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ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE - 11

# QUR'ĀNIC CONCEPTS OF HUMAN PSYCHE

Zafar Afaq Ansari  
Editor

Joint Publishers

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Qur'ānic  
Concepts of  
Human Psyche

**ISLAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE - 11**  
Series Editor (in Pakistan): Zafar Ishaq Ansari



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# CONTENTS

Introduction <i>Zafar Afaq Ansari</i>	1
Qur'ānic Concepts of Human Psyche <i>Absar Ahmad</i>	15
Psyche in Islamic Gnostic and Philosophical Tradition <i>Naumana Amjad</i>	39
Heart: the Locus of Human Psyche <i>Manzurul Haq</i>	57
Individual and Society in the Qur'ān <i>Mah Nazir Riaz</i>	69
The Qur'ānic Concept of Mental Health <i>Abdul Hayy Alawi</i>	87
Dimensions of Muslim Religiosity: Measurement Considerations <i>Quazi Shamsuddin Md. Ilyas</i>	99
Index	115





## Introduction

The Qur'ān, which primarily concerns itself with guiding man to right beliefs and righteous conduct, also provides valuable insights about man and his nature. However, the Qur'ān does not address itself to explaining the physical and biological aspects of man; or at least these are not the main concerns of the Qur'ān. It is rather the inner nature of man - the social, moral and spiritual aspects - that forms the central theme of the Qur'ānic discourse about man. This inner nature of man - human psyche - is the theme that needs to be understood if we want to have a proper understanding of what the Qur'ān has to say about man.

It is significant that rather than resorting to the use of one single word while speaking about the inner psychic aspects of man, the Qur'ān uses a number of words like *rūḥ*, *nafs*, and *qalb*. Therefore, in order to understand the inner nature of man as enunciated by the Qur'ān, it is important that these concepts should be explored in depth. It is also important - even if it might appear self-evident - that the concepts should be understood in the context of the Qur'ān itself rather than as equivalents of the terms used in modern psychology. This is important because unless we observe this methodological precaution, we are likely to fail in grasping the concepts as embodied in the Qur'ān. What we will rather arrive at might be their nearest equivalents in the psychological literature, and these in turn might be quite different from the meanings that

the Qur'ān seeks to convey. The result might be a gross distortion of the meaning of the Qur'ānic concepts.

## I

Even a cursory reading of the Qur'ān indicates that man has a special position in the universe. Man is different in the universal scheme of things primarily because he has been created to be different. This difference has been enunciated at a number of places in the Qur'ān. A typical description would be what has been mentioned in *Sūrat al-Hijr*:

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)

The process of creation as described in the Qur'ān clearly indicates that while the whole process of creation was deliberate (rather than accidental), and was, of course, a result of God's omnipotent will, there was a particular moment which was of special significance, a moment which came towards the end of this process. This was the stage at which a divine element was introduced by breathing into man of *rūḥ* from God, which completed the process of man's creation.

Thus the first and foremost concept regarding the inner nature of man is the one expressed by the term *rūḥ*. What is

*rūḥ*? This question was raised during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him), and the answer is available in the Qur'ān:

They ask thee concerning  
The *rūḥ*  
Say: "The *rūḥ* is from  
The command of my Lord:  
Of knowledge it is only  
A little that is communicated  
To you." (17:85)

It is thus obvious that a direct and detailed understanding of the nature of *rūḥ* is not available. However, if we look at other relevant sections of the Qur'ān which describe the process of creation, we might be able to obtain at least some understanding of its nature.

Apart from the verses of *Sūrat al-Ḥijr* mentioned above, the process is described at several other places in the Qur'ān (see, for instance, 2:30-34, 7:11-25). What is common in these descriptions is that human nature has a base element not in keeping with the exalted place man has been designated to occupy. This was clearly recognized from the very beginning. When it was announced that man is to be created and appointed God's vicegerent on the earth, the first reaction encountered was that of horror from the angels who said:

"Wilt Thou place therein one who will make  
Mischief therein and shed blood?" (2:30)

This, however, changed, and what caused the change was the breathing into Adam "of My *rūḥ*". This is the same phenomenon that has been referred to in *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (2:31) as giving knowledge to Adam. It is significant that it

was after this episode that angels were asked to prostrate themselves before Adam. The demonstration of having this knowledge or being the recipient of divine *rūḥ* is what elevated man from his humble origins, enabled him to overcome the baser part of his nature, and made him a creature worthy of being the vicegerent of Allah.

What, then, is *rūḥ*? One may venture to say that *rūḥ* is a special capacity for acquiring knowledge. This is why it has been repeatedly referred to as a part of Allah Himself. It is a capacity which was granted to man after his physical and biological creation was complete. He was to be the vicegerent of Allah on earth. He had to share some important quality of the Creator - and the quality given to him was the ability to generate knowledge on his own. This becomes very clear if we go back to the verses of *Sūrat al-Baqarah* (30-34), describing the creation of man.

This section starts with the announcement of the proposal for the creation of Adam:

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: "I will create  
A vicegerent on earth." (2:30)

The second part relates to giving Adam knowledge and confronting him with the angels:

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 truthful." (2:31)

The angels accept their limitations by saying:

"Of knowledge



We have none, save what Thou  
Hast taught us ..." (2:32)

It was after this acceptance of superiority of Adam that the angels prostrated themselves before him. The most significant are the words that are used to describe what was given to Adam. It was not the knowledge of a finite number of things; Adam was given the knowledge of the totality of things (*'allama Ādam al-asmā' kullahā*) - 'He taught Adam the names of *all things*'. This can only mean an immense and unlimited potential of knowledge. This is further supported by what was said by the angels while accepting the limits of their knowledge as compared to Adam. The angels could have the knowledge that was specifically given to them, while Adam was apparently given the capacity to generate knowledge, and thus was not subject to the limitations of the other creatures.

