

AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROTECTION OF THE MIND AND ATTAINMENT OF HAPPINESS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the guidance sent by Allah through Prophets and Messengers (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them) is for humans to achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter. Happiness is the ultimate purpose of all human endeavours; the goal pursued by all human beings regardless of their religious and cultural differences. What is happiness? How is it achieved? Answers to these questions are crucial to the understanding of the different worldviews of life. The contention of this paper is the achievement of happiness in Islam through the protection of the mind, which is one of the higher objectives of Islamic Law – *Maqasid al-Shari'ah*. Others are protection of religion, life, progeny and wealth. Firstly, the paper describes happiness on the basis of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* instead of defining it; and secondly, it expounds how happiness is achieved through the protection of the mind. The goal of this paper is to show that happiness is unattainable without the protection of the mind. In other words, the paper shows a correlation between attainment of happiness and protection of the mind. It highlights the importance of mental health. It is hoped that this work will contribute to the understanding of happiness and personal worth on the basis of the Islamic worldview.

Keywords: Happiness, worldview, mental health, *maqasid al-Shari'ah*, personal worth

INTRODUCTION

Preservation of the mind and attainment of happiness are an essential part of Islam. One could not exist without the other. Mind and happiness have been defined in many different ways. The object of this study is not to delve into the different definitions and meanings of mind, but to: firstly, explain the merits of the mind; secondly, explicate the interconnectedness of the mind and happiness, thirdly, describe how Islam preserves the mind and lastly, elucidate the limitations of the mind and the need for revelation.

I. MERITS OF THE MIND

A university is not a service station. Neither is it a political society, nor a meeting place for political societies. With all its limitations and failures, and they are invariably many, it is the best and most benign side of our society insofar as that society aims to cherish the human mind.

Richard Hofstadterⁱ

In this study, mind is described as the faculty within the human being where the following activities take place: thinking, perceiving, reflecting, believing or disbelieving, understanding, remembering, analyzing, planning, creating ideas, deciding, learning, storing knowledge, questioning, problem solving, processing and filtering of information gathered through various means, and shaping and determining how one feels and what one wants. It is “the complex of inner thoughts, feelings and desires.”ⁱⁱ

The Arabic concept for mind is ‘*aql*’ which appears in the Qur’an about forty nine times in the form of a verb ‘*aqala*, *ya’qilun*, ‘*aqalu*, *ta’qilun*, *na’qilu* and *ya’qilu* referring to the ‘use of intellect’. Kocabas believes that the wisdom behind the occurrence of ‘*aql*’ in the Qur’an in the verb form is because “it has a dynamic application.”ⁱⁱⁱ This means that if ‘*aql*’ were to be used in the Qur’an as a noun it would simply mean ‘intellect’ but its occurrence in the verb form gives it the meaning of “using the intellect or activating the intellect.”^{iv} Therefore, *kufir* – disbelief and engagement in wrong acts are the consequence of not using the intellect.

“Did I not enjoin on you, O ye Children of Adam, that ye should not worship Satan; for that he was to you an enemy avowed? And that ye should worship Me, (for that) this was the Straight Way? But he did lead astray a great multitude of you. Did ye not, then, understand? This is the Hell of which ye were (repeatedly) warned!”

(Qur’an 36: 60-63).

“When they are cast therein, they will hear the (terrible) drawing in of its breath even as it blazes forth, almost bursting with fury: Every time a group is cast therein, its Keepers will ask, “Did no Warner come to you?” They will say: “Yes indeed; a Warner did come to us, but we rejected him and said, ‘(Allah) never sent down any (Message): ye are nothing but an egregious delusion!” They will further say: “Had we but listened or used our intelligence, we should not (now) be among the Companions of the Blazing Fire!””

(Qur’an 67: 7-10).

Intellect is an indispensable attribute of human beings; it is what distinguishes them from other creatures. No creature is blessed with the type of mind human beings have. That is, the mind that ascertains the truth – *al-Haqq* – from falsehood – *al-Batil*. Allah endowed human beings with the mind to meditate the signs of nature *ayat al-Kawniyyah*

Additionally, with the mind (intellect) human beings are able to transform themselves, act morally and to do things that set them apart from other species on earth, such as exploitation of nature in the name of development.

“Do ye not see that Allah has subjected to your (use) all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made his bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, (both) seen and unseen? Yet there are among men those who dispute about Allah, without knowledge and without guidance, and without a Book to enlighten them!”

