

Islamic Perspective on Human Nature

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Abstract

Human nature is a widely and popularly discussed topic not only in the East but also in the West. This topic has drawn people from diverse backgrounds of knowledge to explore and investigate who or what man is in relationship to his Creator and other creations that exist in the universe. The research on man and the attempts to answer many of the intricate questions related to his creation and existence which started in the ancient past is still ongoing. The fact that the latest findings on man have added information to the existing body of knowledge makes the study of human nature a dynamic and perennial one. Within the scope of this chapter, the researchers have attempted to discuss the topic of human nature from the Islamic perspective. In discussing the nature of man, the researchers have ventured into the physical and metaphysical realms of his existence as described in the Qur'an. Besides that, the researchers have also entertained some discussions on how man has been perceived in mainstream Western and Islamic psychologies. In concluding the chapter, the researchers have anchored the discussion as to why the study of human nature is important.

Introduction

The topic of human nature has been a favourite topic discussed among people in many religious circles in the world. The concept of man in the different religious scriptures gives somewhat a diverse understanding towards what is the true nature of man. Since human nature is a broad topic, the researchers would like to limit the chapter to discussing what human nature is all about from the Islamic perspective. In doing so, they will refer to the two main sources of Islam, namely the Qur'an and Sunnah. While the crux of the chapter is aimed at discussing the subject matter of this research, it should be admitted that the researchers in their effort to make the research a contrastive one, will sparingly touch on some concepts of human nature that exist outside the realm of Islam, particularly in the mainstream of Western psychology.

The Ongoing Research on Man

Man being the best creation of Allah the Almighty has been a topic of discussion in philosophy, anthropology, sociology, etc. Man, with his power of speech and intellectual capacity dominates life on this planet. It is interesting to note that he is the only creation on earth that has the potential to explore and investigate the universe as well as the flora and fauna. Despite having the power and capacity to explore stars that are millions of miles away from his own planet, and other living organisms and creations, he is yet left in a dilemma to discover his true nature. In the West, man is at the brink of destruction for his life has been subjected to an ever-changing trend of life, from feudalism to monasticism, from communism to capitalism, etc. These fast-changing paradigms have made life difficult for man, especially in his effort to understand the natural disposition in which he has been created. Since man failed to understand his true nature and the reason behind his presence in this world and his ultimate journey into the next life, has made his present life chaotic, stressful, and full of anxiety and frustration.¹

¹ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, *Human Nature: A Comparative Study between Western and Islamic Psychology* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM, 1997), pp.1-2.

In the East, a fragment of men who are in their pursuit of understanding their true nature and the secrets behind their existence, have ventured into celibacy, monkish and yogi sort of lifestyles. Thinking this world is an illusion that is deceiving, they are prepared to flee from it to seek the one that is permanent and everlasting. Some even vehemently argue that to understand God, the journey should start with the understanding of one's true nature.

Modern approaches to the understanding of man's nature and behaviour, be it in the areas of psychology, biology, religion, history, anthropology, sociology, humanities, etc. are all aimed at exploring the yet undiscovered areas of his nature and potential. Researchers believe that any latest findings on man will add information to the presently existing knowledge and science on man. It is thought that knowledge of man and his disposition can be a great help in overcoming many of the problems faced by man. Besides that, it can also improve his quality of life and his state of psychological well-being as an individual coexisting with others, including the flora and fauna.²

In the field of psychology, the research on man, which started in the ancient past, is an ongoing study even during this modern scientific age. It is an undeniable fact that with time from the primitive to modern, new things have emerged concerning the study of man and his nature. Being perennial, the old and the new studies conducted on man, try to unearth and bring to light many of man's potential, which were not known previously. Nye (1986), states that although at times many of these studies complement one another in answering the intricate questions on the nature of man, there are also times when they contradict one another in their views on the theory and concept of man. Strangely enough, even living on the threshold of the modern and scientific age, psychologists like other professionals who conduct studies on man, have yet to arrive at a consensus concerning the question of what is the true nature of man.³

In the mainstream psychology of the West, the absence of an all-encompassing and holistic idea of human nature has been attributed largely to the diversity of paradigms adopted by these schools of psychology. In the case of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) who was the founding father of this school of psychology, conceptualized man in a pessimistic and deterministic manner. According to his views, man is driven by two psychological forces otherwise known as Eros (life instinct) and Thanatos (death instinct). He was convinced through his clinical research that it is a fact that every individual will be enslaved to his or her psychosexual developments in carving out his or her personality. On the contrary, the behaviourist school of psychology which based its theory in line with the 'tabula rasa' theory of John Locke (1632-1704) states that a child is a blank slate at birth waiting to write down its experiences over time. Behaviourism as well as behaviourist psychologists who laid great emphasis on learning experience believe in a concept of man that can be equated to a mechanical object. According to behaviourists like Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), J.B. Watson (1878-1958) and B.F. Skinner (1904-1990), the environment plays a vital role in shaping man's behaviour and personality.⁴ With their 'S-R' (stimulus and response) theory, the behaviourists took the neutral stand by saying that man is neither good nor bad. By putting man in a neutral position, they believe that man becomes good when placed in a good

² Morton Hunt, *The Story of Psychology* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), pp.1-10.

³ Robert D. Nye, *Three psychologies: Perspectives from Freud, Skinner, and Rogers* (3rd. ed.), (California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1986), pp 1-6.

