



# No Limits

Self-Development  
from an Islamic Perspective

Author: Abbas Al-Hamid

"This book is for Muslims and non-Muslims, therapists and patients,  
and anyone who wishes to reach their full potential in this all too short life."

**Alexander Vuckovic, M.D.**

Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry - Harvard Medical School

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# A Dedication to the Beloved of God

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To the Chosen One, the noblest of messengers, the healer of hearts and mercy to all creation—Muhammad, son of Abdullah (peace be upon him)...

To you, O Messenger of God, I dedicate this book. It is but a humble attempt to walk the path you paved in purifying souls and nurturing the spirit. You are the one whom the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (peace be upon him), so beautifully described:

“A doctor who roams with his remedy, having heated his ointment and prepared his instruments, applying his cure where it is most needed—among hearts that are blind, ears that are deaf, and tongues that are mute. He seeks out the places of heedlessness and the homes of confusion.”

O Messenger of God, you were a healer of souls, just as others were healers of bodies. You were made a mercy to all worlds. You came bearing a remedy for every lost heart, a balm for every wounded spirit. You opened the eyes of reason to the light of God. Peace be upon you, as many times as your light revived dying hearts, and as often as you led souls from darkness into divine illumination.

**O my Master, my Beloved, O Messenger of Allah,** Please accept this humble gift from me. I know well that nothing I offer can truly match your noble status. Yet this small gesture comes from a heart filled with sincere love and deep, lasting gratitude. I ask Allah, Most Merciful, to grant me your intercession, and to include me in your blessed prayers—for you are the Mercy gifted to humanity, the one whose plea is always heard.

**O Messenger of Allah,** Pray for me, for my family, and for all believing men and women—that we may be guided, forgiven, and granted goodness in both this life and the next. Pray that we walk in your footsteps, live by your Sunnah, and grow in purity through your teachings—until the day we meet you at the Fountain. May your gaze fall upon us with mercy, and may you bring us the glad news of Allah's eternal pleasure and acceptance.

If there is any goodness in this book, it is but a flicker from the light of your guidance. And if there are shortcomings, then perfection belongs to you—O leader of all generations, and to the truth and compassion you brought to the world.

# A Message to Personal Coaches

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*“And who is better in speech than one who calls to God, does righteous deeds, and says, ‘Indeed, I am of the Muslims?’” (Fussilat, 33)*

Personal coaching is a sacred trust before it is a profession. It is not merely about motivation or encouragement—it is about guiding lives, shaping paths, and holding a mirror to one’s purpose. Such a responsibility demands discernment, integrity, and unwavering scrutiny of every methodology or theory that one chooses to adopt or teach.

In recent decades, countless self-development philosophies have gained global popularity. Yet not all of them align with innate human nature, nor with the holistic vision of Islam. What is widely circulated and praised in the world of personal growth may, upon closer examination, contain flaws or contradictions that mislead rather than guide. Indeed, God warns: ***“This is My straight path, so follow it; and do not follow [other] ways, for they will separate you from His path.”*** (Al-An’am, 153)

Ignorance of the Islamic framework does not absolve one of accountability. Before we direct others, we must be certain of the direction ourselves. As the Qur’an cautions: “Shall We tell you of those who lost the most in their deeds? Those whose efforts in this worldly life were misguided, while they thought they were doing good.” (Al-Kahf, 103–104)

My message to every personal coach is this:

Let your guidance be a light that leads—not a mirage that misguides.

- ♦ Examine every method you adopt with discernment, for the responsibility you carry is immense, and the trust is sacred.
- ♦ Do not let your enthusiasm to spread knowledge outpace the duty to verify its truth and its harmony with Islamic principles.
- ♦ Ground your coaching in truth—for the legacy you leave will echo far beyond your present moment.
- ♦ Lead others toward a balanced form of success—one that marries worldly ambition with eternal purpose.

This book is a humble attempt to offer a comprehensive framework for self-development rooted in the Islamic worldview. Drawing from the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition, it provides a critical lens through which modern self-help theories may be evaluated. We hope it serves as a meaningful companion in your mission, empowering you to deliver deeper, more impactful coaching programs that nurture not only achievement in this world, but also spiritual elevation for the next.

# Acknowledgment and Gratitude

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I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all those who played a role in bringing this book to life in the form you now hold in your hands.

My sincere thanks go to the esteemed reviewers whose thoughtful insights and valuable feedback enriched the manuscript at every stage. I am deeply grateful to Mr. Anis Musa Al-Lawati, Mr. Saleh Mohammed Reda, Mr. Mohammed Reda Mohammed Suleiman, Mr. Mustafa Mohsen, Mr. Hussein Ali Dawood, and my son, Mohammed Abbas. Their observations sharpened the content and elevated the quality of this work, allowing it to reach a higher standard of excellence.

I also wish to express my appreciation for the role of artificial intelligence tools, which served as a vital ally throughout this creative journey. These modern technologies supported me in shaping ideas, organizing the content, and uncovering new analytical perspectives. Without this synergy between human creativity and technological innovation, this book would not have emerged in such a cohesive and polished form.

To me, this work stands as the fruit of a collective effort—a collaboration between the minds and hearts who inspired and enriched the process, and the intelligent tools that acted as inventive partners along the way. To each and every one of you, I offer my deepest thanks and sincere gratitude.

# They said about the book

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Al Humaid has presented us with a comprehensive and masterful synthesis of two disparate yet paradoxically related topics: the science and art of psychotherapy with its grounding in a secular and materialistic principles, and the deeply spiritual Islamic understanding of human affairs.

He persuasively connects several psychological perspectives from the Western canon with specific elements of Islamic teaching and discipline.

Ultimately, he enlarges the scope of his analysis to demonstrating an individual's power to actualize his and her potential by using the combined principles of the two philosophies with scientifically derived algorithms as well as common sensical first principles.

This book is for Muslims and non-Muslims, therapists and patients, and anyone who wishes to reach their full potential in this all too short life.



**Alexander Vuckovic, M.D.**

Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry  
Harvard Medical School



"With smoothness, it penetrates the soul and spirit at the same time, without needing permission. Our creative author Abbas Al-Humaid took us on a journey, moving from flower to flower among the blossoms of life that we once thought distant, making them close and easily within reach."

**Prof. Dr. Tareq Al-Habeeb**

Professor and Consultant of Psychiatry  
General Supervisor of Mutmainnah Centers for Counseling  
and Training  
Secretary-General of the Arab Federation of Psychiatrists (2018 - 2023)

The book “No Limits” sheds light on an important and vital topic: psychotherapy from an Islamic perspective. This book is a valuable addition to the Islamic library as it opens the door to a discussion of a subject that lacks sufficient sources despite its great significance.

The book explores how to apply the principles of Islam in psychotherapy, making it an essential reference for both individuals and Muslim therapists alike. By presenting a comprehensive view that combines science and faith, the book helps meet the needs of those seeking therapeutic approaches aligned with their religious beliefs. The first section offers a spiritual journey that is necessary for anyone searching for inner peace amid a fast-paced, ever-changing world—where the teachings of our noble religion remain steadfast lights illuminating the Muslim’s path: “Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills.”

### **Significance of the Book:**

1. **Providing Reliable Sources:** The book offers trustworthy references and accurate information on how to use Islamic principles in psychotherapy, helping individuals better understand how to deal with their psychological issues from a religious perspective.
2. **Self-Development:** The book does not focus solely on psychotherapy; it also addresses self-development based on Islamic principles, making it a comprehensive reference for those seeking to improve their personal and spiritual lives.
3. **Meeting Community Needs:** The book responds to the needs of the Muslim community seeking therapeutic methods consistent with its values and beliefs, making it an effective tool in promoting psychological and spiritual well-being.

**In Conclusion:** This book represents an important step toward integrating science and religion in the field of psychotherapy, opening new horizons for both individuals and Muslim therapists. By providing reliable information, the book helps meet the needs of the Muslim community and promotes psychological and spiritual health. It also serves as a source for a topic we greatly hope to see further researched, studied, and applied. As a Muslim psychiatrist, I find that Western psychological sciences can be utilized more effectively when infused with an Islamic religious essence in particular.



**Dr. Zakia Ali Salem Al-Difa'iyyah**

Consultant Psychiatrist - Sultan Qaboos University Hospital  
University Medical City



“No Limits” is a distinguished book that presents a new vision in the world of self-development—one that takes into account the purposeful journey of the Muslim individual toward infinite perfection and attaining the pleasure of Allah Almighty. I hope this approach finds its way into practical application.

### **His Eminence, Scholar Dr. Sayyed Muhammad, Bahr Al-Uloom**

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How beautiful it is when knowledge meets the spirit, and how noble when a human being embarks on a journey of self-discovery through a living connection with the Creator who fashioned the soul, perfected it, and inspired it with both its vice and its virtue.

This profound truth is vividly embodied in a deep, contemplative voyage led by a masterful diver—our distinguished author, Mr. Abbas Al-Humaid—in his remarkable work “No Limits.” With exceptional insight, he has charted for us safe harbors upon which we may rest, reflecting on the essence of the self: from where it comes, how it is formed, and what its true purpose in life is.

The book presents its message through an authentic Islamic perspective, while thoughtfully engaging with contemporary psychological theories that have sought to unravel the mysteries of human nature and its inner architecture. Thus, “No Limits” stands as both a comprehensive reference and a practical guide for every seeker of self-understanding and for every traveler journeying toward his Lord—echoing the Divine verse: “O mankind, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord with great exertion and will meet Him.” (Qur’an 84:6)

As always, the author distinguishes himself through a captivating and graceful style that holds the reader’s attention effortlessly. Each chapter concludes with concise summaries and practical exercises that empower readers to develop themselves through a holistic Islamic methodology.

May Allah reward this creative author abundantly, bless his sincere efforts, and make his work a source of guidance and benefit for humanity.



### **Prof. Ahmad Kamal Al-Awadi**

Professor and Consultant Psychiatrist  
Faculty of Medicine, Al-Azhar University – Cairo

# Introduction

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In the palace of Yazid ibn Muawiyah—where tyranny and arrogance loomed over the aftermath of Karbala—the despot deluded himself into believing that the triumph of the sword could erase the truth, and that his reign of terror could forever silence the memory of Ahlulbayt.

But history had another chapter to write.

Lady Zainab (peace be upon her) stood as destiny's chosen voice, not as a broken prisoner, but as a towering emblem of unwavering faith and fearless defiance. With a voice full of certainty in God, and a calm that defied swords and thrones, she confronted him and declared:

*"By God, you shall never erase our memory, nor extinguish our revelation, nor reach the end of our legacy..."*

That moment was far more than a confrontation—it was an eternal lesson in endurance amid trial, in unshakable conviction, and in the quiet power that radiates from a soul anchored in divine truth. Lady Zainab proved that even the gravest challenges can become moments of strength and illumination—if faced with a heart full of faith and a spirit rooted in unyielding principles.

## **| How Does This Book Inspire Our Journey?**

The strength of Lady Zainab (peace be upon her) was not a fleeting moment of courage—it was the culmination of deep-rooted faith and a clear, unwavering understanding of life's true purpose. In this book, we walk together to explore how such values can be woven into the fabric of our own journey—empowering us to build ourselves with resilience and inner strength.

This work offers a comprehensive Islamic vision of self-development. It redefines core concepts such as patience, purification of the soul, balance, and responsibility—transforming them into practical tools that enable you to confront life's challenges and achieve a success that is both worldly and eternal.

Islam, in its essence, is a divine message of purification and reform—designed to cultivate the human being spiritually, intellectually, and ethically. It was never intended as a mere set of ritual acts detached from the pulse of daily life. Rather, it is a complete way of being—a transformative framework that refines the soul, expands the mind, and guides the human heart toward true balance: between body and spirit, between worldly ambition and eternal purpose.

God summarized this noble mission in the Qur'an when He said: ***"Indeed, God has bestowed a great favor upon the believers by sending among them a messenger from among themselves, reciting to them His verses, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom—although they had previously been in manifest error."*** (Aal Imran, 164)

This verse encapsulates the profound mission of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in shaping the human being. His role was never confined to mere proclamation; he was a healer of hearts, a teacher of minds, and a nurturer of souls. He purified hearts, illuminated intellects, and led souls toward wisdom and certainty.

It is from this deep understanding of the Prophetic legacy that any true model of self-development must arise. Only then can self-growth transcend superficial achievement and ascend toward genuine human excellence—toward the highest spiritual and moral potential a person can attain.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) himself affirmed this lofty purpose when he said: ***"I was sent only to perfect noble character."*** (Narrated by Al-Bayhaqi)

True human development, then, is not merely about motivation or personal gain. It is about fulfilling the ultimate purpose of our creation: to worship God, to inhabit the earth with justice and goodness, and to embody the values of truth, compassion, and integrity.

This book is not a mere survey of modern self-help theories. Rather, it is a heartfelt endeavor to reconnect the field of personal development with the timeless framework of authentic Islamic guidance. It reimagines self-growth as a holistic journey—one that unites knowledge with faith, harmonizes personal ambition with

spiritual purpose, and seeks to balance worldly striving with preparation for the Hereafter.

Within its pages, you will find thoughtful comparisons between Islamic teachings and contemporary self-development paradigms—such as the Law of Attraction and the Theory of Flow—revealing how Islam offers a more encompassing, deeply rooted vision of human potential.

More than that, the book provides practical tools drawn from the Qur'an and the Sunnah—tools to help you clarify your goals, confront your challenges with grace, and transform adversity into a pathway for progress and fulfillment.

While many Western self-development theories offer practical insights, they often lack a vital dimension—the spiritual essence that gives life its true meaning. In contrast, Islam presents a holistic model that transcends material achievement. It calls not only for personal success but for inner harmony, divine connection, and a life lived in pursuit of higher, eternal aims.

In this book, you will witness how Islam seamlessly weaves personal growth with spiritual serenity—how it empowers individuals to pursue excellence while anchoring their lives in peace, purpose, and remembrance of the Divine.

Any intellectual framework that neglects the spiritual realm and human innate disposition—no matter how refined or appealing will always fall short of offering true happiness. This deficiency in purely materialistic perspectives leaves them incapable of delivering the deep contentment the human soul longs for throughout its journey.

God Himself warned of this truth when He said: ***“And whoever turns away from My remembrance—indeed, he will have a life of hardship, and We will raise him on the Day of Resurrection blind.” (Ta-Ha, 124)***

To be cut off from one's spiritual core is to live in restlessness and constriction—no matter how high one climbs in wealth, status, or worldly success.

## ■ Why the Title “No Limits”?

*No Limits* is an invitation—a call to rediscover the truth that the human being, when connected to the Divine, holds within themselves a potential that far exceeds the limitations of material existence. You were created by God for a purpose far greater than the world may suggest. Within you lie gifts that are not confined by time or space—capacities that stretch from the moment of your creation to the boundlessness of eternity.

In this book, we explore how Islam opens up an infinite horizon for your being. Your mission goes far beyond personal success or worldly gain—you are God's vicegerent on earth, entrusted with the responsibility to spread goodness, uplift your soul, and elevate the lives of those around you.

*No Limits* is more than a book on self-development—it is a holistic vision that redefines how you perceive your potential and your responsibilities. It is a call to uncover your true power through your connection with God, and to realize a life of balance between worldly success and eternal fulfillment.

Within these pages, you will find practical guidance rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah—timeless wisdom to help you rise above life's challenges and awaken to the boundless capacities God has placed within you.

Prepare yourself for a journey of true transformation. For when you awaken to your limitless strength under the light of faith, your real life begins—a life of purpose, clarity, and infinite potential.

This book is your gateway to that awakening. Let us begin this journey together.

The principles presented in this book are not mere theories or abstract philosophies—they are lived truths, tested and proven through experience. They have profoundly shaped my own life and personal journey.

For those who wish to see these concepts come alive in a real-world narrative, I invite you to explore the novel *"The Journey of a Toiler"*. It offers a vivid portrayal of how applying these Islamic values can empower a person to rise above hardship, and ultimately find true success and lasting joy.

## ■ What Does This Book Offer?

This book invites you on a unique journey of self-discovery, guided by three central pillars:

- 1. Spiritual and Psychological Foundations of the Self:** It helps you confront life's most fundamental questions: Who am I? What is my purpose? How can I find harmony between my soul and my body? Through reflection and faith, you will begin to build a deeper, more rooted understanding of yourself.
- 2. A Comparative Insight: Islamic Perspective vs. Modern Theories:** The book provides a thoughtful analysis of contemporary self-development models—such as the Law of Attraction and meditation—demonstrating how the Islamic approach surpasses them through its depth, spiritual grounding, and holistic vision of human nature.
- 3. Practical and Applicable Steps:** Drawing on the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition, it offers hands-on guidance and

actionable exercises to help you embody Islamic principles in your everyday life, face challenges with positivity and strength, and walk a path of real, lasting transformation.

## ■ Who Is This Book for?

This book is not only for those seeking success, happiness, and inner peace—it is also a valuable resource for anyone working in, or aspiring to enter, the field of personal coaching. It offers personal development professionals a comprehensive framework that blends the most effective elements of modern self-help theories with the depth and wisdom of the Islamic worldview—a perspective that embraces the human being in totality: mind, soul, and body.

Within these pages, coaches will find a critical analysis of Western self-development methodologies, along with practical exercises rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Together, these tools empower coaches to design programs that are not only more effective and transformative—but that also help clients achieve lasting balance between the demands of this life and the fulfillment of their deeper, eternal purpose.

## ■ A Call for Transformation

We all yearn for change. Yet few among us realize that genuine, lasting transformation begins not in the world around us, but within the quiet chambers of the soul. As the Almighty has revealed: ***“Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.” (Ar-Ra’d, 11)***

It is vital to understand that mental and psychological disorders—such as depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, or psychosis—are not signs of spiritual weakness or moral failing. Just as physical illnesses do not reflect a lack of piety, neither do mental health struggles. These conditions often stem from intricate

biochemical imbalances in the brain, genetic predispositions, or deeply rooted psychological and environmental factors—causes that transcend the reach of sheer willpower or spiritual discipline alone.

Walking the path of righteousness and seeking nearness to God undoubtedly fortifies the soul, empowering individuals to face inner trials with greater resilience and peace. Yet, spiritual devotion is not a shield against mental illness, just as a healthy lifestyle is no absolute safeguard against physical disease. Rather, faith functions as a source of strength—deepening one’s ability to endure, adapt, and persevere through life’s most fragile moments.

This book does not offer medical solutions for psychological conditions. Rather, it serves to strengthen your inner resilience, deepen your sense of peace, and empower you to face life’s trials with unwavering faith and calm determination. It is a companion that helps build a more grounded, composed, and spiritually fortified self—capable of navigating life’s many storms with grace and courage.

If you or someone close to you is experiencing a psychological disorder—such as depression, severe anxiety, or obsessive-compulsive disorder—it is essential to seek help from a qualified mental health professional. Accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment—whether through therapy, medication, or a combination of both—can make a significant difference.

Mental well-being is just as important as physical health, and early intervention is often the key to healing and to living a life of greater balance, clarity, and stability.

This book is not merely something to read—it is an interactive experience, an invitation to dive deep within yourself. It calls you to explore your inner landscape: to uncover your strengths and confront

your weaknesses, and to begin building your truest self upon a foundation where knowledge and faith walk hand in hand.

*No Limits* is an open invitation for all who believe in the human spirit's capacity to overcome, to find balance, and to live a life of deeper meaning.

I pray that this book serves as a faithful companion on your journey, illuminating your path toward the realization of your true self—in a way that pleases your Creator and brings benefit to both your life and the lives of those around you.

Part One

# The Spiritual and Psychological Foundations of the Self

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The chapters in this section—reimagined, expanded, and refined—are built upon core ideas previously introduced in my earlier works: *The Islamic Intellectual Framework* and *The Craft of Life*. Here, these concepts are reconstructed into a unified vision that lays the groundwork for personal development at the intersection of faith and conscious awareness.

Introduction to Part One

# A Journey toward the True Self

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We are all travelers in this life—seeking meaning, searching for our true identity, listening to that quiet voice deep within that keeps asking the timeless question:

“Who am I, and why am I here?”

In this section, we embark on a journey inward—not merely to uncover our talents and capabilities, but to redefine who we are

through a deeper lens. A lens that illuminates our relationship with God, and aligns our inner truth with our purpose in this world.

Yet this is no easy path. It is more like unlocking a hidden door within—a door many people never realize exists. How many spend their entire lives imprisoned by a limited image of themselves? And how many believe they know who they are, while in reality, they are only reflections of what others expect them to be?

## ■ Essential Questions that Shape the Journey

In this section, we will confront questions that must be faced with sincerity, for they are the key to any true transformation:

- ♦ **Who are you?** We will delve deep into the understanding of your true essence as a human being, reflecting upon the divine breath that God has bestowed upon you—a breath that grants you potential far beyond the ordinary. This divine spark lies within you, waiting to be awakened, offering the possibility of greatness beyond the limits of the mundane.
- ♦ **What is your purpose in life?** We will seek the highest meaning of your existence, exploring how this purpose can be the guiding light that provides clarity and stability amidst life's storms. This purpose is not merely a destination, but the force that centers you and gives direction, no matter how turbulent the journey may be.
- ♦ **How do you balance your worldly needs with your spiritual aspirations?** Together, we will explore how one can find harmony between the pursuits of the material world and the elevation of the soul. It is a delicate balance—avoiding the trap of excessive materialism while steering clear of the extremes of spiritual detachment. The goal is to live a life of fullness, where both worlds coexist in a meaningful, purposeful way.

These questions are not just philosophical musings; they are the practical foundation upon which we will build our journey in this book.

## ■ Fundamental Concepts for Building the True Self

For this journey to be meaningful and successful, it is essential to pause at pivotal points that form the foundation for understanding and developing the self. Among these key points are:

- ♦ **The Concept of Stewardship:** We will revisit the profound meaning of stewardship on Earth, not merely as an honor, but as a responsibility that demands a deep awareness of the self and its role in this world. This concept calls us to recognize that our presence here is not a mere accident, but a purposeful assignment that requires accountability, integrity, and vision.
- ♦ **The Law of Self-Honesty:** We will explore how being honest with ourselves is the first gateway to discovering our true essence. It is through confronting our fears and illusions that we can achieve inner clarity—one that leads us to peace and certainty. Self-honesty is the mirror that reflects our deepest truths, and only by facing it can we begin to transform.
- ♦ **Self-Awareness:** We will reflect on the importance of knowing oneself from a practical perspective, and how this self-knowledge impacts our decisions, relationships, and worldview. Self-awareness is not just about introspection; it is about being attuned to our inner workings so we can navigate life with intention and purpose.
- ♦ **Ego vs. Humility:** We will uncover the psychological traps that can hinder human growth, such as ego—an insidious force that often masquerades as self-confidence. Through this exploration, we will learn how humility serves as the compass that keeps our

journey toward true greatness grounded. Humility allows us to remain balanced, keeping the ego in check, and ensuring that our path is one of continuous evolution rather than stagnation.

## ■ **Prepare for a Different Experience**

This journey is not a fleeting read; it is not simply a collection of theories. It is an immersive experience of consciousness that will redefine your essence from within. It will unveil to you the secret of living in harmony—between spirit and intellect, between heart and body, between worldly success and nearness to God.

When you finish this section, you will no longer be the same person who began reading. You will find yourself more attuned to your rightful place in the world, more certain of your purpose, and more ready to move forward with unwavering determination on the path to your true self.

**Are you prepared to discover the depths of your own being? The journey begins now...**



Chapter One

# Who Are You?

## Chapter One:

# Who Are You?

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Each of us, at some point in our lives, finds ourselves standing in quiet contemplation, asking: Who am I? Why am I here? What makes me unique in this vast universe? *Am I merely a body bound by the limitations of time and space, or do I possess potential far greater than I can imagine?* These questions are not just fleeting curiosities; they are the true beginning of a profound journey toward self-discovery and an understanding of the role we play in this world.

The significance of knowing who you are lies in the fact that, before you can bring about any genuine change in your life, you must begin from within. It is from this fundamental point that everything else

will unfold. The essential question that sets the stage for all that follows is: *Are you truly honest with yourself?*

## ■ Self-Honesty

**Self-honesty** is a state of deep balance between your mind, heart, body, and soul. It means living in accordance with your truth, not based on your own illusions or the perceptions others have of you. It is the ability to face yourself without deception, to truly understand who you are before you set out to achieve your goals.

Many seek success, but few realize that true success does not come solely from external achievements. It arises from inner harmony, where a person truly knows themselves, understands their genuine motivations, and lives in alignment with their values and principles, not based on the assumptions and expectations of others.

## ■ The Greatness of Humanity: Divine Stewardship

Humanity, as God's steward on Earth, is not merely a transient being, but rather bears a profound responsibility in fulfilling its divine mission. God chose humanity for the gift of free will, the ability to be conscious and aware, which qualified it to take on the role of stewardship on Earth. As Allah says to the angels in the Quran: *\*"Indeed, I am going to place upon the earth a vicegerent." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" He said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know."\** (Al-Baqarah, 30) This elevated station was not even granted to the angels, who are devoted in their worship of God. Yet, Allah has bestowed this role upon you, creating all other beings to be subservient to you, assisting you in your journey toward God and nearness to Him.

You, the human being, are the one whom God has honored, commanding all of His angels to bow to you upon your creation. The only sin of Iblis (Satan) was his refusal to obey Allah's command to bow to humanity. He envied the position granted to you by God, and through his arrogance, he earned the curse of Allah for all eternity. As Allah says in the Quran: ***\*"When your Lord said to the angels, 'I am creating a human being from clay, from molded mud, so when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down to him in prostration.' So the angels prostrated, all of them entirely, except Iblis; he was arrogant and became one of the disbelievers."\**** (Sad, 71-74)

The secret behind the greatness of humanity lies in the divine breath that God has instilled within us, making us more than just a physical body. ***\*"And I breathed into him of My spirit."\**** (Sad, 72) It is the soul that connects us to our Creator, and it is through the soul that we are empowered to strive toward greater goals. Your constant connection to God opens up limitless horizons and possibilities that transcend the confines of time and space. Some of the small yet powerful manifestations of this divine potential are exemplified in the story of the righteous servant, Asif bin Barkhiya, who demonstrated the extraordinary power granted through divine connection when he said: ***\*"The one who had knowledge of the Scripture said, 'I will bring it to you before your gaze returns to you.'"*** (An-Naml, 40)

But the essential question you must ask yourself is: *\*Am I living in alignment with this greatness that God has endowed me with? Have I truly realized my true nature as a steward of the Earth, or have I been swept along by the roles defined for me by society and circumstances?\**

To recognize your true self means to clearly contemplate these questions, and to seek their answers with complete honesty. This is the first step on the path to realizing your true self and the spiritual elevation for which you were created.

## ■ Choice and Free Will

With that divine breath comes a tremendous responsibility: the freedom of will. ***\*“Indeed, We have guided him to the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful.”\* (Al-Insan, 3)*** As a human being, you have been granted the power to choose between good and evil, between nobility and degradation. It is this freedom that shapes your destiny and distinguishes you from all other creations.

Free will is the key to spiritual ascension; just as you can elevate your value and potential through your connection with God and righteous actions, you also have the ability to choose to decline, to lower your worth, and to degrade yourself to the point where you become lower than the creatures, equal in disgrace to Satan himself. The choices you make every day, whether small or large, determine your fate and whether you draw closer or drift farther from spiritual elevation. As Allah says: ***\*“And by the soul and He who proportioned it, then inspired it to its wickedness and its righteousness. He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who instills it with corruption.”\* (Ash-Shams, 7-10).***

## ■ Spiritual Ascension and Closeness to God

Spiritual ascension and closeness to God lie at the very heart of human existence. Ascension is realized through your daily actions, no matter how small or grand, because each choice between good and evil paves your path toward God. Every time you choose to help someone in need, avoid causing harm, or uphold the values of truth, you take a step closer to attaining this ascension, fulfilling the ultimate purpose of your existence. ***\*“Do you think that We created you in vain, and that you will not be returned to Us?”\* (Al-Mu’minun, 115)***

The path to achieving this ascension is through piety and completeness. ***\*“Indeed, the most honorable of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.”\* (Al-Hujurat, 13)*** Allah has placed humanity at the center of the universe and created you to be a

witness to the people, a representative of the values of truth and goodness. ***\*“So that you may be witnesses to the people, and the Messenger will be a witness over you.”\* (Al-Baqarah, 143)*** The divine spirit that God breathed into you at the moment of creation is the source of your strength and your ability to achieve the great goals that may seem impossible.