(Qur’an 31: 20)

Allah likens those who do not use their intellect to animals and in some cases even lower than them.

“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).” (Qur’an 7: 179).

Animals can’t understand the purpose of life and don’t behave morally; they can neither discriminate the right from wrong nor think of the consequences of their actions. We can group people with regard to the use of intellect into three: (1) those who think clearly and correctly. They are conscious of the limitations of intellect. Therefore, they are the ones who are duty-bound to guide others (2) those who “(succumb) to fanatic faith and belief without intellectual assessment and evaluation”^v and (3) those who believe firmly “that they know what they really do not;”^{vi} they are unconscious of the limitations of the intellect because of their rejection of revelation and faith. This group is worse than the second one because it misleads innocent masses.

It is worth noting that in order to have a mind that thinks clearly and correctly, a person must offset egotism, self-conceit, pride, passion, emotion and self-interest and humble himself/herself to Allah, the Creator and the all-Knowing. Un-submissive mind lives in doubt and illusion. It is haunted by many unanswered questions about the fundamental aspects of reality. Consequently, it doesn’t live in peace and tranquility.

Mind (intellect) is what connects a human being to the truth. Therefore, those who do not use their intellect are those who deprive themselves of guidance; they are unable to distinguish and choose the good from evil, truth from falsehood: “(When this message was delivered), (Pharaoh) said: “Who, then, O Moses, is the Lord of you two?” He said: “Our Lord is He Who gave to each (created) thing its form and nature, and further, gave (it) guidance.”” (Qur’an 20: 50).

Sound mental ability is the basis of responsibilities imposed upon human beings by Allah: “” They are assigned with the responsibility of developing the earth and taking care of everything on it, among others. The following are not accountable for their actions: (1) an insane person until he recovers his senses (2) a child until he reaches the age of understanding (puberty) and (3) one who is asleep until he wakes up.

Intellect is also the store of knowledge and a means to its attainment. Human beings possess the cognitive abilities to understand, learn from experience, apply reason and make decisions. Knowledge that is based on the mind is called ‘intellectual knowledge’. Other means and types of knowledge are: tangible knowledge, obtained by the five senses and divine knowledge, obtained through revelation.

Intellect is the basis of human beings’ free will and accountability. They are able to choose freely between the right and wrong, truth and falsehood, belief and disbelief: “We showed him the Way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will).” (Qur’an 76:3). It is evident in this verse that Allah has guided human beings to know what is good and what is bad.

II. THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF THE MIND AND HAPPINESS

“Happy is he who purifies himself and invokes the Name of his Lord and prayeth”

(Qur’an 87:14 - 15)

Abu Huraira reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “**Wealth is not in having many possessions. Rather, true wealth is the richness of the soul.**”

Hadith^{vii}

True enjoyment comes from activity of the mind and exercise of the body; the two are ever united.

Wilhelm von Humboldt^{viii}

To enjoy good health, to bring true happiness to one's family, to bring peace to all, one must first discipline and control one's own mind. If a man can control his mind he can find the way to Enlightenment, and all wisdom and virtue will naturally come to him.

Buddha^{ix}

We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.

Buddha^x

Although beauty may be in the eye of the beholder, the feeling of being beautiful exists solely in the mind of the beheld.
Martha Beck^{xi}

One of the aims of revelation is to guide man in his actions of the body, speech and mind. Actions of the former two originate from the latter. In other words, mind is the pivot on which one's actions of body and speech turn. Thinking is an activity of the mind through which one takes command of his/her actions. Hence to change one's action one must begin by changing his/her mind; the way one thinks. A negative mind (negative thoughts) leads to a negative life or negative actions while a positive mind (positive thoughts) leads to a positive life or positive actions. Every action of the mind (internal action or characteristics) leads to similar external action or characteristic. For example, a negative mind does not lead to positive action. Similarly, positive mind does not lead to negative action. According to al-Ghazali, one's actions are a reflection of one's mind:

"Character means an established state [of the soul] from which actions proceed easily, without any need for reflection and deliberation. If this state is such that good actions – i.e. those which are praised by reason and the Shari'ah – proceed from it, it is called good character. If the actions which proceed the state are evil, the state from which they derive, is called bad character."^{xii}

Here character is construed as an imprint that gives rise to the actions of body and speech (outer actions). It is a person's inner world or inner characteristic while the actions of body and speech are the person's external world or outer characteristics. To purify one's inner world is a difficult task. It is termed as *Jihad al-Akbar* – greater holy war. It is "the inward struggle against passions and ignorance," evil whispers – *wasawis* – and negative and evil thoughts. All religions teach their followers to engage in those actions and thoughts that nurture good qualities.