⁴ R.L George, & T.S Cristiani, *Counseling: Theory and practice* (3rd ed.), (Boston: Allyn and Bacon,1990), p.88.

environment and becomes otherwise when placed in a bad environment. In taking a neutral position, they do not believe in the concept that man is born with some innate knowledge. Furthermore, they also reject the existence of constructs such as the conscious and unconscious in the human mind. With such ideas, it is understood that the form of psychology they believe in is just purely a scientific one, which is based on the learning theory which pays heed only to the observable behaviour of man.⁵

Contrary to the earlier schools of psychology; namely psychoanalysis and behaviourism, humanistic psychology, which emerged as the 'Third Force' of the Western mainstream psychology, deems man to be of innately good nature. Based on the existential and phenomenology philosophies, this school of psychology emphasizes the conscious experience of man rather than paying too much emphasis on the unconscious mind, as what has been done by psychoanalysis. Humanistic psychologists also rejected the behaviourist school of psychology for its mechanistic view of how behaviour and personality develop. They do not agree with the behaviourist concept, which states that all human actions can be reduced to a mere stimulus-response type of reaction. According to them, man has a subjective inner dimension, which influences his actions and thoughts. As such, man has the freedom of choice either to respond or not to respond to the demands of his environment. The main icons of humanistic psychology like Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) and Carl Rogers (1902-1987) believed that the good potential of man could only manifest in totality when he undergoes the process of 'fully-functioning person' and 'self-actualization'.⁶

In observing the intellectual development in the West over the last hundred years or more, it can be seen clearly that not only psychology but many other areas of research have been mainly influenced by what has been conceptualized by Charles Darwin (1809- 1882) on man. According to Darwin, the origin of man goes back to the ape family, as such, the story that refers man to as the biblical character of Adam is a fabrication. He further explained that the instincts found in man are what he has inherited from his forefathers, who belonged to the ape family. Due to the many common aspects shared by man and animals, Darwin considered man to be equal to the rest of the animal kingdom. Furthermore, he also believed that man is in no way exalted in nobility, superiority and spirituality when compared to the animals.⁷

The Position Man Occupies in Islam

Among all creations in the heavens and earth, only man has been bestowed with many distinctive qualities. As the recipient of these distinctive qualities from Allah the Almighty, man is placed on the highest pedestal in the hierarchy of creations. Some of these distinctive features are; that man has been created in the best of forms (The Qur'an, 95:1-4), provided with creative intelligence (The Qur'an, 2:31-34), given the power of speech and freedom of choice (The Qur'an, 55:4; 76: 3). Since man has been endowed with such noble qualities or for some other reasons only known

⁵ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, *Contribution of Iqbal's Dynamic Personality Theory to Islamic Psychology: A Contrastive Analysis with Freud and Selected Mainstream Western Psychology* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM,2011), pp.2-6.

⁶ G. Corey, *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (3rd. ed.), (California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company,1986), pp.101-107.

⁷ Muhammad Qutb, *Islam and the Modern Materialistic thought*. (Delhi: Hindustan Publications, 1985), pp.29-30.

to the Creator, man has been chosen to be His *khalīfah* (vicegerent) on earth. Apart from that, man has been further honoured in his stature and position when Allah made all things created in the heavens and earth to be of service to him. (The Qur'an, 45:13; 17:70).⁸ Having said the status enjoyed by man in the Qur'an, the following will be an elaboration on the preceding points highlighted on man.

ISLAMIC VIEWS ON HUMAN NATURE

The Islamic concept of human nature is a comprehensive and all-encompassing one. According to the Islamic concept, among all creations in the heavens and earth, only man stands on the highest pinnacle to be called the best creation of Allah the Almighty. It has been mentioned in the Qur'an that God has created man most beautifully and excellently: "*We have indeed created man in the best of moulds*" (95:4).⁹ This exalted position and stature make man superior to angels and other luminous creations like the sun, moon, stars, etc. The greatness of man has been further explained in the following verse:

*We have honoured the sons of Adam; provided them transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favours above a great part of our creation (17:70).*¹⁰

Having achieved a noble position in the sight of Allah does not guarantee man to be in that position forever. As explained in *Sūrah al- Tīn*: 5, man will fall from the honoured position given by Allah when he transgresses the limits set by Allah. As such, achieving honour or disgrace in the sight of Allah is a choice left to man to decide.

Apart from being the best creation, man in the Holy Qur'an has been addressed as the *Khalīfatullah fi al-ard* (Allah's vicegerent on earth). This esteemed position was conferred to man despite the protest and remonstrance that came from the angels on the eve of his creation. The exact dialogue that took place between Allah and the angels explains clearly the angels' reason for protest, as can be well understood from the following verse of *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*:

*Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said: "Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?-whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy (names)?" He said: "I know what ye know not" (2:30).*¹¹

⁸ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, *Human Nature: A Comparative Study between Western and Islamic Psychology* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM, 1997), pp.171-173.

⁹ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, translation and commentary*, (Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989), p.1670.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.694

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.24.

The exegesis in the above verse explains that the angels foresaw some negative attitudes of man, while Allah, the All-Wise saw many of the positive things that man is capable of performing on earth. As such, Allah granted man with many gifts that will enable him to carry out his duties well, as being Allah's vicegerent. Among the gifts that man acquired from Allah were, authority, freedom of action, intelligence, etc. In giving his comments on how man should use these God-given gifts, Afzalur Rahman (1988) explains:

He was to be totally independent and autonomous in his sphere of work on the earth and would be well-equipped with knowledge so that he could discover the secrets of the Universe through study, research and experience, learn to explain the forces of nature for his benefit, and gain mastery over them according to his own requirements and plan.¹²