Apart from this unlimited capacity for knowledge, there is at least one other characteristic that is associated with *rūḥ* - an intrinsic knowledge of God. This God-consciousness is vividly described in the Qur'ān as follows:

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." (7:172)

This God-consciousness may not be directly available to man at all times. However the Qur'ān asserts that it is there within the depths of human psyche and becomes evident during the time of an intense crisis (see for instance 6:63).

## II

While *rūḥ* seems to refer to the special spiritual and divine elements in man, *qalb* (heart) is presumably the operating agency of psyche which transforms the spiritual potentiality into actuality. An important characteristic of *qalb* is that it represents that faculty or capacity of human personality which enables the person to know and understand the reality of things, make evaluative judgements, and sift the right from the wrong. The functions of the *qalb* are described quite frequently in the Qur'ān 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. People in such a condition have "eyes with which they do not see, ears with which they do not hear" (7:179).

According to the Qur'ān the perceptual processes - seeing and hearing being the ones most often mentioned - can be reduced to mere sensations. They can become stimulations without meaning, because the *qalb* is blocked or sealed. The process has been described at several places in the Qur'ān (see for instance 2: 6-7, 7: 101, 4: 155, 63: 3, and 16:106-108).

According to the Qur'ānic statements, the blocking of the cognitive processes takes place under special circumstances;

when a person is faced with a situation of conflict and resorts to a special type of defence mechanism in which he rationalizes actions that are emotionally impelled. Such a person starts with a state of conflict between what his moral judgement demands, and what is his need for immediate, unlimited and unjustified gratifications. His belief and his practice become completely at variance. Such people begin with a conflict between their conscience and their overt behaviour. But behaviour is a public commitment, and soon they are taken over by the need to resolve this conflict, and to justify their behaviour. Their conscience is so weak that they can not continue to keep to their belief, and have to resolve this situation by believing in what they are practicing, rather than the other way round. This is a special situation when the belief is so subdued that it completely loses all practical meaning or relevance for life. The central role of *qalb* in this situation has been described in a *ḥadīth* which says:

Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body. If it is healthy, the whole body is healthy. If it becomes unhealthy, the whole body gets unhealthy - that is heart. (Bukhārī)

Another *ḥadīth* emphasizes the process:

When a *mu'min* (believer) commits a sin, a dark spot appears on his heart. If he repents and seeks forgiveness (of Allah), his heart becomes spotless again. If he persists in sin, the dark spot increases. This is the spot that has been mentioned in the Qur'ān: "But on their hearts is the stain of (the ill) which they do." (83:14) (Ibn Mājah)

It may be noted that here the *ḥadīth* does not speak of the sin committed by a non-believer. It describes what happens when a believer commits a sin - knowing full well that it is a sin. The Qur'ān says:

This is because they believed,  
 Then they rejected Faith:  
 So a seal was set  
 On their hearts: therefore  
 They understand not. (63:3)

At another place this issue has been taken up in greater detail:

Anyone who, after accepting  
 Faith in Allah, utters Unbelief-  
 Except under compulsion,  
 His heart remaining firm  
 In Faith - but such as  
 Open their breast to Unbelief-  
 On them is wrath from Allah,  
 And theirs will be  
 A dreadful Penalty.  
 This because they love  
 The life of this world  
 Better than the Hereafter.  
 And Allah will not guide  
 Those who reject Faith.  
 Those are they whose hearts,  
 Ears and eyes Allah has sealed up  
 And they take no heed. (16:106-108)

However the Qur'ān has not confined the process of 'sealing of the heart' to the people who are believers in the formal sense. At other places it includes those people who rejected the truth from the very beginning, because of the emotional blocking.

## III

*Nafs*, like *rūḥ* and *qalb*, is another word used by the Qur'ān to indicate an important aspect of human psyche. At the lowest level it refers to the principle of life and consciousness. It is the person or self. The Qur'ān refers to three states of *nafs* - *al-nafs al-ammārah bi al-sū'* (the *nafs* impelling towards evil), *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* (the changing or blaming *nafs*) and *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* (the *nafs* at peace).

The main effect of *al-nafs al-ammārah bi al-sū'* is to paralyze the cognitive processes. This seems to have been alluded to at several places in the Qur'ān:

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). (7:179)

To be 'heedless of warning', negligent (*ghāfilūn*) and misled is only one of the characteristics of such people. The Qur'ān describes their behaviour as one characterized by thoughtlessness and sordidness. All of these can be the characteristics of *al-nafs al-ammārah bi al-sū'*.

On the other hand *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* is a state of constant awareness. It indicates *nafs* in a state of change and flux, always conscious and vigilant, constantly examining and scrutinizing its actions, fighting against the baser desires, never heedless and sordid. This constant contention is the first stage of *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah*. The Qur'ān has used this term only



at one place, while describing the return of the soul of the blessed to Allah:

(To the righteous soul  
Will be said:)  
"O (thou) soul,  
In complete rest  
And satisfaction!  
Come back thou  
To thy Lord-  
Well pleased thy (self),  
And well-pleasing  
Unto Him!  
Enter thou, then,  
Among My Devotees!  
Yea, enter thou  
My Heaven!" (89:27-30)

It appears that the state of *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* is really reached at the very end of life when one emerges victorious after a constant and life-long struggle against evil. The *nafs* is at peace because the constant struggle (the state of *al-nafs al-lawwāmah*) which encompassed the whole of an individual's life is now behind him, and the period of tussle is over, ending with his triumph.

#### IV

We have attempted to show that the three terms used by the Qur'ān while referring to the inner dimension of man are somewhat different in meaning. *Rūḥ* is the divine element in man which places man in the exalted position of being entrusted with the responsibility of Allah's vicegerency. *Rūḥ* provides a potential for knowledge and God-consciousness.