By nature, the human being is driven toward integration and elevation. We search for truth, hold on to moral values, long for beauty, and aspire to create, innovate, and belong. All these traits are a reflection of the inherent nature that God has placed within us. It is the deep desire to strive toward perfection and draw closer to God, embodying His attributes and ethics. As Allah says: ***“So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. The natural disposition of Allah upon which He has created mankind. There is no altering the creation of Allah.” (Ar-Rum, 30)***

Yet, this inherent nature can only flourish when the individual is honest with themselves in their pursuit of it. A person cannot attain spiritual ascension while living in a state of internal contradiction, where their thoughts, feelings, and actions conflict with each other. True alignment requires an integration of mind, heart, and actions in harmony with the divine purpose. Only then can one rise to the fullness of their being and fulfill the spiritual potential they were created to embody.

Self-honesty means being fully aware of the true nature of your spiritual inclinations and striving to fulfill them, free from the influences of the surrounding environment. When a person is truthful with themselves in recognizing their inherent nature, they experience a profound sense of balance, which enables them to achieve inner peace and move toward God with consciousness and sincerity.

Thus, self-honesty is not limited to understanding your strengths and weaknesses; it extends to comprehending your relationship with your existence and knowing your highest purpose. In this way, your life becomes balanced, harmonizing your personal aspirations with your spiritual role in the universe. It is through this alignment that you can navigate life with clarity, knowing that each step brings you closer to the divine purpose for which you were created.

## Humanity: Unlimited Potential in the Journey of Life

One cannot reduce a human being to narrow material or temporal dimensions. By nature, a human transcends these limits. God created humanity to be His vicegerent on Earth, entrusted with spreading truth, justice, and goodness among people. As Allah says: ***“You are the best nation raised up for mankind. You enjoin what is right, forbid what is wrong, and believe in Allah.”***<sup>\*</sup> (Al Imran, 110) This exalted responsibility requires humans to go beyond their own personal boundaries and broaden their vision toward higher and nobler horizons.

A human being is part of an eternal system, extending from the creation of Adam (peace be upon him) to eternity itself, in which they strive to fulfill the grand mission entrusted to them. As Allah says: ***“We offered the trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it. But man bore it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.”*** (Al-Ahzab, 72)

This human journey is not merely an endeavor to achieve limited worldly successes; it is an eternal journey toward God, where it does not end with the confines of this world but extends into the afterlife. ***“O mankind, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord with [great] labor and will meet it.”*** (Al-Inshiqaaq, 6) With this understanding, humanity is connected to the entire existence, driven by higher

purposes that go beyond material needs, reaching a deeper meaning of life and ultimate purpose.

## Human and the Universe: A Relationship Beyond Brotherhood

The universe is not merely an external scene that you pass through on your journey, but an integral part of that very journey. Every living being, every creature, every star, and every celestial body within it works in perfect harmony, serving you and guiding you toward your highest purpose. It is your companion on the path to God.

From the vast heavens to the wide earth, from the smallest of living creatures to the greatest mountains and oceans, everything has been created and made subservient to you. All is set in motion to support you in your pursuit of the ultimate goal: to get closer to God and connect with Him. As Allah says: *“And He has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth – all from Him. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought.”* (Al-Jathiyah, 13)

Our relationship with the universe is not merely one of benefit or utility—it is far more profound. It is a relationship rooted in **shared servitude to the One True God**. We, along with all of creation, are bound by the truth that we were fashioned by the same Creator, without partner or equal. What unites us is a bond that transcends bloodlines and human kinship: it is the sacred connection of *devotion to God*.

This deep spiritual link between us and the universe reminds us that we are never truly alone in this journey. We are part of a divine, harmonious system—one in which every element moves, breathes, and exists in a unified direction: toward God.

Every creature, through its presence and motion in this universe, shares with you the same ultimate purpose—to seek the pleasure of the Creator and to orient its being toward Him.

As the Qur'an says: *"The seven heavens and the earth and all that is in them glorify Him. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise—but you do not understand their glorification."* (Al-Isra, 44)

## **In Summary: Human Potential Knows No Bounds**

The human being is a remarkable creation, capable of transcending all physical and spiritual limitations through sincere connection with God and steadfast effort. Our greatness lies not merely in physical strength or intellectual prowess, but in our link to the Divine, and in our pursuit of the lofty purposes for which we were created.

Like everything else in the universe, the human is in a state of utter need, absolute poverty before God. Only God is truly and eternally self-sufficient. As the Qur'an declares: *"O mankind, it is you who are in need of God, while God is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy."* (Fatir, 15)

This neediness is not a flaw nor a weakness, it is an unchanging existential truth. No matter how powerful, knowledgeable, or accomplished a person may become, all that we possess remains infinitesimal in the face of God's boundless richness, infinite perfection, and unmatched generosity.

Yet because God is the absolute source of all richness, His giving knows no limits. His grace flows continuously upon His servants, each according to their capacity and readiness to receive from the Divine wellspring. As the Qur'an teaches: *"And say, 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge.'"* (Ta-Ha, 114)

This verse reveals that knowledge is without end that no matter how much understanding a person attains, they remain open to infinite growth. And this truth extends beyond knowledge; it applies to every dimension of human existence. We are beings in a state of constant development, endlessly rising in response to divine generosity ascending the ladder of perfection in proportion to our sincerity and striving.

This concept is reflected even in the most exalted of all creation: **the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)**—the seal of Prophethood, the summit of human virtue. Though he reached the pinnacle of human perfection and the finality of divine message, he remains in a continuous state of receiving from God's radiant light—an outpouring so immense that it defies human comprehension.

And yet, despite his unmatched stature among all of creation, his greatness remains finite in comparison to the **infinite wealth of God**. Like every other created being, the Prophet himself is in absolute need of God at every moment—forever sustained by His boundless light and mercy.

And so it is with us, we, too, are without end. For we are in a state of continual ascent, ever drawing from the endless generosity of God. Our journey toward His nearness is eternal, a path of ceaseless unfolding, of becoming, of rising ever higher in His light.

Every moment in a person's life is an invitation—an opportunity for spiritual and moral growth. And it is through connection with God that this journey finds its strength, its clarity, and its direction. That sacred bond is what empowers the human soul to strive, to hope, and to realize its aspirations in both this world and the Hereafter.

The human being is part of a divine narrative woven into a larger story authored by the Creator. Each moment of life is a sacred thread

in that tapestry, a chapter in a never-ending tale that is forever anchored in God and in the ultimate purpose of existence.

With this deeper understanding, we now begin our journey through *No Limits*, a path that invites you to discover your true self, a self that transcends the boundaries of time and space. This journey is not merely about uncovering material potential or chasing personal ambition. It is a journey toward inner peace and spiritual fulfillment.

True success is not measured solely by worldly achievements. It is found in reaching a genuine connection with God—one that opens infinite horizons of goodness, elevation, and tranquility.

Now that you have explored who you are and what your responsibility is as God's vicegerent on earth, you are ready to confront deeper challenges that lie within the human soul. The ability to choose between right and wrong, between elevation and descent, is not always a simple path.

Within each of us reside inner struggles—battles that sometimes pull us away from the path God has laid before us. In the chapters ahead, we will delve into these psychological conflicts, exploring how to face the soul that inclines toward harm (*an-nafs al-ammārah*), and how to rewire the mind to become more positive, resilient, and empowered.

We will examine how to overcome the negative thoughts that hold us back, and how the human being can rebuild the self to reach a state of spiritual harmony and inner stillness.

## ■ Reflective Exercise

### ► **Contemplative Question:**

Does the way I perceive myself truly reflect who I am within? Or is it merely a projection of what others expect me to be?

Take a few quiet moments to reflect on the image you hold of yourself, and ask:

- ♦ Am I living in alignment with my authentic values, or am I acting based on societal expectations?
- ♦ What aspects of myself do I need to face with honesty and courage?
- ♦ How can I begin to cultivate a deeper awareness of who I truly am—so that my life reflects greater harmony with my inner truth?

### ► **Exercise 1: The Mirror of the Self**

Set aside a quiet moment for honest self-reflection. Describe yourself—your strengths and your vulnerabilities. Identify the core values you hold and the primary goals that guide your life. Focus on the unique qualities that make you who you are, and explore how you can nurture and express those traits in a more positive, impactful way.

### ► **Exercise 2: A Letter to Your Future Self**

Write a heartfelt letter to yourself—ten years from now. Speak of the goals you hope to have achieved, and offer the wisdom and

encouragement you believe you'll need. What values do you hope to preserve? How do you envision the person you will become?

This exercise cultivates long-term vision and helps you anchor your deepest personal aspirations.

### ► **Exercise 3: A Letter of Gratitude to God**

In a moment of stillness, take a pen and paper and write a sincere letter to God—as if you are speaking to Him directly. Let your words flow from the depths of your heart, expressing gratitude, hope, longing, or even confusion. Whatever you feel, let it be honest. Let it be real.

Begin your letter by thanking God for the blessings He has granted you—not only the obvious ones like health or family, but also those subtle, often overlooked gifts that may have gone unnoticed. Reflect on five specific blessings you may not have fully appreciated before, and express your sincere gratitude for them.

Then, share with God your hopes and aspirations. Ask Him to grant you the strength and will to pursue them, and to bless your efforts with success and meaning. Let your letter be more than a list of requests—let it be an honest, heartfelt conversation. Share your dreams, your longings, and ask Him to guide you toward what is best for you.

Close your letter with a prayer—for contentment with His decree, and that you may be among His grateful servants, those who recognize His blessings in every moment—even in the challenges they face.



Chapter Two

# **The Problem Lies Within**

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# The Problem Lies Within

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In our modern world—where economic, social, and psychological pressures continue to intensify—the Book of God offers the highest guidance for understanding the human soul. God says:

***“Yet I do not absolve my own soul. Surely the soul constantly commands to evil—except those upon whom my Lord has mercy. Indeed, my Lord is Forgiving, Merciful.”*** (Yusuf, 5)

These timeless words reveal the essence of the human self—a wondrous and complex entity. By its earthly nature, the soul inclines toward ease, indulgence, and wrongdoing. And yet, by God’s mercy

and guidance, it holds the potential for purification, for elevation, for transcendence.

But the struggle is not only with the soul's base inclinations. It lies, too, in the deep programming etched into the subconscious mind, a powerful internal force that shapes our perception of reality and governs how we react to the world around us.

The subconscious mind does not distinguish between truth and illusion. It builds its beliefs based on repetition—on the thoughts and narratives we allow to echo within us, again and again.

For example, a person who believes they are incapable of success will, often unconsciously, make choices that reinforce that belief. Meanwhile, someone who sees themselves as capable of overcoming challenges will naturally discover paths forward—not because their circumstances are easier, but because their way of thinking leads them toward success.

Realizing this truth is the first step toward freedom from the grip of the lower self—the *nafs al-ammārah bis-sū'*. It is the power to recognize and redirect your thoughts that determines the true course of your life.

Just like the body and mind, the soul requires care and attention. When the body is neglected, it becomes weak and ill; similarly, when the soul does not receive its spiritual nourishment, it weakens and loses its way. However, unlike the body, the soul is a source of elevation and nobility when purified. It transforms into a luminous window that reflects faith and certainty. Just as exercise and proper nutrition empower the body, spiritual purification and nourishment grant the soul steadfastness and tranquility. Without this guidance, the soul risks straying, becoming inclined toward evil, and bringing misery and hardship to its owner. ***“Indeed, man was created anxious.***

***When harm touches him, he is fretful; and when good touches him, he withholds. Except for those who pray.” (Al-Ma’arij, 19-22)***

These noble verses highlight the inherent fragility of human nature when faced with adversity. It reveals how humans become restless in the face of hardship and become stingy in times of ease, unless they have a spiritual dimension to rely on. The verses continue to explain the practices that can reform one’s condition and protect them from drowning in the seas of anxiety and panic.

The creation of humans with this nature, which blends spiritual weakness and worldly desires, was not in vain, but rather a profound divine mercy. This design urges the human being, when they neglect the spiritual aspect of their life, to recognize the void left by straying from their true essence. Without this spiritual anchor, they transform into beings driven solely by instincts and desires, much like any other creature. In doing so, they lose the greatest gift granted by God—the vicegerency on Earth for which the angels were commanded to bow down in reverence.

Since Allah is more merciful to us than we are to ourselves, He made human nature a catalyst for reflection and correction. The negative tendencies that arise within a person are, in essence, divine tools designed to awaken them when they deviate from the path, guiding them back to their pure nature. These tendencies function like an internal alarm, reminding the individual that they were created for a greater purpose. When a person strays from their natural course, they suffer harm and disturbance. This psychological anguish, however, serves as a mercy from Allah, urging them to return to the straight path. Allah says: ***“And We will surely let them taste the lower punishment short of the greater punishment that perhaps they will return.”*** (As-Sajda, 21)

In our modern age, the immersion in negative tendencies has become more widespread than ever, reflecting a true human crisis.

Statistics reveal that the rate of depression in the United States reached 32.8% in 2021, meaning that one in every three adults suffers from this condition. These alarming figures are not just numbers but mirror a society grappling with spiritual alienation, disconnected from the innate nature that Allah has instilled in us. The materialistic and consumer-driven culture that has dominated the modern world has contributed significantly to this disconnection, leading humanity into a spiraling crisis of escalating psychological challenges.

## **The Power of Thoughts and Beliefs: The Path to Self-Transformation**

Dr. Bruce Lipton, a cellular biology expert, points out that more than a third of therapeutic drugs' effectiveness relies on what is known as the "Placebo Effect." In this phenomenon, patients experience healing not because of the drug itself, but due to their deep belief in its healing power. This fascinating discovery highlights the profound power of internal beliefs and their tremendous capacity to shape both our psychological and physical health.

However, the impact of thoughts and beliefs goes beyond just physical health; it extends to all aspects of life. A person who holds negative thoughts about themselves and their capabilities often finds themselves trapped in a cycle of failure and frustration. This is not because external circumstances dictate their fate, but because their mental programming drives them to make decisions that reinforce this negative outlook. The mind, when aligned with limiting beliefs, can create a reality where failure becomes self-fulfilling, pushing the individual further away from the success they may actually be capable of achieving.

This highlights the profound truth that the journey toward personal transformation starts with a shift in mindset—believing in one's

potential and understanding the role of thoughts in shaping one's reality.

The human mind is constantly thinking, yet it doesn't distinguish between reality and imagination. Instead, it forms convictions based on what is repeated and deeply ingrained within it. A simple thought that is repeated in the mind gradually transforms into a belief, and this belief influences behavior, which in turn shapes reality. As Allah (SWT) says: ***"Indeed, Allah does not change what is in a people until they change what is within themselves."*** (Ar-Ra'd, 11)

If a person wishes to change their reality, they must first change the way they think. The way in which they perceive the world is what determines the way they live.

The subconscious mind, which is responsible for managing 95% of our behaviors and reactions, acts as a storage for the beliefs and thoughts we acquire over time. These thoughts, whether positive or negative, become the foundation of our mental operating system, guiding our lives. If these mental maps are distorted by negativity, they turn into an internal prison, preventing us from freeing ourselves and trapping us within a cycle of destructive emotions. This is where the importance of reprogramming the mind comes into play—through meditation and conscious reflection, we can create a new path that leads us toward balance and inner peace.

## **Reclaiming Control: Understanding the Role of the Subconscious Mind**

Many of the thoughts and beliefs we carry—whether we are aware of them or not—exert a profound influence over the direction of our lives and the choices we make each day. The subconscious mind navigates life through internal “mental maps”—deeply embedded

frameworks that shape how we perceive and respond to situations and events.

When these maps are distorted by negativity, they become invisible chains subtle but powerful constraints that hold us back from growth, transformation, and the realization of our true potential.

That is why **reprogramming the subconscious mind is not a luxury, it is a necessity**. Through reflection, deep contemplation, and the disciplined alignment of the self with what is good and right, we can begin to dissolve the inner chains that, if left unchecked, quietly pull us toward harmful patterns and away from our higher purpose.

Research suggests that nearly **80% of the thoughts** we experience each day are negative in nature—and about **95% of them repeat themselves** like background noise on a loop. This creates a closed circuit of worry and tension. Left unexamined, these recurring thoughts gradually solidify into rigid beliefs—beliefs that foster inner defeat, sustain negativity, and diminish our sense of agency and hope.

Negative beliefs are like a **distorted lens** through which we view the world. They filter our awareness, attracting only negative experiences to the forefront of our perception—while even joyful moments become colored by pain and doubt. Over time, the mind itself becomes a tool of self-sabotage, trapping the soul in a cycle of helplessness and despair, often without any real, objective cause.

The Qur'an describes this fragile tendency in human nature when God says: ***"Say, even if you possessed the treasures of my Lord's mercy, you would still withhold them, fearing they would run out—for mankind is ever stingy."*** (Al-Isra, 100)

**Reprogramming negative thought patterns is essential** to free the soul from this warped lens. True change does not come from the outside, it begins within, in the very depths of the thoughts and beliefs we allow to inhabit our minds.

God affirms this reality in the Qur'an: ***"Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves."*** (Ar-Ra'd, 11)

The first step toward meaningful transformation begins with the self—with the conscious decision to reshape what lives within.

But changing your thoughts is not enough. **It requires strong will and disciplined effort** to sustain and support that change. New, empowering ideas must be practiced daily—repeated with intention—until they are imprinted within the subconscious mind. Otherwise, the old programming will continue to dominate, quietly shaping your reactions and choices.

**Self-mastery** means having the power to discern which thoughts are worthy of taking root in your awareness—and refusing to allow negative ones to take hold. It means choosing how you respond, rather than being a captive to the habits and reflexes of your conditioned mind.

When a person succeeds in uniting **positive thinking with strong will**, they gain the power to reshape their life through a new lens, rather than remaining a prisoner of past mental conditioning.

Turning to God and returning to one's **pure, innate nature (fitrah)** is the path to liberating the soul from the shackles of destructive beliefs and spiritual weakness.

As one deepens their faith and embraces sincere servitude to the Divine, a door begins to open—a door to hope, to light, to the strength needed to rise above inner darkness. It is in this sacred alignment that the heart finds true **freedom and inner peace**.

## **The Human Soul: Between Pure Nature and Misguidance**

The human soul carries within it the seeds of both virtue and vice. As God declares in the Qur'an: *"And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it, and inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness."* (Ash-Shams, 7–8)

This inner conflict—between the soul's pure, God-given nature (*fitrah*) and the constant pull of temptation—is the fundamental struggle that every human must face throughout life.

The greatest danger lies in neglecting this struggle. When ignored, the soul's spiritual instinct becomes dulled, and the pull toward deviation and material excess grows stronger. In such a state, the soul gradually slips into confusion—lost under the dominion of the *nafs al-ammārah*, the lower self that commands toward harm.

The inner struggle a human being experiences is **not a predetermined fate**, nor a burden one must passively accept. Rather, it is part of life's divine test—wherein God has granted us **free will**, the sacred capacity to make conscious choices that can reshape the course of our lives.

We are not victims of our innate weaknesses. On the contrary, the human being has been honored and dignified: *"Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam."* (Al-Isra, 7)

Within us lies a profound potential for spiritual purification and elevation, if we choose to walk the path guided by divine values and inner truth. As the Qur'an states: *"Successful is the one who purifies it, and ruined is the one who corrupts it."* (Ash-Shams, 9–10)

Here lies the greatest challenge of human existence: Will you choose to become the **master of your soul**, nurturing and refining it? Or will you surrender to its unchecked impulses, letting it drag you into the depths of corruption and deviation?

This choice—repeated moment by moment—is what ultimately defines the difference between a person who rises toward their God-given potential, and one who sinks into the mire of the lower self.

## **The Path to Liberation: Spiritual Guidance and the Conscious Mind**

To safeguard the soul from its own pitfalls, a person must undergo a transformation—one that rebuilds the self upon a foundation of pure spiritual values and a return to their innate, God-given nature (*fitrah*). As God declares in the Qur'an:

*"Successful is the one who purifies himself, and remembers the name of his Lord and prays. But you prefer the life of this world, while the Hereafter is better and more lasting."* (Al-A'la, 14–17)

The essence of true transformation begins **within**—with the soul's recognition of its spiritual identity and its purpose as a servant of God and His representative on earth. This profound awareness is the **key to self-guidance**: directing one's path toward goodness, and protecting it from the pull of darkness.

The practical solution to this inner dilemma lies in **harnessing the power of the conscious mind** to reprogram the subconscious. By intentionally focusing on and embedding positive beliefs, we can begin to overwrite the negative mental maps that have accumulated over time.

God reminds us of this principle in the Qur'an: ***"Whoever seeks honor, then [let them know that] all honor belongs to God. To Him ascends good speech, and righteous action raises it."*** (Fatir, 10)

This verse highlights the profound impact of both pure speech and righteous action in elevating the human being—revealing that true dignity and empowerment flow from alignment with divine values.

**Mental reconstruction is not instantaneous.** It requires consistent practice and patience. Yet over time, these new, empowering beliefs begin to dominate your thought patterns. This shift not only enhances your perception of reality but also fosters more positive responses—transforming your daily life and aligning your actions with your higher purpose.

And when you're deeply ingrained mental maps are restructured around **true, positive beliefs**, your subconscious mind will, over time, begin to operate naturally and effortlessly—transforming your life from one of sorrow and inner turmoil into a state of **joy, peace, and spiritual ease**.

Through this inner reprogramming, the subconscious begins to interpret life's events—and all incoming experiences—through a healthier lens, reinforcing positivity, serenity, and a deep sense of fulfillment.

This transformation is not merely self-improvement—it is the very **purpose of our existence in this worldly life**. It is the essence of

servitude to God: to purify the self, to grow through every trial, and to return to the light of divine truth.

As the Qur'an beautifully declares: ***"God is the Guardian of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into light. As for those who disbelieve, their allies are false gods, who lead them from light into darkness."*** (Al-Baqarah, 257)

To deeply embed these positive thoughts and beliefs into your being, harmonizing with them, and eradicating any trace of destructive negative thoughts in your subconscious mind, you must consciously support this new, healthy perspective on life with corresponding practices. As the Quran beautifully illustrates: ***"Indeed, those who say 'Our Lord is Allah' and then remain steadfast – the angels will descend upon them, [saying], 'Do not fear and do not grieve, but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised.'"***(Fussilat, 30) This is not an easy task; it requires considerable effort, focus, and a form of discipline. For this reason, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) described the struggle of the self (the process of self-improvement) as the greatest form of jihad.

It is important to note that when the Quran, in the verses from Surah Al-Ma'arij, mentions that humanity is inherently impatient, sorrowful, and covetous of wealth, it makes an exception for those who pray, who engage in a set of healthful, nurturing practices. The verse states: ***"Except for those who pray"*** (Al-Ma'arij, 22) It then goes on to mention the practices that these exceptional individuals perform, practices that protect them from the ugly traits of anxiety, sorrow, and greed.

However, not all thoughts that appear positive are capable of bringing about happiness. A person needs their thoughts and beliefs to align with their inner nature and soul in order to experience true peace of mind. Thoughts that do not resonate with sound innate principles lead to internal conflict and psychological pain, even if they seem

positive on the surface. Therefore, we must be careful to ensure that the thoughts we embrace, believe in, and adopt come from the right source—the Almighty Allah, who created humanity and knows them better than anyone else. As the Quran reminds us: ***“Does He who created not know, while He is the Subtle, the Acquainted?”*** (Al-Mulk, 14)

Since our subconscious mind records everything we experience, whether we are aware of it or not, it becomes essential to continuously educate ourselves, reassess our convictions, and engage in activities that nourish our soul and mind. Additionally, we must ensure that our surroundings are supportive and healthy, so that all the inputs reaching our subconscious mind are positive. This, in turn, helps strengthen constructive beliefs and shields us from the intellectual and psychological pollution caused by negative influences. As the Quran advises: ***“And do not follow that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight, and the heart – about all of those, one will be questioned.”*** (Al-Isra, 36)

With the increasing complexities and challenges in the modern world, achieving self-balance and maintaining mental health may seem like an arduous, even nearly impossible task. However, the solution lies in training our subconscious minds to receive positive inputs, while empathetically engaging with the beautiful events that resonate with our human nature.

At the same time, we must adopt a conscious stance toward negative events. This does not mean ignoring them or simply coexisting with them, but rather requires us to internally denounce them and reject them as inputs that could corrupt our minds and burden our souls. In this context, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) offers us an inspiring example, when he declared his disassociation from negative thoughts and false deities: ***“There has certainly been for you in Ibrahim and those with him an excellent example when they said to their people, ‘Indeed, we are disassociated from you and from whatever you worship other than Allah.’”*** (Al-Mumtahina, 4)

Furthermore, Allah clarifies in His words: ***“You will not find a people who believe in Allah and the Last Day loving those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even if they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kindred.”*** (Al-Mujadila, 22), emphasizing the importance of taking a firm stance against any deviation or negative influence.

Islam expresses this balanced interaction between positivity and conscious rejection through the concept of ***“Tawalli wa Tabarri”***—the act of embracing goodness while consciously rejecting and distancing ourselves from harm. It teaches us to adopt what is beneficial and, at the same time, confront and isolate the negative influences that could impact our souls.

Finally, we must recognize that true reform does not stem from isolation or self-closure, but is achieved by transcending individualism and advancing reform at all levels. This reform begins within the family, with our spouses and children, as Allah says: ***“O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones.”*** (At-Tahrim, 6) However, it does not stop at the family; it extends to encompass society as a whole and, ultimately, the entire world. We are an ummah with a greater responsibility, as stated in the Quran: ***“You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah.”*** (Al-Imran, 110)

Because individual efforts alone may not be sufficient, the Quran directs us toward the importance of organized collective action based on cooperation and unity. Allah (SWT) says: ***“And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression.”*** (Al-Ma'idah, 2) Through this collective spirit, reform becomes a shared effort, and its positive impact extends to all.

## ■ Reflective Exercises and Questions:

### ► Reflective Question:

Am I the one in control of my thoughts, or are my thoughts controlling me? Take a moment to reflect on your daily thinking patterns and ask yourself:

- ♦ What thoughts do I repeat to myself daily? Do they help me grow, or do they hinder my progress?
- ♦ Do I have the ability to change my way of thinking, or do I unconsciously surrender to these thoughts?
- ♦ How can I begin to program my subconscious mind in a way that supports me, rather than restricts me?

## ► **Exercise 1: Analyzing Negative Thoughts**

Set aside time each day to record the negative thoughts that cross your mind. After one week, review your notes and identify recurring patterns or themes. Reflect on the following:

- ♦ What negative thoughts dominate your mind most often?
- ♦ What are the sources of these thoughts?
- ♦ How do these thoughts affect your emotions and behavior?

## ► **Exercise 2: Reframing Thoughts**

Choose one negative thought that frequently occurs in your mind, and write down positive or rational responses to it. Focus on repeating these positive responses daily to develop more constructive reactions and reprogram your perspective.



Chapter Three

# **What Is Your Purpose in Life?**

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### **The Pursuit of Understanding Life's Purpose**

Since the dawn of human existence on this earth, the question of life's purpose has been one of the deepest and most significant inquiries occupying human thought. What does it mean to live? Why are we here? These questions are not merely philosophical musings

or fleeting thoughts, but the essence of the human search for the meaning of existence and its role in this universe.

Life is not a random journey; rather, it is a purposeful and goal-driven path. Every individual, at some point, finds themselves questioning the reason for their existence and the meaning of the events and experiences they go through. In these moments of self-reflection, it becomes clear that life is not solely about the pursuit of wealth, fame, or even temporary happiness, but about achieving a greater purpose that transcends all these limited material goals.

The purpose of life begins with understanding the self, and through this understanding, a person realizes that they were created for a higher purpose. Allah (SWT) says: ***“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.”*** (Adh-Dhariyat, 56) This realization that we were created to worship Allah places us on a path that rearranges our priorities and provides us with a compass to guide our lives toward something greater than mere worldly accomplishments.

However, this realization is not merely theoretical knowledge; it is a lived experience that a person engages with daily. When one becomes aware that their life holds a deeper meaning than simply striving for material success, they begin to perceive the details of their day in a completely different way.

Every decision, every step, and every challenge becomes part of their journey toward achieving their higher purpose. Life holds true meaning only when a person views it as an ongoing path toward spiritual purification and elevation, rather than just a series of random events.

This deep awareness not only makes life clearer but also imbues it with a sense of tranquility and inner stability. The person who understands their ultimate purpose does not stumble between

choices nor feel lost in the face of challenges; instead, they walk confidently toward fulfilling their mission in this life.