The title *Khalīfah* places man in an honoured position to be Allah's deputy; administrator; representative, etc. on earth. His position as Allah's *Khalīfah* gives him power and authority to rule, manage and preserve the earth. Al-Maududi, in his commentary of the Holy Qur'an, explains that man's status as the *Khalīfah* (pl. *Khalā'if* and *Khulafā'*) of Allah does not make him the master of the universe, but only as a deputy who is allowed to exercise the delegated powers given to him by Allah the all Supreme. He further expounds that the office to vicegerency can be used by man in two ways: to either abuse the power and authority for the spread of evil and injustice or to use them for things that are good for humanity.¹³

In Islam, man is born with the *fiṭrah* (primordial nature). *Al-fiṭrah* in the Arabic language renders several different meanings that reveal the many positive and interesting dimensions of human nature. One meaning of the word *al-fiṭrah* explains that man comes to this world without any stain of sin. This Islamic concept of *al-fiṭrah* rejects the doctrine of the "Original Sin" as espoused in Christianity. The other meaning of *al-fiṭrah* as stated in the Holy Qur'an explains that naturally man has been born as a believer in Allah the Almighty (30:30).

Further exploration into the topic of man in the Holy Qur'an reveals that he has a dual nature; body and spirit (*rūh*). The Holy Qur'an explains that after creating Adam, Allah breathed into him His spirit:

"Behold! Thy Lord said to the angels: "*I am about to create man, from sounding clay form mud moulded into shape; "When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him "* (15:28-29).¹⁴

As such, all human beings who are the progeny of Adam are made up of two elements; the physical body, which represents clay, is mortal, and the *Rūh*, or the spirit, which is immortal leaves the

¹² Afzalur Rahman, *Muhammad: Encyclopedia of Seerah*. Vol. 6. (London: Seerah Foundation, 1988), p.1.

¹³ Seyyed Abu A'la Al-Maududi, *The meaning of the Qur'an*, Vol. 1 (7th edn.), (Lahore: Islamic Publication, 1992), pp.66-68.

¹⁴ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, op. cit., p.26.

body upon death of an individual. Man, who has been made the most honoured creation of Allah, is also entrusted with the *Amānah* (trust) from Allah:

*“We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it- he was indeed unjust and foolish” (33:72).*¹⁵

The word *amānah* in the Holy Qur’an has very many diverse meanings. *Amānah* can be referred to as reason, intellect or the faculty of volition.¹⁶ The other aspects of *amānah* also mean the power and authority given to man through the office of vicegerency. Last but not least, *amānah* could also mean the total of all the decrees, commands (*amr*) and prohibitions (*nahy*) present in the *Sharī‘ah*.¹⁷

Another aspect of man, which is contained within the Islamic concept of human nature, is that man has been given the *mīthāq* (covenant). Through this covenant, humanity as a whole has accepted Allah to be their Lord and Cherisher while they were in the form of spirits in ‘*ālam al-Arwāḥ* (in the realm of the spirits). This contract between man and his Lord has been made long before he was born into this world. The Holy Qur’an explains about this contract in *Sūrah al- A‘rāf*:

*When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam from their loins-their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): ‘Am I not your Lord (Who cherishes and sustains you)?’- They said: ‘Yea! we do testify!’ (This), lest Ye should say on the Day of Judgement: ‘Of this we were never mindful’ (8:172).*¹⁸

According to Afzalur Rahman (1988), through this covenant, Allah has imbued in the heart of every human being the knowledge that He is Allah the One and the Only Lord who deserves to be worshipped. The content of this covenant is retained in the subconscious mind of man as potentiality that can be brought to consciousness. Factors like type of education, social environment, etc. could never totally efface or tarnish the covenant, but the least they could do is to pervert and prevent the covenant from coming to the conscious part of the human being. In addition to this, Rahman also believes that despite the perversion and prevention caused by wrong education and negative social influences, the covenant is a potential lie embedded in the subconscious mind of man and it will emerge as reality in response to the positive external factors. Some of these factors that have always invited and called humanity to the remembrance of the covenant were the prophets, heavenly Books, inviters to the Truth from among the followers of the prophets, good social environment, proper and correct education, etc.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., pp.1080-1081.

¹⁶ Muhammad Asad, *The message of the Qur’an*. (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), Notes no. 87-89, pp.653.

¹⁷ Afzalur Rahman, Muhammad: op. cit., pp.15-16.

¹⁸ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, op. cit., p.395.

¹⁹ Afzalur Rahman, Muhammad, op. cit., pp.9-10.

Man being the vicegerent of Allah was also elevated in his stature and position when he was taught *al-asmā'* (attributes of Allah/ the beautiful names of Allah) by God Almighty Himself. The reference to this, man as the recipient of 'the names' has been stated in the following verse:

*And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said: "Tell Me the names of these if ye are right." They said: Glory to Three: of knowledge we have none, save what Thou has taught us: in truth it is Thou who art perfect in knowledge and wisdom"(2:31-32).*²⁰

As a result of Allah teaching *al-asmā'* to Adam, Adam and his progeny can achieve the status of being the most knowledgeable of all creations in the heavens and earth. Muslim scholars differ in their opinion with regard to the exact meaning of *al-asmā'* mentioned in *Sūrah Al-Baqarah*, verse 31. In giving his comment on the view of early Muslim scholars on *al-asmā'*, this is what Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1989) says:

The names of things: "according to commentators means the inner nature and qualities of things, and things here would include feelings. The particular qualities of feelings which were outside the nature of angels were put by Allah into the nature of man. Man was thus able to love and understand love, and thus plan and initiate, as becomes the office of vicegerent".²¹