However this potential can be operated through the *qalb* which is the locus of cognition, thought and feeling, and therefore, responsible for decision-making regarding actions and their correspondence with belief. *Qalb*, if properly functioning, can reinforce the positive tendencies of the personality leading to a state of constant awareness and self-understanding. On the other hand the heart can be subdued by the conflicting demands and overcome by the need for immediate gratification. If this state continues it leads to the blocking of the *qalb* which in turn reduces the perceptual and cognitive functions of a person. He becomes subdued to *al-nafs al-ammārah bi al-sū'*. His God-consciousness and his capacity for knowledge are clouded. This means that the distinction of having *rūh* is completely lost and the man starts existing at the level of animals. The Qur'ān actually refers to such low beings as animals (see for instance 8:22, 55).

*Nafs* has been used in several meanings in the Qur'ān. It is the principle of life, of consciousness, and of individuality. Two aspects of *nafs* are of particular interest to a student of human psyche, as they are related to the dynamics of moral conflict - *al-nafs al-ammārah bi al-sū'*, which impels a person to immediate gratification irrespective of moral consequences, and *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* - which impels an examination of the moral aspects of any action.

It should be noted here that the three words have other meanings as well. Also, at times they have been used interchangeably. However, since they are not related to the central theme of this paper - human psyche - we have not discussed these meanings in detail.

## V

The articles which comprise this book are based on the papers read in a seminar on 'Qur'ānic Concepts of Human Psyche', which was organised by the International Institute of Islamic Thought, Pakistan, in collaboration with the Department of Psychology, Government College, Lahore. This seminar was held on the occasion of the seventh conference of Pakistan Psychological Association in April, 1988.

Some of the papers were read in the seminar almost in the same form that they are being reproduced here. Other papers were presented orally and subsequently given a written form. The paper written by Mrs. Naumana Amjad could not be read out because of the time constraint, although she was present in the seminar.

The seminar was graced by the presence of a number of very distinguished persons, some of whom made oral presentations. The late Professor S. M. Moghni who presided over one of the two sessions, and Dr. Israr Ahmad, a well known scholar, made worthy presentations. However, since these expositions could not be committed to writing, they do not form part of the present book. Some other scholars who attended the seminar also made brief but important contributions. We regret that they are not a part of this book, again because they were not written down.

The present volume contains six papers. As one would expect in a volume of this nature the papers cover a wide range of subjects, and at the same time, have a good deal of common ground.

Dr. Absar Ahmad's article covers a very wide canvas. He starts with an in-depth analysis of the term 'psyche' in the history of human thought, both in philosophy and psychology, particularly analytical psychology. He then turns to the Qur'ān and shows that the essential nature of man has a major spiritual dimension. The human mind is not just a storehouse of repressed wishes, but has God-consciousness in its depths. He bases his arguments on the verses of the Qur'ān which describe the primordial covenant of man with God.

Mrs. Naumana Amjad takes this analysis further and discusses psyche in terms of the four terms used in the Qur'ān: *rūh*, *qalb*, *nafs* and *'aql*. She traces the meaning of these terms in the Qur'ān, and in the history of Muslim thought, and in so doing discusses the ideas of people like al-Ghazālī, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, Ibn Sīnā and Mullā Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī.

Professor Manzurul Haq discusses the special role that has been assigned, in the Islamic intellectual tradition, to 'heart' which, according to him, is the locus of human psyche.

Dr. Mah Nazeer Riaz has emphasised the principles enunciated by the Qur'ān that govern the functioning of the individual and the society. These principles in turn are based on the concept of human psyche presented by the Qur'ān, which rests on the place of man as the vicegerent of God, who has been created with a definite purpose. This is very different from considering man as merely another animal which came into existence as a result of a biological accident. It is also different from the view of man as inherently evil who is concerned only with the gratification of immediate needs.

The article by Professor Abdul Hayy Alawi and Quazi Shamsuddin Ilyas are more applied in nature. Professor Alawi talks about various models of mental health, and compares them with a model that he has derived from the Qur'ān. This provides interesting food for thought.

Quazi Shamsuddin has taken up the concept of religiosity and tried to show how this concept can vary in different religio-cultural traditions. Given the fact that research in Muslim societies is lacking, his work is quite useful and one would expect that it would lead to a better understanding of some aspects of Muslim psyche.

The seminar, for which the initiative came from the International Institute of Islamic Thought, could hardly have been a success without the active support of the Department of Psychology, Government College, Lahore. In this regard, we owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Azhar Ali Rizvi, Head, Department of Psychology who was the local organizer of the seminar, and to his colleagues and students, who worked very hard to make the seminar a success.

This seminar and the present volume constitute a modest effort towards developing an understanding of human psyche from the perspective of the Qur'ān. One hopes that other Muslim psychologists and scholars of Islam will come forward and contribute to a better understanding of the Qur'ānic view of man.

Islamabad  
January 11, 1992

**Zafar Afaq Ansari**



## Qur'ānic Concepts of Human Psyche

*Absar Ahmad*

The topic of this seminar - 'Qur'ānic Concepts of Human Psyche' - is somewhat puzzling in many ways. First of all, the use of the word 'concepts' (in the plural!) leads one to think that presumably there are in the Qur'ān more than one doctrines or conceptual frameworks on or about the nature of human psyche. Or else the Qur'ānic injunctions on human nature or psyche do not fall into a consistent and systematic pattern. Again the Qur'ān, while dilating on the essential inner nature of man, uses its own variegated Arabic terms like *rūh*, *nafs*, *qalb*, etc., and it is quite problematic to assert that their connotations correspond exactly to the locution 'psyche' as used in the classical literature as well as in modern psychological disciplines. Indeed a critic may even level the charge that, to use Gilbert Ryle's phrase, a category-mistake is being committed here. Therefore, in order to avoid unnecessary complications and conceptual confusions, we shall start off by making an in-depth exploration into the usage, meanings and conceptual import of the word 'psyche'.