The pursuit of understanding the purpose of life is not only about philosophy or religion; it is a practical experience that every individual lives in every moment of their existence. Ambitions, relationships, successes, and even the challenges we face, all fit into this greater context. Here, the balance we seek becomes clear: How can we live our daily lives, with all its details, while simultaneously staying connected to the higher purpose for which Allah created us?

## ■ Proximity to Allah as the Foundation of Life

Allah teaches us that the ultimate purpose of our lives is to worship Him and draw closer to Him. He says: ***“And the foremost are the foremost. Those are the ones brought near [to Allah].”*** (Al-Waqi’ah, 10-11), indicating that closeness to Him is not just a metaphorical or spiritual idea, but a true and tangible reality. This proximity comes from the depth of our servitude to Allah and from our spiritual completeness and elevation. It reflects how much we embody the qualities of Allah and how deeply we understand this servitude. This understanding liberates us from all worldly chains and obstacles that hinder our spiritual growth.

Closeness to Allah means living in a state of “complete devotion to Allah,” as Imam Ali (AS) described in the Sha’ban supplications. However, this does not imply detachment from reality or daily life. The goal is not to live in isolation or to distance ourselves from interacting with others, but rather to be at the heart of life. This proximity manifests in our daily interactions with society and in facing life’s challenges in ways that enhance both our spiritual and human integrity. Closeness to Allah is a state in which every detail of life is connected to Allah: in our food and drink, in our work and recreation, in our relationships and goals, and even in the smallest

aspects of our day. As Imam Ali (AS) said: ***"I have not seen anything except that I saw Allah before it and after it."***

This connection grants the individual immense energy and inner strength to face life's challenges with positivity and determination. Moreover, the pursuit of closeness to Allah gives life profound meaning and a higher purpose. Just as football players are consumed by their dream of winning the World Cup, and this dream drives them to give their utmost, the person seeking closeness to Allah lives in a state of continuous spiritual motivation. This pursuit not only grants them strength but also tranquility and inner peace.

Nevertheless, servitude and closeness to Allah do not contradict enjoying the pleasures of life, as Allah says: ***"Say, 'Who has prohibited the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good provisions?' Say, 'They are for those who believe during the life of this world, but exclusively for them on the Day of Resurrection.'"*** (Al-A'raf, 32) On the contrary, Allah created these pleasures as means to achieve human completeness and draw closer to Him, as He says: ***"Indeed, We have made whatever is on the earth an adornment for it, that We may test them as to which of them is best in deed."*** (Al-Kahf, 7)

But the question that many face is: How can we balance our pursuit of worldly success with our commitment to our ultimate purpose?

The challenge does not lie in having worldly ambitions, but in how we manage them so that they do not become a burden preventing us from achieving our spiritual happiness.

Material success, whether in work, wealth, or even relationships, should be a means to achieve balance, not an end in itself. When a person directs their worldly ambitions toward serving their higher purpose, they find that every worldly success enhances their sense of closeness to Allah, rather than becoming an obstacle to it.

Allah says: ***“But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and do not forget your share of the world.”*** (Al-Qasas, 77) This Quranic guidance is not an invitation to reject the world, but rather a call for balance, where success in this world becomes a means to achieve spiritual completeness, not a goal detached from the higher path of human life.

## **The Pursuit of True Happiness and Tranquility**

In our search for the purpose of life, we find that happiness and tranquility are among the most prominent things every human strives for. However, the pursuit of material happiness—such as wealth, fame, influence, and power—dominates the majority of people, under the assumption that these things will bring them happiness, peace, strength, and security.

Dr. Robert Waldinger, a physician and psychoanalyst at Harvard Medical School and the director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, mentions a recent study conducted on the millennial generation. In this study, participants were asked about the most important goals in their lives. Over 80% of them responded that their primary goal in life was to become wealthy, while 50% stated that another main goal was to become famous.

But reality proves the opposite. For example, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, which spanned 75 years and focused on the physical and psychological aspects of two groups of 724 individuals, as mentioned by the study’s director, Dr. Robert Waldinger, revealed that the most important factor in life is good relationships. Waldinger states, ***“The clearest message we get from this 75-year study is that good relationships keep us healthier and happier.”*** He goes on to say, ***“Happiness is not about the number of conferences you’ve spoken at, the number of likes you’ve received on social media, the number of***

***tech companies you've worked for, or how much effort you've put in..."***  
And further adds, ***"More importantly, the greatest actual indicator of happiness in a person's life is love."***

Good human relationships play a crucial role in achieving happiness. Humans are inherently social beings, and our relationships with others make up a significant part of our sense of happiness. This is a natural result of the deep-seated nature within us, as God created us: ***"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another"*** (Al-Hujurat, 13) The Harvard study highlighted that good relationships are the key factor in making people happy and healthy. Relationships built on love, respect, and trust enhance a person's sense of peace and provide the emotional support necessary to face life's challenges.

However, more important than external relationships is the relationship we build with ourselves. True happiness comes from within: ***"O you who have believed, upon you is [responsibility for] yourselves. Those who have gone astray will not harm you when you have been guided"*** (Al-Ma'idah, 105)

True happiness is not related to how much wealth, power, status, fame, or other material possessions we have, but rather to the quality of life we live, the harmony we find with ourselves, and the simplicity and self-truth we experience. As Allah says: ***"Whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer – We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely reward them according to the best of what they used to do"*** (An-Nahl, 97)

Real happiness lies in the feeling of contentment and tranquility that comes from your connection to Allah, closeness to Him, trust in Him, acceptance of His decree, and love for Him. It is tied to the extent to which you live with inner truth, within your fourfold human nature. The important questions to ask ourselves are: Do the actions you practice and the positions you take align with your emotions and

feelings? Do they align with your thoughts, faith, and what your mind dictates? And most importantly, do all these align with the natural disposition (fitrah) embedded within you, the programming of your soul?

Indeed, religion offers the path to tranquility and contentment. Allah says: *“O tranquil soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him]. And enter among My [righteous] servants and enter My Paradise”* (Al-Fajr, 27-30) This verse beautifully illustrates that true peace of mind is found in reconnecting with Allah, and the ultimate peace comes from being content with Him and earning His pleasure.

## **Ambition and Achievement: Balancing the Dunya and the Akhirah**

Ambition is an essential driving force in every person's life. The pursuit of achievement, the desire for success, and the striving for progress are fundamental goals that energize us and give us a sense of forward movement and development. However, the crucial question we must ask ourselves is: *How do we achieve our ambitions without losing sight of our higher purpose in life? How do we balance striving for worldly success with working for the Hereafter?*

Many focus on material and professional success as the ultimate proof of self-fulfillment. We strive for wealth, fame, and social status, often believing that these achievements define our worth. However, in truth, this ambition must be directed toward serving a greater purpose in life: the attainment of happiness and inner peace through closeness to God.

Earthly ambition is not condemned in Islam; on the contrary, Allah encourages us to pursue our goals in this world, but with the condition that such pursuits are balanced and in harmony with the demands of the soul and the afterlife. As Allah says in the Quran:

***“But seek, with the wealth Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter, and do not forget your share of the world” (Al-Qasas, 77)***

This verse clearly highlights the importance of balancing worldly ambition with spiritual objectives. Success in this life should be a means to draw closer to Allah, not an end in itself.

Material or professional ambition should serve the individual and their spiritual goals, not the other way around. When material ambition becomes an end in itself, it can lead to an endless cycle of striving for more, which in turn causes the loss of inner peace. This is like a person constantly chasing after wealth or fame, never finding fulfillment. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: ***“If the son of Adam had two valleys of wealth, he would seek a third, and nothing will fill the belly of the son of Adam except dust.”***

True ambition, then, lies not in amassing more wealth or influence, but in achieving self-fulfillment through the development of the talents and abilities that Allah has bestowed upon us, using them to serve others and uphold the faith. Allah created us for greater purposes than mere wealth or fame. As Allah says: ***“He who created death and life to test you, which of you is best in deed” (Al-Mulk, 2)*** True success is measured by righteous deeds and by how much a person serves themselves and their community, leaving a positive impact on this world.

Therefore, one must set their sights on a goal greater than mere material gains. It is possible to achieve professional or financial ambitions while maintaining balance in one’s spiritual life. The mind, heart, soul, and body all require growth and nurturing. As Allah says: ***“Men whom neither trade nor sale distract from the remembrance of Allah, and the establishment of prayer, and the giving of zakah; they fear a Day when hearts and eyes will be overturned” (An-Nur, 37)*** If a person focuses on just one aspect, such as career or wealth, they lose their inner balance and lose sight of the compass that leads them to their higher purpose.

The balance between worldly ambition and striving for the Hereafter is the greatest challenge a person faces. This balance is achieved by being conscious of one's true goals and striving to achieve worldly successes in alignment with this awareness. Ambition does not conflict with contentment; rather, contentment ensures that ambition stays on the right path. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: ***"Richness is not having many possessions, but richness is the richness of the soul."*** Ambition can become a means to achieve the wealth of the soul when it is balanced and regulated.

Thus, true fulfillment is not found solely in the accumulation of material wealth, but in the cultivation of a rich inner life, grounded in spiritual wisdom and the pursuit of meaningful, purposeful goals.

## ■ Self-Honesty as a Path to Happiness

True happiness is not merely a fleeting feeling of joy or contentment; rather, it is a profound state of tranquility and inner peace. It arises when a person lives in harmony with themselves and with the universe around them. This harmony is achieved when all the dimensions that make up a person—the body, mind, heart, and soul—are aligned in a unified, coherent manner that expresses the essence of their being. This state is often referred to as "self-honesty," which means that every action and movement a person takes to fulfill their natural needs and instincts (the body), every emotion and feeling they experience (the heart), and their thoughts, knowledge, beliefs, perspectives, and visions in life (the mind) are in perfect alignment with one another and with the innate nature (fitrah) that Allah has placed within them when He breathed His spirit into them, as He says: ***"And I breathed into him of My spirit"*** (Al-Hijr, 29)

Self-honesty is not merely about honesty with others; it is, more profoundly, about being truthful with oneself—recognizing and accepting one's true nature, and ensuring that every action, thought, and feeling is in harmony with the deeper truths of existence. It is

through this alignment that one can experience true fulfillment and peace, for it is only when we are honest with ourselves that we can truly embrace the peace and tranquility that comes with living authentically.

As the individual deepens in authenticity, they become simpler, more profound, and draw closer to God, for God Himself is the essence of simplicity and the core of all existence. As the Qur'an beautifully states:

***"So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to the truth, the fitrah of Allah upon which He has created humanity. There is no changing the creation of Allah. That is the upright religion, but most people do not know."*** (Ar-roum, 30)

The search for truth, the striving for righteousness, the pursuit of beauty in all its forms, the yearning for innovation and creativity, the quest for love and belonging, and the drive toward growth, transcendence, and greatness—these all emanate from the very nature (fitrah) with which humanity has been endowed. The truth at the heart of this is that humans are both body and soul, as Allah affirms:

***"And when your Lord said to the angels, 'I am creating a human being from clay of molded mud. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down to him in prostration.'"*** (Al-Hijr, 28-29)

Thus, the path to achieving happiness and tranquility, and to continually increasing them, lies in walking the path of self-authenticity, which is itself the "journey to God," ultimately reaching the station of the truthful (Al-sidikiyyin). As the four dimensions of one's personality—body, mind, heart, and soul—become more harmonious and aligned, the individual's character is marked by simplicity, strength, tranquility, greatness, contentment, and closeness to God, reaching the level of the sidikiyyin. This is the stage

where there is no longer any discrepancy between these four dimensions, and they reflect each other fully and perfectly. As the Quran beautifully reminds us: ***“And mention in the Book, Abraham. Indeed, he was a man of truth and a prophet.”*** (Mariam, 41)

Self-authenticity is not just a moral virtue; it is the foundation upon which spiritual and psychological happiness is built. When a person lives with sincerity toward themselves, they no longer suffer from the contradictions that create internal tension and turmoil. In contrast, a life devoid of self-truth leads to a sense of confusion and dissatisfaction.

Moreover, self-authenticity is the path that leads a person to a deeper understanding of the meaning of life and its ultimate purpose. When a person is true to themselves, they can distinguish between what is essential and what is secondary, enabling them to direct their energies and efforts toward that higher goal. In a world full of pressures and material demands, self-authenticity becomes an internal compass, guiding the individual toward what benefits them and helps achieve inner peace.

However, reaching a state of self-authenticity requires courage. The courage to face the truth in all its aspects, even those that may be uncomfortable. It also requires relentless effort to improve oneself and learn from mistakes. The person who is honest with themselves does not deny their weaknesses, but acknowledges them and strives for improvement. They do not pretend to be perfect; instead, they accept themselves as they are, while continuing to strive for better.

Self-authenticity is the key to achieving true happiness. It allows a person to live in harmony with their own self, their values, beliefs, and with God. This opens their soul to receive divine grace, filling their being with the love of God. From that love, the heart overflows to encompass a love for the entire universe, because it is God's

creation, and because the individual, like the universe, is on a shared journey toward God.

Self-authenticity is not only about understanding oneself, but also serves as the fundamental element that helps a person achieve their highest purpose. The individual who sincerely seeks to realize their mission in life and lives in alignment with that mission is the one who attains the deepest levels of peace and success.

Achieving the highest purpose is only possible when a person is in a state of internal coherence, where their beliefs, emotions, and behaviors are in harmony with their true vision of life. And when self-authenticity becomes the foundation of this pursuit, the journey toward the highest goal becomes clearer and more stable.

## **Summary of the Chapter**

When we reflect on life, we realize that the question of its purpose is one of the most profound and impactful inquiries that shape how we live and the direction we take. The ultimate purpose of life is not merely to pursue material success or achieve fame, but is inherently linked to the essence of human existence and our servitude to God. It involves reaching a state of inner harmony and tranquility that arises from a deep understanding of our role in this universe.

In this chapter, we have explored how closeness to God serves as the foundation upon which we should build our lives. This closeness is not simply a fleeting spiritual experience or a passing religious practice; rather, it is a lasting, tangible relationship with God that is reflected in every aspect of our lives. It becomes the compass that guides us in making decisions, setting priorities, and dealing with the daily challenges of life. It is this closeness that grants us true freedom from the servitude of desires and temptations, enabling us to face life with positivity and an inexhaustible inner strength.

The pursuit of true happiness and inner peace can only be achieved through self-honesty and the harmony between the four dimensions of the human being: body, mind, heart, and soul. The more this harmony increases, the closer a person gets to achieving inner contentment, becoming more capable of facing life's challenges with confidence and calmness. The path to happiness is not found in the pursuit of material gains, but in creating a complete unity, alignment, and harmony between striving for the Hereafter and working for this world. This balance brings about human dignity and true success.

When it comes to ambition and achievement, we recognize that ambition and passion are important parts of our lives. However, this ambition must be directed toward serving our ultimate goal: ***“Indeed, We have made what is on the earth an adornment for it, that We may test them as to which of them is best in deed”*** (Al-Kahf, 7) Material and professional success, in itself, is not the end goal; rather, it is a means to achieve a balance between spiritual and worldly life. When we achieve success with balance and awareness, we can benefit from our worldly accomplishments without losing our connection to Allah and our spiritual purpose.

Ultimately, the highest goal in life is to live in complete harmony with what Allah has intended for us: pure servitude and balance in striving between this world and the Hereafter. This balance is realized when we have true awareness of the reality of our existence, and when we live our lives sincerely with ourselves and others. Therefore, true success is not measured by the quantity of worldly material achievements we accumulate, but by our ability to live with inner peace and true happiness, rooted in closeness to Allah and self-fulfillment.

Therefore, every human being is called to pause and reassess the goals that guide their life. Is one striving solely for material accomplishments, or for a balanced life that allows for inner peace and closeness to God? This contemplative journey toward

understanding life's ultimate purpose is not merely a solitary pursuit—it is an interactive journey with life itself, and with the universe that surrounds us.

God Almighty wills for us to be both successful and happy, but on the condition that our success remains in harmony with our greater purpose: to worship Him and draw nearer to Him.

Life, then, is a continuous journey toward God. Every moment is an opportunity—a sacred chance—to grow in spiritual stature and achieve deeper human fulfillment.

# Reflective Exercises and Contemplative Questions

## ► Contemplative Question:

Are the goals I'm striving to achieve today truly reflective of my ultimate purpose in life, or are they merely temporary milestones that do not express my inner truth?

Take a quiet moment to reflect, and ask yourself:

- ♦ Are these goals rooted in my own values, or are they shaped by societal expectations?
- ♦ If I were to achieve all of these goals, would I feel fulfilled—or would I still be searching for something more?
- ♦ How can I reshape my current goals so they align more authentically with my deeper purpose?

## ► Exercise 1: Identifying Core Values

List the core values and principles that guide your life and aspirations. For each value:

- ♦ Describe why it is meaningful to you.
- ♦ Reflect on how it influences your daily decisions and long-term goals.

This exercise helps you clarify the foundation upon which your life purpose is built, making your journey more intentional and value-driven.

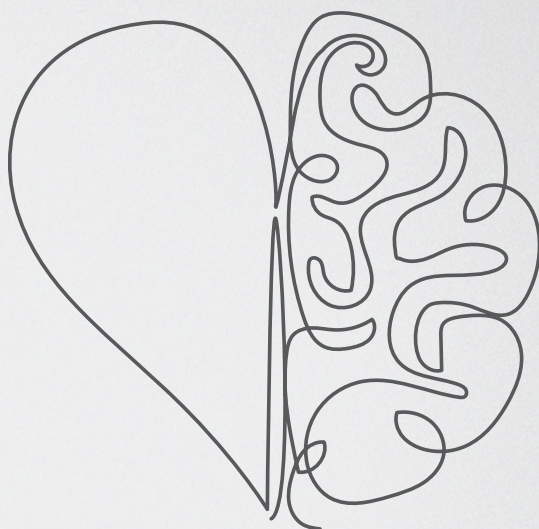
## ► **Exercise 2: Visualizing Success**

Define what success means to you—not only in material terms, but also in spiritual and emotional dimensions.

- ♦ Write down clear goals that represent your personal vision of success.
- ♦ Explore how these goals serve your higher purpose and contribute to your growth as a whole human being.

This exercise encourages you to align your ambitions with a holistic vision of success that embraces both worldly achievement and spiritual fulfillment.

These reflections and practices aim to center your path, helping you walk it with awareness, purpose, and a deeper connection to your true self and to God.



Chapter Four

# **The Formation of the Self — A Tale of the Soul and Mind**

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After contemplating the true purpose of our lives in the previous chapter, we now embark on a new journey—one that dives into the depths of how our selves are formed, and how our interaction with life shapes our identities and paths.

In this chapter, we come to realize that we are not merely the outcome of biological inheritance or genetic patterns. We are souls breathed by God into earthly vessels, beings whose essence unfolds through the interplay of spirit, thought, experience, and choice. We are stories in motion—souls in dialogue with the world.

We will explore the human psyche, uncovering the intricate web of influences that shape who we become—from the genes we inherit, to the environments we grow in, from the choices we make, to the habits we form day by day.

But more than that, we will learn how to harness the power of conscious will, of reasoned thought, and of steadfast faith to reprogram ourselves—intentionally reshaping behaviors and thought patterns—on the quest to become the most authentic and elevated version of who we are meant to be.

## **The Journey of Self-Discovery: The Power of the Subconscious and the Will to Change**

The subconscious mind governs more than 95% of our daily behaviors and automatic responses. Like an unseen current beneath the surface of consciousness, it silently steers the direction of our lives, shaping our habits, decisions, and emotional reactions without us even realizing. It is, in many ways, the hidden engine of the self.

God Almighty states: ***"Say, 'Each works according to his own disposition.'"*** (Al-Isra, 84) — reminding us that our actions are not random, but rather emerge from the deep structure of our inner selves, from the psychological and spiritual mold that shapes our being.

Yet, alongside this immense force of the subconscious, God has gifted us with a sacred tool — the conscious mind. With it, we are

granted the power of awareness, the ability to reflect, to choose, and to transform. No matter how deeply ingrained our patterns may be, we are not prisoners of our past programming.

Our subconscious scripts are not unchangeable fate. They are not divine sentences carved in stone. They are malleable, subject to the will of the conscious heart that dares to awaken. Through intentional self-awareness and spiritual striving, we can reprogram our inner world thought by thought, habit by habit and steer our lives toward truth, goodness, and meaning.

As God says: ***“Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves.”*** (Ar-Ra’d, 11) an eternal reminder that transformation begins from within.

Authentic transformation never begins on the outside. It is not sparked by circumstances, possessions, or external success. Rather, it takes root deep within — in the quiet chambers of the mind where beliefs, convictions, and self-perceptions reside. These hidden thoughts, often unspoken and unquestioned, govern our behaviors with silent authority.

A person raised in an environment of encouragement and trust, where their worth is affirmed, naturally grows into someone more confident in making positive choices. In contrast, one who is shaped by negative beliefs about themselves or the world may struggle to break free from self-imposed limitations, even when surrounded by opportunities.

This is why true self-development requires more than just identifying one’s strengths and weaknesses. It demands deep inner awareness. It calls us to examine the stories we tell ourselves and, more importantly, to rewrite them.

To evolve, we must engage in the sacred work of **reprogramming the subconscious mind** — not as an enemy to overcome, but as a powerful ally to align with. When the inner voice begins to echo truth instead of fear, possibility instead of limitation, the path to growth unfolds with clarity and grace.

When God proclaimed, **“When your Lord said to the angels: I am creating a human being from clay. So when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down before him in prostration”** (Şād, 71–72), He revealed the profound and sacred structure of human existence — a being forged from two intertwined realms:

- ♦ **The corporeal, animal dimension:** This encompasses our biological traits and physical characteristics — skin color, height, muscular strength — even the inherited temperaments and emotional predispositions encoded in our genes. This is the clay from which we are shaped.
- ♦ **The spiritual, human dimension:** This is the divine breath, the gift that sets us apart. It grants us the capacity to transcend mere survival and pleasure, to engage with higher meanings — goodness, beauty, truth, and love.

These two dimensions do not exist in opposition, nor do they function in isolation. They are deeply interwoven, forming the very fabric of our identity. Our essence emerges at the crossroads of the seen and unseen — a soul breathed into a body, a being both rooted in earth and drawn toward heaven.

A large part of who we are begins with the genetic spark — the union of a single sperm and egg. Yet beyond biology lies the mystery of the spirit, placed within us by the Creator Himself. And it is in the harmony between these two realms that our full humanity unfolds.

Beyond the physical and spiritual dimensions of our being, each human is born with a divinely embedded blueprint — a unified moral compass known in Islamic tradition as *fitrah*. As the Qur'an reminds us: ***"So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth — the natural disposition (fitrah) Allah instilled in mankind."*** (Ar-Rum, 30)

This **fitrah** is not learned, it is **planted within us**, a seed of purity and guidance, deeply embedded in the soil of our soul. It inclines us toward truth, virtue, justice, and the yearning for what is beautiful and eternal. Yet, like all seeds, its growth depends on the environment on how we live, what we choose, and the paths we follow. It can blossom into clarity and strength, or wither under the weight of neglect and distortion.

While our physical traits are largely inherited and fixed, the qualities of the soul — courage, willpower, love, compassion — are fluid and dynamic. These are not preordained; they do not remain static. Instead, they expand or shrink, strengthen or fade, depending on the beliefs we nurture, the knowledge we pursue, and the intentions we carry.

It is within this dynamic arena of the self between the constancy of biology and the potential of spirit — that our truest growth takes place. We are, in essence, **works in progress**: shaped not just by what we are given, but by **how we choose to live**.

Our inner identity is not carved in stone — it is ever-evolving, reshaped by the countless moments that fill our daily lives. As we study and work, as we rest and play, as we converse with loved ones and face the wider world, our psychological essence is etched with invisible strokes. Every thought we think, every feeling we experience, every interaction we engage in — all leave their imprint on the canvas of our being.

These seemingly fleeting details are, in truth, the **letters that write the language of our soul** — spelling out qualities like knowledge, willpower, determination, wisdom, love, piety, beauty, goodness, courage, and unwavering faith.

The human being is, by nature, a creature of renewal — endowed with a profound capacity to reshape the self and redirect their path. Our identity emerges from a rich interplay of inheritance, environment, and, most crucially, personal will. And it is this last element — **conscious intention** — that holds the key to genuine transformation.

For our lives are not simply a series of passing events; they are the **living architecture** of who we are becoming. Every act, every choice, every perspective becomes a brushstroke in the masterpiece of the self — a sacred invitation to draw closer to the highest version of who we're meant to be.

## **Self-Honesty: The Bridge between Mind, Heart, Body, and Soul**

Far too often, we find ourselves caught in an invisible storm — pulled between what we desire and what we feel, between what we know and how we act. We may long for something, yet feel unease in its pursuit. We may think with logic, yet ache with emotion. This internal dissonance is one of the deepest sources of anxiety and unrest in the human experience.

But there is a way through the storm — a quiet compass that leads us back to ourselves. It is called **self-honesty**.

Self-honesty is more than making honest choices. It is the art of **living in harmony** — when your mind aligns with your heart, your

body's needs resonate with your soul's longing, and your actions reflect your truest beliefs.

To be self-honest is to no longer live in fragments. It is to become whole — thinking, feeling, acting, and aspiring in one unified direction. Only then does the turmoil within begin to settle. Only then can peace unfold from the inside out.

The greatest suffering known to the human soul often comes not from the world outside — but from within, from the quiet war between its own parts. A person may chase material success with relentless drive, yet feel a gnawing emptiness that success cannot fill. The soul starves while the hands are busy. The heart may leap toward a passion, yet stumble for lack of mindful guidance. And when the body is worn down for the sake of fleeting pleasures or spiritual neglect, the whole self begins to fracture.

This is the invisible struggle — the misalignment of mind, heart, body, and soul.

But **self-honesty** becomes the remedy. Not a mere skill, but a **way of being**. It is the light that brings each part of us into harmony — no longer pulling in different directions, no longer drowning in contradiction.

To live with self-honesty is to walk with steady steps, anchored by inner peace. It is to move through life with a quiet assurance that who you are, what you believe, and how you live all speak the same truth.

## ■ The Fulfillment of Needs

We come into this world with needs that stem from both dimensions of our existence: the **soul** and the **body**. We need food to nourish our bodies, clothing to protect us, love to sustain our hearts, and

knowledge to enrich our minds. We seek joy, connection, and even pride in our achievements. Our interaction with the world and its countless offerings is rooted in this ongoing quest to satisfy these needs.

Thus, we study, learn, search, work, create, and toil to fulfill our needs. And yet, as we meet one need, another arises in its place. The cycle is endless; from the moment we are born until the day we depart, we are on a constant journey to fill these insatiable desires. Our needs never cease, and we remain in pursuit of their fulfillment throughout our lives.

To earn your livelihood with dignity and security, and to live your life with peace of mind without enduring the humiliation of need, you must study for many years and then work. During these academic and professional stages, you will encounter numerous situations that require you to make many decisions, and these decisions will weave your traits, faculties, abilities, and personality, ultimately shaping you. If you have inherited a certain level of courage from your parents, you now build upon it in this world. If, however, you have become accustomed to taking cowardly stances, you form and develop fear and cowardice in your inner being until these traits become ingrained in your psychological makeup. But if you consistently take courageous stances, you shape and cultivate courage until it becomes an intrinsic part of your psyche. If your actions and behaviors fluctuate between fear and courage, you continuously increase and decrease your store of bravery according to your decisions and actions. The same process occurs with other psychological traits, such as knowledge, willpower, piety, certainty, wisdom, patience, and more.

This is how our identities are shaped, naturally and automatically. The question remains: how do we change our behaviors or reactions? How do we rid ourselves of bad habits and traits? And how do we acquire virtuous qualities?

## ■ Behavior change

Stephen R. Covey says in his book *“The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People”*: “We can spend weeks, months, or even years laboring with self-discipline, trying to change our attitudes and behaviors, without attempting to begin to approach the change that happens automatically when we see things from a different perspective. Thus, it becomes clear that if we wish to make relatively minor changes in our lives, we might succeed by focusing appropriately on our attitudes and behaviors. However, if we desire to make a profound and quantitative change, our efforts must be directed toward altering our fundamental mental perceptions.”

Your ability to acquire human values and virtues depends on three key elements: first, the desire; second, practice; and third, the nature of your psychological environment (your unconscious mind), which includes your abilities, talents, skills, perceptions, and mental maps, and the extent to which these are healthy and positive.