According to Langgulong (1986), *al-asmā'* mentioned in verse 31 of *al-Baqarah* refers to *al-asmā'* *al-Husnā* mentioned in the Holy Qur'an. He further expounds that these beautiful names represent the attributes of Allah given to man as potential that need to be developed and actualized in the life of an individual Muslim. By doing so, the individual will be able to fulfill and perform his duties and obligations that will turn out to be *'Ibādah* (acts of worship done in seeking the good pleasure of Allah).²²

Whatever the meaning deduced from the word *al-asmā'*, one fact that is clearly related to human nature is that man has been exalted in his potential and knowledge compared to what has been given to the angels. With regard to the knowledge given to the angels and man, Zafar Afaq Ansari's opinion reflects the point that *al-asmā'* means an immense and unlimited potential of knowledge. He further asserts that the knowledge given to the angels is limited and specific, while man is bestowed not only with knowledge but also the capacity to generate new knowledge.²³ Another thing that needs to be highlighted here is the statement made by the angels in *al-Baqarah*, verse

²⁰ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, op. cit., pp.24-25.

²¹ Ibid., Note no. 48, p.24.

²² Hasan Langgulong, *Manusia dan Pendidikan: Suatu Analisis Psikologi dan Pendidikan*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Pustaka Al-Husna, 1986), pp.263-264.

²³ Zafar Afaq Ansari (ed). '*Qur'anic concepts of human psyche*'. (Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought, Pakistan,1992), pp.1-14.

31. This verse reveals the humble acceptance of the angels of their limited knowledge compared to that equipped and possessed by man. It also reveals that their protest and undermining of man's strength and potential on the eve of his creation were mistaken. Moreover, man compared to the angels, has the freedom of choice to react and respond to the many of the biological, psychological and sociological (environmental) demands of his mundane life. In his choice, man can be either good or evil; a righteous or a perverted transgressor towards what has been instructed in the Holy Qur'an. This has been stated in the Holy Qur'an: "*We showed him the way; whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will)*" (76:3).²⁴ A similar statement on the freedom of choice has also been mentioned in *Sūrah al-Balad*, verses 8-10; "*Have We not given him two eyes, and a tongue and two lips, and shown him the two highways (of good and evil)*".²⁵ Besides man, the other creation of Allah which is a 'rational' being and enjoys the freedom of choice is the *jinn* (genie). However, the freedom enjoyed by the *jinn* is limited compared to man.²⁶

The final aspect of man in Islam is that he is forgetful. In the Holy Qur'an, one can read the forgetful nature of man in the story of Adam. As the father of humanity, he ate the fruit of the forbidden tree together with his companion Hawwā' while he was in the garden of paradise. This incident is mentioned in *Sūrah Tāhā*, verse 115, "*We had already, beforehand, taken the covenant of Adam, but he forgot: and We found on his part no firm resolve*".²⁷ This nature of being forgetful is a trait that has been inherited by Adam's progeny.

MAN'S SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

One marked difference that separates Islamic psychology, which is based on the religion of Islam, from Western mainstream psychology, is that it discusses the existence of the spiritual dimension in man, besides all other dimensions highlighted by Western psychology. In contrast to Western psychology, Islamic psychology has a great deal of information to explain the spiritual dimension of man. The Holy Qur'an as a guidebook for man on all his moral behaviour and religious obligations also provides information on man's physical and biological nature. Besides this, what forms the core of the Qur'anic message to the whole of humanity is the topic of man's inner nature. Information on this dimension of man elaborates that man is not only a social and moral being but also a spiritual being.²⁸

To the Western mainstream psychology, the investigation on the spiritual dimension of man is never considered as a matter of great concern for the simple reason that the human spirit or soul is a thing unseen and since it is intangible, it cannot be subjected to any empirical investigation. On

²⁴ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, op. cit., p.1571.

²⁵ Ibid., p.1651.

²⁶ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, *Contribution of Iqbal's Dynamic Personality Theory to Islamic Psychology: A Contrastive Analysis with Freud and Selected Mainstream Western Psychology* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM,2011), p.83

²⁷ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, op. cit., p.788.

²⁸ Zafar Afaq Ansari, op. cit., pp.1-14.

the other hand, for Muslim scholars, this unseen dimension of human nature forms a part and parcel of their fundamental beliefs and principles. One among the many verses that state the belief in the unseen is this verse:

*“Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them” (Surah Al-Baqarah: 3)*²⁹

To believe in the existence of the human soul is one of the unseen things in Islam similar to other unseen things like believing in life in the grave, the Day of Judgment, angels, heaven and hell, etc. Under the Islamic perspective of psychology, man has a dual nature; body (physical) and spirit/soul (spiritual). As the Islamic concept of the physical nature of man has already been dealt with, the following discussion aims to explore and investigate the spiritual or the inner dimension of man. In Islam as well as in Islamic psychology, the spiritual dimension of man has been described by using several different jargon/terms; like *al-rūh*, *al-qalb*, *al-nafs* and *al-‘aql*. These terms that explain the human psyche are found in many parts of the Holy Qur’an. Thus, what follows will be an endeavour to elucidate their nature and characteristics as well as their relationship towards one another in the human psyche.

The Human Spirit (*Al-Rūh*)

The Holy Qur’an has given several different meanings to the word *al-rūh*: as a life-giving entity in (22:29; 32:9; 21:19), divine revelation in (42:52), and as the archangel Gabriel (*al-Rūh al-Amīn*) who brings the revelations to the prophets in (40:15; 16:102; 26:199). The word *al-rūh* with all its different meanings has been stated in twenty-five places in the whole Qur’an.³⁰

It should be highlighted that the primary concern of the investigation on the word *al-rūh* in this chapter will be on its meaning as the life-giving entity with its relationship to the human body and not on its other diverse meanings. As such the description given by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri (1989) on *al-rūh* is:

The word *rūh* means spirit, and what it generally implies is the breath of life, or the origin of life. It is derived from the root ‘*raha*’, which means to animate or revive, to inhale or breathe, also to leave or to go away.³¹

The Qur’anic verses that are of vital importance to the discussion of *al-rūh* are:

*They ask thee concerning the Spirit (of inspiration). Say: “The Spirit (cometh) by command of my Lord: Of knowledge it is only a little is communicated to you, (O men!) (17:85).”*³²

²⁹ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, op. cit., p.17.