The Qur'an has provided a formula for positive mind and attainment of happiness: "Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah. For without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction." (Qur'an 13: 28). It is crystal clear in this verse that (true) peace of mind or tranquility can only be obtained from *zikir Allah* – remembrance of Allah: "O you who believe, remember Allah with much remembrance." (Qur'an 33: 41).

Abdullah bin Busr (may Allah be pleased with him) said that a man asked the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), "O Messenger of Allah! Verily, the sanctions of Islam have become too numerous for me (to perform them all). Inform me of something (simple) that I may adhere to." The Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) said, "Let your tongue always be moist with the remembrance of Allah."^{xiii}

Here it must be made quite plain that spending a few minutes on *zikir Allah* – remembrance of Allah – every day leads to fruitful and beneficial results. It (frequent remembrance of Allah) enhances one's concentration (clear thinking); helps a person gain a positive outlook on life; battles psychological problems such as depression, stress, worry, anxiety and helps a person maintain physical and mental health. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) also said:

"Whoever sits and does not mention the Name of Allah (before he rises) will find it a cause of sorrow from Allah. Whoever lies down to sleep and does not mention the name of Allah before rising, will find it a cause of sorrow from Allah."^{xiv}

"No people sit in an assembly without mentioning Allah, and without asking Allah for blessings on their Prophet, except that it will be a cause of sorrow upon them. Thus if He (Allah) wishes He will punish them, and if He wishes He will forgive them."^{xv}

Zikir Allah is a spiritual need and the link with Allah. Neglect of this need is the cause of anxiety and constant restlessness: "And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind." (Qur'an 20: 124-1260.

III. HOW ISLAM PRESERVES THE MIND

Mental purity is one of the objectives of Islam. Islam aims, among others, to free human mind from all obstacles to *iman* (belief in Allah and the hidden reality) and to guide people on how to act upon evil whispers– *wasawis* – and negative and evil thoughts.

Mental purity is critical to mental and physical health, productivity and efficiency. Hence it is a duty of every human being to work ceaselessly to preserve their mind (intellect). The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) described the role and importance of the mind as follows:

"Truly in the body there is a morsel of flesh which, if it be sound, all the body is sound and which, if it be diseased, all of it is diseased. Truly it is the heart."^{xvi}

The role and importance of the mind is particularly evident in the following verses:

"So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? For indeed, it is not eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts which are within the breasts." (Quran 22: 46)

"Surely the worst of beasts in God's sight are those that are deaf and dumb and do not reason." (Qur'an 8:22)

The above verses indicate that mind is the driver of one's actions, the governor of the senses, the container of intellect and the vehicle for all knowledge that a human being acquires from cradle to the grave. It is the faculty by which Allah has honoured a human being and favoured him over other creatures (Qur'an 17:70). Loss of rational capability does not only lead to the suffering of one individual but the society as a whole.

Mental health is one of the five basic necessities of human existence. The rest are: religion, life, honour/lineage and wealth. One cannot lead an honourable life or live in peace and security without preserving his mind. In order to preserve the mind, Islam has obligated and prohibited certain things. For example, it has obligated salat and pursuit of knowledge. It has prohibited intoxicants and everything that impairs the sobriety of the mind or has a negative effect on it (Qur'an 5: 90-91).

IV. BOUNDARIES OF THE MIND AND THE NEED FOR REVELATION

With the exception of the creator – Allah – everything has boundaries. The same holds true with the human mind. Its boundaries are classified into two: those set upon it by its Creator, Allah and those set upon it by its possessor.

"They ask thee concerning the Spirit (of inspiration). Say: "The Spirit (cometh) by command of my Lord: of knowledge it is only a little that is communicated to you, (O men!)"

(Qur'an 17: 85).

It is obvious from the above verse that human mind is a limited means to knowledge. Firstly, it is unable to recall every piece of information, carry out multiple tasks and process all information. Secondly, its perception is limited by what is perceived by the senses. Thirdly, Allah has given it a limited rational ability just as He has limited a human being's existence in time and space. It is unable to comprehend most of the created things and to recall some of the past events. It is also unable to fully grasp the meaning of Allah's attributes such as Allah's being *al-Awwal wa al-Akhir*, meaning, the First without a beginning and the Last without an end.

