

Why should we study Islamic Psychology?

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The question "why" is essential because it helps us gain new knowledge and make better decisions. It all boils down to understanding and staying true to our faith, identity, and purpose in this life and afterlife while maintaining the fiṭrah or innate nature on which we are born.

When we look at the Islamic worldview, we learn that...

1. The creation of human beings has a purpose.
2. This world is a place of tests, and we are responsible for our actions.
3. The Quran is the guide for everything, including human nature.
4. The humans will be brought back to life after death and judged according to their deeds.

The Quran says that humans are:

A. A physical creation. Bismillah...

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ فَإِذَا هُوَ خَصِيمٌ مُبِينٌ

“He (Allah) has created humans from a sperm-drop; and they become an open disputer!” [16:4]

B. A Spirit.

ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ

Then He proportioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit (32:7)

C. Possess a Fitrah or predisposition to worship One God.

فَفِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا

[Adhere to] the fitrah of Allah upon which He has created [all] people... ' [Surah Ar-Room 30:30].

D. Can also be Light:

يَوْمَ تَرَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَسْعَى نُورُهُمْ

بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ

On the Day you see the believing men and women with their light emanating before them and to their right. (57:12).

The Quran has mentioned Nafs 298 x, Qalb 132 x (with 15 different types of spiritual hearts), and 'Aql 49 x, discussing their interplay and impact on our personality and life's outcomes.

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ

“We will soon show them our signs in the universe and in their own souls, until it becomes quite clear to them that is the Truth.” (41:53).

وَفِي الْأَرْضِ آيَاتٌ لِلْمُوقِنِينَ وَفِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ

“And there are signs on the earth for those who are certain. And in your own souls (too); will you not then see?”(51: 20-21).

These verses from the Quran and our creed mandates that we unravel the mysteries of human nature not only through modern science but also through the Divine words and wisdom as scientific knowledge keeps changing, while Divine words are final and infallible. Therefore, **Ma'rifa an-Nafs** is a responsibility of every Muslim psychologist.

There is a famous saying in Arabic:

مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ فَقَدْ عَرَفَ رَبَّهُ

“He who truly knows himself has known his Lord”

Islamic Psychology (IP) helps us connect with our Creator and improve our spiritual heart. It links our body, mind, and soul, and guides us towards fitrah, bringing us peace, tranquility, and closeness to Allah SWT.

Upon examining the secular view of humans, we learn that...

- Humans are a matter without a soul or spirit.
- Human actions result from biological impulses and environmental influences (biopsychosocial perspective).
- There is no place for the supernatural or immaterial in science.
- The scientific method is the only sure way of knowing anything, so if something cannot be observed, tested, and experimented on, it doesn't exist or is outside the realm of science.
- Since one can't observe God, hell, heaven, angels, human soul and conduct experiments on them, they can't – and don't – exist.
- The government is sovereign because there is no higher power.

Secular Psychology is...

- Rooted in the principle of accidental creation of humans
- Focuses on observable behaviors, disregarding internal mental processes
- Uses a reductionist vocabulary rather than holistic to explain behaviors
- Neglects religion and spirituality as a theory, method, or means of understanding and treating humans.
- And this is despite the polls in America showing that 95% of people here believe in religion and spirituality. The situation is almost the same worldwide.

William James, the father of American psychology, wrote in his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, a century ago that exclusion of religious experience from psychology would be something like offering a menu without a meal!

It is important for Muslim psychologists to realize that secular views were established in the West based on their social and environmental circumstances. However, Muslims embraced mainstream psychology, often more vehemently than Western psychologists, without much analysis. This reminds us of a hadith that states: "Muslims would follow the path of those who came before them, so much so that if they entered a lizard's hole, Muslims would follow them."

So, what are some of the challenges for Modern Psychology?

The biggest challenge is its limited success, as the deeper issues of life's meaning, purpose, and values are ignored.

Studies suggest that Muslims often have difficulty trusting and connecting with mainstream therapies and thus may not benefit much from them. This is one reason psychology never gained respect in the Muslim world or may I say the entire non-western world.