³⁰ Hasan Langgulung, op. cit., p.238.

³¹ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *The Journey of the Self*, (London: Element Books Limited,1989), pp.46-47.

³² Abdullah Yusuf Ali, op. cit., p.85.

*Behold! thy Lord said to the angels: I am about to create man, from sounding clay from mud moulded into shape; When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him (15:28-29)*³³

In giving her comment on verse:85 of *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, Naumana Amjad thinks that *al-rūh* is an eternal, indivisible, non-corporeal and transcendental element that must have emanated from, or have been created by Allah the Almighty (Amjad 1992: 44)³⁴ In addition to Amjad's view on *al-rūh*, Langgulung explains the body-spirit (*jasad-rūh*) relationship in terms of '*ālam al-amr* (the world of Command) and '*ālam al-khalq* (the world of Creation). He further elaborates that *al-Rūh* belongs to the 'world of Command' and the body to the 'world of Creation'. With regards to the creation of *al-rūh* compared to the body, Langgulung (1995a) says:

Its creation depends spontaneously on the exercise of Divine will or command without the need for preparation of any material, temporal or special ground. Because the creation of non-material beings in the world of Command happens immediately since they come into existence no sooner than God commands them to be.³⁵

The above view of Langgulung can be well justified in the light of verse 82 of *Sūrah Yāsīn*: *Verily, when He intends a thing, His command is, 'Be', and it is!*³⁶ In contrast to *al-rūh*, the human body and other material beings that belong to the world of Creation normally do not come into existence without any prior preparation or necessary circumstances readily available to accept them. One good example of this is the development of the sperm-drop into a fetus in the mother's womb till it receives the Spirit and later it comes out of the womb as a newborn baby.

From the two verses (28 and 29) of *Sūrah al-Hijr* it is clear that Allah breathed into Adam His spirit (*rūhī*) after his physical and biological creation were completed. Like in Adam, all human spirits proceed from Allah. Therefore, *al-rūh* has a divine nature. Zafar Afaq Ansari³⁷ and a great number of other Muslim scholars think that even though Adam's origin was from clay which was lowly in the eyes of the angels, he was elevated from his humble origin when he became the recipient of Allah's Spirit and *al-asmā'* (names/attributes) in him. Adam's honour manifested as a reality only after he received Allah's Spirit and later when Allah asked the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam (15:29).

³³ Ibid., p.625.

³⁴ Naumana, Amjad, '*Psyche in Islamic Gnostic and philosophical traditions*', in Zafar Afaq Ansari (ed.), *Qur'anic concepts of human psyche* (pp.39-56). (Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought (Pakistan) 1992), p. 44.

³⁵ Hasan Langgulung, *Paradigm shift: The landmark of 21st century education*. (Chapter presented at the International Islamic University Malaysia. Selangor: 15th June, 1995a), p.15.

³⁶ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, op. cit., p.1134.

³⁷ Zafar Afaq Ansari, op. cit., pp.1-14.

Another difference that exists between the body and spirit (*al-rūh*) as highlighted by Langgulong is that the body belongs to the world of Creation. As such, it is subject to motion, change, alteration and bound by time and space. But *al-rūh* belongs to the world of Command and therefore it is free from time and space. Furthermore, *al-rūh* does not perish during death experienced by the human body. In his comments on verse 28 of *Sūrah al-Baqarah* (“How can ye reject faith in Allah? - seeing that ye were without life, and He gave you life; then will He cause you to die, and will again bring you to life; and again to Him will ye return”), Langgulong believes that life as mentioned in the above verse is only when *al-rūh* is united with the body, and man is proclaimed dead when *al-rūh* separates from the body. He further expresses the Islamic idea that during resurrection *al-rūh* will once again be reunited with the body.³⁸

The *rūh* besides being a life-giving entity is immortal, invisible and has a transcendental origin. It is also a potential place for generating and storing knowledge and it also has the potential for being a God-conscious entity in the human psyche. A point that needs to be mentioned here is that its potential for knowledge and God-consciousness can only be operationalized through *al-qalb* (heart) which provides the locus for cognition, thought and feelings.³⁹

The Spiritual Heart Called *Al-Qalb*

The word *al-qalb* in the Holy Qur’an appears in hundred and forty-four places.⁴⁰ The heart (*al-qalb*) mentioned in the Holy Qur’an should not be mistakenly understood as the gross physical organ that lies in the bosom of man. The *qalb* as explained by Muslim scholars refers to the subtle spiritual light that is contained within the cone-shaped structure of the human heart. The physical human heart can be considered as the point of interaction between the body and the *qalb* as a spiritual entity.⁴¹

It is interesting and noteworthy to look into Zafar Afaq Ansari’s (1992) view on the characteristics and functions of the *qalb*. According to him, the *qalb*:

represents the faculty or capacity of human personality which enables the person to know and understand the reality of things, make evaluative judgements, and sift right from wrong. The functions of the *qalb* are described quite frequently in the Qur’an along with the sensory capacities of human beings, indicating that what the *qalb* does is an extension and a superior function of what is being done at the lower level by the sensory organs like eyes and ears. However, if the functions of the *qalb* are blocked the sensory organs lose their utility.⁴²

³⁸ Hasan Langgulong. Op. cit., p.16.

