



Tazkiyatun Nafs (Purification of the Soul): A Psycho-Spiritual Approach in Strengthening Marriage Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Marriage has been seen as an essential tool in creating an ideal society. Through marriage institution, a man and a woman could stay jointly and live through affection and happiness. However, due to the lack of spiritual knowledge and practice, some couples, specifically Muslims married couples, facing marital conflicts that lead to either marital distress or marital dissolution. Therefore, this paper discusses the importance of a psycho-spiritual approach based on Islamic perspective to help Muslims married couples to understand and strengthen their marriage relationships. Four elements of human nature; *ruh* (spirit), *qalb* (heart), *aql* (intellect), and *nafs* (soul), will be discussed to understand the nature of human beings. This paper will examine how these four elements influence Muslim married couples' personality in order to be affective couples. In addition, the spiritual practices of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) will be presented to assist Muslim couples fulfill their responsibilities as the vicegerents of Allah SWT on earth.

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Introduction

Marriage is an important turning point in one's life. This form of relationship is to bind married couples together and strengthen their relationships. Islam has stated regulations and obligations for marriage and provides tools by which husbands and wives can achieve the state of peace and tranquility in marriage. Islam considers marriage relationships as an important aspect of Muslims' life as stated in hadith that, "When the servant marries he completes half of his religion; let him thereafter fear Allah SWT in the remaining half." However, marriage institution has lost its significant functions among couples nowadays. Many cases of marital distress and divorce are reported every day (Huang, 2005). Therefore this paper tries to discuss an Islamic psycho-spiritual approach, focusing on the process of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) to help Muslim married couples enhancing their marriage relationships.

Islamic concept of human nature

An Islamic concept of human nature expressed through four elements; the *ruh* (spirit), *qalb* (heart), *aql* (intellect), and *nafs* (soul), needs to be understood in order to strengthen marriage relationships. These four interrelated elements have been continuously used since the time of Al-Ghazali (the prominent Islamic scholar) to explain the concept of human personality, especially among Muslim scholars (Yatimah Sarmani & Mohd. Tajudin Ninggal, 2008).

Ruh is considered as an essence of human being. It is the manifestation of a Divine existence in human body, which Allah SWT blow His spirit into the man, as mentioned in the Holy Quran, "When I have made him and have breathed into him of my spirit" (15: 29). *Ruh* is a spiritual substance differs from human body, where it is the element that makes the body alive. Scientifically, a man is considered died when their *ruh* is no longer in their body. *Ruh* makes human being worthy of being the vicegerent of Allah SWT and provides them the potential to be true believers. However, human knowledge on understanding of the *ruh* is limited as the Holy Quran has specifically informed

in the following verse,

"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!)" (17: 85).

Qalb is the spiritual entity of heart that contains feelings, intuitions, and emotions that manifested through human actions. It connects man with the knowledge of Allah SWT in the spiritual realm (Ahmed, 1994). All external actions of human being are in fact is the reflection of their *qalb*. Thus, *qalb* has been considered as the center of wisdom. Allah SWT says, "Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts (and mind) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts which are in their breasts" (22: 46).

Aql is the ability to acquire knowledge. Through *aql*, human being would be able to think and to understand the meaning of live and to function according to the nature. It helps human beings to differentiate the truth from the false and to make wise life decision based on the Islamic teaching. Thus, *aql* is a dimension that differentiates human being from animals.

Nafs is a dimension of self. It corresponds with the function of *aql* and *qalb* to represent human being as a whole. The *nafs* has to be nurtured and build based on the Divine guidance. In the Holy Quran, Allah SWT has explained 3 main types of the *nafs*, which were ranked from poor to better: *an-nafs al-ammara*, *an-nafs al-lawwamah*, and *an-nafs al-mutma'innah*.

i) An-nafs al-ammara (the commanding self)

This *nafs* directs man to get involved in every wrong action. Allah SWT says in the Holy Quran (12:53) "Surely the human self urges evil". It damages the cognitive process of human being as described by the Holy Quran:

"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)" (7: 179).

This level of nafs is the lowest level and the greatest obstacle to the development of human being. If this nafs control the self, a man loses his consciousness and tends to involve in unnecessary activities. Consequently man starts trusting deceit as veracity, fantasy as fact, and self-adoration as the main purpose of human life.

ii) An-nafs al-lawwamah, (the blaming self)

This is the blameworthy self which accuses men for their own fault. This nafs is in a condition of continuous consciousness, self-inspection, and self-criticism. At this level, men know their weaknesses, their naughtiness, and the neglect of their responsibilities. This nafs is stated in the Holy Quran in the following verse. "And I do call to witness the nafs that blames" (75: 2). This nafs could not repose in one condition. It frequently changes, remembers and forgets, submits and withdraws. At this level, men are in the middle of its expedition to perfection.

iii) An-nafs al-mutma'innah (satisfying self or the self at peace)

This is the highest level of nafs. At this level, men could overcome their mazmumah (bad) traits and their mahmudah (good) traits have increased. This nafs would guide men to resolve their problems and finally help men achieve the closeness with Allah SWT. This level of nafs is the righteous soul, as stated in the Holy Quran,

"To the righteous soul will be said; "O soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction!" (89: 27).