Anything that is beyond the comprehension of the mind is conveyed to human beings by means of revelation. Therefore, revelation transcends the limitations of human mind. Reason and revelation must go hand in hand; they are

complementary to each other. The relation between the two is, Nabulsi writes, “revelation is the source (of knowledge) and the mind is the mean to comprehend it (revelation) and to authenticate the text (the revealed Book)...mind comes before reporting (revelation) to authenticate the text and after reporting to comprehend it.”^{xvii} He argues that no matter how sharp sighted a person is, without light his/her sharp sightedness is meaningless. Light is a connector between the sense of sight and the visible objects. To illustrate, he writes, “when a blind man sits with a sharp-sighted man in a dark room, both of them become equal. As the eye is useless without a light that intermediates between it and the visible objects, so is the mind. It is useless without a leading revelation. So light to the eye is like revelation to the mind.”^{xviii} Here it is clear that revelation is the guiding framework within which the intellect works; it is the regulator of intellect. As a means to knowledge, intellect is limited just like senses. It is not able to know the purpose of life and to find solutions for all problems humans are faced with. It is also not able to conceive infinity.

Therefore, it is necessary for a person to know the limitations set upon the intellect so that it does not veil him/her from seeing/knowing/exploring the reality especially that which lies beyond the visible spectrum – *al-Ghaib*; one must ensure that intellect does not separate him/her from the creator – Allah.

When intellect becomes an obstruction to reality, it becomes a veil instead of a means or tool to knowledge/reality; a curse instead of a blessing. Pride, egoism and emotion are the diseases of the mind that operates outside the boundaries of revelation.

CONCLUSION

We are living in a world full of many problems without solutions because of the belief in the superiority of intellect to revelation. Unguided mind is the biggest enemy to inner peace, happiness and tranquility. The object of this study was to explain the merits of the mind, its interconnectedness with happiness, to describe how Islam preserves the mind and elucidate the limitations of the mind and the need for revelation. It is evident from the foregone that one of the distinctive characteristics of human beings is the mind. Allah created human beings and endowed them with mind to think before making any decision, to reflect on nature (the world around them) so as to believe in the Creator, to acquire and store knowledge, and to solve problems among others. It is also evident from the foregone that human actions are a reflection of their inner world. They are the mirror of their character. From a purified and guided character emanate praiseworthy action while blameworthy actions emanate from impure and unguided character. Last, but by no means the least, preservation of the purity of the mind is one of the objectives of the *Shari'ah*; it is one of its goals. Islam preserves the purity of the mind through commands and prohibitions. For example, it commands every human being to seek true knowledge and prohibits intoxicants.

ⁱ Retrieved from:

<https://www.google.com/search?q=Quotes+on+limitation+of+human+mind&biw=1440&bih=743&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwje2crf2o7SAhUJNi8KHWN-CVoQsAQIIw#imgrc=CwWu2xZGZnHU6M>: on February 10, 2017.

ⁱⁱ John Milton, “Understanding The Human Mind: The Big Picture” in Linda Elder and Richard Paul, *The Miniature Guide to Taking Charge of The Human Mind*, Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2004, p.3.

ⁱⁱⁱ S. Kocabas, *The Qur'anic Concept of Intellect* (The Word aql in the Qur'an), London: The Islamic Philosophical Society, 1987, p. 3.

^{iv} Kocabas, *The Qur'anic Concept of Intellect*, p. 3.

^v A. Parthasarathy, *The Fall of the Human Intellect*, P. 45.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, p.46.

^{vii} Bukhari, *Sahih*, kitab al-Riqaq, Bab al-Ghina ‘an al-Nafs.

viii Retrieved from https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/wilhelmvon141400.html?src=t_mind on February 14, 2017.

ix Ibid.

x Ibid.

xi Ibid.

xii Muhammad Abdul Quasem, *Ethics of Al-Ghazali: A Composite Ethics in Islam*, Muhammad Abdul Quasem: Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia, 1975

xiii Al-Tirmidhi 5/458, Ibn Majah 2/1246.

xiv Abu Dawud 4/264 and Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami' al-Saghir* 5/342.

xv Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Tirmidhi* 3/140.

xvi Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

xvii Mohammed Rateb Nabulsi “Human being and the Mind” Retrieved from <http://www.muhammad-pbuh.com/en/?p=329> on January 20, 2017.

xviii Mohammed Rateb Nabulsi “Human being and the Mind” Retrieved from <http://www.muhammad-pbuh.com/en/?p=329> on February 10, 2017 with some editing of some words.