The process of changing any trait or mental perception you hold is also reliant on the same three elements: your desire to change, your behaviors and practices, and the depth of the mental perception or trait within your psychological environment.

Your psychological environment, by nature, is fluid and constantly changing. In reality, it is the result of your responses to every stimulus and trigger you encounter in life, no matter how small, whether you are aware of them or not.

The psychological environment of any individual acts as the lens through which they view and interact with the world on a daily basis. As the Qur’an states: ***“Say, ‘If you possessed the depositories of the mercy of my Lord, you would withhold, for fear of spending’”*** (Al-Isra, 100)

You may look at the sea and see beauty and goodness in it, hearing in its waves a magnificent melody that soothes your soul and unleashes your imagination. On the contrary, you might see it as a terrifying, mysterious beast that fills you with dread and fear, hearing in its sounds the mournful wails of those who have drowned in its depths, suffocated by its might. Or perhaps you see something entirely different. All of this depends on the nature of your psychological environment, your perceptions, and the mental maps you hold within.

## ■ Changing Mental Perceptions

A sunset may represent a source of discomfort and pain for you; your heart tightens every time you see it. Alternatively, it may symbolize tranquility, peace, rest, and beauty.

You might be in a place where someone's phone rings with a ringtone that is the same as the one you heard when you received the news of a loved one's death, filling you with immense sorrow. On the other hand, you might feel comfort and joy if that ringtone reminds you of a time when you received many good news. All of this is tied to your perceptions and mental maps.

This is the secret behind all the attention given in the Qur'an, books of supplications, and various acts of worship we engage in: to change our perceptions and mental maps, making them positive and healthy. This aligns with the affirmation of the oneness of worship to Allah, the Almighty, and rejects all negative emotions, sources of fear, weakness, and anxiety. As Allah says: ***"Allah is the Protector of those who believe. He brings them out from darkness into light."*** (Al-Baqarah, 257)

Not only that, but our psychological environment (our unconscious mind) automatically determines the nature of our responses to the various challenges of life, as Allah mentions: ***"Say, 'Each works***

*according to his manner.”* (Al-Isra, 84) However, we have the ability, through our will, to engage in practices that differ from what our psychological environment dictates, whether negatively or positively.

If your psychological environment is characterized by clarity, strong willpower, and a high degree of love for goodness, and is in harmony with human nature (the soul), without any psychological obstacles or complexes, you can acquire values, traits, and virtues simply by yearning for them, turning your attention to them, and having the will to possess them. However, they become more deeply ingrained as you practically practice them.

Likewise, your continuous practice of any value or trait (whether positive or negative) will lead to its acquisition, even if you didn't initially desire it. Of course, this trait becomes more firmly embedded in you—and may even merge with your very being to the point that it becomes practically inseparable—if you desire this trait and if your psychological environment supports acquiring it.

Let's take the following example: imagine you feel distressed when seeing a sunset scene. The first step is to understand the cause of these negative feelings. Try to delve into your memory to identify the mental perceptions embedded in you that trigger these negative emotions toward the sunset.

Challenge your mind, and when you start feeling tired, let go of the issue and occupy yourself with other things. But make sure to return to thinking about this matter periodically—perhaps three times a day, one of which could be while you lie in bed before sleep at night. This will stimulate your unconscious mind to continue thinking about the subject while you are busy with other matters, even during sleep.

You may reach the cause simply by thinking about the issue, or it might take you an entire day, several days, or sometimes even weeks. But in all likelihood, you will eventually arrive at the reason.

Now, the reason you might discover could be that your boss, who always wears an orange coat, harshly reprimands you every time he sees you, which causes you deep frustration and embarrassment in front of your colleagues. As a result, your sense of discomfort became linked to the color orange, which you associate with your boss. Therefore, the orange color accompanying the sunset triggers those feelings of distress in you.

Or perhaps you will discover that the reason for your negative feelings toward the sunset lies in a distant childhood memory, when you were deeply afraid of the night and the monsters that would appear with it. As a result, you would remain terrified and unsettled until daylight arrived.

It's natural for negative feelings toward the night to become deeply ingrained within you if you didn't work on addressing them, even if you outgrew your fear of the night as you got older. Thus, when you see the sunset, it triggers those negative feelings.

Merely knowing the cause of the connection between the sunset and your sense of discomfort—and recognizing that it is illogical—helps you in the process of healing yourself, and it may even directly lead to breaking that connection.

Now, you possess two elements to work on your psyche: the desire and the psychological readiness. However, you still need the third element, "practice," to ensure that no negative residues remain deep within you.

To ensure positive behavior and practice toward the sunset scene, in order to remove the negative feelings associated with it, make it a habit to engage in an activity that brings you joy and comfort while watching the sunset at least two or three times a week consistently for several months. For example, take a walk with a friend you feel comfortable with along the beach.

This practice will change the old negative association and replace it with a new positive connection between the sunset and your feeling of comfort.

As you become accustomed to practicing this approach in your life, you will grow closer to your subconscious mind, enhancing your self-confidence and belief in your abilities. This will make you more capable of healing and developing yourself. You might even be able to change some of your mental maps and form new ones simply by your desire and willpower, and perhaps even without needing to practice them.

## **Willpower: The Decisive Factor in Shaping the Self**

Knowledge alone is not enough to change a person. How many individuals know exactly what they should do, but fail to act? The secret lies in willpower and the consistent commitment to change.

Willpower is not merely a momentary feeling of enthusiasm; it is the continuous ability to control oneself and make the right decisions even when the motivation is weak. A person who understands that they are responsible for shaping their own self does not wait for ideal circumstances but begins to apply what they know from now, no matter how simple it may seem.

God Almighty says: ***"And those who strive for Us – We will surely guide them to Our ways"*** (Al-Ankabut, 69) This verse affirms that true struggle is the struggle of a person against themselves, their continuous effort to overcome the habits that hinder their progress. Success in reshaping the self is not achieved in a single strike, but is the result of daily commitment and persistent determination.

## ■ Conclusion

At the end of this journey into the depths of our inner selves, we come to realize that our personalities are not fixed or confined to predetermined molds; rather, they are in a constant state of movement and transformation. We have learned how heredity, environment, and personal experiences interact to shape our identity, and how we can harness the power of will and conscious thought to reshape ourselves and steer toward a better version of who we are.

Yet, this transformation cannot be random or impulsive—it requires a deep sense of **self-honesty**. A person who seeks to reshape their character must be sincere with themselves about their strengths and weaknesses, and must take concrete steps that reflect this awareness.

**Self-honesty** is what empowers a person to confront themselves with courage and choose the right path for personal growth. When this honesty is achieved, change becomes more sustainable—because one's actions are no longer driven by fleeting desires, but by a genuine awareness of who they are and who they aspire to become.

Now that we understand how our inner selves are shaped, we move into a new stage—one where we begin to explore our role in this universe and our responsibility as **vicegerents of God on Earth**.

## **| A Reflective Question**

*Am I consciously shaping my identity, or am I merely a reflection of what my society and past experiences have programmed me to be?*

Take a few moments to reflect on your daily behaviors, and ask yourself:

- ♦ Are my actions and reactions truly born of conscious awareness, or are they automatic responses shaped by long-standing habits?
- ♦ Are there behaviors I repeat every day even though I know they do not serve me?
- ♦ How can I begin to reprogram myself in a way that brings me closer to the truest version of myself—the self I genuinely aspire to become?



Chapter Five

# **Vicegerency and Wholeness**

## Chapter Five

# Vicegerency and Wholeness

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Now that we have clarified our life's purpose in the previous chapter, a more profound question naturally arises: How can we fulfill this purpose? How do we walk the path that earns God's pleasure and brings to our hearts the serenity and joy we so deeply seek?

The answer lies in understanding the sacred bond that unites us with the universe we inhabit. For God Almighty did not create us—nor the universe around us—in vain. Rather, He created all things for a majestic and deliberate purpose: that we may worship Him, draw nearer to Him, and live in conscious harmony with His will, as has already been alluded to.

To truly live with meaning is to live in awareness of this divine role, and to recognize that everything in creation—sun and moon, stone and tree, bird and breeze—is part of a grand symphony of divine purpose. In this orchestra, the human being is not the conductor, but a responsible participant, one who must attune their inner self to the rhythms of divine harmony.

**To fulfill this sacred purpose**, we must come to know the laws that govern this universe and align ourselves with them in both spirit and action. In this chapter, we shall explore how understanding and harmonizing with these divine principles can guide us steadily along the path toward our ultimate aim: closeness to God and His pleasure.

# The Doctrine of Vicegerency and the Human Role in the Universe

What distinguishes the human form of servitude to God—raising it above that of any other creature—is the divine trust placed upon humankind: the **vicegerency** (*istikhlaf*). The Qur'an reveals this profound truth:

*"And [mention] when your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a vicegerent.'"* (Al-Baqarah, 30)

This role of vicegerency is not a symbolic or passing assignment. It lies at the very core of human existence. To be a **khalifah**—a vicegerent of God on earth—is to be entrusted with a sacred responsibility: to strive toward God, to reflect His attributes in our character, and to build a world rooted in justice, mercy, and the beauty of divine order.

In other words, **vicegerency** signifies that God has entrusted humankind with a sacred mission: the responsibility to govern and cultivate the earth in accordance with the divine blueprint revealed to His prophets. This role calls upon the human being to rise as a wise and conscious leader—one who channels knowledge, resources, and energy into building a world that reflects the harmony and values of the divine.

The Qur'an states: *"It is He who brought you forth from the earth and settled you upon it."* (Hud, 61)

To lead in this sacred capacity is not to wield power for selfish ends, but to act as a steward of creation, preserving its balance and nurturing its potential. In fulfilling this divine appointment, God grants the human being **freedom of choice**—between good and evil, between elevation and decline—and subjects him to a continuous

inner test: Can he uphold the balance between his material desires and his spiritual essence?

True **vicegerency** is not a title—it is a moral responsibility. It requires a profound ethical commitment toward all of creation. The earth and its treasures are not possessions to be exploited, but trusts to be honored and cared for with wisdom and compassion.

As the Qur'an proclaims: ***"Indeed, We offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and feared it; yet man undertook to bear it."*** (Al-Ahzab, 72)

This verse reveals the immensity of the human role. The heavens, the earth, and the mountains—majestic and immense as they are shrank back in awe from the weight of this Trust. Yet the human soul, fragile and finite, embraced it. In doing so, man affirmed his potential for greatness, but also his profound responsibility before his Creator.

And because the human being is God's vicegerent on Earth, this role comes with a profound and weighty responsibility: to strive for the **restoration of balance** whenever corruption spreads, to stand in defense of the oppressed, and to actively contribute to the creation of a just and compassionate society. As God commands in the Qur'an:

***"Indeed, Allah commands justice and excellence (ihsan)."*** (An-Nahl, 90)

Thus, the individual does not merely seek personal happiness or inner peace in isolation, but extends his efforts toward the **welfare of all humanity**, endeavoring to establish a social order rooted in divine values—justice, mercy, truth, and patience. The Qur'an beautifully encapsulates this vision:

***"By Time, indeed, mankind is in loss—except for those who believe, do righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to truth, and enjoin one another to patience."*** (Al-'Asr, 1–3)

But **vicegerency is not confined to external action**—it also necessitates deep **inner harmony and spiritual integration**. One cannot truly fulfill this divine role without achieving equilibrium within the multifaceted dimensions of the self: the body, the intellect, the heart, and the soul.

As the Qur'an declares: *"And by the soul and the One who fashioned it, then inspired it with its wickedness and its righteousness—successful is the one who purifies it, and failed is the one who corrupts it."* (Ash-Shams, 7–10)

The human being is thus called not only to pursue justice and contribute to the flourishing of his society, but also to cultivate an inner harmony that enables him to carry this divine trust with clarity and responsibility. Such a profound undertaking cannot be fulfilled unless one is able to discipline the self, refining its impulses and aligning its spiritual aspirations with its worldly duties.

Only through this internal integration—this equilibrium between soul and society—can the human being truly become worthy of the sacred role he has been entrusted with.

In this light, man stands as the **bearer of the divine mission of stewardship**, charged with a dual responsibility: to **build and nurture the world** materially, and to **uphold justice and spread goodness** morally and spiritually. Through this twofold path, he draws nearer to the Divine, seeking His pleasure and fulfilling the highest purpose of his existence.

## **Cosmic Duality – The Human Journey toward Wholeness**

God created the universe within a grand design of contrasts - life and death: *"He who created death and life"* (Al-Mulk, 2); deficiency and

abundance, darkness and light: ***“And made the darkness and the light”*** (Al-An’am, 1); trial and ease, adversity and goodness: ***“And We test you with evil and with good as a trial; and to Us you will be returned”*** (Al-Anbiya, 35)

Through this divine polarity, existence is infused with movement, tension, and meaning. These opposing forces are not in conflict but in purposeful interplay, generating the momentum that propels the human soul in its striving—its *kadh*—toward self-realization and proximity to the Divine: ***“O man! You are laboring toward your Lord with great exertion and will meet Him”*** (Al-Inshiqaq, 6)

This journey is not random. It is a sacred call toward growth, a divine invitation to become the finest versions of ourselves: ***“That He may test you to see who is best in deeds”*** (Al-Mulk, 2) It is a path designed to draw us out of ***“darkness into light”*** (Al-Baqarah, 257), so that through every challenge and every blessing, we may move closer to our Creator in depth, in clarity, and in grace.

And to accelerate the motion of life around us in pursuit of this grand purpose, the Almighty fashioned us from “male and female”, and made us into ***“nations and tribes”*** (Al-Hujurat, 13) He says: ***“Had God willed, He could have made you one nation; but He intended to test you in what He has given you. So compete with one another in doing good. To God you shall all return”*** (Al-Ma’idah, 48) In His infinite wisdom, He elevated some over others in rank: ***“And We raised some of you above others in degrees, that He may test you in what He has given you”*** (Al-An’am, 165)

This divine variation is not one of inequality, but of diversity meant to enrich our collective journey. We were created ***“in the best of stature”*** (At-Tin, 4), endowed with a fourfold essence: body, intellect, heart, and soul. When God declared, ***“And when I have fashioned him and breathed into him of My spirit”*** (Al-Hijr, 29), it was a sign that each

dimension of our being was divinely crafted to engage with the tensions and dualities of existence.

Within ourselves, we carry the echoes of this cosmic dialogue: ***“And He inspired the soul [with] its wickedness and its righteousness”*** (Ash-Shams, 8) Through this inner dialectic, we are called to grow, to transcend, to harmonize our parts and move ever closer to the Divine. Life, in all its contrasts and challenges, becomes a sacred classroom—where the test is transformation, and the reward is nearness to God. And so, too, did He subdue the entire cosmos to serve and support us:

***“And He has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth all from Him”*** (Al-Jathiyah, 13)

Everything around us, earth and sky, beauty and abundance was placed at our disposal not as an end, but as a means to stir our hearts and awaken our will, to propel us toward purposeful movement in life, movement that orients us back to God.

***“Indeed, We made whatever is on the earth an adornment for it, that We may test them [to see] which of them is best in deeds”*** (Al-Kahf, 7)

This divine adornment, these earthly enticements, are not meant to distract, but to energize; not to anchor us in worldliness, but to ignite within us the passion to strive—with vigor and intention. And so, He commands us:

***“It is He who made the earth manageable for you—so walk among its paths and eat of His provision. And to Him is the resurrection”*** (Al-Mulk, 15)

Our movement through life, then, is not random or aimless, it is a form of worship, an embodiment of our servitude to the One who created us.

***“And I did not create jinn and humankind except to worship Me”***  
(Adh-Dhariyat, 56)

In this striving, in this alignment of our energy with divine purpose, we ascend the ladder of spiritual refinement. We grow in nearness, in awareness, and in worthiness—until we fulfill the sacred trust for which we were made:

***“And [remember] when your Lord said to the angels: Indeed, I will place a vicegerent upon the earth”*** (Al-Baqarah, 30)

And because we are partners in this divine strategy, its agents and executors—God did not veil it from us.

On the contrary, He revealed it with clarity in His noble Book, outlining the path and urging us to pursue it with all the strength we have been granted: ***“So flee to God”*** (Adh-Dhariyat, 50) not in fear, but in longing, in hope, and in surrender.

He called us to be among those who race toward Him:

***“And the foremost [in faith] will be the foremost [in reward]; they are the ones brought near [to God]”*** (Al-Waqi’ah, 10–11)

And not merely to race—but to compete: ***“And for this, let the competitors compete”*** (Al-Mutaffifin, 26)

This is no ordinary contest. It is a striving of hearts, a labor of souls reaching upward toward the Divine. It is the pursuit of a victory unlike any other—***“And what will make you know what is Illiyyun? A written record, witnessed by those brought near [to God]”*** (Al-Mutaffifin, 19–21) This, God declares, ***“is the supreme triumph”*** (At-Tawbah, 72)

## ■ Evolution through the Four Realms

The life we live in this world is but a fleeting stop along a vast and intricate journey—one that begins in the womb, perhaps even before, and extends all the way to the Day of Judgment. What defines this journey is the human being's continuous evolution as they pass through four distinct realms of existence.

In the first, the womb, the human is formed—nurtured in secret, unseen by the world, yet destined for it. From there, the journey continues into the realm of the *dunya*, where the soul awakens to consciousness, responsibility, and the test of free will.

But this world, too, is not the end. It is merely a corridor to the next phase: the **Barzakh**, a realm of waiting and refinement. Then comes the eternal Hereafter—**the realm of completion**, where the human soul reaches its highest potential, stripped of worldly veils, and drawn nearer to the Divine.

Each transition between these realms is not a rupture but a natural progression—a transformation that frees the soul from material constraints and elevates it toward spiritual clarity. Through this unfolding, the human being moves ever closer to their true essence, and ultimately, to the presence of God.

What sets humans apart from other creatures is their unique ability to harness these four realms in a way that elevates their role as God's vicegerent on Earth. Each stage a person passes through is not merely a phase, but a purposeful preparation for the next world—so that the transitions between these realms are not random shifts in time, but deliberate steps toward spiritual refinement and ascension.

Humans do not move between these realms by chance; rather, their journey follows a precise divine order designed to raise their spiritual rank and ready them for the station they are destined to hold in the

Hereafter. When a person truly comprehends this reality, they recognize that life in this world is far more than a material experience, it is a sacred field of testing and preparation for their eternal voyage. As God reminds us:

***“O mankind, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet Him.”*** (Al-Inshiqaq, 6)

Thus, recognizing this profound truth heightens a person’s awareness of the significance of their daily deeds and deepens their understanding that every action in this worldly life is a step along the path toward spiritual perfection and closeness to God.

Allah, the Exalted, says: ***“And certainly did We create man from an extract of clay. Then We placed him as a sperm-drop in a firm lodging. Then We made the sperm-drop into a clinging clot, and We made the clot into a lump, and We made from the lump bones, and We covered the bones with flesh; then We developed him into another creation. So blessed is Allah, the best of creators. Then indeed, after that, you are to die. Then indeed you, on the Day of Resurrection, will be resurrected.”***  
— (Al-Mu’minun, 12–16)

This beautiful progression from the simplest form to the full creation, followed inevitably by death and resurrection, is a powerful reminder of our continuous journey of transformation and the ultimate purpose for which we were created.

## ► **The First Stage: The Realm of the Womb**

In the realm of the womb, the human being exists at the very beginning of physical development, surrounded by divine protection within a “secure place” — ***qarar makin***. This stage represents the initial phase of bodily formation and growth, where the human is shaped as a living being, prepared to transition to the next stage of existence.

Here, everything depends solely on material and biological factors, with no conscious role or choice given to the human:

***“And Allah has brought you out from the wombs of your mothers while you know nothing, and He gave you hearing, sight, and hearts that you might give thanks.”*** (An-Nahl, 78)

## ► **The Second Stage: The World of This Life (Dunya)**

After completing its growth in the womb, the human being transitions into the “world of this life” through the process of birth. This realm is the most critical stage, where the human becomes conscious, accountable, and responsible for their actions. As Allah Almighty says:

***“Indeed, We created man from a sperm-drop mixture that We may test him; and We made him hearing and seeing.”*** (Al-Insan, 2)

In this world, the human is tested through trials and tribulations, granted the freedom to choose between good and evil, obedience to God or deviation from His path.

The dunya is the arena of effort and struggle, the stage where a person can cultivate their true self through righteous deeds, acquiring spiritual and intellectual values. At this phase, the human invests their energy in spiritual growth, for Allah declares:

***“O man, indeed you are toiling toward your Lord with [great] toil and will meet Him.”*** (Al-Inshiqaq, 6)

This journey demands that one follows the divine guidance, facing life’s challenges with strength, resilience, and faith. It is here that the foundation for eternal success is laid through conscious choice and steadfast effort.

## ► The Third Stage: The Realm of Barzakh

When the role entrusted to the human in this world reaches its completion, the soul transitions to the next phase — the realm known as **Barzakh**. Barzakh is the intermediary world that separates this life from the Hereafter, serving as a stage for the continuation of spiritual evolution. Allah the Exalted says:

*“And behind them is a barrier until the Day they are resurrected.”*  
(Al-Mu’minun, 100)

In this realm, the soul remains in a state of ongoing development, where its spiritual faculties mature and prepare for the ultimate passage to the eternal world — the Hereafter.

During Barzakh, the human no longer has the opportunity to acquire new righteous deeds; rather, they reside in reflection and awaiting the Day of Judgment. It is a time to contemplate the deeds performed in the earthly life and ready oneself for the final transition. This phase is thus both a spiritual culmination of past efforts and a solemn preparation for the reckoning to come.

## ► The Fourth Stage: The Realm of the Hereafter

In the realm of the Hereafter, every soul stands before Allah, presented with a full account of its deeds — every minor and major act laid bare. Allah, the Exalted, declares:

*“The Day when every soul will find what it has done of good present [before it], and what it has done of evil, it will wish that between itself and that [evil] was a great distance.”* (Al-Imran, 30)

The passage into the Hereafter unfolds according to how we have shaped ourselves in this worldly life — through the traits and virtues we have embraced or neglected. Our happiness or suffering in that

eternal realm is intrinsically tied to the fruits of our actions and how we engaged with the divine laws governing that world. Allah further affirms:

***“And they will find what they did present [before them]. And your Lord does not wrong anyone.”*** (Al-Kahf, 49)

This spiritual reckoning resembles the condition of a mother carrying a child infected with HIV — the child remains unharmed within the womb, but upon entering the external world with its strict laws and challenges, the disease manifests. Similarly, we live heedlessly, unaware of the ultimate truth, until the Day of Resurrection arrives and the veil is lifted. Allah says:

***“Indeed, you were in neglect of this, so We removed from you your cover, and your sight, this Day, is sharp.”*** (Qaf, 22)

Thus, the Hereafter is the final unveiling — where the true consequences of our earthly life are revealed with absolute clarity.

The esteemed scholar Sayyid al-Tabataba'i pointed to a profound truth regarding what awaits humanity in the Hereafter: it is not a separate or detached reward, but rather the true reality of one's deeds themselves. These deeds are preserved by God, recorded faithfully, and they manifest in the afterlife exactly as they deserve—neither diminished nor exaggerated. As the Divine Word declares: ***“Make no excuses this Day. You are only recompensed for what you used to do.”*** (Al-Tahrim,7)

When we imagine Paradise, our minds often conjure repetitive, materialistic images—a monotonous existence of opulent palaces and lush gardens, flowing rivers of wine and honey, surrounded by houris and eternal youthful servants. Yet, this portrayal, though outwardly alluring, can feel shallow, lacking the spiritual depth and true meaning that the soul yearns for. This leads some to wonder:

Will we be forever trapped in endless indulgence of such earthly pleasures? And does all the effort we exert in this world—our striving to cultivate spiritual strength and intellectual growth—culminate merely in a purely physical reward?

The truth is that what the Qur'an describes of Paradise's bliss is but a glimpse—a mere facet of its vast reality, while the unseen aspects are far greater and beyond human comprehension. As God Almighty declares: ***"They will have therein whatever they desire, and with Us is more."*** (Qaf, 35) In Paradise, there are delights no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and no human heart has ever imagined. The Divine Word affirms: ***"No soul knows what joy is kept hidden for them as a reward for what they used to do."*** (As-Sajda, 17)

Paradise is not merely a physical existence; rather, it is a complete realm overflowing with spiritual and intellectual pleasures that transcend all imagination. As God says: ***"And the greatest bliss is the pleasure of Allah. That is the supreme success."*** (At-Tawba, 72) Indeed, the highest delight in Paradise is the divine approval—God's pleasure and the joy of closeness to Him.

Life in this world, despite its apparent vastness, cannot compare to the boundlessness of life in Paradise. The worldly existence—with all its pleasures and pains—is but a fleeting illusion, much like the simulations of virtual reality. In contrast, Paradise is the true life, with its infinite dimensions that know no limits. As God Almighty declares: ***"And this worldly life is nothing but amusement and diversion; but the home of the Hereafter is best for those who fear Allah—would that you knew!"*** (Al-Ankabut, 64)

Our purpose in this earthly life is to cultivate and develop our human potentials so they may flourish and be perfected in Paradise. The life of Paradise is neither static nor dull; it is vibrant, ever-changing, and a continuous journey of growth and closeness to God. As He says: ***"They will abide therein forever; they will desire no change."*** (Al-Kahf,

108) In Paradise, all things transform alongside the evolving soul, and its delights renew themselves in harmony with the spirit's ascent through the stages of perfection.

Ultimately, Paradise is the realm where one attains the profound and diverse bliss one yearns for, a reflection of what one has cultivated within oneself during the earthly sojourn.

## ■ Reflective Exercises and Questions

### ► **Contemplative Question:**

Do my personal goals align with my role as God's vicegerent on earth? Or am I pursuing success in a way that distances me from my higher purpose?

Take a moment to reflect on your current goals and ask yourself:

- ♦ Am I living by a vision that seeks success alone, or am I striving for a deeper, positive impact?
- ♦ Are my goals truly connected to my life's greater mission, or are they merely temporary milestones that fail to reflect my inner truth?
- ♦ How can I find balance between personal success and my social responsibilities?

### ► **Exercise 1: Applying the Concept of Vicegerency (Khilafah)**

Reflect on your daily life. How can you embody the role of vicegerent of God in its various dimensions? Consider these examples:

- ♦ **In your relationships with others:** How might you contribute to spreading goodness and justice among people?
- ♦ **In your work:** How can you perform your duties with honesty and excellence, making your work a means to serve others?
- ♦ **In your use of natural resources:** How can you preserve the environment and use resources wisely?
- ♦ **In your learning and personal development:** How can you invest your knowledge and skills in service of humanity?

## ▶ **Exercise 2: Achieving Holistic Integration**

What are some ways you can harmonize the different aspects of your life? Reflect on questions like:

- ♦ How can you balance your work, family life, and acts of worship?
- ♦ How can you allocate time for nurturing your physical, mental, and spiritual health?
- ♦ How can you reconcile worldly ambitions with the pursuit of the Hereafter?



Chapter Six

# **The Journey Toward God?**

## Chapter Six

# The Journey Toward God

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On our path to God, a tapestry of diverse routes and successive stages unfolds before us, guiding us along the “Path of Inner Truth.” Here, the pursuit of God becomes a profound and multifaceted experience, reflecting the full spectrum of spiritual life.

Walking toward God is not merely an abstract idea or an isolated personal practice. Rather, it is a journey where our daily lives intertwine with the needs of the self and the dimensions of the soul—a path that harmonizes divine guidance with human nature, inviting us to balance the demands of the body with the aspirations of the spirit.

In this chapter, we carefully explore the pillars of this journey: beginning with the balanced fulfillment of human needs, progressing through self-development and knowledge, and culminating in the surrender of the self for God's sake. We move beyond theory into practice, unveiling core principles of the journey to God—rooted in sincere love, steadfast trust, deep sincerity, and holistic balance.

As we navigate these paths, we also unravel common misconceptions that may obscure the clarity of this luminous road, learning how every detail of our lives can become a deliberate step toward drawing nearer to the Divine.

## **Self-Honesty: The Key to the Journey Toward God**

Many hold the misconception that walking toward God is simply a matter of performing acts of worship or observing religious rituals. Yet, the truth is that the journey toward God is a profound inner voyage that transcends outward actions. It centers on achieving harmony among the mind, heart, body, and soul—a voyage of self-honesty.

To walk toward God is not merely to draw near through acts of obedience; it is to dwell in a state of deep awareness of one's true self, where every facet of life is connected to a higher purpose, rather than being a disconnected series of isolated deeds.