³⁹ Zafar Afaq Ansari, op. cit., p.11.

⁴⁰ Hasan Langgulong, *Kreativiti dan Pendidikan: Suatu Kajian Psikologi dan Falsafah*, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1991a), p.227.

⁴¹ Manzurul Haq, ‘*The Locus of Human Psyche*’. In Zafar Afaq Ansari (ed). *Qur’anic concepts of human psyche* (pp.57-67). Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought Pakistan, 1992), p.62.

⁴² Zafar Afaq Ansari, op. cit., p.6.

The relationship of the *qalb* with the sense organs/sense perceptions can be well explained that these organs act as windows or gateways through which the transcendental *qalb* gets information about the physical world. Data received by the *qalb* will be processed by its inner illumination and later it will reveal their interrelationship and meaning to the self. Based on this meaning, the *qalb* will form its own basis of judgment and decision. As such the *qalb*, which forms one of the components of man's inner dimension makes the evaluative judgment and arrives at a decision, while the brain and the nervous system function as instruments to implement it.⁴³

The *qalb*'s role as the evaluative decision maker in the human psyche makes it the centre or seat of personality, alongside its other roles as the seat of intellectual faculties, understanding, affection and emotions. The human *qalb*, when properly functioning, can enhance the positive tendencies of the human personality that lead to a state of constant awareness and self-understanding. On the contrary, when it becomes subdued by the continuous persuasive demands of the *nafs ammārah* (the *nafs* impelling towards evil / the evil self) it loses the proper perceptual and cognitive functions. As a result of this, man's God-consciousness and his capacity for knowledge and sound judgment become clouded.⁴⁴

As a consequence of the above state, man loses his honoured position of being the best creation to a level equal to that of an animal. This downfall of man is caused by the spiritual blindness of the *qalb* that affects man's sensory organs, emotions, affections, cognition and personality. The following verse elucidates vividly the condition of a man whose *qalb* is defeated by the onslaught of the *nafs ammārah*:

*Many are the Jinns and men We have made for Hell: They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes, wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle-nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning) (8:179)*⁴⁵

Additional information on the *qalb*'s vital and central role in producing a human being who has a sound personality, who is intellectually and spiritually strong, as well as morally, socially and emotionally good, has been candidly mentioned in the following Hadīth which gives the idea that all human potential and goodness can only emerge and materialize when the *qalb* of an individual is in a good spiritual condition:

Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body; if it becomes good (reformed), the whole body becomes good, but if it gets spoilt, the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart.⁴⁶

⁴³ Manzurul Haq, op. cit., p.62.

⁴⁴ Absar Ahmad. (1992). *Qur'anic concepts of human psyche*. In Zafar Afaq Ansari (ed.), *Qur'anic concepts of human psyche* (pp. 15-37). (Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought Pakistan, 1992), p.32.

⁴⁵ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, op. cit., p.397.

⁴⁶ Muhammad Muhsin Khan, (1986). *The translation of the meanings of Sahih al- Bukhari*. (6th edn.). Vol.1. Lahore: Kazi Publications), p.44.

Another aspect of the *qalb* (heart) that deserves mentioning here is its meaning in Arabic and its nature and relationship with the *rūh* and *nafs*. In Arabic, the noun *qalb* is derived from the root word *qalaba* (verb) which means to turn around or to revolve. Its unfixed, unstable and moving condition puts it in a situation whereby it will have an inclination or tendency either to follow the *rūh* or the *nafs*. When the *nafs ammārah* becomes the dominant entity in the human psyche, the *qalb* becomes weak and makes its descent to the lowest of low levels of the *nafs* to join the *nafs ammārah*. At this stage, the *qalb*'s divine light fades away causing it to lose its power of cognition. On the contrary, when the *nafs muṭma'innah* becomes the dominant entity in the human psyche, then the *qalb* will move towards the *rūh*. At this stage, the *qalb* becomes luminous and enjoys peace and tranquility.

Human Soul/Self (Al-Nafs)

The word *nafs* as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an has several different meanings. Many times, *nafs* in the Holy Qur'an explain mainly the biological activities of man more than his conscious or cognitive part. It is also a general term used in the Holy Qur'an when referring to the whole of humanity. The word *nafs* in the singular, while *anfus* and *nufūs* in the plural have been mentioned time and again in the Holy Qur'an at 376 places.⁴⁷

In describing the nature of the *nafs*, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri says that it is indestructible, indivisible; its origin is from the realm of the unseen (non-time or pre-existence), lives in time and returns to non-time (beyond physical existence). Furthermore, he adds that the *nafs* is an essence which is immortal and non-physical and provides the impetus of life for man's physical body. It can be easily influenced by the mind, will, intellect, heart and other cognitive processes.⁴⁸

Additional information given by Naumana Amjad on the *nafs*, reveals that a great multitude of Muslim scholars believe that when *al-rūh* (Spirit) comes in contact with the human body, it forms a borderline area that connects the physical part of man with his spiritual nature, and that area is known as *nafs*. No doubt, the *nafs* is subtle; nevertheless, it contain forms (images, sensations, ideas, etc.); unlike the *nafs*, the *rūh* is formless.⁴⁹ The *nafs* as mentioned in the Holy Qur'an has three levels or dimensions. The names and characteristics of the three *nufūs* (plural of *nafs*) that have been elucidated in the Holy Qur'an are:

⁴⁷ Hasan Langgulung, *Manusia dan pendidikan: Suatu analisis psikologi dan pendidikan*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Pustaka Al-Husna), p.276.