Religion is studied from a psychological lens, for instance, by analyzing religious behaviors but from a secular perspective. Psychology and religion are considered distinct disciplines interacting with one another on topics like mental health, resilience, coping styles, etc., but religious psychology based on the foundations of religious ontology and epistemology is entirely ignored.

Psychology should be inclusive of all forms of specialties, including Islamic Psychology. Christian psychology are independent programs. Division 36 of the APA was founded in 1946 by the American Catholic Psychologists Association (ACPA), renamed to PIRI in 1970, and became The Society for Psychology and Spirituality in 1976. The APA is now tolerant of spiritual views including IP, so we don't need to be apologetic about Islamic Psychology.

The Emergence of Islamic Psychology

Islamic Psychology (IP) known earlier as "Ilm an-nafs" in the Islamic sciences and philosophy was studied by Muslim scholars over a thousand years ago but we lost that knowledge for various reasons. The resurgence of IP began decades ago in many countries, as Haque & Rothman (2021) documented in their work "IP Around the Globe." Around twelve formal Islamic Psychology (IP) programs are currently offered worldwide (Haque, et al. 2024).

The younger generation of Muslim psychologists, especially members of the International Students of Islamic Psychology (ISIP), believe that reclaiming our Islamic heritage in psychology is essential. This step can benefit Muslims and others and is part of the global indigenization movement in psychology. It is worth noting that IP does not stand alone, as it still employs many concepts and methodologies used in mainstream psychology.

What should we study under IP?

A. Theoretical Foundations.

The concepts of *rūḥ*, *nafs*, *Aql*, and *fitrah* are the essential elements of Islamic psychology. Some critics say that because it is hard to study abstract ideas, a person's *AAMAL* can be the subject matter of IP. Quranic theories of personality, dimensions of *fitrah*, humans as a microcosm, Islamic spirituality, etc. Topics like learning, motivation, emotions, ethics, morality, etc., from an Islamic perspective.

The lives of prophets and their wisdom can be a rich resource in studying Islamic perspectives. The works of early Muslim scholars, which continue to be invaluable, can also be a rich resource. Many useful current theories in psychology can trace their origins back to the insightful works of early Muslim scholars.

Islamic models of mental health, work, child development, relationships, and differentiation between cultures and religions are just a few examples.

B. Research Methodology.

Examples of research methodologies include grounded theory, qualitative content analysis, critical ethnography, and methodologies of revealed knowledge where the Islamic sciences can also provide valuable insights. **Ijtihad** can be crucial in using scientific methodologies that align with Islamic values and principles.

C. Research Integration.

Developing integrated mindset is crucial, studying religious growth in children, conflict resolution in Islam, positive youth development, spirituality

measurement scales, religious coping, etc. and a student capstone course and publications can promote the quality, reach, and effectiveness of IP.

D. Intrapersonal Integration of Psychologists.

Intrapersonal integration or developing greater personal congruence between self and religious beliefs, reflecting on own theological and psychological viewpoints, and analyzing one's own personality are essential. A review of prophet's stories, deriving lessons, and self-analysis are keys to intrapersonal integration. See for instance, my chapter addressing the *Qualities of a Muslim Therapist* (2023) as outlined by Thanvi.

E. Integration in training.

Utilizing religious-based assessments, therapies (Tazkiya is one), supervision from an integrated perspective, integrated symposiums, etc. Use treatment methodologies only if congruent with Islamic principles. Case studies and treatment plans are an essential part of training.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is an exciting time for those interested in Islamic Psychology (IP), and everyone involved in this movement can make a difference. We hope that associations such as the International Association of Islamic Psychology (IAIP) and International Association of Muslim Psychologists (IAMP), with the support of the International Students of Islamic Psychology (ISIP), can monitor the growth of IP programs, establish short and long-term plans, and lead in ways that include translating important works in IP from early Muslim scholars from different parts of the world, publish an encyclopedia, a dictionary, and an international journal in the coming years. We strongly believe that the global IP community can play a major role in this endeavor and assist one another in every way possible.