For this reason, the Qur'an does not confine the journey toward God merely to acts of worship; rather, it intimately links it to the inner struggle—the greater jihad—which is the "struggle of the self." God Almighty declares:

***"And those who strive for Us – We will surely guide them to Our ways."***  
(Al-Ankabut, 69)

This signifies that walking toward God is not a fleeting decision but an ongoing process of purification, continual self-correction, and reconciliation with one's own soul.

A person cannot truly walk toward God with sincerity unless they are first honest with themselves. Many believe they are on the right path, yet in reality, they live divided within—disconnected between what they profess and how they live their daily lives.

Authentic self-honesty means being in harmony—mind, heart, actions, and soul aligned. No one can journey toward God while harboring inner contradictions they refuse to confront, emotions they deny, or goals that conflict with their deepest values.

This is why the Qur'an warns us against the rift between outward appearance and inner reality:

***"And be not like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget themselves."*** (Al-Hashr, 19)

Whoever forgets God ultimately forgets their own self, wandering lost in an inner void, even if outwardly they appear devout. But the one who truly walks toward God is the one who dares to face their own soul honestly, courageously reshaping their life in harmony with their deepest truth.

## **■ The Journey of Self-Honesty**

Allah, the Exalted, says:

***"And We have made the night and the day two signs, and We erased the sign of the night and made the sign of the day visible that you may seek bounty from your Lord."*** (Al-Isra, 12)

In His infinite wisdom, God has established two interwoven and complementary paths for human beings on the road of self-honesty—paths that nurture growth and prepare the soul for the eternal bliss to come. One path is legislative, embodied in the divine law of Islam, guiding moral and spiritual conduct. The other is formative: He fashioned the night as a time of darkness and rest, inviting the human being to find peace and reflection within its quiet embrace; and He made the day bright and clear, urging one to strive, labor, and seek sustenance, security, and the fulfillment of worldly needs—the “bounty” that flows from the grace of the Lord.

To truly achieve your existential purpose—drawing near to God in devoted worship, and attaining true happiness, strength, and tranquility—you must unite both paths with full vigor. Just as no one can win a football match without playing it earnestly and by its established rules, keeping the championship firmly in their sights, so too can no one triumph in this worldly life without living it powerfully according to divine legislation, with the ultimate victory being the pleasure of God.

This is why, when the cursed man ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljam struck Imam Ali (peace be upon him) with a sword upon his forehead while he was in prostration, Ali cried out joyfully as a true conqueror: ***“I have won, by the Lord of the Ka’bah.”***

Walking and ascending the path of self-honesty is nothing but the rectification of your beliefs, thoughts, and worldview—aligning them harmoniously with the innate, God-given nature implanted within you. It is the consistent practice of what strengthens these true beliefs and ideas, and the avoidance of whatever shakes or undermines them. It involves protecting yourself by embracing loyalty and disavowal—affirming what is righteous and rejecting what is corrupt—and purifying your surroundings as much as possible, whether through your five senses or through the realm of

thought and emotion. Above all, it is the continuous practice of reform and renewal.

Reflect deeply on the divine words:

***“God is the Protector of those who believe; He brings them out of darkness into light. As for those who disbelieve, their protectors are the false deities, who lead them out of light into darkness.”***  
(Al-Baqarah, 257)

Reaching the stage of the ***Sidqeen*** (the Truthful Ones) means breaking free from every shackle that binds you—freedom from all darkness and negative feelings such as despair, fear, and anxiety, and from weakness and fatigue. It is liberation even from the servitude of the self. At this level, nothing in this world, no matter how great or small—holds any sway over you. Instead, you become wholly submissive and devoted to God alone, surrendering yourself entirely to His will and grace. In doing so, you arrive at the very essence of greatness, strength, and beauty which is, in truth, the meaning of servitude to God Almighty.

In the eloquent supplications of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) in ***Al-Munaaja al-Sha'baniyya***, he prays:

***“O my God, grant me the perfection of complete surrender to You, and illuminate the eyes of our hearts with the light of their gaze upon You, so that the eyes of the heart pierce through the veils of light and reach the source of greatness, and that our souls become suspended upon the honor of Your holiness.”***

To cultivate ourselves to this highest level of complete servitude to God, we must nurture two vital elements:

First, the magnitude of our servitude to God, embodied in the faculties, talents, abilities, and existential qualities we possess;

Second, the depth of our full awareness—both conscious and unconscious, intellectual, emotional, and behavioral—of this servitude.

Together, these two form the very essence of the *Journey to God*.

## ■ Pillars of the Journey to God

Islam, in its comprehensive legislation, identifies four interwoven pillars that guide our conduct as we navigate daily life with sincerity and balance, in harmony with our natural disposition (*fitra*), Islamic teachings, and the wisdom of reason. Through steadfast adherence to these pillars, we draw ever closer to God until we reach the pinnacle of absolute servitude to Him, the Exalted. These pillars are:

### ► **First Pillar: Striving to Fulfill Our Physical and Psychological Needs with Balance and Moderation**

Achieving harmony in meeting the human being's bodily and psychological needs is a fundamental principle upon which Islam builds a faithful character—one capable of confronting life's challenges without excess or neglect. Islam acknowledges human nature and its inherent physical and emotional demands, providing a disciplined framework that regulates these needs within balanced limits. This approach transforms them into pathways leading closer to God rather than means of distancing oneself from Him.

#### ♦ **The Importance of Achieving Balance in Meeting Needs**

Meeting basic needs is an essential requirement for human survival, yet when done with awareness and consciousness, it also becomes a source of spiritual motivation. Islam teaches that fulfilling bodily needs is itself part of worship—provided it is carried out within the bounds of moderation and does not distract a person from remembering and connecting with God. As Allah the Almighty says:

***“Say, ‘Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good [lawful] things?’ Say, ‘They are for those who believe during the life of this world, [but] exclusively for them on the Day of Resurrection.’”*** (Al-A’raf, 32)

This verse affirms that the lawful pleasures of this life are permitted for the believers. God has made these blessings accessible for human benefit, on the condition that they do not become a gateway to heedlessness or a distraction from the ultimate spiritual goal. As stated in the Quran:

***“Men whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allah and performance of prayer and giving of zakah...”*** (An-Nur, 37)

This balance grants the believer the capacity to enjoy the pleasures of this world without letting them govern their focus or sever their bond with God. For indeed, ***“Whoever desires the reward of this world—then with Allah is the reward of this world and the Hereafter.”*** (An-Nisa, 134)

#### ♦ **Quranic Guidance on Dietary Balance and Healthy Conduct**

Islam establishes a clear framework to achieve this delicate balance, urging moderation in eating and drinking, while warning sternly against excess. Allah the Exalted commands:

***“And eat and drink but do not waste; indeed, He does not like the wasteful.”*** (Al-A’raf, 31)

This divine injunction highlights Islam’s concern for regulating the physical and health-related dimensions of human life. Consuming food and drink in moderation safeguards the body from illness and alleviates psychological disturbances that often arise from overindulgence. Beyond mere physical well-being, this balanced

approach opens the door to a broader horizon—one where the soul attains inner peace, enabling the believer to focus wholeheartedly on worship and to pursue the path toward God with vigor and vitality.

- ♦ **Psychological Balance and Contentment as Fundamental Needs on the Path to God**

The quest for balance does not stop at the physical needs alone; it extends deeply into the realm of the psyche. Islam calls for the refinement of the self and the mastery over innate desires and impulses, while simultaneously acknowledging the vital importance of fulfilling them in ways that serve the journey toward God. Emotions such as love, happiness, and belonging are natural and essential to human existence. Yet, here lies the crucial role of moderation—so that the pursuit of these feelings does not become an end in itself, distracting the servant from walking sincerely toward the Divine. Rather, these feelings should act as stepping stones that nurture and enhance closeness to God.

As the Qur'an beautifully supplicates:

*"And those who say, 'Our Lord, grant us from among our wives and offspring comfort to our eyes and make us an example for the righteous.'"* (Al-Furqan, 74)

- ♦ **Practical Application of Balancing the Needs of the Body and the Soul**

Islam offers a rich framework of acts of worship and practices designed to help the believer cultivate this delicate balance. Fasting, for instance, serves as a powerful tool for disciplining the soul and refining one's desires. It teaches a person how to restrain their impulses, fostering greater self-control and diminishing the bondage to fleeting passions. This strengthening of the will empowers the

believer to resist temptations that could divert them from the path of God.

Moreover, prayer acts as a daily reset for the self. It offers a spiritual retreat within the rhythms of everyday life—moments in which the believer transcends the material world to reconnect with the Divine. This sacred pause restores harmony between body and soul, reminding the heart of its ultimate purpose. As the Qur'an affirms:

***"Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing."*** (Al-Ankabut, 45)

#### ♦ **The Spiritual Impact of Fulfilling Balanced Needs**

When both the body and soul are nourished in harmony, a sense of inner contentment and emotional stability begins to take root opening the heart to deeper spiritual awareness and a more intimate connection with God. The less a person is entangled in excessive desires and indulgence, the more freedom they discover within to surrender fully to divine servitude.

In this light, the act of fulfilling physical and emotional needs becomes a **spiritual practice**—an opportunity for gratitude, humility, and conscious devotion. The believer learns to receive blessings not with heedless consumption, but with reverence and purpose using them in ways that bring pleasure to the Giver.

Ultimately, this alignment gives rise to a profound inner stillness—a peace that draws the soul ever closer to its Source. As God promises in the Qur'an:

***"Those who believe and do righteous deeds—blessed are they, and a beautiful place of return awaits them."*** (Ar-Ra'd, 29)

## ► **Pillar Two: Self-Development and the Pursuit of Knowledge as a Journey Toward God**

On the path to God, **self-development**, the pursuit of knowledge, and the cultivation of virtues are not optional—they are essential foundations. Each serves as a means by which our every step in life gains meaning, drawing us closer to the ultimate purpose of our existence.

Islam, with its holistic worldview, does not regard personal growth as luxury or mere worldly ambition. Rather, it sees it as an inseparable part of sincere servitude to God. The journey of self-betterment becomes a sacred endeavor—one that elevates the soul and refines the character.

This pillar invites us into realms of human excellence and spiritual elevation, where the qualities of the complete, God-conscious human being are revealed from noble character to sincerity, from strong will to deep wisdom. As the Qur'an beautifully states:

*"Just as We have sent among you a Messenger from yourselves, reciting to you Our verses, purifying you, teaching you the Book and wisdom, and teaching you that which you did not know."*  
(Al-Baqarah, 151)

### ♦ **First: Morals— The Fragrance of the Soul and the Elevation of the Human Spirit**

Morality is not merely behavior—it is the very essence that reflects the purity of the soul and the clarity of the heart. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: *"I was sent only to perfect noble character."*

In this light, good character is not an ornamental trait added to the self—it is a foundational pillar in the making of the human being who journeys toward God.

Imagine that every interaction, every word, every glance infused with compassion, sincerity, and humility becomes a step that draws you nearer to the Divine. With this understanding, cultivating noble character becomes an inner pilgrimage—a spiritual refinement that aligns us with the essence of God’s message.

Forgiveness, mercy, courage, honesty, and humility—these are not superficial acts, but elevating forces that carry the soul upward on the path to God. These virtues are not habits of convenience; they are the living reflections of a heart that loves God and serves humanity with sincerity. As the Qur’an reminds us: ***“And they enjoin one another to truth, and they enjoin one another to patience.”*** (Al-‘Asr, 3)

Virtues are what make us most human, most beautiful in our humanity. They are the clearest expression of a life in harmony with divine truth.

#### ♦ **Second: The Power of Will and Resolve — Standing Firm Against the Storm**

When life challenges our resolve—when we are tested by trials that threaten to weaken us—true willpower and **sincere** determination must rise to the surface. But this strength of will is not a stubborn pursuit of worldly gain; it is a deep, sacred longing to walk toward God, to resist the impulses of the lower self, and to endure for the sake of truth.

As the Qur’an reassures us: ***“Do not lose heart and do not grieve—for you shall have the upper hand, if you are true believers.”*** (Aal ‘Imran, 139)

Through such resilience, the soul gains the power to remain steadfast. The will becomes more than mere force—it becomes a pathway to inner peace, a shield against despair, and a tool for spiritual discipline. The believer learns that **God blesses the steps** of those who persist with courage and clarity, moving forward even in the fiercest of winds.

#### ♦ **Third: Awareness and Maturity — The Insight of the Heart and the Depth of Understanding**

In Islam, awareness is a light that illuminates the path—and maturity is the fruit that enables a person to carry responsibility with grace and excellence in all they do.

To be truly aware is to distinguish between purpose and means; it is to see this world through the lens of the Hereafter. As the Qur'an challenges us: ***"Do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon their hearts?"*** (Muhammad, 24)

Such awareness is not shallow knowledge—it is a deep inner knowing, a clarity that awakens the soul to the truth that every day is an opportunity to strengthen our connection with God, and that every event is a sign, calling us to reflect, to ponder, and to grow.

#### ♦ **Fourth: Wisdom — The Pearl of Enlightened Hearts**

Wisdom allows us to see beyond the surface of events—to discern the hidden messages embedded in life's unfolding lessons. It is the ability to respond rightly in moments of difficulty, and to maintain balance in times of emotional weight and uncertainty.

At its deepest level, wisdom is the realization that everything rests in the hands of God, and that **contentment** is the secret to true inner peace.

As the Qur'an affirms: *"He grants wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been granted wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding."* (Al-Baqarah, 269)

Thus, wisdom is not merely an intellectual trait—it is a light born from the heart, guiding you gently along the path of nearness to God.

#### ♦ **Fifth: Knowledge — The Key to Arrival and the Instrument of Elevation**

In Islam, knowledge is a sacred tool—one that unlocks the mysteries of life and deepens our perception of the world around us. It is not pursued for theory alone, but as a spiritual provision—fuel for the journey of engaging the world with clarity and grace.

Knowledge enables us to recognize the signs of God scattered throughout the universe. As the Qur'an declares:

*"It is only those who have knowledge among His servants who truly fear God."* (Fatir, 28)

True knowledge becomes a map for the soul—a lens through which we contemplate God's wisdom in His creation, and come to realize that everything in existence is pointing back to Him.

#### ♦ **Conclusion of the Pillar: The Path of Wholeness and Nearness to God**

The journey toward God through self-development is not a passing endeavor—it is an inner calling, one that urges us to open ourselves to every form of excellence that draws us nearer to the Divine.

Each moment we move closer to virtue, each effort we make to know God, to seek wisdom and clarity—these are acts of soul-building. In

the language of Islam, self-development is not superficial; it is a profound path, one defined by balance: between spirit, intellect, and self; between love for God and goodness toward creation; between relentless striving and graceful surrender to divine will.

In this harmony, the journey to God becomes more than a duty—it becomes a sacred experience. A spiritual unfolding that fills the soul with peace and stillness. And with every step taken on the path of inward perfection, we discover new horizons—deeper truths and loftier states of being.

### ► **Pillar Three: Selflessness for the Sake of God — Cultivating a Spirit of Giving and Renewal**

On the path toward God, Islam calls us to transcend the narrow confines of the self—to move beyond ego and enter the vastness of our shared humanity. In this expansive vision, our acts of giving become part of our life's mission, and our efforts to uplift others become a natural extension of the inner work we do to purify ourselves.

The journey to God is not a solitary pursuit. It is a deeply relational experience—one that matures and elevates the soul when we look beyond our personal concerns to offer something greater: service, compassion, and a contribution that leaves the world better than we found it.

This self-denial, when paired with sincere giving and a drive to reform, is not a loss of self—it is the elevation of the self to a higher station of grace, dignity, and divine nearness.

## ♦ **First: Giving — The Language of Pure Hearts and the Pathway of the God-Conscious**

In Islam, giving is not merely an action—it is a spirit, a state of being that flows from the heart of the believer and fills them with a unique joy: the joy of being a source of happiness for others.

God says: *“You will never attain righteousness until you give from that which you love.”* (Aal ‘Imrān, 92) This form of giving is not dependent on wealth or material abundance. It manifests in the small, sacred gestures of everyday life: a kind word, a helping hand, a quiet sacrifice made for the elevation of another. It is a quality that transcends possessions—it is a reflection of the soul.

The believer who gives sincerely begins to feel the ego dissolve in the face of love, generosity, and compassion. And in that sacred dissolving, they draw nearer to God—the Ultimate Giver, the One from whom all goodness flows.

## ♦ **Second: Reform — A Sincere Call to Illuminate the Path for Others**

In Islam, reform is not optional—it is a divine duty, a sacred mission entrusted to those who believe. God praises those who strive to bring goodness to their communities and plant the seeds of righteousness wherever they go. As the Qur’an declares:

*“You are the best nation ever raised for mankind—you enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong.”* (Aal ‘Imrān, 110)

When a person works to reform others, they are simultaneously engaged in the reformation of their own soul—reviving their faith, renewing their sense of purpose, and reconnecting with their divine mission.

Reform is not limited to giving advice or offering guidance; it is a continuous act of embodying the living example of Islam—an Islam rooted in ethics, compassion, and meaningful action.

♦ **Third: Self-Denial – The Liberation of the Soul from the Bonds of Ego**

Self-denial is the noble act of transcending our personal desires and cravings, elevating our being above the ephemeral yearnings of the self. It is a conscious surrender, where our deeds are devoted solely to God, and the purpose of our existence becomes increasingly clear and pure—untainted by worldly gains or the praise of men. Islam teaches us that the path to the Divine can only be walked by relinquishing selfishness and embracing the concept of “annihilation in God” (fanaa fi Allah). In this state, our actions are stripped of ego, and we experience a profound connection with the Almighty—one that does not drive us to seek fleeting rewards, but rather the deeper, more enduring satisfaction of His pleasure. As the Qur’an beautifully affirms:

*“And whoever is saved from the greed of his soul—those are the successful.”* (Al-Hashr, 9)

♦ **Fourth: Social Solidarity – The Life of the Community in the Spirit of Brotherhood and Mutual Support**

Self-denial and generosity are not mere individual sentiments but a profound way of life that unfolds within the fabric of the Islamic community. Each member feels a deep responsibility toward others, embodying the prophetic ideal expressed by the Messenger of God (peace be upon him): *“The example of the believers in their mutual love, compassion, and sympathy is like that of a single body; when one limb suffers, the entire body responds with sleeplessness and fever.”* Through this sacred vision, giving transcends personal charity

to become a comprehensive social system. A community built on solidarity and mercy emerges—thriving with goodness and reform that permeate every facet of life.

- ♦ **Fifth: Altruism – The Highest Rank of Giving for the Sake of God**

Altruism is the noble act of placing others before oneself in the path of God, representing one of the loftiest expressions of faith. When a person shares from their own needs and prefers others over themselves, they reach the pinnacle of self-denial and pure devotion to the Divine. The Qur'an solemnly declares:

*“And they give them preference over themselves, even though they are in privation.”* (Al-Hashr, 9)

Here unfolds a profound spirituality, where true happiness springs not from self-interest, but from the joy of uplifting others—imbuing the soul with a deep sense of purpose as an integral part of manifesting goodness in the lives of people.

- ♦ **Conclusion of the Theme: Drawing Near to God Through Giving and Reform**

The journey toward God through giving, reform, and self-denial is a path suffused with inner peace and spiritual radiance. It is a noble ascent beyond the self, transforming the individual into an instrument of goodness and mercy. The more we relinquish our own desires to bring happiness to others, the closer we draw to God, deepening our true understanding of servitude to Him. This act of giving leaves an eternal imprint, filling one's life with profound purpose. It makes one's existence a meaningful message, a magnificent journey illuminated by light and goodness—all undertaken for the sake of God.

## ► **Pillar Four: The Remembrance of God and Worship – The Path to Tranquility and Constant Connection with the Divine**

The remembrance of God and His worship form the very foundation upon which the journey toward God is built. This theme penetrates deeply into the believer's life, bestowing upon them true serenity and lasting happiness. Here, the soul stands before an open window to eternity, bound to a God whose mercy and care never cease. Remembrance is not merely the repetition of words; it is a living reality embraced by the faithful, whose heart remains continuously connected to God, and whose consciousness stays firmly rooted in the profound meanings of faith and the certainty of God's power and love.

### ♦ **Firstly: The Remembrance of God – Nourishment for the Soul and Light for the Heart**

God Almighty says: *“Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Indeed, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.”* (Ar-Ra'd, 28) Remembrance is the pathway to inner tranquility and spiritual balance, granting the heart a profound sense of peace and steadfastness. Amidst the bustle of life, where thoughts scatter and distractions abound, remembrance becomes a sanctuary for the soul—a serene oasis to which the believer returns to draw solace and wisdom.

The repeated recitation of affirmations of God's oneness, seeking forgiveness, praise, and gratitude is far more than mere ritual. It is the means by which the heart deeply engages with the Divine, releasing its burdens, filling itself with certainty, and training the self in acceptance and surrender.

## ♦ **Secondly: Prayer – A Daily Encounter and a Renewal of the Covenant with God**

Prayer is the greatest pillar of worship—a sacred appointment in which the servant meets his Lord, casting aside his burdens and renewing his faith. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) once said, ***“Bring us comfort through it, O Bilal,”*** pointing to the fact that prayer is not merely an obligation, but a source of deep peace and solace that casts its calming shadow over one’s life.

Through prayer, the heart remains tethered to the Divine, nurtured by a sense of serenity and assurance. It fortifies the soul, enabling steadfastness in the face of life’s challenges.

Because prayer is distributed throughout the day, it serves as a constant reminder and realignment toward one’s ultimate purpose. It is a practical training for the believer—a discipline that instills reverence and composure, purifies the soul from heedlessness, and cultivates within the heart a deep-rooted culture of patience and certainty.

As the Qur’an declares: ***“Seek help through patience and prayer; and truly, it is difficult except for the humbly submissive.”*** (Al-Baqarah, 45)

## ♦ **Thirdly: Contemplation of God’s Creation – Reviving the Sense of Majesty and Reverence**

Reflecting upon the universe and contemplating the signs of God scattered throughout creation is an integral form of worship. It is a pathway that awakens the heart to the grandeur and wisdom of the Divine. As God commands: ***“Say, observe what is in the heavens and the earth.”*** (Yunus, 101)

Gazing upon the manifestations of divine power—the heavens, the earth, the oceans, and all living beings—opens for the believer a

window onto the perfection of the Creator. It rekindles within the soul both love and awe for God.

Contemplation is not merely a physical observation of nature; it is an inner awakening—a feeling that fills the heart with the majesty of the One who created all things. It deepens human awareness of our place in this vast cosmos. Every natural scene, every detail of life, becomes a gentle invitation to reflect, to return to God with a heart brimming with wonder, reverence, and gratitude.

♦ **Fourthly: Supplication – The Power of Connection with God and the Release of Burdens**

Supplication is the sacred refuge to which the believer turns in moments of vulnerability and need. It is the sincerest expression of one's dependence on God. The Almighty says:

***“And your Lord says, ‘Call upon Me; I will respond to you.’”*** (Ghafir, 60)

Through supplication, the heart draws near to God, and the doors of mercy and forgiveness are opened wide. The believer lives with the unshakable conviction that God hears, responds, and supports him.

Supplication is not merely a request for needs—it is an ongoing dialogue between the servant and his Lord, a spiritual lifeline that renews faith and deepens trust in the Divine. When a person pours out their thoughts, fears, and hopes before God, they find inner peace and relief, sensing that they are heard and fully known. In that sacred exchange, the bond with God grows more profound.

As the Qur'an beautifully assures: ***“And when My servants ask you about Me indeed, I am near. I respond to the call of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me that they may be rightly guided.”*** (Al-Baqarah, 186)

- ♦ **Fifthly: Tasbīḥ and Istighfār — Purity of the Soul and Clarity of Spirit**

Glorifying God (tasbīḥ) and seeking His forgiveness (istighfār) are two sacred practices that purify the heart and cleanse the soul from sin and spiritual residue. Through *tasbīḥ*, the believer is lifted into the heights of spiritual awareness; through *istighfār*, the soul is washed and restored to its original purity.

God says: *“Seek forgiveness from your Lord, then turn to Him in repentance.”* (Hūd, 3)

Istighfār teaches humility. It anchors the believer in a constant state of returning to God—acknowledging one’s shortcomings and embracing the lifelong process of course correction and spiritual renewal.

Tasbīḥ, on the other hand, is a **perpetual declaration of divine perfection**—a rhythm of the heart that immerses the soul in reverence and awe. It awakens the believer to live in a state of sanctification, attuned to the majesty of God in every moment.

- ♦ **Conclusion of the Pillar: The Remembrance and Worship of God — Life for the Heart and the Ascension of the Soul**

The remembrance and worship of God are not mere obligations—they are the very life force of the heart, the tranquility of the mind, and the horizon through which the believer remains connected to the Divine in every detail of life.

Through remembrance, the believer draws spiritual strength, renews faith, and lives with a peaceful soul—anchored in the certainty that everything unfolds by God’s will and wisdom.

This ongoing state of worship cultivates inner resilience, preparing the believer to face life's challenges with clarity and trust. Every act becomes a step closer to God, and every moment, however ordinary, is infused with sacred purpose. True happiness, then, is not found in fleeting pleasures—but in nearness to the Creator.

As the Qur'an beautifully teaches: *"When the prayer is concluded, disperse through the land and seek the bounty of God, and remember God often, so that you may be successful."*(Al-Jumu'ah, 10)

### ► **Conclusion of the Pathways to God: Divine Guidance, Perfected and Complete**

God, in His infinite mercy, has not merely called us toward these four spiritual paths through abstract commands or moral ideals. Rather, He has established **a comprehensive system of principles and practices** that gently guide us toward these stations of growth and nearness.

As the Qur'an declares: *"Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your way."* (Al-Mā'idah, 3)

Even before the legislation was revealed, God created us—and the entire universe—in a way that naturally leads us back to Him, unless we, by our own free will, choose to turn away.

He reminds us: *"And He has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth—it is all from Him."* (Al-Jāthiyah, 13)

Thus, the journey to God is embedded in the very design of existence. The laws, the signs, the inner longings—they are all signposts leading home to Him... unless we consciously choose another path.

## Paths That Lead to God: Personal Journeys Toward Divine Nearness

Having explored the broader dimensions of the spiritual journey toward God, we now turn to the concept of the **“paths that lead to Him”**—a reflection of the unique diversity found within each soul’s quest for closeness to the Divine.

In Islam, these paths are as varied as the people who walk them, shaped by individual circumstances, personalities, and environments. Each human being is invited to discover a distinct and personal route—a route that embodies Islam’s universal wisdom and its deep embrace of individual differences.

### ► **First: The Personal Nature of the Journey to God**

God has created every soul with its own particular set of qualities, inclinations, and capabilities. What brings one person closer to God may not be the same for another. The path to Him is personalized—rooted in each individual’s psychological makeup, life context, and inner readiness.

This spiritual quest begins with self-awareness: recognizing one’s strengths and limitations, and seeking a way that addresses the unique challenges that lie between the self and its Lord.

As the Qur’an so beautifully expresses:

***“And that I may do righteous deeds that You, [O Lord], will be pleased with.”*** (An-Naml, 19)

This verse captures the essence of a journey shaped by one’s personal striving, unique abilities, and sincere will. The way to God is not a

rigid, one-size-fits-all road—it is an intimate unfolding, a custom path carved by the soul's devotion and effort.

## ► **Second: Adapting the Spiritual Journey to Life's Trials and Circumstances**

Every human being encounters a unique set of trials and events in life. These challenges are not simply obstacles—they are often instruments of transformation, designed to support inner growth and draw the soul closer to God.

A person may face profound hardships: the loss of a loved one, chronic illness, emotional upheaval—and it is precisely these moments that can become turning points in their spiritual journey.

To face adversity with resolve, patience, and trust in God strengthens the core of faith. It awakens within the believer a deeper understanding: that trials are not punishments, but divine invitations—tests, or bridges to nearness.

As the Qur'an reminds us:

*"And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits—but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere."*(Al-Baqarah, 155)

## ► **Third: Diversity in Acts of Worship and Pathways to Divine Nearness**

The gateways to closeness with God are many, and each soul finds its way through the door most aligned with its nature. Some feel most connected to God through prayer and night vigil; others through charity and generous giving. Still others draw near through the pursuit of knowledge and the teaching of others.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: ***“Actions are judged by intentions.”***

Thus, any righteous act can become a personal path to God—so long as it is carried out with sincerity and guided by a pure intention.

This diversity in worship is a divine mercy. It offers the believer freedom and authenticity in choosing the acts that resonate most deeply with their heart, relieving them from rigid formality and artificial effort.