⁴⁸ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, op. cit., pp.32.

⁴⁹ Naumana Amjad, 'Psyche in Islamic Gnostic and philosophical traditions', in Zafar Afaq Ansari (ed.), *Qur'anic concepts of human psyche* (pp.39-56). (Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought (Pakistan) 1992), p.42.

- 1) *Al-Nafs al-Ammārah* (the *nafs* impelling towards evil /the evil Self)

*Nor do I absolve my own self (of blame): the (human) soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord do bestow His Mercy: but surely My Lord is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful (12:53)*⁵⁰

- 2) *Al-Nafs al-Lawwāmah* (the changing or blaming *Nafs*/the reproaching Self):
*And I do call to witness the self-reproaching spirit; (Eschew Evil) (75:2)*⁵¹

- 3) *Al-Nafs al-Muīma 'innah* (the *nafs* at peace/the content Self):

*To the righteous soul will be said: O (thou) soul, In (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to thy Lord- well pleased (thysself) and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter thou, then, among my Devotees! Yea, enter thou My Heaven (89:27-30).*⁵²

At this junction in the discussion of the human *nafs*, it should be highlighted that the vast majority of Muslim scholars think that the three dimensions of the *nafs* may have their own independent name as though they are three separate entities, but the three dimensions or stages are referring to the same entity.

Rightly understood, they describe the three developmental stages of the *nafs*, starting from the lowest rung (*nafs ammārah*) and gradually progressing towards the highest rung (*nafs mut 'ma 'innah*). According to al-Ghazālī (1043-1111), the upward dimension of the *Nafs* in its uppermost limit links it with the *rūh*, while its downward dimension links it with the world of matter through the sensory faculties of the body.⁵³

One more fact that deserves mentioning here about the human *Nafs* is that it comes to exist in the human body together with the *rūh* (spirit), but its existence, manifestation, and development cannot be felt in the real sense by man during his childhood. But its presence can more obviously be felt during puberty and adulthood together with the physical development of the human body. The *nafs* is part and parcel of the human spirit (*al-rūh*). As such, during human death, the *nafs* which is immortal will depart from the body together with the spirit to exist in another dimension of life known as *'ālam-al-barzakh* (life after death) while waiting for *yawm-al-qiyāmah* (day of resurrection).⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Abdullah Yusuf Ali, op. cit., p.564.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.1565.

⁵² Ibid., pp.1647-1648.

⁵³ M. Umaruddin, *The ethical philosophy of al-Ghazzali*. (Lahore: SH. Muhammad Ashraf,1991), pp1-10.

⁵⁴ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, op. cit., pp.115-116.

Human Intellect Called *Al-‘Aql*

The word *al-‘aql* in the form of a noun does not appear in any of the chapters of the Holy Qur’an. But as a verb *‘aqala* with its other derivatives has been mentioned in over 49 places throughout the Holy Qur’an. Generally, these verses refer to the thinking capacity of man (i.e. 2:24 and 75; 8:22; 67:10).⁵⁵ The definition given by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri (1989) to the word *al-‘aql* is:

The Arabic word for intellect is *‘aql*, and is derived from the root *aqala*, which means to be endowed with reason, to possess intelligence, to comprehend, to understand. The intellect, in its highest sense, is a sublime power which receives the unveilings of pure light. In its lowest sense, it is the power of ordinary reasoning.⁵⁶

M. Hasan Askari and many other Muslim scholars have expressed their understanding of the human *‘aql* by using the terms *‘aql juz’ī* for reason and *‘aql kllī* for intellect. They believe that *‘aql juz’ī* or reason is the faculty of discursive and analytical thought, while *‘aql kullī* is the faculty of intuition.⁵⁷ Looking from the Sūfi’s perspective, the *‘aql* is lower in rank compared to the *qalb* for it is only capable of conceiving knowledge that comes through man’s sense perceptions, namely touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing, whereas the *qalb* can receive the divine knowledge (*‘ilm al-ladunnī*) inspired by Allah.⁵⁸

The other function of the *‘aql* as expressed by Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri is that, for the human *nafs* or self to defeat or reject its lower nature, it needs the light of the *‘aql* (intellect). The *‘aql*, besides being repulsive to what is harmful to the *nafs*, also attracts what is conducive to the healthy growth of the *nafs*.⁵⁹ Apart from the preceding views on the human *‘aql*, al-Attas’ view on the *‘aql* concerning learning and knowledge is as follows:

The term *‘aql* itself basically signifies a kind of ‘binding’ or ‘withholding’, so that in this respect *‘aql* signifies an innate property that binds and withholds objects of knowledge by means of words. *‘Aql* is synonymous with *qalb* in the same way as *qalb*, which is a spiritual organ of cognition called the ‘heart’ is synonymous with *‘aql*. The real nature of *‘aql* is that it is a spiritual substance by which the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) recognizes and distinguishes truth from falsehood.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Hasan Langgulung, *Manusia dan Pendidikan: Suatu Analisis Psikologi dan Pendidikan*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Pustaka Al-Husna, 1986), p.276.

⁵⁶ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, op. cit., p.51.

⁵⁷ Naumana Amjad, *Psyche in Islamic Gnostic and philosophical traditions*, in Zafar Afaq Ansari (ed.), *Qur’anic concepts of human psyche* (pp.39-56). (Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought (Pakistan) 1992), p.53.

⁵⁸ Hasan Langgulung, *Paradigm shift: The landmark of 21st century education*. Chapter presented at the International Islamic University Malaysia. Selangor: 15th June, 1995a), p.12.