Professor G.B. Kerfred in his brief note in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*<sup>1</sup> writes that psyche in Homer first means life and later means a departed life or ghost. The first

means life and later means a departed life or ghost. The first identification with soul in the sense of the conscious self is found perhaps in Ionia, and the earliest full identification with the rational as well as with the emotional side of personality has been attributed to Socrates. In early Greek mythology, psyche was regarded as the personification of the human soul. The importance, in Platonic philosophy, of love in its highest sense as an agent of the soul's progress leads, from the fourth century B.C. in art to representations, allegorical or playful, of psyche.

Initially, in all this there was no opposition between soul and body. The doctrine that the soul is a prisoner in the body that Plato took over from Orphic doctrine had reached Greece, perhaps from Scythia, before the time of Pythagoras, probably in association with a doctrine of transmigration. In one sense, it was considered as the principle of life, defined as what makes living things alive. The Greek word for 'alive' like the equivalent Latin word 'animatus' and its English derivative 'animate', is etymologically the same as 'ensouled'; this is the ancient connection between the ideas of soul and of life. Plato, presumably following Socrates, both identified the soul with the person who reasons, decides, and acts, and assumed that this person or soul is not the familiar creature of flesh and blood but rather the incorporeal occupant and director of, even prisoner in, the corporeal being. The separate Greek word translated 'soul' or 'mind' later became English psyche which is also the root in 'psychology', 'psychosomatic', 'psycho-physical', etc. Having made this move, for which there were anticipations both in popular religion and earlier philosophical thought, Plato proceeded to contend: first, that souls, like

common-sense persons, are substances; and, second, for various reasons - including the fact that it is the principle of life - that the soul must be immortal. The technical term 'substance' is here defined as something that can be said to have a significantly separate existence. If souls are not in this sense substances, then it makes no sense at all to suggest that they might survive the dissolution of their bodies. According to Plato it is the presence and activity of a substantial soul which is responsible for bringing about all the various phenomena of life and mental activity.

Indeed Plato's argument seems to be a clear-cut 'two-component' picture of the human person. Body and soul or psyche are two distinct, ontologically disparate, things or entities. The self, soul, or mind, in his view, is something distinct from a gross material and observable body. For instance, in one of Plato's dialogues, Socrates is portrayed on the day of his death arguing about immortality and the nature of the soul. And he begins by defining death in a way that plainly seems to presuppose a two-component conception of the person:

Being dead is this: the body's having come to be apart, separated from the soul, alone by itself, and the soul's being apart, alone by itself, separated from the body.<sup>2</sup>

And later Socrates sums up his view as the following:

Consider, then, ... if these are our conclusions from all that has been said: soul is most similar to what is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, unvarying, and constant in relation to itself; whereas body, in its turn, is most similar to what is human,

mortal, multiform, non-intelligible, dissoluble, and never constant in relation to itself. Have we anything to say against those statements ... to show that they are false?<sup>3</sup>

The suggestion, then, is that a man has two parts, the body which is of earthly stuff, and the soul which has a touch of the divine. Elsewhere in the *Phaedo* our mental functions (or at least the higher ones) are attributed to this non-material soul. This picture is repeatedly endorsed by later philosophers, most notably by the founding father of modern philosophy, René Descartes. Thus the very title page of Descartes' *Meditations* announces that one of the two central aims of that work is to demonstrate 'the distinction between the human soul and the body'; and the key passage halfway through the Sixth Meditation concludes thus:

It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.<sup>4</sup>

So here again one finds a very clear presentation of a sharp contrast drawn between two entities, one of which has physical characteristics such as being extended (i.e., taking up a certain amount of space) but is not conscious, the other of which has mental characteristics such as consciousness but lacks physical properties, the two separable entities being normally 'closely bound up' together to make up the composite

being, the embodied human person. Just as in the philosophy of Plato the emphasis is laid on man's twin elements in the form of rational soul (psyche or *nous*) and body (*soma*), similarly emphasis was laid by Descartes on self-consciousness, on the spiritual substance, the whole essence of which is to 'think'. With Descartes the human person tends to become primarily a self-enclosed substantial conscious subject in contradistinction to its physical body.

Let us now shift our attention from philosophy to psychology. James Drever in *A Dictionary of Psychology*<sup>5</sup> defines 'psyche' as originally the principle of life, but used generally as equivalent to mentality, or as a substitute for mind or soul. Charles Rycroft's description of psyche given in his well-known *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* reads:

The mind. The psychoanalytic literature, following Freud, uses psyche and mind (*seele*) synonymously. Its two adjectives, psychical and psychic, are also synonymous with 'mental'. However, whereas 'mind' tends to be used in contrast to 'body', psyche is usually contrasted with 'soma'.<sup>6</sup>

In the light of these two dictionary definitions it is easy to understand why most people follow the standard convention in translating the Greek word psyche by the English 'soul' or 'self'. And this is, in a way, quite right, for the sense of the English word is definitely coloured by certain theological usages with decidedly dualistic connotations. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the German word *seele* means psyche as well as soul.<sup>7</sup> Indeed among the modern psychologists, the most impressive and seminal work of C.G. Jung offers us the deepest and most perceptive understanding of the human psyche.

Jung's entire psychological work, as is well-known, is concerned with the conception of the nature and functioning of the human psyche and its focal area is occupied by the symbolic expressions of man's spiritual experience and thus it lays the groundwork for a psychology of the spirit. Digging out the full sense and weaving up the numerous strands of psyche from the Jungian corpus is both difficult and beyond the scope of this paper. I have absolutely no doubt, however, that Jung's treatment of human psyche has deep affinities with the Platonic-Cartesian model. In *The Basic Postulates of Analytical Psychology*, Jung laments that to grant the substantiality of the soul or psyche is repugnant to the spirit of the age, for to do so would be heresy. Yet he himself vehemently repudiates the reductionist view according to which the psyche is nothing but a product of bio-chemical processes. In fact he ventures to found a psychology upon the postulate of an independent and autonomous psyche that is not determined by the body. He is firmly of the view that it arises from a spiritual principle which is as inaccessible to our understanding as matter. He clearly affirms Cartesian dualism of the mental and the physical when he writes:

The conflict of the material and spiritual aspects of life only shows that the psychic is in the last resort an incomprehensible something. Without a doubt psychic happenings constitute our only, immediate experience. All that I experience is psychic. Even physical pain is a psychic event that belongs to my experience ... All our knowledge is conditioned by the psyche which, because it alone is conditioned, is superlatively real.<sup>8</sup>

He considers the idea of psychic reality as the most important achievement of modern psychology, for it alone enables us to do justice to psychic manifestations in all their variety and uniqueness. General conceptions of a spiritual nature, according to Jung, are indispensable constituents of the psyche, though our knowledge of the spiritual aspect of it at present is only partial and fragmentary.

