. Islam wants to produce good individuals and good citizens.

Islam teaches us to address our personal problems first so that we do not become a burden to the community, thus without forgetting our obligations towards society. The fifth is a balance between *aqal* and *ruh*. The knowledge culture of Islam puts a strong emphasis on the role of *aqal* *fikr* that requires learning. The overall condition of the *ruh* is dependent on how worship (*ibadat*) has conditioned man as a true servant of God.

To derive a correct decision is therefore the obligation of every true believer. Utilising the *aqal* as an intellectual faculty of man in order to empower him to discern between right and wrong, has to be implemented with kindness and equity to oneself and others. In addition, a balance between knowledge (*ilm*) and work (*amal*) ensures good mental health and emotion. Acquiring too much knowledge with less work has a minimal effect on man's individual and social life. Similarly, hastening to work hard without proper knowledge and understanding may or may not bear positive results.

Good mental health and emotions can be attained through diligence and the right knowledge of a thing, that is how the blessings or *barakat* are being felt in one's journey in life. The blessings of Allah manifest in different forms with the condition that man and society seek to attain equilibrium of moderation between the earth and hereafter, by enjoying what is good and forbidding what is evil.

Viewing mental health from the perspective of Maqasid al-Shari'ah, Prof. Kasule explained intensively that all the five *maqasid* contribute to a balanced state that leads to normal health. The *maqasid hifdh al aql* needs to be studied from the Islamic tradition or *turath* of Islam and its contemporary equivalence to understand the physical causes of mental illness, to relieve stress in life, and to prevent and treat addiction towards vices.

Prof. Kasule reminded the participants, colleagues, organisers of the seminar, and invited speakers of their respective roles towards revitalising and integrating modern psychology with Islamic psychology where research in Islamic history with contributions by Sufis who were concerned about inner human condition and motivation, has been promoted based on the Islamicised understanding and empirical research.

Meanwhile, Dr. Jamilah Hanum Abdul Khaiyom and Nur Aini Alegrea Suñer, assistant professors at Department of Psychology, AHAS Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (KIRKHS), IIUM, shared their current research and experiences in addressing the issues and challenges of mental health from a comparative perspective.

At the initial stage of this webinar, Prof. Emeritus Dato' Wira Dr. Jamil bin Osman, IIIT Director for Regional Cooperation of East and Southeast Asia, made it clear to the organising committee that the discourse on mental health was not only timely but also a need for every society which seeks to derive practical solutions in solving problem of mental health emanating from the relevance of revealed sciences and its harmony with other social sciences. \*\*\*

(Dr. Alizaman Dumangcaq Gamon is an academic in Department of Fundamental and Inter-Disciplinary Studies, AHAS KIRKHS, and Dr. Mariam Saidona Tagoranao is an academic at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM). The views expressed here are those of the authors/contributors and do not necessarily represent the views of IIUMToday)

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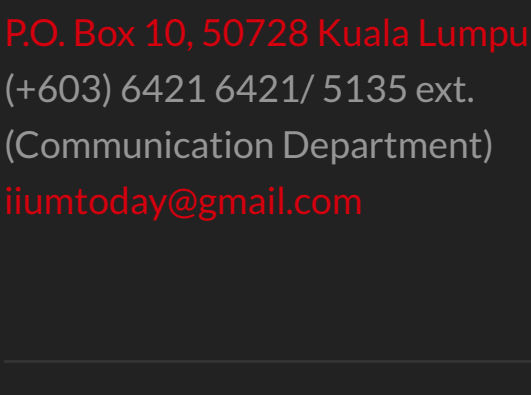
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P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur  
(+603) 6421 6421/ 5135 ext.  
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