These four elements of human nature are the comprehensive view of human personality. In summary, through the process of tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul), Muslim married couples gradually could move from the an-nafs al-ammarah stage to an-nafs al-lawwamah and finally to an-nafs al-mutma'innah stage which is regarded as personality or psycho-spiritual development as shown in figure as follow.

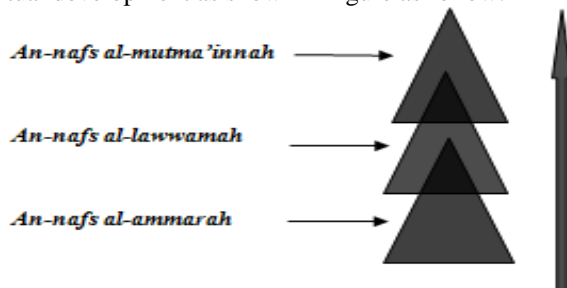


Figure 1.1. Psycho-Spiritual Development
(Source: Hassan & Baba, 2008)

The purpose of life and marriage in Islam

In Islam, the goal and purpose of human existence is to acknowledge the Allah SWT, to be thankful, and to act upon the rules that He has determined for man. In other words, the main reason for human creation is to worship Allah SWT. This reason has mentioned in the Holy Quran (51: 56): "And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me". This verse has examined that, Muslims have to fulfill obligatory duties to Allah SWT. Therefore, as a form of ibadah (worship), marriage is a platform for Muslim to worship and get closer to Allah SWT. As stated in the Holy Quran, "And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts); verily in that are Signs for those who reflect (30: 21), the purpose of marriage is to enable man and woman dwell in peace and tranquility in the world and the hereafter. Thus, in enhancing marriage relationships, every married couple has to

realize and understand the purpose of life and the purpose of marriage as well.

Tazkiyatun nafs (Purification of the Soul) in marriage relationship

In Islam, relationship between husbands and wives becomes precious when it is intended purely to obtain the good pleasure of Allah SWT. Therefore, to gain the good pleasure of Allah SWT and to find happiness and success in the world and the hereafter, Muslim married couples need to have strong religious beliefs. Allah SWT has mentioned in the Holy Quran, "It is He Who has sent amongst the Unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom — although they had been, before, in manifest error" (66: 2). Based on this verse, Allah SWT teaches that the many goals in this life, a Muslim must cleanse their nafs. This process is known as tazkiyatun nafs which is an Arabic-Islamic term. This is the process of cleansing the soul from corruption, and growing it with the belief in Allah SWT, and by doing good deeds and refraining from doing evil so that the soul is blessed in this world and in the hereafter (Hawwa, 2001). Allah SWT has mentioned the importance of this process in the Holy Quran, "Truly he succeeds that purifies it, And he fails that corrupts it!" (91: 9 & 10). In marriage context, these verses can be understood that the successful of relationship between husbands and wives in this world and the hereafter should come through the process of tazkiyyah (purification), and the failure of their relationship comes through of their nafs (soul).

As mentioned before, qalb is an important dimension because it is an axis or the center of change in humans. This was stated by the Prophet SAW in a hadith, "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".

Through the process of tazkiyatun nafs, the human's qalb could be purified from mazmumah (bad) traits to mahmudah (good) traits. It's because human's qalb will determine the quality of aql and nafs. When the qalb is good, the aql is good, which will eventually lead to an increase in nafs, (from an-nafs al-ammarah stage to an-nafs al-lawwamah and finally to an-nafs al-mutma'innah). At the an-nafs al-mutma'innah stage, husbands and wives will enjoy peace and happiness in this world and in the hereafter. Further, the concept of marriage as a form of ibadah (worship) to Allah SWT can be achieved at this stage.

There are many ways of tazkiyatun nafs in Islam. However in this article, the discussion is limited to the practical means of tazkiyatun nafs which gives the obvious impact on the human soul to enable couples to get closer to Allah SWT. The followings are the practical means that married couples are recommended to practice in daily life. These practical means of worship were emphasized by Al-Ghazali through his writing in *Ihya Ulumuddin* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences).

i) Building a relationship with Allah SWT through Rukun Islam (the pillars of Islam) which are shahadah (Muslim profession of faith), solat (performing ritual prayers five times each day), zakat (paying an alms or aids for the sake of the needy), sawm (fasting during the month of Ramadan) and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). These are the notable deeds that help purify the Muslim couples' soul. In Islamic psycho-spiritual approach, these deeds are the five responsibilities that every Muslim husband and wife should fulfil with the purpose of staying in a harmonious life according to Islam.

ii) Solat (prayer) is the most effective means in this approach. The Muslim married couples must recognize the importance of

solat. This is the most important act of worship. It is because solat differentiates the believers and non-believers. Husbands and wives must realize that solat is a connection between them and Allah SWT. Solat will wipe out sins and lift man to higher degrees and protect from evil doing. The goal of marriage in Islam is to enable husbands and wives to dwell in peace and tranquility. Through solat, couples can achieve this goal. This is because solat makes man feel at peace and prevents them from doing bad things. This is stated in the following verse:

“Recite what is sent of the Book by inspiration to thee, and establish Regular Prayer: for Prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds; and remembrance of Allah is the greatest (thing in life) without doubt. And Allah knows the (deeds) that ye do” (29: 45).