A Muslim is invited to walk the path of devotion that speaks most naturally to their soul—so long as the intention is purely for God. This nurtures motivation, consistency, and inner joy, making the journey to Him both sustainable and deeply personal.

#### ► **Fourth: The Sweetness of Seeking God — A Spiritual Exercise for the Soul**

The journey toward God is not merely a religious duty—it is a profound inner experience, one that grants the believer a spiritual joy far greater than any pleasure the world can offer. Though this path may demand effort, patience, and perseverance, it offers in return a happiness of the heart that no worldly pursuit can match.

Imam Ali Zayn al-Abidin (peace be upon him) beautifully expressed this truth in his whispered supplications:

***“My God, who has tasted the sweetness of Your love and sought another in Your place? And who has found comfort in nearness to You, then longed to be apart?”***

To truly know the delight of closeness to God is to know that nothing else compares—and to **never desire separation again.**

This spiritual pleasure transforms the path to God into a kind of soulful exercise—like physical training. At first, it may feel challenging, even demanding. But soon, the soul becomes attached to it, drawn to it, finding joy in every step taken closer to the Divine.

Eventually, this striving becomes the **primary source of tranquility and inner contentment**. It becomes the wellspring from which peace flows—lifting the believer above fear, sorrow, and anxiety, into a life grounded in sacred serenity.

### ► **Fifth: The Psychological Joy of Seeking God**

The journey toward God is not only a pursuit of salvation in the Hereafter—it is also a **spiritual and psychological healing**. It gently frees the soul from the burdens of anxiety, depression, and despair. The closer one draws to God, the deeper their **certainty**, the greater their **inner calm**, and the stronger their ability to face life's trials with courage and hope.

A life infused with faith and nearness to God becomes a life filled with **inner peace**, where the heart is anchored in quiet joy—a joy that is not loud or fleeting, but deep and enduring.

### ► **Conclusion**

The paths that lead to God are many and diverse—reflecting the inclusive nature of Islam and its profound respect for individual uniqueness. In this sacred journey, each person follows a path that aligns with their nature and circumstances, crafting a personal way to fulfill their divine purpose.

Though the journey may begin with difficulty or hesitation, it gradually transforms into a road paved with **contentment, clarity, and sacred delight**. The more the believer advances, the more they are enveloped by serenity and peace—until they come to dwell in a

life marked not merely by external success, but by **true psychological wellness and spiritual tranquility.**

## ■ Principles of the Journey to God

The journey to God is a profound spiritual expedition—a quest of the soul seeking wholeness, harmony, and alignment with the Divine will. It is not limited to the external performance of rituals, but embraces the renewal of intention, the refinement of behavior, and the engagement with life through love, awareness, and balance.

At the heart of this journey lie essential principles:

Love for God, trust in Him, balance in fulfilling one's responsibilities, sincerity in intention, and gentleness toward the self. Through these guiding values, the will to continue is kindled, and the heart begins to beat in rhythm with the spiritual truths that draw us ever closer to our Creator.

With these principles as our compass, the path to God becomes a transformative experience—one in which even the smallest moments of daily life are turned into steady steps toward lasting happiness and true inner peace.

### ► **Principle One: The Love of God — The Supreme Driving Force Toward Him**

The love of God is one of the most powerful and deeply rooted forces within the human soul. It is not a fleeting emotion—it is a sacred longing, an inner pull engraved in our very primordial nature (fiṭrah). As the Qur'an declares:

***"So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. This is the natural disposition God has instilled in mankind."*** (Ar-Rūm, 30)

This love is not merely emotional—it is a transformative energy, a yearning that lifts the heart from the realm of the material to the sublime expanses of the Divine.

As the Qur'an further states: ***"But God has made faith beloved to you and beautified it in your hearts, and made disbelief, sin, and disobedience hateful to you."*** (Al-Hujurāt, 7)

Yet this innate drive toward God can become veiled, blurred by life's endless distractions and the soul's attachment to the temporary. As a result, the human heart may chase perfection and beauty in fleeting worldly forms—seeking meaning in material or emotional pursuits.

But these longings are, in truth, reflections of a deeper truth: the soul's natural inclination toward God's infinite perfection. Every search for beauty, goodness, and completeness is ultimately a response to the spirit's original call—its yearning for the One who is the source of all beauty, all strength, all grace.

Herein lies the importance of uncovering the truth behind our desires. Every glimpse of beauty we chase, every form of excellence we admire, is a mirror of God's ultimate perfection. Every good we seek flows from His mercy and generosity. The more we come to know Him, the more we realize that He alone is the source of richness, power, and eternal beauty—and the more our hearts begin to detach from illusion and return to their origin.

In that sacred clarity, love for God becomes not only a motivation—it becomes the very heartbeat of life. We begin to see Him reflected in all things.

As Imam Ali (peace be upon him) once said:

***"I have never seen anything without seeing God before it, after it, and with it."***

## ♦ Gratitude to God — Divine Sovereignty and the Right of Thankfulness

God's sovereignty over us is revealed in His role as our Creator and Sustainer; He is our true Owner who brought us into existence from nothingness and continuously bestows upon us both manifest and hidden blessings. This love for Him arises naturally from our deep awareness of His boundless grace toward us.

This grace is not a mere abstract concept, but an absolute reality—just as God is the Creator of all existence, His continuous outpouring of life and sustenance upon us and the entire universe flows unceasingly in every moment. He is the Owner of every provision we receive and every blessing we enjoy; all good that comes into our lives is solely from Him. As the Qur'an proclaims:

***"O mankind, you are those in need of Allah, while Allah is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy."*** (Fatir, 15)

From this profound truth springs the human obligation of gratitude to God, a thankfulness that resonates deeply within the soul. This gratitude draws us closer to Him, awakening in our hearts a tender love and planting within us a peace that can only be attained through complete submission to Him alone.

As revealed in the sacred words:

***"Descendants of those We carried [in the ship] with Noah. Indeed, he was a grateful servant."*** (Al-Isra, 3)

Thus, gratitude becomes both a recognition of God's absolute ownership and a heartfelt response that enriches the believer's relationship with the Divine.

## ♦ **The Delight of Servitude to God — Worship as a Source of Comfort and Joy**

When the love of God takes root deeply within our hearts, servitude to Him transforms into a boundless source of joy and happiness. Worship ceases to be a mere duty or obligation; it becomes a heartfelt relationship of gratitude and thanksgiving. This feeling, born from divine love, renews our perspective on every aspect of life—serving God and worshipping Him become a sweet delight we savor and long to sustain, not a burden we bear.

Imam Al-Sajjad (peace be upon him), in his intimate supplications to the Beloved, beautifully expresses this spiritual joy:

*“O You whose holy lights are the delight of the eyes of His lovers, and the glory of His face captivates the hearts of the knowing; O the wish of the hearts of the yearning and the ultimate hope of the loving.”*

## ♦ **Knowing God — The Key to Ascending in Divine Love**

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) states in *Nahj al-Balagha*:

*“The beginning of religion is knowledge of it; the perfection of knowledge is belief in it; the perfection of belief is the oneness of God; and the perfection of oneness is sincerity to Him...”*

Indeed, as our knowledge of God deepens, so does our love for Him, our yearning for sincerity in devotion grows, and the sweetness of worship intensifies.

To kindle the flame of God’s love in our hearts, we must seek sincere knowledge—an awareness that reveals the beauty and majesty of the Divine. The more we come to truly know God, the more our love for Him flourishes, and the stronger our passion to draw near

becomes. This passion is the vital energy and driving force behind our spiritual journey.

Learning, reflection, and living in harmony with faith's values are all paths that deepen our love for God and enrich our minds and souls. Through these, we align more fully with our spiritual calling and find ourselves increasingly attuned to the Divine presence.

♦ **Turning to God as Life's Center — The Love of God and the Driving Forces of Existence**

The love of God is not an isolated emotion detached from other life motivations; rather, it transcends and embraces them all as the supreme driving force interwoven into every facet of our existence. Our ambitions for success, perfection, and contentment do not conflict with love for God—instead, they harmonize and converge into a single path. Every action we undertake, every good we strive for, becomes a step closer to God when accompanied by sincere and pure intention.

Through this profound integration of divine love and self-realization in the material realm, the human soul ascends in its journey toward God, uniting spiritual and physical needs into a harmonious whole. This unity allows one to live a life that delights the spirit and bathes it in enduring peace.

Thus, the love of God becomes the foundational pillar and the greatest principle guiding our path toward the Divine. Through this love, we grasp the true meaning of our existence, living within God's embrace as we pursue divine perfection—an elevation that lifts us beyond the confines of the material world to the boundless horizons of eternity.

## ► Principle Two: Trust in God — The Pillar of the Journey Toward Tranquility and Peace

The journey to God is not a mere linear progression of steps taken in one direction; rather, it is a living, dynamic interaction that begins with God Himself—the Most Exalted—who draws us through His mercy and guides us to His path. This profound truth is beautifully expressed in the heartfelt supplication of Imam Al-Sajjad (peace be upon him) in the prayer of Abi Hamza Al-Thumali, where he says:

*“Through You I have known You, and You have led me to Yourself, and You have called me to You; and were it not for You, I would not have known who You are.”*

God, exalted be He, is both the beginning and the end, the One who envelops our hearts with His gentle care, drawing them back to Himself. This divine attraction and kindness manifest in myriad ways—sometimes through blessings and ease, and other times through trials and afflictions—each perfectly suited to our needs and ordained by His wisdom.

**Trust in God**, then, is that inner strength which elevates us above fear and sustains our balance amid life’s challenges. It is a steadfast faith that reassures us, step by step, that God is always with us.

This trust becomes most apparent in our ability to endure hardships and tests. Often, difficult trials arrive to measure the depth of our trust and to draw us closer to God, revealing that at the heart of every trial lies hidden mercy. As the Quran declares:

*“And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient, who, when disaster strikes them, say, ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.’ Those are the ones upon whom are*

*blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided.”* (Al-Baqarah, 155-157)

#### ♦ **Certainty in God: A Refuge Amid Life’s Storms**

As our knowledge of God deepens, so too does our trust in Him; for true understanding of the Divine illuminates our insight, steadies our hearts, and grants us tranquility amidst turmoil. This trust awakens in us the awareness that God’s wisdom transcends all, that whatever He chooses for us is perfect, and that no matter how tightly the world’s burdens press upon us, God never abandons His servants. He has bound Himself by His own sacred promise of mercy for the believers. As the Almighty declares:

*“Say, ‘To whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth?’ Say, ‘To Allah.’ He has decreed upon Himself mercy.”* (Al-An’am, 12)

Yet such trust rests upon an unshakable certainty in God’s existence and nearness. It frees us from the fear of losing sustenance, health, or safety—because we know all things come from Him and ultimately return to Him. This certainty is like a steady hand holding ours through the darkest moments of confusion, filling our hearts with calm and our souls with reassurance.

*“And when My servants ask you concerning Me—indeed I am near. I respond to the invocation of the supplicant when he calls upon Me. So let them respond to Me and believe in Me that they may be [rightly] guided.”* (Al-Baqarah, 186)

#### ♦ **Surrender to God: The Wisdom of Giving and Withholding**

At times, God places us in situations we perceive as trials, yet He alone knows the profound wisdom behind these moments of hardship. He may withhold from us what we believe to be good,

while granting us blessings beyond our expectations. As the Almighty declares:

***“And if Allah were to give provision to His servants according to their desires, they would surely misbehave throughout the earth; but He sends [it] down in due measure. Indeed He is, of His servants, Acquainted and Seeing.”*** (Ash-Shura, 27)

With this understanding, difficulties transform into channels of divine grace. Our deprivation becomes part of God’s wise plan, and the delay in fulfilling our desires serves to strengthen patience and deepen faith.

#### ♦ **Rejecting the Whisperings of Satan and Strengthening Faith**

Despite our certainty in God’s mercy, Satan strives to sow doubt in our hearts, tempting us to believe that God does not desire what is best for us. But the truth we must hold firmly is that God’s mercy surpasses even our own, and He always guides us toward goodness. Just as we would never doubt the love of a mother who cared for us with unwavering devotion, how then can we allow Satan to cast shadows over our trust in God’s compassion?

In a heartfelt supplication, Imam Zain al-Abidin (peace be upon him) asks:

***“How can I hope in anyone but You, when all good is in Your hands? And how could I expect from anyone else, when creation and command belong solely to You?”***

#### ♦ **Reliance and Trust in God: The Principle of Starting Anew and Deep Faith**

Trusting in God liberates the soul from clinging to worldly causes and strengthens sincere reliance upon the Divine. This reliance—

*tawakkul*—is not a form of negligence or abandoning effort, but rather a profound balance between striving diligently and placing full confidence that the outcome rests solely with God. As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught: ***“Tie your camel and then trust in God.”***

The faith that the prophets called for was never a mere feeling; it was a committed practice of depending on God alone and avoiding excessive attachment to any power or cause besides Him.

***“And We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a guidance for the Children of Israel, [commanding], ‘Do not take other than Me as [your] Disposer of affairs.’”*** (Al-Isra, 2)

#### ♦ **The Impact of Trust in God on Our Daily Lives**

Every day, in every challenge, in every hope and setback, our trust in God fuels an extraordinary energy to keep moving forward. It shields us from despair and anxiety, filling us with psychological and emotional equilibrium. The more our trust in God deepens, the better equipped we become to face life’s trials with wisdom and tranquility, certain that God is present in every moment—supporting every seeker and guiding every plan with perfect wisdom.

#### ▶ **Principle Three: Sincerity to God — The Essence of True Proximity**

Your daily deeds—whether social, professional, or developmental—may be driven by good intentions, noble motivations, or lofty goals, yielding blessings, rewards, and closeness to God. Yet, when your intention in these actions is pure and solely for God, the impact transcends ordinary reward. It becomes a profound means of drawing near to God, a closeness without measurable bounds.

Sincerity to God means that your intention is central and unwavering—not seeking human praise, nor personal success, but directed solely toward pleasing Him. This pure devotion in action is the vital link that opens the gates of divine mercy, allowing us to receive God’s care and guidance. It is the most powerful factor in God’s response to us and the outpouring of His boundless grace.

#### ♦ **Sincerity: Being with God in Every Beat**

Sincerity is to make every heartbeat and every action arise from a soul deeply aware that God is both the ultimate destination and the final goal. Sincerity is not confined to acts of worship alone; rather, it is the presence of God permeating every deed, transforming work into worship and life into a continuous path toward Him. As the Divine declares:

*“And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion.”* (Al-Bayyina, 5)

When this pure intention takes root within the heart, every effort gains profound meaning, and every step carries a deep sense of closeness to God—even if others fail to perceive the true value of what you do.

#### ♦ **The Impact of Sincerity on the Fruits of Our Actions**

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “The intention of a believer is better than their deed,” highlighting the profound significance of a sincere heart that transcends the mere outward act. A small deed, perhaps taking only moments, can draw one closer to God than a grand effort demanding great exertion but lacking sincere intention. As Al-Fakhr al-Razi narrated, the Prophet said, *“A single strike by Ali on the Day of the Trench is better than the worship of the two heavy things [i.e., the heavens and the earth].”*

Sincerity in our devotion transforms even the most ordinary acts of life into blessed works, infused with divine grace and nearness. It draws the favor and care of God toward us and opens the gates of contentment and tranquility. When our intentions are purified, and we live our lives for God and by God, every moment becomes a means of drawing nearer to Him—bringing a deeper sense of purpose and an unbounded peace to the heart.

#### ♦ **Sincerity: The Pathway to True Happiness**

Sincerity liberates us from the chains of worldly expectations and the judgments of others. It directs our efforts solely toward God, bestowing upon us a profound sense of security and contentment. Through sincerity, our hearts find steadiness in a single direction—free from the distractions of personal ambitions, praise, or worldly gain. It is the path to inner peace, where we rely wholly on God alone and bask in His divine approval.

Ultimately, sincerity to God is the essence of genuine closeness to Him. It teaches us that true happiness is not measured by the magnitude of our deeds, but by the depth of our intention and the purity of our devotion.

#### ► **Principle Four: Balance — The Foundation of Perfection and Wholeness on the Path to God**

Imagine a person who devotes all their energy to strengthening the muscles of one arm, neglecting the rest of the body. After some time, that arm may grow strong and toned, yet the body remains weak and unfit, far from true harmony. So it is with the human soul: if we truly wish to journey toward God, we must nurture every facet of our being and live with a balanced heart, ensuring no aspect overshadows another. Human perfection is built upon balance, just as God created the universe with order and measure:

***“And the heaven He raised and imposed the balance, That you not transgress within the balance.”*** (Ar-Rahman, 7-8)

Often in life, we witness those who focus exclusively on one dimension while neglecting others. Some immerse themselves in the pursuit of knowledge, believing it to be the highest calling, yet overlook the purification of their souls or their social responsibilities. Others pour their energies into advancing their careers, forgetting the spiritual, social, and familial dimensions of life. And some dedicate themselves entirely to caring for their families, neglecting the wider role they play beyond that circle.

True growth on the path to God demands harmony — cultivating the mind, heart, soul, and social self in concert, just as the cosmos thrives by divine equilibrium.

#### ♦ **Excess and Neglect in Fulfilling Our Spiritual and Physical Needs**

We have come into this life with needs arising from two essential dimensions: the spiritual and the physical. We require nourishment, shelter, joy, love, knowledge, and emotions — all of which complement each other and create harmony between body and soul. Seeking God does not mean neglecting any of these aspects; rather, it calls for fulfilling them with awareness and moderation, avoiding both excess and deficiency.

The balance advocated by Islam extends beyond mere acts of worship to encompass all facets of life, firmly rejecting asceticism that suppresses our physical needs. As Allah says:

***“Say, ‘Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good [lawful] things of provision?’ Say, ‘They are for those who believe during the worldly life, [but] exclusively for them on the Day of Resurrection.’”*** (Al-A’raf, 32)

Every blessing from God is an adornment and a beauty in our lives, and we are entitled to use and enjoy them with moderation and balance, without becoming attached or dependent upon them.

#### ♦ **Balance in Living Life and Self-Development**

It may not be realistic or even necessary to attend to every aspect of our lives every single day. True balance comes from periodically dedicating time to nurture the different dimensions of our personality, fulfilling our various needs according to our abilities and circumstances. The pursuit of this balance forms the foundation of happiness, psychological stability, and spiritual well-being.

Imam Musa al-Kadhim (peace be upon him) emphasized the importance of wisely and moderately allocating our time, saying:

***“Strive to divide your time into four hours: one hour for intimate conversation with God, one hour for worldly affairs, one hour to spend with trustworthy friends who point out your faults sincerely, and one hour alone with yourself in a way that is not forbidden. With this last hour, you will be able to manage the other three.”***

This balance enables us to live a complete life that pleases God while harmonizing our spiritual and physical needs.

Striving toward God requires us to be balanced—directing our efforts to elevate the self, expand our knowledge, and meet our natural needs, while simultaneously nurturing our relationships and fulfilling our social roles. In doing so, we achieve the harmony that empowers us to walk toward God with strength and holistic awareness.

## ► Principle Five: Compassion toward the Self — The Essential Balance on the Path to God

The journey toward God is a profound and noble undertaking, one that requires a heart pulsating with sincerity and a spirit aflame with yearning. Yet, this pursuit must not come at the expense of exhausting the soul. As Imam Ali (peace be upon him) wisely advised: ***“Know that your leader was content with little from this world — a handful of dates and two morsels of bread. You, however, cannot sustain such austerity; so support me with piety, diligence, chastity, and sound judgment.”***

Many are tempted by the tales of the saints’ miraculous deeds, or they are overwhelmed by the sweetness of divine closeness, rushing forward without measure. They burden themselves with relentless acts of worship and ceaseless good deeds, mistakenly believing that this intensity is the ideal path. However, the truth is that immersing oneself in worship without balance or moderation is a perilous error. Such excess can weigh heavily on the soul, often leading not to growth but to retreat—sometimes even back to square one.

True progress demands gentleness toward the self, recognizing that sustainable devotion is born from equilibrium. The harmony between earnest striving and compassionate restraint safeguards the soul, enabling a steady, enduring ascent toward divine proximity.

The Noble Prophet (peace be upon him) urged us to embrace gentleness, saying: ***“Gentleness has never been placed in anything without adorning it, nor removed from anything without disgracing it.”*** When it comes to the self and the journey toward God, gentleness becomes an essential ingredient for achieving true balance. The heart, after all, has its limits; weariness can dim the flame of love within it, and so it requires moments of rest and renewal.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also advised: ***“Refresh your hearts hour by hour, for when the hearts grow weary, they become blind.”*** This profound guidance underscores the vital importance of granting the soul time to rest, so it may be rekindled with fresh passion and love for the Divine.

- ♦ **Gradual Progress on the Path to God: Avoiding Excess and Embracing Gentleness**

The journey toward God does not call for haste but for wisdom and gradual progression. Gentleness with the self does not imply negligence or complacency; rather, it means walking in balance, remaining open to the richness of life, and committing to the guidance of Islamic law with kindness and positivity. The Prophet (peace be upon him) advised Ali (peace be upon him): ***“O Ali, this religion is strong, so advance steadily with gentleness, and do not make worship of your Lord burdensome upon yourself. Indeed, the one who rushes will neither sustain his back nor cover the earth.”*** This teaches us that the path to God demands rationality and moderation — we are called to worship and work with awareness and equilibrium.

- ♦ **Mastering the Art of Steady, Deliberate Progress**

Gentleness with the self means recognizing that this is no race but a profound journey toward God, a journey that requires patience and calm. It is a journey where life’s diversity and richness are fully experienced. When we are gentle companions to our own souls, we plant within our hearts a renewed love, a continuous passion, and sincere commitment — all without overburdening ourselves. With such gentleness, the journey toward God becomes both joyful and sustainable, and the heart remains ever ready to receive divine light and tranquility.

In essence, gentleness with the self is the art of walking toward God with balance and calmness, avoiding both excess and neglect, while preserving a heart alive and pulsating with divine love.

#### ♦ **Common Misconceptions about the Journey to God**

God created humanity and instilled within it a pure innate nature—a timeless yearning toward its Creator. Yet, the human life is not merely a smooth ascent toward the divine; rather, it is an ongoing struggle between the spiritual forces urging us upward and the whispers of the self and earthly desires pulling us downward. As God declares in the Holy Qur'an:

***“And indeed We created man, and We know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than his jugular vein”*** (Qaf, 16)

This profound reminder affirms that God's closeness and omniscience embrace even the deepest, most hidden stirrings of our hearts and minds.

However, the human soul often encounters what may be called **common misconceptions**—erroneous notions propagated by prevailing cultural currents. These are thoughts and whispers shaped by the mind that obstruct the path to God, dampening resolve and discouraging sincere effort. Such misconceptions act like invisible walls rising within the soul, blocking the free flow of the spirit, preventing it from advancing with love and freedom toward its Creator.

To embark freely and purely on the path toward God, we must first cleanse our souls of the negative thoughts and whispers that Satan injects to weaken our resolve and divert us from His way. One of the most effective methods to counter these whispers is through **self-suggestion**—a conscious, deliberate redirection of our inner selves

toward the truth, supported by deep reflection on the verses of the Qur'an and contemplation of divine revelation and sacred texts.

We will explore several common misconceptions surrounding the journey to God, seeking to unravel them and offer brighter, more authentic alternatives. May these insights serve as a guiding light for every seeker longing for God's love and nearness, fostering a deeper awareness and a more steadfast faith.

#### ♦ **Misconception One: Worshiping God Out of Fear or Greed**

This misconception assumes that, generally, humans worship God and follow religion either out of fear of punishment—what might be called “the worship of slaves”—or out of greed for reward—“the worship of merchants.” It suggests that true worship out of love for God, which Imam Ali (peace be upon him) refers to as the “worship of the free,” is a rare phenomenon. The danger of this misconception lies in its subtle yet profound negative psychological impact on our spiritual journey toward God.

In reality, many of us do worship God out of genuine love. The secret behind our love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), the pure Companions, and the righteous saints is that they were men of God Himself.

This love springs from the very nature in which we were created. God says in the Qur'an:

***“Set your face toward the religion, upright—[the] fitrah of Allah upon which He has created [all] people”*** (Ar-Rum, 30)

Moreover, the love of God permeates our innermost being, flowing through the divine majesty manifested by the Prophet and the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt, carried in the lifeblood of their devotion and guidance.

Indeed, the love of God is deeply rooted within us, profoundly ingrained in our souls, firmly anchored in our hearts, and overwhelmingly dominant over our inner selves, emotions, sensations, and behaviors. This remains true despite the negative misconception that seeks to undermine our love for God and hinder our heartfelt journey toward Him.

However, our immersion in material life and worldly indulgences can sometimes act as veils over this love, cloaking its radiant light with thick coverings that obscure its presence in our lives. What is required of us, then, is to gently and gradually lift these veils, allowing the divine light of love to shine forth more clearly and powerfully.

- ♦ **The Second Misconception: The Necessity of a Pure Faithful Environment to Walk Toward God**

This is a widespread misconception almost taken for granted in popular culture — that the path to God can only be tread within a pure, faithful environment, one almost free of worldly temptations, such as renowned religious academic circles or sacred gatherings. Conversely, walking toward God in environments like ours, saturated with the glitter and allure of this world, is deemed nearly impossible.

Our surroundings, heavy with the dazzling charms and pleasures of life, bind us tightly. Our desires, instincts, and illusions are entangled and shackled by the worldly routines and material habits we have grown accustomed to — habits that increasingly govern our emotions and reactions, shaping our perceptions and mental maps. Even in moments of clarity and resolve, when we strive to transcend ourselves, the relentless pressures of social norms, family responsibilities, and daily demands weigh heavily on us, pulling us back into the mundane, material routine.

And that is assuming our job — with all its demands, conspiracies, and conflicts — has not already eroded what remained of our pure

souls, transforming us into fierce beasts bent on revenge against those who wronged us or, at the very least, deriving cruel satisfaction from their suffering.

In such an environment, one's greatest aspiration often shrinks to merely preserving the bare minimum of their faith, hoping that God may forgive them and grant them entry into Paradise. This negative mindset is, in essence, a declaration of defeat and failure before even attempting the journey. Our subconscious mind begins to resonate with this belief, taking control and shaping our actions accordingly — inevitably leading to failure.

But this is not only wrong; the truth is quite the opposite. A person raised in an ordinary environment — like ours — often develops greater resilience and strength than one nurtured in a sterile, purified setting free of the germs of corruption and desires.

The truth is that our environments are, in fact, ideal settings for human growth and the journey toward God. When we truly desire to achieve a goal and face challenges and hardships, we become energized, performing at our best to attain what we strive for. When all means seem exhausted, we do not despair; instead, we delve deep within ourselves to uncover the talents and strengths God has bestowed upon us to help us reach our aspirations. Thus, we remain in a dynamic, ongoing interaction with our surroundings until we finally arrive at our sought-after destination.

But do you know that this very struggle, this constant striving and effort, *is* the path to God? We rise and journey toward Him, often without even realizing it. As the Almighty says, ***“O mankind, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet it.”*** (Al-Inshiqaq, 6)

The sense of humility and submission before God is indeed one of the key measures of one's closeness to Him—but it is not the sole

criterion. Neither is it determined by one's poverty, nor by the degree of detachment from worldly life. Rather, true proximity to God is shaped by the wisdom we possess, the maturity we attain, the knowledge we acquire, and the strength of our resolve and will. It is reflected in the elevation of our character, the growth of our capabilities, the fervor of our ambition, the depth of our love, and the profound sense of beauty we carry within.

The problem lies in the everyday culture we absorb and breathe, which has painted the image of the "knower of God" and the seeker on His path in a monastic and scholastic mold. This rigid portrayal has erected barriers between us and those sublime spiritual states, because it assumes we must be either scholars or monks. And here lies the grave error.

Engaging with life in all its reality—its bitterness, temptations, pleasures, challenges, and hardships—is the swiftest path to God Almighty, provided we keep His majestic presence firmly before our eyes and earnestly strive toward Him.

Moreover, in this very environment, whenever we face a challenge or a hardship, we sincerely turn to Him for help and relief. This sincere turning is the essence of servitude, forging a profound and unwavering bond within us with the One who holds ultimate power and boundless mercy.

To truly benefit from the challenges and turbulent environment we live in, and to walk the path to God in the best possible way, we must shift our perspective. Instead of viewing these trials and temptations as obstacles or veils between us and God, let us see them as paths and tools that enable our journey toward Him. They are the integral parts of the divine training program God has designed for us to draw closer to Him. Therefore, the road to God is not by avoiding these realities, but by engaging with them positively and constructively, just as God wills us to do.