In his essay 'The Spirit of Psychology', later entitled as 'The Nature of the Psyche', are contained Jung's final and maturest thoughts on the subject. 'Psyche' there assumes a psychological-spiritual-religious significance in which the unconscious as well as consciousness participates: the former as the ground of being, the latter as the perceiving agent without whom the stream of experiences could run on endlessly and ineffectually. The Cartesian-type subject-of-consciousness view of psyche is manifest in an important statement included in *On the Nature of Psyche*: 'volition presupposes a choosing subject who envisages different possibilities'.<sup>9</sup> The metaphysical and spiritual content of Jung's conception of psyche in the form of the collective unconscious is so immense that one can rightly view it *sub specie aeternitatis*: a divine element or component in man.

This is not an appropriate occasion to discuss in detail a number of important theoretical concepts of Jungian analytical psychotherapy which bear directly or obliquely on the nature of human psyche like 'individuation', 'archetypes', 'persona', 'shadow', 'transference', to name a few. In a nutshell, Jung held that the increase in the scientific understanding and the resultant scienticism has led to a dehumanization of the natural and social worlds. A former unconscious acceptance of natural

phenomena, which involved affirmation of spiritual outlook and endowing them with symbolic power, has disappeared. It follows that men have a strong need for religious beliefs and experiences, since in religious form they are able to encounter and accept the contents of the collective unconscious. Religious beliefs, Jung conceded, cannot be shown to be true; but he held that they cannot be shown to be false either. In psychotherapy the patient comes to acknowledge the hitherto unrecognized parts of his personality. To rid oneself of symptoms, one has to become aware of the process of individuation, of the need for the creation of a harmonious synthesis of the functions in which the nature of the shadow and the power of the archetypes of the collective unconscious have been reconciled with the demands of the conscious personality.

Mainly inspired by Jung's work, the humanistic psychology movement was initiated in the 1950's and 1960's when many Americans started to realize their spiritual emptiness in spite of their material affluence. As a broad movement, humanistic psychology has been supported, among others, by renowned psychologists such as Gordon Allport, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Though less mystically inclined, this school of psychology has a more positive attitude towards religious views of human psyche. Its personality theory is much less deterministic than the Freudian psychoanalytical theory. The Freudian and behaviouristic approaches are seen by humanistic psychologists as oversimplifications which neglect man's self, as well as his potential for self-direction and actualization. They lay great emphasis on the self as a unifying factor which accounts for the



individual's subjective experiences, and which determines much of his observable behaviour. Thus, like Jung, they too affirm a religio-metaphysical dualistic conception of human psyche: man's body versus his soul or mind. Man is not seen as a passive automaton, but as an active participant who has the freedom of choice to shape his destiny and that of his fellow men.

Let us now turn to the Qur'ān and try to see what its picture of the inner human nature or psyche is. In the opening paragraph it was pointed out that the Qur'ān employs its own technical terms in this context and has its own typical approach and typology. From the Qur'ānic standpoint it can be asserted with certainty that the concept of human psyche is not purely a psychological one and has a great deal to do with the philosophical-metaphysical problem of the essential substantial nature of man. According to the Qur'ān, humanity emerged in creation primarily in the transcendental dimension of existence:

And We said: 'O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in this garden, and eat freely thereof, both of you, whatever you may wish: but do not approach this one tree, lest you become wrong-doers.' (2:35)

At that stage of existence they possessed not only the spiritual dimension but also the rational dimension of personality. The spiritual dimension was there because of the very fact of the transcendental nature of their existence. The existence of the rational dimension has been affirmed thus:

And He (i.e. God) taught Adam the names of all things. (2:31)

It may be legitimately inferred that the 'knowledge of all the names' signifies man's faculty of logical definition and, thus, of conceptual thinking. That by 'Adam' the whole human race is meant here becomes obvious from the preceding reference, by the angels, to 'such as will spread corruption on earth and will shed blood'. This means that the essential and real (primordial!) human personality is spiritual in nature. Besides the above reference (2:35) this truth is also corroborated by the following verse, which speaks, not only of the existence of the spiritual souls of all human beings - from the first to the last - at the dawn of creation, but also of the possession of consciousness - self-consciousness as well as the consciousness of the Personality of God - and hence of full-fledged personality, which is based and built upon conscious, appreciative and non-mechanical response to other personality or personalities:

And recall when (at the time of creation and in the world of spirits) thy Lord brought forth their offspring from the loins of the children of Adam. He (thus) made them testify as to themselves, say: 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Yea, indeed, we do bear witness thereto.' (8:172)

Thus the essential covenant of monotheism is inscribed on every human soul. According to the Qur'ān, the ability to affirm the existence of the Supreme Power is inborn in the primordial human nature (*fiṭrah*); and it is this inner cognition - which may or may not be blurred subsequently by self-indulgence or adverse environmental influences - that makes every sane human being 'bear witness about himself' before God. Diametrically opposed to the Freudian view which reduces human mind to a strange storehouse of repressed

infantile wishes and desires, the Qur'ān emphatically asserts God-consciousness in the depths of human psyche and soul. Because the event alluded to in the verse 8:172 relates to the transcendental world and conditions of transcendental existence, the transcendental or spiritual nature of the original i.e., the real human personality is thereby established. This truth is further affirmed by the following verse:

And they ask thee regarding the (human) soul (*rūḥ*).  
 Say thou: 'The soul proceeds from my Lord's  
 Command (*amr*); and of knowledge ye have been  
 vouchsafed but little.' (17:85)

The term *rūḥ* (literally 'spirit', 'soul' or 'breath of life') is used in the Qur'ān to refer to numerous metaphysical verities like angels, revelation or divine inspiration. But quite often it connotes the inner divine human nature or 'soul' of metaphysical parlance. Indeed these various senses of the word *rūḥ* have subtle affinities of meaning. For example al-Zamakhsharī, a famous Qur'ānic exegetical scholar of the early period, while interpreting the word *rūḥ* here as divine inspiration, points out that it gives life to hearts that were (as if) dead in their ignorance, and has in religion the same function as the soul has in a body.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the Qur'ān tells us that inspite of its intangibility, or non-physical character, the reality of the soul should not be doubted. It is, to use a Sufi expression, a divine spark in man. The earthly existence of every human being commences when the human soul, whose original abode is the transcendental world, projects itself into spatio-temporal dimensions and aligns with a particular body. Even the personalities of Adam and Eve were projected into the material world in the same manner. This has been very explicitly stated

at several places in the Qur'ān. I shall here quote verses 28 and 29 of *Sūrat al-Hijr*:

And lo! thy Lord said unto the angels: 'Behold, I am about to create mortal man out of sounding clay, out of dark slime transmuted; and when I have formed him fully and *breathed into him of My spirit*, fall down before him in prostration. ( 15:28-29; italics added)

God's 'breathing of His spirit' into man is obviously of immense metaphysical significance. Many modernist interpreters and translators of the Qur'ān do not at all seem to grasp the deep-structured meanings and ontological significance of this. For example Abdullah Yusuf Ali writes at this point: 'Note that here the emphasis is on three points: (1) the breathing of God's spirit into man i.e., the faculty of God-like knowledge and will, which, if rightly used, would give man superiority over other creatures; (2) the origin of evil in arrogance and jealousy on the part of Satan who saw only the lower side of man (his clay i.e., somatic body) and failed to see the higher side, the faculty brought in by the spirit of God; (3) that this evil only touches those who yield to it, and has no power over God's sincere servants purified by His grace. Adam is not here mentioned by name, but only Man, whose symbol is Adam'.<sup>11</sup> Similarly Muhammad Asad in his explanatory note devotes a single sentence to this part of the verse and takes it as a metaphor for God's endowing man with life and consciousness.<sup>12</sup> To my mind, 'breathing of His spirit into man' is a most explicit and categorical assertion of a divine (i.e. spiritual) element or component in man. Taking it as merely a 'faculty of God-like knowledge' or 'endowing man with life

and consciousness' tantamounts to a total negation of the two-component Qur'ānic conception of man and human personality. This very conception is further reaffirmed in most unambiguous terms in verses 12-14 of *Sūrat al-Mu'minūn* thus:

Now, indeed, We created man out of the essence of clay, and then We caused him to remain as a drop of sperm in (the womb's) firm keeping, and then We created out of the drop of sperm a germ-cell, and then We created within the embryonic lump bones, and then We clothed the bones with flesh - and then We brought (all this) into a new creation: hallowed, therefore, is God, the best of creators. (40:12-14)

The frequent Qur'ānic references to man's being 'created out of clay,' or 'out of dust' or as here, 'out of the essence (*sulālah*) of clay' point to the fact that his body is composed of various organic and inorganic substances existing on or in the earth, as well as to the continuous transmutation of those substances, through the intake of earth-grown food, into reproductive cells. It is no doubt a great feat of divine creativity by which inorganic matter becomes living matter. Again, the inorganic constituents of the earth are absorbed into living matter by way of food, and living matter reproduces itself by means of sperm. This is deposited in the womb and fertilizes the ovum, and rests for a time in security in the mother's womb. And then passing through various stages, it assumes shape in its growth as a fetus, and finally it develops bones, flesh and nervous system. So far, or rather more precisely, upto this stage, man's growth is like that of an animal. But then an altogether new creative feat takes place which has been very forcefully depicted by the Arabic words *thumma ansha' nā-hu khalqan ākhar*. Starting from *sulālah*

upto the stage of fully-developed embryo, all the details have no doubt been given in order to stress man's humble origin. But what marks off a human infant from an animal infant is the last episode in which it underwent, not only a totally new shaping but rather assumed an altogether different status as a spiritual being imbued with a soul. Thus 'bringing into a new creation' clearly signifies the addition of a new ontological element - the soul - into the animal infant making him *homo Dei*: God's vicegerent on earth.

Indeed, according to a saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him), which has been reported both by Bukhārī and Muslim, various stages in the development of fetus in the form of *nutfah*, '*alaqah* and *mudghah* take forty days each and then an angel is sent by God to breathe soul into it. This breathing of the soul has, of course, nothing to do with life or sensation because neither the male sperm nor the female ovum is dead or without organic properties from the very start. Therefore, interpreting 'bringing into a new creation' as introducing life principle to the fetus is a travesty of truth which totally distorts the Qur'ānic conception of man: a composite being of two ontologically distinct elements or substances *viz.*, organic body and a spiritual soul. It is on account of an uncritical acceptance of Western rationalistic empiricism that some Muslim scholars tend to interpret the essential and inner metaphysical core of man as merely life or consciousness. In fact modern rationalistic and pseudo-scientific versions of the basic Qur'ānic teachings are quite alien to Islam as a supremely spiritual tradition and lack a direct link with the original Prophetic mission. They are devoid of the spiritual content which is the heart of the Qur'ānic revelation. The locution

*ihsān*, according to the Qur'ān, is not to be attributed to man's animal and corporeal body, but to that divine spirit or soul the presence of which makes man superior to angels. Out of a duality of two, one element of man - his spiritual psyche or soul - is the basis on which God has called his creation 'best of moulds' or 'best conformation' in *Sūrat al-Tīn*. The verse 4 of this *sūrah* reads:

Verily, We have created man in the best of conformation (or in the best of moulds). (95:4)

And the very next verse refers to the carnal desires pertaining to his bodily component undue indulgence of which abases him to the lowest of the low. To man God gave the purest and best nature in the form of divinely-infused spirit or soul, and it is man's duty to preserve the pattern on which God has made him. By making him His vicegerent, God exalted him *in posse* even higher than the angels, for the angels had to make obeisance to him. But surely man's position as vicegerent also gives him will and discretion, and if he uses them wrongly he falls even lower than the beasts. Abasement and 'reduction to the lowest of low' (95:5) is a consequence of man's betrayal, or in another word, corruption, of his original, positive nature: that is to say, a consequence of man's own doings and omissions. The spiritual element, the primordial and uncorrupted psyche, of man has a tendency towards its divine source and finds solace and fulfilment in God and His revelation - the Qur'ān. The corporeal and bodily part, on the contrary, exists at the purely animal level and always presses for mere sensual gratification, thus personifying a man described in the Qur'ān in these words:

... but he always clung to the earth and followed but his own desires. (7:176)

The term for soul or psyche used mostly by the Qur'ān is *nafs*. *Nafs* and its plurals *anfus* and *nufūs* have two uses: (i) reflexive, in which (to confine the matter to the topic of this paper), it refers to the human self or person; (ii) it means the human soul, as for example in the Qur'ān (6: 93) we read: 'While the angels stretch forth their hands (saying) send forth your souls (*anfus*)'. T.J. De Boer in his article entitled *nafs*<sup>13</sup> in the *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* identifies the Qur'ānic notion of *nafs* with soul and calls the three modalities of *nafs* the three characteristics of the human soul. The nature, dynamics and diverse aspects of *nafs* have especially attracted the attention of the Sufis and they have developed fascinating theophanic doctrines of this subjective and active agency in man. I shall here briefly expound the three strata of *nafs* as delineated by the Qur'ān.

The soul as conceived by the Qur'ān has a multi-layer structure consisting primarily of three principal strata. Let me first enumerate them without a detailed explanation, keeping in mind only that although each of these three is given an independent name as if there were three independent entities, they are, in the view of the majority of scholars, nothing but three different dimensions or stages of one and the same 'soul'.

The first stratum is technically called *al-nafs al-ammārah bi al-sū'* meaning literally the 'commanding soul', that is, that aspect of the 'soul' which instigates man to evil. It may be translated as the 'lower soul' or 'appetitive soul'. It is an inner locus of immoderate desires and fiery passions. It is, according



to some Sufis, in this dimension that the ego-consciousness of the ordinary man is constituted as the sensuous and sensual I.

The second stratum is called *al-nafs al-lawwāmah*, literally 'the blaming soul'. It refers to that aspect of the soul which blames or criticizes itself, that is to say, which becomes aware of its own evil nature which it manifests in the first stratum just explained. In this sense it is the locus of moral conscience. And the ego which is formed in this dimension is principally a rational ego, the subject passing critical judgement upon itself and others. In this respect the concept partially covers what the philosophers call '*aql*', 'reason' or 'intellect'.

The third stratum is *al-nafs al-muṭma'innah* or the 'pacified soul', designating the mode of being of the 'soul' in which the turbulence of desires and passions has been calmed down and the agitations of thoughts and concepts reduced to stillness, tranquillity and quietude. This dimension of the 'soul' is more generally called *qalb*, the 'heart'. *Qalb* is one of the most important technical terms of Sufism. It is no other than what has been referred to as the spiritual core of the Man of Light, as an integral whole of the subtle, esoteric organs for perceiving the esoteric aspects of things. The *qalb* is a supersensory organ of cognition through the activation of which is realized what is usually known as mystical experience. According to the Sufi theory of the 'soul', the *qalb* which is the third stratum, is the threshold of the divine dimension of Being; it is essentially of a luminous nature, and the world which is disclosed by the activity of the *qalb* constitutes ontologically the middle domain between the world of pure Light of God, and the world of material darkness under the dominion of Satan.

Some Sufis recognize within the *qalb* itself two deeper layers. The first is called *rūh*, the 'spirit' and the second which lies still deeper than the 'spirit' and which therefore is the deepest of all the strata of the 'soul', is *sirr*, meaning literally the 'secret' i.e., the innermost recess of the soul. The 'spirit' is represented by the image of an incandescent sun whose dazzling light illumines the whole world of Being. As the sun in the physical world rises from the eastern horizon and illumines all things and activates their life-energy, so the divine Sun, rising from the spiritual east, illumines the infinitely wide world of the 'spirit' and animates all the energies contained in the spiritual faculty of this subtle organ of supersensory cognition. Subjectively the Sufi feels at this stage that he is standing in extreme proximity to God. The *sirr*, 'secret', on the other hand, is the innermost ground of the soul, the deepest layer of consciousness which is in reality beyond 'consciousness' in the ordinary sense of the word. It is the sacred core of the soul, where the divine and the human become united, unified and fused. In other words, it is in this dimension of the soul that the so-called *uniomystica* is realized. The ego-consciousness which is actualized in this dimension and which naturally is the highest form of ego-consciousness in Sufism is no longer the consciousness of the mystic himself. It is rather than the consciousness of the divine I.