In addition, any marital problem that couples face can be solved through solat. This is clearly stated in another verse shown below:

“...seek help with patient perseverance and prayer: for Allah is with those who patiently persevere” (2:153).

iii) Zikr (remembrance of Allah SWT) is another most effective means in enhancing marriage relationship through psycho-spiritual approach, which can be done at anywhere and at any time. The couples' qalb (heart) needs the constant application of zikr and repentance to keep it sparkling. Zikr is the cure of the qalb. The nafs is more stubborn and in the majority of cases needs strong tazkiyyah to root out evil desires. Holy Quran has stated in verse (33: 35), “...for men and women who guard their chastity and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise — for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward”. In another verse, “...verily, in the remembrance of Allāh do hearts find rest” (13: 28). This verse mentions that zikr makes human being feel peaceful which an important aspect of human life.

iv) Reciting Holy Quran is another way in the process of purification of the soul and the most important nourishment for the qalb. In many cases, marital conflicts caused by a spiritual disease such as love of the world, boasting and arrogance. By reciting Holy Quran, these spiritual diseases can be eliminated because the Holy Quran is a cure for both physical and spiritual ailments as stated, “We sent down the Quran which is a healing and a mercy for the believers” (17:82). Besides that, every married couple should recite, understand, and implement Quran teachings in daily life to fulfill the Islamic duty. Holy Quran should become a source of guidance in couple's lives which is stated in verse “... the month of Ramadhan is that in which the Quran was sent down, a guidance for mankind, and clear proofs of the guidance, and the criterion of right and wrong” (2: 185).

v) Doa (supplication) is an act of obedience to Allah SWT. By offering supplications, human beings are actually carrying out Allah's SWT command. With the purpose of establishing strong relationship with Allah SWT, husbands and wives should always ask Him in doa in all conditions and rely on Him for all of necessities, assistance, and support.

Allah SWT has stated in the Holy Quran, "Call on Me. I will answer your prayer, but those who are too arrogant to serve me will surely find themselves humiliated in Hell" (40: 60). In most cases when the married couples face marital problem, the best way or tool for healing that is doa and “surrendering to Allah SWT”.

This is clearly stated in Holy Quran, “And put thy trust in Allah, and enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs” (33: 3).

These practical means of tazkiyatun nafs would help Muslim couples purify their soul. Through this process, the quality of qalb can be improved which eventually would

influence on emotions and behavior. It will help married couples to practice all the attributes of mahmudah (good attribute) such as patience, redha (acceptance), generosity, being charitable with forgiveness, and many other good attributes which are the traits that are important in marriage relationships.

Implication for Marriage Counseling

In marriage counseling, it is a necessity for marriage counselors to discuss the elements of spiritual with the client. An Islamic psycho-spiritual approach should be exposed to Muslim couples. In addition, the husbands and wives should be made aware that any marital problems can be faced and dealt with when the couples surrender and get closer to Allah SWT. Marriage counselors have a responsibility to check on the clients' spiritual level and their religious beliefs as a source of change. Besides, it is important for marriage counselors to understand how the client's spiritual belief is associated with the problems faced by them, and how it can be a source or an obstacle to their clients to achieve a therapeutic goal. Marriage counselors also have to be familiar with the concept of human nature which consists of the elements of ruh, qalb, aql, and nafs in order to figure out the Muslim personality comprehensively. Muslim clients should also be helped to understand their level of nafs (personality development).

Conclusion

In this modern time, couples gradually believe that any problem in marriage relationship cannot be solved through spirituality approach. This is due to the impact of globalization, where couples no longer talk about the purpose of life and marriage from a religious perspective. In many cases, marital conflict occurs when couples start to forget that Allah SWT is the One that they should rely on to help them solve the problem. An Islamic psycho-spiritual approach emphasizes on the important role of remembrance of Allah SWT. The process of tazkiyatun nafs is a way to improve the quality of qalb which is the center of changes in human lives. By drawing closer and nearer to Allah SWT, Muslim couples will acquire His assistance in every facet of marriage relationships in this world and gain mercy in the Jannah. In summary, the relationship with Allah SWT and the relationship between human beings are the most important factor in ensuring long lasting happiness in life.

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