### ♦ **The Third Fallacy: The Requirement of Absolute Purity to Walk the Path to God**

A widespread misconception is that one cannot begin the journey toward God unless they have completely ceased all sins and abandoned every vice. This mistaken belief can deter the vast majority of us from even considering the path to God, simply because we are all aware of our own shortcomings and misdeeds.

However, the reality is quite different. Certain sins—indeed, some flawed behaviors here and there—do not necessarily prevent us from embarking on this spiritual journey, provided that our overall inner state is secured and oriented toward God and righteousness.

One can gradually ascend the ranks of spiritual perfection and draw near to God Almighty, even amid personal weaknesses, lapses, and shortcomings in worship. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ***“Indeed, a servant may reach great ranks in the Hereafter and noble stations by his good character, even if his worship is weak.”***

Some of us may struggle with sins such as lying or backbiting—may God protect us—and might be afflicted by other moral shortcomings. Undoubtedly, these spiritual ailments and veils can hinder our progress and slow our journey toward God. Yet, they do not entirely prevent us from advancing. On the contrary, they may become a catalyst: the torment of conscience arising from these faults can ignite a deeper motivation to seek God’s forgiveness and solace, driving us ever closer to Him.

Numerous sacred texts affirm that a believer who endures hardship and feels the burning passion of turning to God—even while burdened by sin—is in a better state than one who is self-conceited, however upright and free from apparent sins they may be. Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said: ***“God knows that sin is better for the believer than pride; otherwise, the believer would never be tested with sin.”***

It is narrated in a noble hadith that the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) once said:

“O Messenger of God, we fear hypocrisy upon ourselves.”

He replied, *“And why would you fear that?”*

They said, “When we are with you, you remind us and inspire us; we tremble and forget the world, becoming detached from it, as if we see the Hereafter, Paradise, and Hell before our very eyes. But when we leave you and return to our homes, smell the children, see the family and relatives, we almost revert to the state we were in before meeting you—almost as if nothing had happened. Should we fear that this is hypocrisy?”

The Prophet (peace be upon him) responded:

*“No, these are the footsteps of Satan who tempts you with the world. Were you to remain always in that state you described, angels would greet you and you would walk on water. But you sin and then seek forgiveness from God, and God creates a people who sin and repent, so He forgives them. Truly, the believer is tested and turns often in repentance.”*

*Have you not heard what God Almighty says:*

*‘Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves.’* (Al-Baqarah, 222)

*And His words:*

*‘Ask forgiveness of your Lord and then repent to Him.’* (Hud, 52)

The closer we draw to God Almighty, the more strength, clarity, purity, resolve, and understanding we gain. This nearness empowers us to shed many of our faults and sins, often without even realizing it.

Thus, it is this intimate closeness and turning toward God that we frequently need to overcome our weaknesses when our own willpower falters. Reflect on His words:

***"Establish prayer, for prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds."*** (Al-Ankabut, 45)

Indeed, there are exalted levels of closeness to Him which we cannot reach until we have been purified from our sins. Yet, such heights are beyond the grasp of ordinary faith levels. Moreover, when we finally stand at the threshold of these lofty stages, we will have naturally and effortlessly freed ourselves from sins and moral defects.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, this chapter reveals that the journey toward God is not a fixed destination but an infinite voyage filled with renewal and reflection. It is through sincere servitude to God and earnest striving toward Him that a person realizes the highest meanings of their existence.

We have explored key dimensions of this spiritual path, emphasizing the vital importance of balance, sincerity, and gentleness with oneself as practical tools that strengthen our steadfastness along the way. We have also dispelled common misconceptions, clarifying that every trial, need, or deed serves as an opportunity to draw closer to God, and a means to attain profound tranquility and contentment.

The path to God is a harmonious journey bridging this world and the hereafter, where human aspirations meet spiritual satisfaction, and

material needs find equilibrium with soulful pursuits. Through this integration of body and spirit, purification and action, worship and generosity, the way to God unfolds before us with clarity and beauty—bringing us ever nearer to His mercy and blessings, and filling our hearts with joy and peace.

## ■ Reflective Questions and Exercises

### ► Reflective Question:

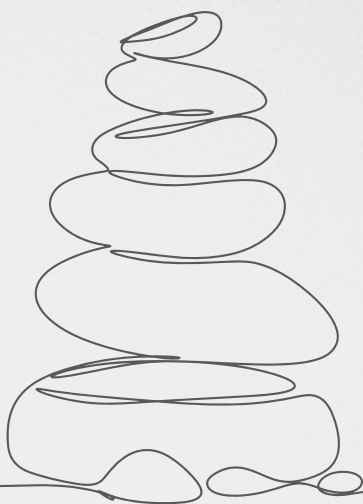
Am I truly walking sincerely toward God, or do I still carry inner contradictions that prevent me from reaching true tranquility?

Take a moment for honest self-reflection and ask yourself:

- ♦ Do I live in genuine harmony between my values and actions, or is there a gap between what I believe and what I do?
- ♦ Are my decisions driven by true spiritual awareness, or am I still influenced by external pressures and material factors?
- ♦ How can I begin to reorganize my life so that every aspect is connected to a higher purpose?

## ► **Exercise 1: Circles of Influence**

- ♦ Draw circles representing the different areas of your life, such as family, work, and community.
- ♦ Identify the impact you wish to leave in each of these areas and how to benefit others according to your responsibilities as a steward of the earth.
- ♦ How can you utilize your abilities and talents to contribute to the improvement of these areas?
- ♦ What are some specific goals you aspire to achieve in each area?
- ♦ How can you track your progress and measure your impact in these areas?



Chapter Seven

# **Understanding the Self to Achieve Balance**

## Chapter Seven

# Understanding the Self to Achieve Balance

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The human soul holds a distinguished place in our journey toward spiritual development and practical success. Each person carries a unique fingerprint that reflects the depth of their personality, the pattern of their thinking, and the direction of their emotions and behaviors.

A person's self-awareness and understanding of their strengths and weaknesses form the cornerstone of achieving inner happiness and harmony with oneself. This is what is referred to as "self-awareness."

This awareness includes a person's recognition of their traits and aspirations, as well as the ability to consciously read their emotions and analyze their decisions.

**Inner balance** is not merely a state of psychological comfort or a superficial harmony between the different aspects of life; rather, it is a profound process that begins with an honest and clear understanding of the self. Many people believe they are seeking balance, but in reality, they are unaware of the essence of their own being and do not truly know their needs. As a result, they wander between goals and decisions without ever feeling genuine peace.

Allah Almighty says: ***"But man will be a witness against himself."*** (Al-Qiyamah, 14) This means that the greatest source of wisdom is not the external world, but a person's awareness of themselves. When one begins to analyze their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors with sincere awareness, they become capable of achieving the balance they seek—directing their energy toward what aligns with their true nature, rather than what society or circumstances impose on them.

In this chapter, we explore the importance of **self-awareness** in guiding the soul and developing one's capabilities to make the most of their potential. We draw upon both religious texts and psychological studies to deepen our understanding of the dimensions of this awareness.

We also highlight effective methods to enhance self-knowledge, such as **identifying core values and principles, self-observation, avoiding obsessive thoughts, and holding oneself accountable.**

Self-awareness is not merely a superficial recognition of one's traits—it is a profound journey toward building an honest, self-reconciled personality that aspires to achieve its goals with joy and confidence.

## ■ Why Self-Awareness?

Every human soul bears its own unique imprint—distinct traits that make it as wondrous and exclusive as a fingerprint. Just as no two fingerprints are identical, no two souls are alike in their spiritual and intellectual features. These characteristics are shaped and refined over the course of a person's life, molded by a blend of genetic inheritance, life experiences, choices, and ways of interacting with the world and with others. Even thoughts and emotions, constantly flowing and evolving, contribute to this individuality from the moment one opens their eyes to life.

The soul is not merely a tool we control; it is the very source of our energy, our decisions, and the arena of our actions and movements. God says:

***"Say, 'Each works according to his own disposition.'"*** (Al-Isra, 84) — a profound reminder that every person draws from within themselves in a manner that aligns with their unique nature and inner characteristics.

He also says:

***"So whoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord—let him do righteous deeds."*** (Al-Kahf, 110) — suggesting that righteous actions are not confined to generic acts of worship, but also include those actions chosen by the soul based on its passions and traits, as long as they fall within the realm of goodness.

Thus, self-awareness allows us to align our actions with our deeper nature, unlocking authenticity and enabling us to walk a path of righteousness that truly reflects who we are.

Surah Al-Kahf presents a variety of characters who reached the highest levels of closeness to God. Despite their diverse traits and

actions, what unified them was the **sincerity with which they expressed their true selves**—whether it was the steadfastness of the Companions of the Cave in holding onto faith, Dhul-Qarnayn's use of his talents to protect the vulnerable, or the spiritually enlightened servant in his inward journey.

This teaches us that **genuine righteous action is that which aligns with your inner nature and reflects your unique essence**. When your deeds emerge from your true self, they gain authenticity and power, enabling you to realize your potential with clarity and sincerity.

Your ability to perform righteous deeds is intimately tied to your psychological traits and personal passions. So, **choose your path in this life wisely—and let your good deeds naturally flow from that path, in harmony with who you truly are**.

For this reason, **self-awareness is of utmost necessity**, for it grants us the ability to lead ourselves skillfully toward balance and harmony—not just between what we reveal and what we conceal, but across our four integrated dimensions: the body, the mind, the heart, and the soul. At that point, a person's character becomes marked by insight and strength, and they find within themselves tranquility, confidence, and closeness to God.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said, ***"He who knows himself, knows his Lord,"*** indicating that understanding the self is the true path to grasping the purpose of life. It is a road that leads to closeness with God—not merely through obedience, but through a deeper journey of discovering the inner and outer meanings of existence.

## **Self-Awareness: Definition and Importance**

Psychologists Shelley Duval and Robert Wicklund define self-awareness as ***"the ability to focus on yourself and understand how well your behavior, thoughts, and emotions align with your internal***

**standards.”** This kind of awareness empowers you to objectively evaluate yourself, regulate your emotions, align your actions with your values, and even grasp how others perceive you.

The more you understand yourself, the greater your ability to manage your thoughts and behaviors becomes, and the clearer your awareness of the paths that lead you to goodness and happiness. Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said, ***“The greatest triumph is attained by the one who gains knowledge of the self,”*** indicating that true success begins within—from understanding who we are, and what we can become.

Dr. Tasha Eurich supports this perspective and emphasizes that modern research shows individuals with self-awareness possess several advantages: they tend to be more capable of achieving their goals, build stronger relationships, and excel creatively in their professional lives. They are also more self-confident and better able to communicate clearly. These are the individuals who lead effectively, attain success, and rise to leadership positions that bring them a sustainable return of trust and accomplishment.

## **How Well Do People Know Themselves?**

It may seem that self-knowledge is something obvious, but in reality, most people have only a limited awareness of themselves. Dr. Tasha Eurich, an organizational psychologist, points out that “95% of people believe they are self-aware,” yet the studies she conducted with her team revealed a surprising result: only **10% to 15%** of individuals actually possess **genuine self-awareness**. This means that over 80% of us live under self-delusions, believing we understand ourselves better than we truly do.

What’s concerning here is that the importance of knowing oneself for achieving happiness and success is contradicted by the difficulty of attaining full self-awareness. Dr. Eurich explains, ***“No matter how***

*hard we try to dig into our thoughts and feelings, much of them remain hidden—tucked away from our consciousness—leading us to often come up with answers that seem true but are far from accurate.”*

Self-awareness is not a binary state—it’s not about having it or not—but rather a **spectrum of perception**. Each of us possesses a certain level of awareness, but it is rare for anyone to reach a completely comprehensive and absolute understanding of themselves.

## ■ How can one enhance self-awareness?

Enhancing self-awareness requires regular practice and conscious effort to truly understand oneself. Religious texts emphasize the importance of certain practices that help a person delve deeply into their inner self. However, at the same time, one must be cautious of self-deception or falling into the trap of arrogance. The human soul is naturally inclined toward wrongdoing—except for those whom God has mercy upon. Here are some practices that contribute to the development of self-awareness:

### 1. Defining Values, Principles, and Goals

Give yourself the time to clearly articulate your values and goals. Reflect on them, write them down, and revisit them both in your waking hours and in moments of quiet contemplation, allowing them to sink deep into your subconscious mind. Discuss them with close friends or family members to gain diverse perspectives that deepen your understanding. Without this clarity, you may find yourself chasing goals imposed by society or local culture—goals that might not bring you true happiness or inner satisfaction.

Ask yourself: Why was I created? What truly brings me fulfillment and pride in my life? What talents do I possess that I can invest to achieve my highest purposes? When you answer these questions

honestly, you begin to chart your unique path and move forward with awareness and confidence. As God says in the Quran:

***“Those who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], ‘Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly.’”***  
(Al-Imran, 191)

## **2. Regular Self-Reflection**

Set aside time to study and understand yourself in all your diverse dimensions—cultural, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, practical, and more—by delving deep into your inner self and analyzing your past experiences and lessons. Observe your strengths and weaknesses, and identify the areas that need improvement. You may keep a personal journal for your reflections or review your thoughts mentally on a regular basis—say, every three months—to assess your progress and determine what still requires effort.

## **3. Seeking Advice and Feedback**

Advice is a valuable tool that helps you see yourself from a different perspective, revealing angles that might be hidden to you. Islam emphasizes the virtue and importance of sincere advice. Allah says:

***“By time, indeed, mankind is in loss, except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.”*** (Al-Asr, 1-3)

And the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: ***“Religion is sincere advice.”***

Seeking advice not only helps you gain an objective opinion from a neutral person, but it also encourages you to think aloud about

yourself, stimulating your subconscious mind and bringing awareness to many points you may not have noticed before.

Ask for advice from sincere friends you trust, and from those whose genuine care for you have experienced. Make sure your questions are specific and objective, and listen to criticism with an open heart, avoiding a defensive stance. Constructive criticism can be a valuable aid on your journey toward self-development.

#### **4. Self-Monitoring in Daily Activities**

The subconscious mind typically operates in a routine manner, reacting directly to the continuous flow of sensations within us. In contrast, the conscious mind controls the flow of emotions by observing them along with the five senses and their effects on us. Everything the eyes see, the ears hear, or the hands touch evokes various and often conflicting emotions within us.

Self-monitoring is an act of internal self-control rather than external enforcement. It helps a person use their mind to manage emotions, carefully think through actions before performing them, thereby enabling the execution of right deeds and the avoidance of wrong ones that may lead to undesirable outcomes.

Thus, self-monitoring can be described as an internal thought or feeling that either permits or prevents a person from saying or doing something. It is also a personal trait that reflects the ability to regulate behavior appropriately in different social situations, in a way that pleases God.

As the Quran says: ***“O you who have believed, fear Allah. And let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow.”*** (Al-Hashr, 18)

## 5. Avoiding Obsessive Thoughts and Excessive Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring is a double-edged sword; it is a behavior that reflects heightened self-awareness. However, if a person allows their mind and imagination to run wild with every thought, this can ultimately lead to obsessive doubts, inner conflicts, and potentially the need for psychological treatment or medication. To prevent excessive self-monitoring, follow practical steps such as trusting in God, relying on Him, avoiding excessive worry, and dedicating your time to clear goals and meaningful activities.

## 6. Hold Yourself Accountable

Self-accountability is a vital self-evaluation practice that elevates a person, bringing happiness, comfort, and improved performance. Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: ***“He is not one of us who does not hold himself accountable daily; if he does good, he increases it, and if he does evil, he seeks God’s forgiveness.”***

The purpose of self-accountability is not to harshly reprimand or punish oneself, but rather to conduct an objective and calm self-review and evaluation. This is something a person might do every night before sleep, identifying their weaknesses and strengths, assessing their actions and achievements, and then setting a plan for growth and progress.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) narrated from the Noble Prophet (peace be upon him): ***“The wisest of the wise is the one who holds himself accountable and works for what comes after death.”***

Someone asked, ***“O Commander of the Faithful, how does one hold himself accountable?”***

Imam Ali replied: ***“When morning turns to evening, one returns to oneself and says: ‘O my soul, this day has passed and will never return.***

*God will question you about how you spent it. What did you do in it? Did you remember God and praise Him? Did you help a believer in need? Did you relieve someone's distress? Did you protect yourself from sin after death? Did you refrain from backbiting a believer? Did you assist a fellow Muslim? What did you accomplish today?"*

Then the person recalls what they did: if it was good, they thank God and glorify Him for His guidance; if it was a sin or shortcoming, they seek God's forgiveness and resolve to avoid repeating it."

What is truly beautiful is that you can perform this self-accountability while confiding in God, which greatly helps release the negative energy that accumulates in your heart daily from the struggles and challenges of life. At the same time, it fills you with tremendous positive energy that brings happiness and tranquility.

You can share with God the beautiful things you have done throughout your day while you are in prostration before sleep, or even while sitting before the final prostration. This will fill you with a sense of joy and delight, much like a small child proudly telling their father about something they accomplished.

Then, tell Him everything that troubled you—things you did or neglected during your day—even if they weren't strictly wrong. Feel regret and apologize sincerely to Him, and make a promise that you will be more mindful and careful next time.

## **Conclusion of Chapter Seven:**

In conclusion, self-awareness is a fundamental cornerstone for anyone striving to lead a balanced and purposeful life. Understanding oneself deeply sets us on the path to psychological and spiritual integration, enabling us to harmonize our values, goals, and daily behaviors. The journey of self-awareness may be long and ever-evolving, yet it grants us profound wisdom to face life's challenges,

bringing us into greater alignment with our true selves and closer to God.

Through this chapter, we have highlighted the importance of cultivating self-awareness as a means to achieve inner peace and balance, and explored how to overcome the obstacles that arise along this path. Self-recognition is the key to reaching our authentic self, providing a sense of contentment and confidence, and filling our lives with deeper meaning and inner tranquility that fuels our energy and creativity.

## **Reflective Question:**

Am I truly balanced in my mind, heart, body, and spirit, or does one aspect dominate the others? Take a moment to reflect on your daily life and ask yourself:

- ♦ Do I give each part of myself the attention it deserves?
- ♦ Is there an aspect I tend to neglect and need to focus on more?
- ♦ How can I reorganize my life so that each dimension of my being is in harmony with the others?

## **► Exercise 1: Self-Journaling**

Set aside time each day to write in your journal. Focus on your feelings, thoughts, and actions throughout the day. What emotions and thoughts do you notice recurring in your entries? How do these feelings and thoughts influence your daily decisions?

## **► Exercise 2: Self-Monitoring**

In every situation you face, pause briefly and note your automatic reaction. Later, analyze whether this response was driven by previous emotions or thoughts. What patterns do you notice in your reactions? How can you adjust your responses to align better with your values and goals?



Chapter Eight

# **Pride and Self-Confidence**

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# Pride and Self-Confidence

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As you journey toward perfection, striving earnestly to cultivate virtues and develop yourself, the fruits of this effort will inevitably manifest. God will bless you with a range of gifts and qualities that become evident to those around you, earning you much praise and admiration. Initially, this feeling can be motivating, but over time, if not handled wisely, it can become an inner danger.

When we become overwhelmed by admiration for our achievements, and compliments become frequent, a subtle sense of superiority

may creep into the heart. Gradually, this swells into pride that blinds us to our true selves. God Almighty says:

***“Know that the life of this world is but play and amusement, and adornment, and boasting to one another, and competition in increase of wealth and children.”*** (Al-Hadid, 20)

This verse reveals how outward appearances and external success can easily turn into a deceptive illusion that distances a person from their true essence.

## **■ Pride: The Enemy of True Growth**

Pride, vanity, and an inflated ego stand among the most dangerous foes a person may face on the path toward spiritual and intellectual completion. At first glance, self-confidence and inner strength appear essential for success, yet when this confidence detaches from humility, it becomes a barrier that halts personal growth. For this reason, Islam does not forbid self-respect, but rather warns against letting it turn into a false sense of superiority—one that weakens rather than empowers the individual.

God Almighty says:

***“And do not turn your face away from people in arrogance, nor walk arrogantly upon the earth. Indeed, Allah does not like everyone self-deluded and boastful.”*** (Luqman, 18)

The arrogant is one who sees himself above others, and the boastful is one who believes he has reached the pinnacle and no longer needs to learn or improve. Such people do not fall due to a lack of ability, but because they believe they no longer need to grow.

History is full of examples of those who believed they had reached greatness, yet in reality, they were walking toward the abyss. Those

who fell into the trap of pride did not collapse because they lost their strength, but because they believed themselves above every test. For this reason, Islam sets forth a golden principle to preserve true humility: a person's sense of dignity must stem from their servitude to God, not merely from their own abilities.

Reflect upon the intimate prayer of Imam Ali (peace be upon him), who said:

***"My God, it suffices me honor to be Your servant, and it suffices me pride that You are my Lord."***

The truth is that a person does not rise by their own power but by their closeness to God. Any success that distances one from God is, in essence, a failure—even if it appears as a victory in the eyes of people.

## **Is Self-Confidence an Illusion or a Necessity?**

When you achieve success and demonstrate clear abilities in a particular field—be it physical strength, intelligence, wisdom, knowledge, or leadership—it is natural to feel confident in yourself and your capacity to use these skills to reach your goals. On the surface, this confidence appears positive; indeed, many self-help books present it as an essential condition for success and psychological stability. But is self-confidence an objective reality, or could it sometimes be a mere illusion cloaked in pride?

In truth, self-confidence is a double-edged sword. It grants a person the strength and motivation to persevere, yet at the same time, it can transform into a false illusion that blinds them to factors beyond their personal abilities. So how can we trust ourselves in a scientific and objective manner, especially after understanding the complexity of

the human psyche? How can we be certain that our self-assessment is accurate, while studies show that 95% of people believe they possess self-awareness, yet 85% of them are actually deceiving themselves?

Even if you are among the rare few who see yourself objectively, in the end, you are just one factor within a vast network of forces shaping your destiny. There are external powers and circumstances moving in different—and sometimes opposing—directions, which means that achieving your goals depends not only on your abilities but also on many factors beyond your control.

## ■ The Danger of Excessive Self-Confidence

When a person trusts their abilities but believes they alone are sufficient for success—without considering external factors, the commanding nature of the soul toward evil, and the whispers of Satan—they fall into the trap of arrogance and illusion.

Self-confidence is not dangerous when it is conscious, balanced, and built upon a true awareness of human limitations. However, it can become a dangerous form of self-deception if it causes us to overlook the influence of other factors essential to achieving success.

This is why Islam warns us against falling into this trap. God says:

***“And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those upon which my Lord has mercy.”*** (Yusuf, 53)

This verse reminds us that humans are inherently fallible, and excessive confidence may blind us to our real weaknesses

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) supplicated:

***“O my God, never leave me to myself even for the blink of an eye. For if You do, I am closer to evil and farther from good.”***

Similarly, Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said:

***“Self-confidence is one of Satan’s strongest opportunities.”***

These profound words highlight that if confidence is not balanced, and if a person is unaware of their own weakness before God, then such confidence can become a path leading to ruin.

## **■ A Realistic Alternative to Self-Confidence**

If self-confidence alone does not guarantee the true achievement of one’s goals, then is there a more realistic and objective alternative? One that grants a person genuine strength and peace of mind in facing challenges, no matter how many external forces may conspire against them? Is there a source of steadfastness that protects a person from illusion and arrogance?

**The answer is: yes, it is reliance upon God (Tawakkul).**

But to understand this clearly, let us examine the matter from all its angles—just as puzzle pieces are gathered one by one until the full picture emerges, revealing the realistic alternative to self-confidence.

### **► The First Piece: Objective Knowledge is the Foundation for Any Successful Start**

The first step in any successful endeavor is not “blind self-confidence,” but rather objective knowledge. Instead of building one’s confidence on inaccurate assumptions, a person must rely on true knowledge of their abilities, capabilities, and limits.

This is affirmed by Imam Ali (peace be upon him), who said to his companion Kumail:

***“O Kumail, there is no action except that you need knowledge for it.”***

**In other words**, every step a person takes requires insight, not merely a subjective feeling of capability. Relying on the illusion of self-confidence without an accurate understanding of reality can lead to ill-considered decisions.

For this reason, Islam always calls us to recognize the blessings that God has granted us—but in a conscious and balanced manner, far from exaggeration or arrogance. Allah says: *“And **as for the favor of your Lord, report it**”* (Ad-Duha, 11)

Similarly, the Prophet Joseph (peace be upon him), when he offered himself to manage the treasures of Egypt, did not rely solely on a personal sense of ability, but rather on true knowledge of his skills and expertise. He said:

He said, *“**Appoint me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I will be a knowing guardian.**”* (Yusuf, 55)

This means that a person must come to understand their own strengths and weaknesses, and clearly identify their capabilities and opportunities—much like the strategic SWOT analysis used in effective planning.

However, even more important is the realization that this self-awareness alone is not a guarantee of success. It is merely one piece of the larger picture.

### ► **The Second Piece: Self-Confidence Alone Is Not Enough—Even with Capability**

Even when a person possesses a clear understanding of their strengths, and invests serious effort into personal development, this by itself is **not enough to guarantee success**. Life operates within a vast and intricate web of causes and conditions—many of which lie **beyond our control**.

We are but one thread in a complex tapestry woven from external forces: economic shifts, unforeseen events, the choices of others—all of these factors shape outcomes in ways we cannot fully predict or master.

And even if **every visible element** seems aligned in our favor, the final word belongs to **God alone**. The universe does not unfold solely by human capacity, but in accordance with **Divine will and decree**.

As the Qur'an reminds us:

*"His command is only when He intends a thing that He says to it, 'Be,' and it is."* (Yā Sīn, 82)

The Qur'an emphasizes this truth as well, illustrating the utter fragility of all power in comparison to God's absolute might:

*"O mankind, an example is presented, so listen to it. Indeed, those you call upon besides God will never create [as much as] a fly, even if they gathered together for it. And if the fly should steal something from them, they could not recover it. Weak are the pursuer and the pursued."* (Al-Ḥajj, 73)

This verse reveals that placing one's absolute trust in the self is not only **unrealistic**—it can also lead to **deep frustration** when life refuses to conform to our expectations.

True strength, then, does not lie in self-reliance alone. Rather, it flows from **reliance upon God (tawakkul)**—a trust that lifts the burden of control from the heart and replaces it with calm surrender, faith, and enduring confidence in the One who governs all affairs.

## ► The Third Piece: Trust in God—and in Him Alone

As one seeks success in life, two essential forces must come together in harmony:

- ♦ The **development of one's skills and potential**, through sincere effort and personal growth.
- ♦ And the **complete reliance on God**, with unwavering faith that He alone orchestrates all outcomes and determines all results.

Drawing nearer to God is not merely a spiritual retreat—it is a **holistic process**, one that combines the inner work of self-development with the deep realization of our servitude to the Divine.

The more we come to know God, the more we understand that **everything we possess is His gift**, every success is granted by His favor, and every ounce of strength we gain is **borrowed from His infinite power**.

God says:

*“O mankind, you are in need of God, while God is Free of need, Worthy of all praise.”* (Fāṭir, 15)

This truth brings clarity: all human effort must be grounded in the awareness that real power is not self-generated—it flows from God alone.

Thus, while God calls us to strive, to plan, and to act within the framework of **the law of cause and effect** that governs creation, He simultaneously commands us to place our trust **exclusively in Him**—to take no other as our ultimate refuge or protector.

As the Qur'an states:

***"Do not take anyone besides Me as a trustee."*** (Al-Isrā', 2)

This makes it clear that reliance on God (tawakkul) is not a passive substitute for action—it is the essence of true servitude. It is not a rejection of effort, but the spiritual foundation upon which all effort becomes meaningful.

#### ♦ **Trusting in God—Not Merely in the Self**

Rather than anchoring our confidence solely in ourselves or in worldly means, God calls us to place our complete trust in Him—while continuing to strive with purpose and effort.

The Qur'an reminds us:

***"Whoever desires the reward of this world—then with God is the reward of this world and the Hereafter. And God is All-Hearing, All-Seeing."*** (An-Nisā', 13)

This means that anyone who seeks success must recognize that the ultimate outcome lies with God alone. We are to work diligently in life—but without placing our faith in our efforts alone. Instead, we are called to entrust the matter to God with full surrender and devotion.

As the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

***"Tie your camel and rely on God."*** a profound reminder that God is the Creator of causes and the One who governs all things.

Tawakkul (trust in God) does not mean abandoning effort—it means working with dedication while holding a deep certainty that the results are in God's hands alone.