That the essential human psyche or soul is not blind is repeatedly affirmed by the Qur'ān, and accordingly it lays great emphasis on *qalb* as a supersensory organ of cognizing metaphysical truths - *tafaquh* in the Qur'ānic terminology. *Qalb* - the word for heart in Arabic - imports both the seat of

intellectual faculties and understanding as well as the seat of affections and emotions. Verse 179 of *Sūrat al-A'rāf* reads:

They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle - nay even more misguided: for they are heedless (of the warning).  
(7:179)

The cognitive role of the heart is further affirmed in verse 46 of *Sūrat al-Ḥajj* thus:

Have they, then, never journeyed about the earth, letting their hearts gain wisdom, and causing their ears to hear. Yet verily it is not their eyes that have become blind - but blind have become the hearts that are in their breasts. (22:46)

Those who reject God's message have their physical eyes and ears, but their hearts are blind and deaf. If their faculties of understanding and true discernment were active, would they not see the signs of God's Providence and wrath in nature around them and in the dwellings and ruins. Though apparently they have all the faculties of reason and perception, they have so deadened them and those faculties do not work and thus they are worse than cattle. The Qur'an tells us that the heart of man, as created by God, is pure and unsullied. But when a man does an evil deed, it marks a stain or rust on his heart. On repentance and forgiveness, sin is washed off. But if a person does not repent or pray for forgiveness, the stains deepen and spread more and more, until the heart is sealed and eventually the man dies a spiritual death. Two verses here are of utmost significance:

Nay, but their hearts are corroded by all (the evil) that they were wont to do. (83:14)

God has sealed their hearts and their hearing, and over their eyes is a veil; and awesome suffering awaits them. (2:7)

'Sealing of the heart' refers to a law instituted by God. As a person goes down the path of sin, his penalty gathers momentum, just as goodness brings its own capacity for greater goodness. In other words, when a person persistently adheres to false beliefs and refuses to listen to the voice of truth, he gradually loses the ability to perceive the truth, so that finally, as it were, a seal is set upon his heart. But surely it is a consequence of man's free choice and not an act of 'predestination'. The Qur'ān even goes so far as to declare such people dead and tells the Prophet (peace be upon him):

And verily, thou can not make the dead hear: and (so, too) thou can not make the deaf (of heart) hear this call when they turn their backs (on thee) and go away. (30:52)

The Qur'ānic assertion of spiritual death and disease - *marad* particularly of the heart - closely links up with the concepts of existential vacuum and non-being very forcefully presented by Dr. V.E. Frankl.<sup>14</sup> For him the main cause for the contemporary explosion of emotional disturbance is the frustration of modern man's will to meaning. Modern life has deprived man of the possibility of seeing a real meaning or cause for which to live. From the Qur'ānic perspective, life without faith in, and love of, God is a state of spiritual non-being in which the atheist loses touch with his own true self. God, in Islam, is the only True Reality of which man is only

a reflection. Hence to forget God is to alienate one's self from the very source of one's being. Thus the Qur'ān says:

And be not like those who forgot God and He caused them to be oblivious of their own selves or souls. (49:19)

Islam considers the spiritual meaning derived from submission to God as the only true meaning for man in this life. Frankl and other existential analysts seem to endorse this Qur'ānic insight in their claim that without religious orientation modern life with its material wealth may actually increase the chances of agony and existential anxiety for the modern man. According to Qur'ānic psychology, God-consciousness and self-consciousness are interdependent and intertwined. A true knowledge of one's deeper self necessarily leads to awareness of the Ultimate Self or God and *vice versa*. There are also a good many sayings of the Prophet (peace be on him) to this effect. That is the reason why the whole of the Qur'ān aims at inducing in man an attitude based on God-consciousness and heightened self-awareness.

In the foregoing I have made a modest attempt to explicate at least one strand of the Qur'ānic teachings with regard to human psyche. I have maintained that although the original use of the term psyche derives from a different field of perception, it nevertheless seeks to delineate roughly the same group of ontological realities that the Qur'ān speaks about in terms of *rūh*, *nafs*, *qalb*, etc. Taken together, they refer to the incorporeal or spiritual component of man and thus the Qur'ān merges the psychologically subjective intimacy of 'I' with the rather impersonal but profoundly metaphysical ego or soul. And in so doing the image it offers of human psyche is that of

*Homo cum Deo* which assures the highest conceivable freedom for man - the freedom to step into the very fabric of the universe, the formula for his collaboration with the creative process and the only one which is able to protect man from the terror of existence. Only thus can man face creatively the dangers of the conversion of human conscience and psyche to naturalism, a dogmatic secularism, and an opposition to belief in the transcendent goal of life.


## NOTES

1. G.B. Kerfred, *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, (ed.), Paul Edwards, (London and New York: Macmillan, 1967), vol. 6, p. 512 .
2. F.J. Church (tr.), *Plato's Dialogues*, (New York: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1961), p.9.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
4. R. Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, (tr.), Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), vol. I, p. 190.
5. James Drever, *A Dictionary of Psychology*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963).
6. Charles Rycroft, *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977).
7. Cf. the translator's note in Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 200.
8. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-220.
9. Violet Staub, (ed.), *The Basic Writings of C. G. Jung*, (New York: De Laszlo, 1959), p. 92.

10. See Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'ān*, (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), p. 393.
11. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān: Text, Translation and Commentary*, (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1975), p. 643.
12. *Asad, op. cit.*, p.386.
13. Cf. *The Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (London: Luzac and Co., 1961), pp. 433-36.
14. In his book entitled *Man's Search for Meaning* (London, 1964).







The inner nature of man-human psyche - is a major theme of the Qur'ān and the Qur'ān uses its own terminology while speaking about it. One comes across terms like *rūh*, *nafs*, *qalb*, etc. What do these terms mean, and how their understanding can throw light on human psyche from the Qur'ānic perspective is the topic of this book.

This book consists of six articles based on papers read in a seminar on 'Qur'ānic Concepts of Human Psyche', which was organized by the International Institute of Islamic Thought, Pakistan.

The articles cover a wide spectrum of topics including various philosophical and psychological theories, and a host of views expressed by Muslim thinkers. The authors advocate that it is important that the Qur'ānic concepts should be understood in terms of the Qur'ān itself, and not as equivalents of concepts of foreign intellectual provenance. This is important, and unless due care is taken of it, one would at the most grasp near-equivalents of those concepts in the contemporary works on psychology, and these might be quite different from the intrinsic meanings embodied in the relevant verses of the Qur'ān.

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