⁵⁹ Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri. Op. cit., p.53.

⁶⁰ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *The concept of education in Islam*. (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, International Islamic University Malaysia, 1991), p.14.

From the foregoing definitions and ideas on the human *'aql*, a general assumption can be made concerning the function and relationship between the *qalb* and *'aql*. The *qalb* as the seat of knowledge uses the *'aql* as an instrument to carry out certain duties; mainly in comprehending knowledge that comes through the sense perceptions, and at the same time is involved in attaining knowledge at a higher level; intuition, enlightenment, inspiration, etc. *'aql juz'ī* as mentioned earlier can be referred to as reason or the power of reasoning which engages itself in acquiring knowledge through the sensory organs. On the other hand, *'aql kullī* which has a higher function as highlighted above can be referred to as the *qalb* itself.

It is hoped that the assumption put forward above can harmonize and fit into the idea of Al-Attas when he says: “*'Aql* is synonymous with *qalb* in the same way as *qalb*, which is a spiritual organ of cognition called the ‘heart’ is synonymous with *'aql*.” In concluding the discussion on the spiritual dimension of man, it can be said with clear-cut evidence provided so far that the three entities of the human psyche namely; the *qalb*, *nafs* and the *'aql* come into existence along with the infusion of the immortal *rūḥ* into the mortal body of man.

It is also clear from the investigation that the *rūḥ* as the divine element in the human body manifests itself in other psychic dimensions like the *qalb*, *nafs* and *'aql*. The *rūḥ* which comes from the *'ālam al-arwāḥ* (the realm of the spirits) with the command of Allah (world of Command) will abide in the human body for a certain time until the body meets death. During the bodily death of a person, the immortal *rūḥ* separates itself from the body of an individual to exist in another dimension of life known as *'ālam al-barzakh* (life after death). When the *rūḥ* departs from the human body, together with it the *qalb* and *nafs*, which form part and parcel of it, will also follow. References to this can be deduced from the Holy Qur'an, *Sūrah al-Shu'arā'*, verses 88-89, and *Sūrah al-Fajr*, verses 27-30. In these references, the *qalb* and the *nafs* have been related to the life hereafter.

The above investigation also reveals that the Holy Qur'an as well as the Muslim scholars use the terms *al-rūḥ*, *al-qalb*, *an-nafs* and *al-'aql* interchangeably. At times, what they mean as *al-rūḥ*, *al-nafs* and *al-qalb* are the same entity, while at other times the words *al-'aql* and *al-qalb* refer to the same entity. What has become clearer through the exploration of the human psyche in this segment of the chapter is that, although the *rūḥ* (spirit) forms the basic origin or entity for the emergence of the other entities of the human psyche, yet in terms of its functions and tendencies it is the *qalb* (heart) that supersedes all other entities. The *qalb*, plays a very dominant/central role in the human psyche as the seat of personality, knowledge and intellectual faculty, affections and emotions.⁶¹

⁶¹ Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, *Contribution of Iqbal's Dynamic Personality Theory to Islamic Psychology: A Contrastive Analysis with Freud and Selected Mainstream Western Psychology* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM, 2011), p.94-96.

In concluding the preceding discussion on human nature from the Islamic perspective, it can be said that man shares some of his basic characteristics with animals and he also inherits some attributes found in the angels and also some of Allah's attributes. Man, in his desire for food, sex, anger, greed, rivalry, etc. resembles the animals. While being interested in singing the praises of God and in performing other meritorious acts of devotion he resembles the angels, and finally in showing love, care, kindness, sympathy, empathy, etc. man emulates some of the godly attributes of God Almighty. The laxity on the part of man in developing and in actualizing the angelic and godly attributes in him, makes him go steep and deep in his animal nature. Due to this, he becomes a perverted transgressor and goes beyond all limits set by Allah in the Holy Qur'an. On the contrary, when man develops and actualizes the angelic and godly attributes he becomes an angelic as well as a godly individual who qualifies himself in gaining Allah's good pleasure. It has been envisioned in the Holy Qur'an and Hadith that such an individual will taste happiness in this world and an everlasting felicity in the hereafter.⁶²

Overview of the Chapter

The knowledge of human nature is very important in understanding man and his disposition. This knowledge of man can help him overcome many of the complexities of his life. As such, parents, teachers, doctors, psychologists, counsellors and other professionals who come to the rescue of man, need to equip themselves with this knowledge so that they can render better advice and services to those who are faced with problems in their life. A mere research done on animals, like the one carried out by Western psychologists, cannot fully be applied to human beings in solving their problems. Man, as the best creation of God, is much higher than the animals, in his nature as the recipient of the soul/spirit from God Almighty. It can be said that Islam and Islamic psychology have given a concept of human nature which is diametrically contrastive to what has been conceived by Western mainstream psychology. Muslim scholars explain that human nature in Islam discusses man's position not only from the physical, social and psychological angles but from the spiritual dimension as well. The comprehensive role and significance of 'aql (intellect) is something that is missing in almost all Western schools of psychology. The Islamic concept of human nature highlights many interesting facts about man, such as, that he is the best creation of Allah, born with the *fitrah* (primordial nature), he has a dual nature (body and spirit), he is the *khalifah* of Allah (God's vicegerent), he is the recipient of the *amanah* (trust) and *mithaq* (covenant), etc. With such ideas present in the Qur'an, the Islamic perspective elucidates the condition of man before his birth, his life in this world and also what happens to him after death.

⁶² Mohd Abbas Abdul Razak, *Human Nature: A Comparative Study between Western and Islamic Psychology*, (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM,1997), pp.171-175.

