

Book Reviews

Psychology from the Islamic perspective. By Aisha Utz. Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 2011, pp. 351. ISBN: 978-603-501-108-2 (Paperback).

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Psychology from the Islamic Perspective is a long awaited book that helps in satisfying the long quest endured by Muslim psychologists. Quite often, materials in this field are written from secular perspective. The author begins her book by clearly stating its objectives namely, to describe and detail Islamic perspectives on psychology, mental health and well-being, to present a number of contemporary scientific evidences that verify the miracles of the Qur’ān and to further remind readers of the potential for self-transformation that Islam offers. In line with these objectives, the author adopts an analytical and descriptive methodology. This book contains nineteen chapters with a total of 351 pages. For this review, these chapters will be reclassified as some of them share similar themes. In the introductory chapter, the author initially defines psychology from both Western and Islamic perspectives. Without denying the contributions of modern psychology, she highlights its greatest weaknesses, especially when its major schools disregard the reality (*ḥaqīqat*) of human being; specifically the soul (*rūḥ*), rendering man as nothing more than his physical body, emotion, thought and behaviour (p. 29). She then suggests a comprehensive Islamic definition of psychology, consisting of “the study of the soul; the ensuing behavioural, emotional, and mental processes; and both the seen and unseen aspects that influence these elements (p. 34).”

Human nature, which is discussed in the second chapter, is a very essential topic in Psychology. Psychologists differ in their analyses of human

nature due to their different views on this subject. Aisha Utz highlights the basic principles of Islamic psychology, that is, the dualistic nature of man where the soul is his reality. She further elaborates on the concept of *fiṭrah* with respect to the purpose of life, creed (*'aaqīdah*), faith (*īmān*), good and evil, as well as the four spiritual entities, including the soul (*rūḥ*), heart (*qalb*), intellect (*'aql*) and self (*nafs*), free will and accountability, and predestination (*qaḍā'* and *qadar*). These issues are generally absent from modern psychology but are nonetheless considered central to Islamic psychology. The third chapter deals with personality. The author stresses that issues of personality are better presented in the Qur'ān, then elaborates on a number of good personality traits such as truth, justice, humility, patience and honesty while highlighting other negative traits such as showing off, arrogance and hypocrisy. The fourth chapter is an extension of the third, but goes further and discusses the involvement of Satan in human personality – a new perspective of positive and negative psychology that is lacking in modern Western psychology. The impacts of Satan on the human is further discussed in chapter thirteen. This raises pertinent issues such as the goals of Satan, whispers, magic, possession and its signs, methods used by him as well as means of protection from him. This subject is found to be virtually silent in modern Western psychology due to its presumably unscientific nature. The inclusion of the topic of spirituality, as well as parapsychology as a chapter reflects the comprehensive nature of Islamic psychology.

The fifth chapter is on motivation which the author classifies into the following aspects: spiritual, physiological and psychological. The spiritual, according to the author, is by far the most important. It represents an innate aspect whose satisfaction leads to the fulfilment of the ultimate objective of human beings, while conversely, its disregard leads to emptiness, despair, anxiety and fear. Furthermore, the spiritual aspect is about comprehending the sense of being the true servant of Allah. Emotion is another essential subject in psychology and is addressed in the sixth chapter of the book. The author first reminds the reader that there are bounties from Allah (p. 155). She discusses some major emotions such as love, hope, hate, anger and fear, and further substantiates how these emotions affect human life while relating them to the quest for the pleasure of Allah and avoidance of His wrath. The seventh and the eighth chapters are devoted to the discussion of intelligence, reason, learning and modelling. The author highlights some differences of the discourse on intelligence from both Western and Islamic perspectives. Intelligence in the West is

merely related to enhancing abilities so as to achieve higher levels of education while in Islam, the scope is broader as it encompasses *'aql* (intellect), *'ilm* (knowledge) and *hikmah* (wisdom). Discussing divine wisdom, the author concludes that wisdom in Islam does not only relate to worldly matters but rather to submission to God and trust of His wisdom. Regarding learning, the author highlights the weaknesses of behaviourism's learning approaches that they cannot explain properly human behaviour and even disregard cognition, volition and choice. With regards to modelling, the author suggests a spiritual modelling, a new concept adapted from behaviourism. The only difference is that the author brings models and examples from Islam, especially, the Prophet SAW and his companions.

Chapter nine, which is on the concept of trials and tribulations can come together with chapter fifteen which revolves around counseling and psychotherapy. While chapter sixteen is on the attainment of peace and serenity, chapter seventeen is devoted to a discussion on the benefits of worship. In these chapters, the author introduces some dominant Western schools of psychotherapy showing their uniqueness and limitations. These schools oversimplify the complexities of human behaviour to chemical and physical data of laboratory experiments for they are keenly interested in being scientific (p. 292). She then suggests the need for modern psychotherapy to be restructured in order to fit the worldview of Muslims. With respect to counseling and psychotherapy that help patients to attain happiness and to get rid of distress due to trials and tribulations, the author affirms that it can only be attained when one is able to draw his heart to his Lord through love and worship. She then discusses several worships (*'ibādah*) such as prayer and contemplation and their effects on human happiness. The author maintains that through sincere and serious performance of religious duties, one can get support from Allah (SWT) for all of his needs whether physiological, mental or spiritual. As a result, one can enjoy a good life in both the mundane world and in the hereafter.

Chapter ten discusses consciousness, sleep and dream. Only half a page, however, is devoted to consciousness, while the remaining discussion is on sleep and dream. Dreams are either seen as divine glad tidings, Satanic whispers or reflections of thought and experience gained during wakefulness. As dream is an inspiration, the importance of its interpretation should not be discounted. The eleventh chapter

is on human lifespan development, which covers human life starting as early as the development which begins in the uterus. All facets of human development ranging from spiritual, psychological, emotional, intellectual, social and physical aspects are elaborated within the chapter; the primary focus being to nurture a relationship with Allah. The twelfth chapter is on social psychology where the author begins with a *ḥadīth* implying that socialization increases sustenance and age (p. 224). Various topics from different domains of social relationships and support are also discussed. The author stresses that relationships in Islam are centred on fear and consciousness of Allah. She highlights an attempt to redefine the family unit, among others, by stressing on the equality of sexes and women empowerment. This move is triggered by the belief that religion inhibits women's abilities, a false notion which is definitely not Islamic. The fourteenth chapter is on abnormal psychology and mental illness. Acknowledging the vast scope and various types of mental illnesses, the author focuses on two major mental illnesses, namely, anxiety and depression. In Islam, these two illnesses which cause experiences of unhappiness are always coupled together and repeated in the Qur'ān. The author stresses the role of spirituality as the major cause of mental illness without denying some other related factors. She argues that "The soul is calling out in distress for its spiritual needs, but the call is not being answered" (p. 280). The last two pages provide a summary and conclusion of her work. The author stresses again the importance of knowing oneself first. The best way to do so is throughly knowing his Lord and establishing a strong bond with Him. Closeness to God elevates oneself while, being away from Him only debases the self.

Psychology from the Islamic Perspective is an attempt to lay foundation for an Islamic psychology. The author has successfully opened a new horizon of approaching psychology of man in a way that reflects his diverse complexities. This work has good references, ranging from classical, modern, Arabic and English sources, for readers on Islamic or comparative psychology. Thus, the author's objective of writing this book is achieved. Unfortunately, since the work has too many topics, some topics are discussed briefly. The final chapter which was in effect supposed to summarize the whole discussions consists of only two pages. The book contains references but there is no index. The author should have provided an index to help her reader make better use of her work.