As the Qur'an beautifully states:

*“Say: Nothing will ever befall us except what God has written for us. He is our Protector. And in God let the believers put their trust.”*  
(At-Tawbah, 51)

- ♦ **Trust in God Does Not Mean a Life without Trials but a Heart Certain That All Is for Our Good**

To truly trust in God is to **believe that He is always with us**, extending His hand of support—even when that support appears in the form of hardship, loss, or painful tests.

Sometimes, God closes doors in our lives—not as a sign of abandonment, but because He knows that greater good lies elsewhere. The believer learns to see every detour as direction, every trial as hidden mercy.

No matter how heavy the burden or how daunting the path, we must never lose our certainty that **God will never forsake us**. For He has written upon Himself a promise: mercy.

As the Qur'an proclaims: *“He has prescribed mercy upon Himself.”*  
(Al-An'ām, 12)

This means that everything we experience—whether triumph or trial—is part of God's expansive mercy. Nothing is random. Everything is guided. And the heart that trusts in Him walks through this world with deep serenity, knowing that in every moment, there is divine care unfolding, even when unseen.

- ♦ **Tawakkul, the Secret of Strength, Peace, and True Dignity**

This trust in God—**this sacred tawakkul**—is the source of real strength. It is what distinguishes a believer from others: a heart

fortified by faith, untouched by panic, and a spirit resilient in the face of adversity.

Consider the moment when the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) stood trapped between the sea and the armies of Pharaoh. His people cried out in fear: ***“We will surely be overtaken!”*** (Ash-Shu’arā’, 61)

Yet his trust in God remained unshaken. He responded with unwavering certainty:

***“No! Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me.”*** (Ash-Shu’arā’, 62)

This is the essence of true tawakkul—it is not wishful thinking, but a liberating conviction that frees the heart from anxiety over outcomes. The believer who places their trust in God does not fear failure, because they know that whatever the result, it is infused with divine wisdom and guided by divine mercy.

Whether the outcome matches our hopes or not, we walk with peace—knowing that God is managing our affairs in ways far greater than we can imagine.

And it is this very trust that inspired Imam Ali (peace be upon him) to declare:

***“The root of a strong heart is reliance upon God.”***

True tranquility, then, does not come from a sense of control over every outcome, but from surrendering to God’s wisdom while striving with sincere effort.

The believer who knows—deep in their soul—that God is the true Orchestrator of all things, is freed from the trap of constant worry. They are no longer enslaved by fear of the unknown, because their trust in God becomes their refuge—a sanctuary of peace that

remains intact, no matter how turbulent the external world may become. With such trust, the heart finds rest without passivity, and peace without complacency.

#### ♦ **Tawakkul Gives You Strength Even When Life Defies Your Desires**

The strength and quiet dignity of the believer do not stem merely from the hope that God will fulfill their worldly wishes. Rather, they arise from a deeper **certainty**: that **God will always guide their life toward what is best**, even if that path diverges from their original hopes.

The believer does not collapse when plans fall apart, nor do they crumble in the face of disappointment—because they trust that **God’s plans are higher, wiser, and more complete** than their own.

As the Qur’an reminds us:

***“Do not weaken and do not grieve—for you will be superior if you are truly believers.”*** (Āl ‘Imrān, 139)

This unwavering trust creates a strength that is **not shaken by outcomes**. Even when life says “no,” the heart of the believer whispers, “God knows better.”

To place one’s trust in God is not to surrender to weakness, but rather to embrace an unwavering strength that stands firm against the ever-shifting tides of life. This profound truth is echoed in the words of the Almighty: ***“For Allah is the source of all might, as is His Messenger and the believers”*** (Al-Munafiqun, 8) It reveals that the true believer does not seek power within the confines of the self; instead, they draw their strength from the deep certainty that it is God who orchestrates all goodness and guides every affair with divine wisdom.

## ♦ The Certainty That God Chooses What Is Best for You

Lady Fatimah Al-Zahra (peace be upon her) beautifully articulated this profound truth: ***“Whoever ascends to God with sincere worship, God Almighty will bestow upon them the finest of blessings.”*** This reveals that the believer’s heart is not shackled to immediate outcomes, but is anchored deeply in the unwavering trust that God, in His infinite wisdom, will grant what is best — even if it diverges from their present desires or expectations.

## ► Piece Four: Humility Before God: Recognizing Blessings as a Sacred Trust

Every blessing God bestows upon you—whether it be an inherited gift, the fruit of a nurturing upbringing, the result of your own efforts and perseverance, or even a gift of fate—is far more than a source of joy or pride. It is a solemn trust, a weighty responsibility demanding sincere stewardship. The more blessings God entrusts to you, the greater your duty to honor and employ them rightly. Much like worldly positions, which are not mere privileges but profound callings, these blessings require your faithful commitment and conscientious fulfillment.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: ***“Every possession has its zakat (purification), and the zakat of the intellect is enduring the ignorant.”***

This teaches us that the talents and qualities you hold are not solely your own; they carry with them a profound responsibility toward God and humanity. Just as you must express gratitude to God for these gifts, you are also called to harness them for the sake of good, not for the nourishment of ego or vanity.

## ♦ True Humility Springs from Responsibility, Not Denial

When a person truly comprehends that all they possess is a grace bestowed by God, they cultivate a genuine humility—a humility that does not stem from denying their blessings, but from deeply feeling the weight of the responsibility they entail.

The true believer, the more they succeed and ascend in life, grows increasingly aware of their inability to fully fulfill their duty to God. This realization draws them ever closer in earnest supplication for divine help and guidance. Thus, the greater the blessings bestowed upon you, the greater your need to express heartfelt gratitude, so these gifts never become a source of pride, but rather a means for spiritual elevation.

Allah the Exalted declares: ***“If you are grateful, I will surely increase you”*** (Ibrahim, 7) Gratitude, therefore, is not a mere verbal acknowledgment of blessings, but a profound awareness that these blessings are not finite; rather, they are ever-renewing and flowing in accordance with one’s worthiness to receive them.

## ♦ Inner Humility Strengthens the Bond with God

Hence, we observe that the higher a person’s standing among people, the greater their need to cultivate humility before God, lest they fall prey to arrogance. This profound truth is beautifully embodied in the supplication of Imam Zain al-Abidin (peace be upon him) in ***Makarim al-Akhlaq***:

***“My God, do not raise me in the eyes of people except that You humble me to the same degree in my own soul, and do not grant me outward honor except that You place an inward humiliation in my heart equal to it.”***

Humility does not mean denying the favor and blessings bestowed upon us; rather, it is the profound recognition that all we possess is but a divine outpouring, and fulfilling the due rights of these blessings demands sincere devotion and continuous effort.

#### ♦ **True Gratitude is Endless**

Yet, no matter how much effort one exerts, one remains incapable of fully repaying the gratitude owed to God, for His blessings are vast and beyond measure.

Reflect on the words of Imam Hussain (peace be upon him) in his supplication on the Day of Arafah:

*“If I were to strive and labor through the ages and epochs, even if I lived that long, to express thanks for a single one of Your blessings, I could only do so by Your grace — which has made it incumbent upon me to offer You endless, ever-renewing praise and unwavering gratitude.”*

This profound understanding places the believer in a state of perpetual humility—not the humility of weakness, but the humility born from the awareness that God alone is the source of all grace, and no matter how much thanks one offers, God’s favors far exceed any expression of gratitude.

#### ♦ **Humility Does Not Breed a Sense of Deficiency, But a Sincere Reverence for God**

With this conviction, humility becomes an intrinsic part of the believer’s character. The believer does not feel pride in possessing certain abilities; rather, they feel a profound sense of responsibility toward these blessings and a constant yearning to draw nearer to God, so as to be truly worthy of them. This deep spiritual reality

resonates in the heartfelt supplication of Imam Zain al-Abidin (peace be upon him):

*“My God, to You I complain of a soul prone to evil, eager for sin, passionate about disobedience, and exposed to Your wrath. It leads me down paths of destruction, making me the most insignificant of Your creation—burdened with many ailments and long hopes. When touched by good, it restrains it; when touched by evil, it is distressed. Inclined toward frivolity, filled with heedlessness and forgetfulness.”*

No matter how profound one’s faith and devotion may be, the human soul remains imperfect in fulfilling the rights due to God. Yet, by His boundless mercy and tender grace, even the smallest act of sincere gratitude is accepted, and those who thank Him with a pure heart are gently led toward ever greater gifts and a more intimate closeness with the Divine.

True humility, however, does not stop at the threshold of one’s relationship with God. It ripples outward, shaping the way we treat others. The awareness of being a servant before the Almighty softens the heart and fills it with compassion and respect for all humanity. For in this shared servitude lies the true measure of worth — not in achievements or talents, but in the depth of one’s piety and sincerity before God.

## ► **Piece Five: Humility Before People — A Recognition of Truth**

Humility in the presence of others does not mean denying the blessings God has granted you, nor diminishing your own abilities. Rather, it means never considering yourself superior to others — regardless of the knowledge, wisdom, or strength you possess, no matter how great your accomplishments, and no matter how flawed others may seem in your eyes.

The true measure of honor is not found in talents or achievements, but in God-consciousness alone. Allah, the Exalted, says: ***“Indeed, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted”*** (Al-Hujurat, 13)

This reveals that the blessings and gifts God bestows upon His servants are not necessarily a reflection of their rank before Him. God grants His bounty to all, regardless of their faith or disbelief, as He declares: ***“We bestow from the gift of your Lord upon whom We will, and We do not withhold from them a thing”*** (Al-Isra, 20)

♦ **Humility Is Not Denial of Abilities, but Awareness of the True Measure of Distinction**

You may be more knowledgeable, more cultured, and more devoted to serving others than someone else—but does that necessarily mean you hold a higher rank before God? The truth is, you can never be certain of that.

True distinction is not measured solely by the magnitude of accomplishments, but also by the effort exerted, and by the sincerity and intention behind the actions. The person who appears less knowledgeable or successful than you may have struggled far more to reach where they are—due to the circumstances of their upbringing, mental or physical challenges, or the environment in which they grew.

Indeed, what they do, despite its apparent simplicity, may be far greater in the eyes of God than all your achievements combined—because they may be more sincere, purer in their intention, and more aware of their own limitations.

This truth is affirmed in the Holy Qur’an, where it recounts the astonishment of the denizens of Hell when they fail to find among its inmates some of those they once scorned in this world:

*“And they will say, ‘Why do we not see men whom we used to count among the wicked? Did we take them as a mockery, or did their vision wander?’” (Sad, 62-63)*

Those whom people despised in this life turn out not to share the fate of the arrogant; rather, they may hold a loftier station in the sight of God.

♦ **Do Not Judge People by Their Outward Appearance—For God May Harbor a Secret in Them Unknown to You**

This is precisely why humility is such a noble virtue: it is the recognition that only God knows who truly holds the highest rank in His sight. The very person you may look down upon in this world might be among God’s close friends—without your knowledge.

As Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: *“God has concealed four things within four: He has concealed His guardian among His servants. Do not belittle any servant of God, for perhaps he is His guardian and you do not know.”*

The humble believer does not view others with arrogance, but rather with compassion and respect, fully aware that true distinction is not within human hands—it is a matter reserved for God alone.

## ■ Reflective Exercise 1: Identifying Signs of Pride

Throughout this week, observe yourself and those around you to identify manifestations of pride in various situations. This may appear in the way people speak, make decisions, or even respond to criticism. Record your observations in a journal, then reflect on the underlying causes of these behaviors. Are they rooted in specific achievements? Comparisons with others? Or perhaps unconscious inner feelings?

Afterward, contemplate ways to avoid these signs in the future. Develop practical steps that will help you cultivate humility instead of falling into the trap of arrogance.

## ► Reflective Exercise 2: Practicing Humility

Each day, choose at least one situation in which to practice humility—whether by helping someone in need, patiently listening to someone speak, offering an apology when you are wrong, refraining from interrupting others, or expressing gratitude to those who assist you.

Afterward, record in your journal what you learned from this experience. How did you feel while practicing humility? Did you notice any impact on those around you? How might you further cultivate this habit to make it an integral part of your daily life?

### ► **Reflective Exercise 3: Contemplating the Blessings of God**

Set aside a quiet moment to reflect deeply on some of the blessings God has bestowed upon you—whether they are outward blessings such as health, family, and sustenance, or inward blessings like intellect, heart, and faith.

Write a list of these blessings and meditate on them: How do these blessings shape your life? Are there blessings you had never truly noticed before? How can you express your gratitude to God through your actions and character?

Finally, consider how the certainty that these blessings come solely from God can help you avoid arrogance and nurture a spirit of humility.

### ► **Reflective Exercise 4: Journaling the Journey**

Dedicate a journal to document your personal journey in overcoming pride and nurturing humility. Each day, record the thoughts and situations you encountered, and reflect on how you responded.

Did you find it difficult to be humble in certain moments? What emotions surfaced as you tried to restrain pride? How might you refine your approach in facing these internal challenges?

Let this be an ongoing practice—a mirror to your inner world. Over time, observe how your awareness deepens and your behavior transforms.

## Conclusion of Part One

# True Greatness

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True greatness is born when we awaken to the profound truth of our identity—that we belong to God Almighty, and that He has entrusted us with the role of His vicegerents on earth. It is a station so exalted that both angels and jinn longed for it, yet it was not granted to them. Even the heavens and the earth trembled before its weight.

In this realization lies the honor and nobility of our existence. The entire cosmos, including the angels themselves, has been placed in service of our ascent—our journey toward eternity and closeness to the Divine. This awareness instills in the soul a deep sense of dignity

and elevation, binding our belonging to none but God. As the Qur'an declares:

***"And to God belongs all honor, and to His Messenger, and to the believers."*** (Al-Munāfiqūn, 8)

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) captured this essence in his whispered prayer:

***"O my Lord, it is enough of an honor for me that I am Your servant, and enough of a pride for me that You are my Lord."***

With this sacred belonging, we naturally rise above the fleeting illusions of this world—its pleasures no more than a passing shadow, its glitter a momentary mirage. True elevation is not found in worldly gains, but in drawing nearer to the One who gave us a soul worthy of the heavens.

We then become like a starving, homeless wanderer—roaming the streets in desperation, scavenging for scraps from garbage heaps. Until, suddenly, he discovers that he is in fact the son of the greatest king on earth, the rightful heir to a glorious kingdom. At that moment, his soul recoils from humiliation. He rises above the struggle for crumbs and filth, and sets his heart and will on reclaiming his rightful place of honor and inheritance.

Yet this inheritance is not a fleeting worldly throne—it is the pursuit of the highest station, the eternal rank prepared by God for His sincere servants:

***"In a seat of honor in the presence of a Sovereign, Perfect in Ability."*** (Al-Qamar, 55)

But such a discovery does not merely awaken pride; it ignites a profound sense of **gratitude**—to God, who alone has granted us this

majestic dignity. And this gratitude becomes the first true step toward deserving such a rank. For it transforms knowledge into **worship**, and reflection into a **way of life**—a path that leads the soul back to God.

And when a person truly realizes that everything they possess is a divine gift, they no longer view their blessings as personal possessions, but rather as sacred trusts—requiring constant gratitude. This gratitude is not confined to spoken words; it is a state of the heart, a deep well of thankfulness that fills the soul and strengthens its bond with the Divine. It nourishes a profound sense of dignity and belonging to God alone.

Such emotions, born of deep spiritual insight, allow us to savor the sweetness of true gratitude to Allah—for His countless favors, and for the unparalleled honor and status He has bestowed upon us. This gratitude overflows in the heart as pure praise to God, just as He commanded:

***“And be grateful for the favor of Allah, if it is [indeed] Him that you worship.”*** (An-Nahl, 114)

Over time, this gratitude transforms into a deep and abiding love that fills your entire being—a love that makes you see in God alone your refuge and ultimate purpose. It is a love described in the Qur’an:

***“Yet there are some who take others besides Allah as equals—they love them as they should love Allah. But the believers are stronger in their love for Allah.”*** (Al-Baqarah, 165)

This love flows from the purity of your innate nature, once it has been illuminated by the light of knowledge and freed from the shadows of ignorance. As Imam Ali (peace be upon him) so eloquently stated:

***“The first step in religion is to know Him; the perfection of knowing Him is to affirm Him; the perfection of affirming Him is to declare His oneness; and the perfection of declaring His oneness is sincerity to Him.”***

True love for God is not confined to emotions of the heart—it manifests as action and a constant striving toward Him. It is not a fleeting feeling, but rather a driving force that steers all of one’s ambitions and dreams toward that which pleases God. This love becomes the fuel that energizes every aspect of life.

These profound feelings—of honor in belonging to God, of gratitude and thankfulness—mature into a pure love and an insistent longing to turn solely toward Him. It becomes a yearning to fulfill your natural right to elevation and nobility, to inherit the leadership of the universe, as God has called you to do in His words:

***“And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a Paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the righteous.”*** (Aal Imran, 133)

When you realize that your goal is not merely a small piece of land—or even an entire planet—but rather the vast Paradise whose width encompasses the heavens and the earth, you rise above trivial matters and dedicate your efforts to attaining the greatness for which you were created.

This awareness makes you resilient against the fluctuations of worldly life. Neither death, nor imprisonment, nor poverty, nor any of life’s trials can shake you, because you dwell in a celestial realm with your Almighty Lord. As God Almighty says:

***“O you who have believed, take care of yourselves. Those who have gone astray will not harm you when you have been guided.”*** (Al-Ma’idah, 105)

In that state, you feel deep serenity and steadfastness in your heart, because you believe with certainty in His words:

***“Say, ‘Nothing will ever befall us except what Allah has decreed for us; He is our protector.’ And upon Allah let the believers rely.”***  
(At-Tawbah, 51)

These exalted emotions lift your soul above the petty struggles over the wreckage and ornaments of a fleeting world. Your heart no longer harbors space for hatred or bitterness—for it has been filled, entirely and luminously, with the love of God and the honor of belonging to Him. As He, the Most High, declares:

***“Those who suppress their anger and forgive others—indeed, God loves those who excel in goodness.”*** (Aal Imran, 134)

With such a love, pure and unwavering, and a profound sense of divine majesty dwelling within you, you rise beyond personal grievances. You no longer see adversaries except those who stand in defiance of God and His Messenger. You walk, then, in the luminous footsteps of the Beloved Prophet (PBUH), who taught:

***“Forgive the one who wrongs you, uphold ties with the one who severs you, and extend goodness to the one who harms you.”***

When these noble emotions take root in the heart of the believer, fear and anxiety become foreign to him.

How could one who is connected to God, who places full trust in the Divine, ever be truly afraid?

The believer, awakened to the truth that ***everything***—joy or tribulation—is but a step on the path toward God, begins to see each moment not as a random event, but as an invitation to draw closer

to the Beloved. Every joy becomes a gift of divine nearness; every hardship, a chance to prove loyalty and deepen faith.

As the Messenger of God (PBUH) beautifully said:

***“Wondrous is the affair of the believer! For everything in his life is good—and this is for none but the believer. If something joyful comes to him, he is grateful, and that is good for him; and if hardship befalls him, he is patient, and that too is good for him.”***

With this profound understanding, every trial in the believer’s life becomes a sacred station of spiritual advancement.

Through the lens of faith, hardships are no longer mere difficulties; they transform into divine opportunities—moments to purify the soul and draw ever closer to God.

Thus, the believer fears nothing in this world except God alone, for true reverence springs from the deep awareness of His greatness and justice.

Yet this fear is not a paralyzing dread, but a luminous consciousness that urges constant self-reflection and renewal.

The believer dwells in serene peace, assured that he is under the care of the Divine, and that every step he takes leads him nearer to his Creator.

God Almighty declares: ***“Indeed, those who fear their Lord unseen will have forgiveness and a great reward.”*** (Al-Mulk, 12)

This reverence is not a negative fear but a perpetual state of mindfulness of God’s majesty, compelling the believer to vigilantly watch over his soul and correct its course whenever it strays from the path of truth.

As God commands: ***“O you who have believed, fear Allah. And let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow—and fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do.”*** (Al-Hashr, 18)

The believer fears that his desires might overpower him, or that his anger may sweep him away, or that the weaknesses of the soul might prevail. So he remains vigilant, constantly reassessing and purifying his deeds.

He fears falling short in fulfilling the rights of God, fully aware that no matter how much gratitude and obedience he offers, it can never match even the greatness of a single blessing bestowed upon him by God.

As Imam Hussain (peace be upon him) solemnly proclaimed in the Day of Arafah supplication:

***“I bear witness, O my God, to the truth of my faith, that even if I strive and exert effort through endless ages and epochs, I would never be able to fully thank You for even one of Your blessings, except by Your grace that compels me to forever be thankful.”***

Yet, the believer does not dwell in fear alone, he balances fear with hope.

He calls upon God with longing for His mercy and awe of his own shortcomings, seeking His help to overcome his faults, resting assured in the promise made to the sincere servants of God.

God Almighty says: ***“Indeed, they used to hasten to good deeds and supplicate Us in hope and fear, and they were to Us humbly submissive.”*** (Al-Anbiya, 90)

Despite his greatness, exalted status, and intimate connection with God, the believer’s heart remains a radiant source of love and kindness toward the weak, the poor, and the downtrodden.

He feels their pain as if it were his own, weeping silently for the sufferings of the ignorant, the sick, and the forlorn.

Within his soul burns a profound yearning to heal their wounds, to uplift their spirits, and to extend goodness not only to humanity but to the entire cosmos.

This generous spirit flows from his deep communion with the Divine—for he perceives in every creature a fragment of God's creation, worthy of mercy, care, and compassion.

As revealed in the Holy Qur'an: ***"And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds."*** (Al-Anbiya, 107) The believer knows that the supreme purpose of his life is to earn the pleasure of God, making every act of kindness a path to draw nearer to Him. God Almighty declares: ***"Your ally is none but Allah and [therefore] His Messenger and those who have believed those who establish prayer and give zakah, and they bow [in worship]."*** (Al-Ma'idah, 55) Thus, the believer gives selflessly, expecting no reward or thanks from anyone, his deeds are sincerely devoted solely for God's sake.

This pure intention is beautifully exemplified by the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), as described in the Quran:

***"And they give food in spite of love for it to the needy, the orphan, and the captive, [Saying], 'We feed you only for the countenance of Allah. We wish not from you reward or gratitude.'"*** (Al-Insan, 8-9)

This greatness of the spirit makes the believer a shining lamp for others, spreading goodness and mercy everywhere, always aspiring toward his ultimate goal: the pleasure of God and serving His creation.

Part Two

# **Self- Development: A Comparative Reflection Between Islamic Perspectives and Modern Theories**

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## Introduction to

# Part Two

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### **From Self-Knowledge to Facing Life's Deeper Questions**

As the reader closes the final page of the first part, they carry with them more than mere theoretical knowledge about themselves. What they hold is something deeper—a subtle yet profound sense of inner peace, or at the very least, the gentle stirrings of sincere self-honesty.

For a fleeting moment, they feel that their innate nature is not a burden but a divine guidance, and that their weaknesses do not

diminish their worth, but rather remind them of the true source of their strength: God.

He came to know himself not as a tool to be controlled, nor as an enemy to be conquered, but as a sacred trust—created to bear the light and walk in its guidance. Within him, he beheld a soul breathed into existence by the divine command, a mind that contemplates, a heart that yearns, a body that desires, and a self wavering between light and temptation...

And yet, amid this complexity, he realized that balance is not impossible; that true dignity lies not solely in achievement, but in sincerity and spiritual refinement.

The first part was not merely a journey *into* the self, but a journey *toward* the self. It was not only an exploration, but a quiet return to origin—to a natural disposition long called upon by God, awaiting its awakening.

But this return to self does not end with reflection alone... it stirs new questions, and opens doors that must be crossed.

## **From Reflection to Inquiry — the Birth of the Need for a Compass**

When a person truly comes to know themselves with honesty, their soul does not find rest; rather, it begins to question. The tranquility touched within their innate nature is not a state of stillness, but a quiet awakening of a hidden yearning — a yearning for movement... for growth... for transformation.

New questions arise, not as inner turmoil, but as heartfelt voices seeking to chart a clearer path: How do I live in the light of what I have come to know about myself? How can I nurture my being

without forsaking my innate nature? What is truly right amidst the flood of ideas about success, happiness, motivation, leadership, and presence that surround me?

Once a person gains self-awareness, their gaze turns toward understanding their reality. They begin to question the myriad theories that surround them—promising to make them better, faster, more successful. But this time, their search is no longer merely for success; it is for authenticity. For a path that does not silence the inner call, nor surrender its reins to dazzling but hollow ideals that bear no true relation to their soul.

It is at this precise moment that the need for a compass arises. Not to reject modern ideas outright, but to comprehend them, to unravel their core, and to discern their true nature: Are they an extension of our innate disposition, or a detour around it? Do they help us advance toward God, or do they cloud the path before us?

## **A Critical Reflection — Between Modern Promises and the Deep Void**

In recent decades, self-development has ceased to be a mere niche; it has become one of the most powerful intellectual currents shaping the contemporary human's awareness of self.

Today, we are offered books selling by the millions, workshops filled with eager attendees, and countless models flourishing under banners of inspiration, motivation, success, and happiness.

These theories promise us much: that we are capable of anything, that our thoughts shape our reality, that everything we need resides within us, and that we alone hold the keys to transformation.

Yet beneath these dazzling promises lie questions too often left unspoken: What if I fail? What about my weaknesses? My shortcomings? My past? My purpose? Who am I if I do not succeed? And why should I succeed at all—if I do not truly know why I strive?

Many of these models despite offering practical tools are built on an incomplete vision of humanity. A vision that severs us from our spiritual dimension, from our connection to God, and from the ultimate meaning of our existence. They reduce us to mere machines to be trained or reprogrammed like apps on a smartphone.

They stimulate and motivate... but they do not illuminate. They promise success... but they never ask about meaning.

Thus, amid the rapid flood of concepts around achievement, motivation, and happiness, the more profound questions slip away unnoticed: Who defines success? Which self are we truly seeking to develop? And is all growth necessarily an ascent?

## **The Purpose of This Section, a Calm, and Comparative Journey: Neither Rejection nor Blind Admiration**

It is from this perspective that this section of the book emerges—not to attack contemporary self-development theories, nor to embrace them uncritically, but to pause before them with a reflective, discerning gaze. To understand their motivations, to unravel their foundations, and then to reevaluate them in the light of our innate nature and divine guidance.

In this section, we will begin by listening. We will explore nine of the most influential theories in the world of personal growth: from Maslow's hierarchy, to the law of attraction, to The Power of Now, to

neuro-linguistic programming, to the growth mindset, all the way through positive psychology, self-motivation, and the state of flow.

We will appreciate their strengths and acknowledge the ways in which they have benefited humanity, yet we will pause where the ultimate purpose falls silent, where the soul is sidelined, and where the human being is reduced to mere intellect, performance, or isolated feeling—cut off from the broader horizon.

We will not pit Islam against these concepts, but rather place it in its rightful position: a **broadier framework** that realigns what is sound within them and reveals the shortcomings in what has diverged from human nature and its divine purpose.

We will examine each concept—not to blindly adopt or reject it, but to discern whether it leads us toward God, or merely keeps us successful in a world devoid of light.

## **Beyond Alternatives — When Islam Redefines Concepts from Their Roots**

As we present the Islamic perspective in this section, we do not offer it as a mere blend of religious techniques, nor as a package of added spiritual values layered upon a successful material model.

Rather, we bring it forth as a **comprehensive framework** that redefines the very foundations: What is success? What does presence truly mean? What is growth? What is motivation? What is willpower? And what is the self we truly seek to transform?

The Islamic approach does not compete with these concepts on the basis of mere effectiveness— it recalibrates their compass.

It does not simply teach you how to master your mind; it asks: **Why do you seek to master it? And for whose sake?**

It does not stop at cultivating your drive; it connects it deeply with destiny, trial, and the covenant with God.

In the Islamic paradigm, the self is never severed from servitude, presence is never detached from purpose, growth is never understood outside the context of purification, and balance is only truly grasped when the heart finds equilibrium between the poles of fear and hope.

Thus, Islam does not enter the race of speed, productivity, or persuasion, rather, it comes to remind us that what we seek in self-development is not “success without struggle,” but truthfulness without pretense, a path without detours, and growth that never distances us from God.

## **An Invitation to Reflection and Openness — Walking with the Eye of Truth, Not of Awe**

This section is neither a neutral academic survey nor a campaign against modern self-development concepts.

It is an invitation to walk with open eyes, an awakened heart, a critical mind, and a soul that seeks truth more than mere impact.

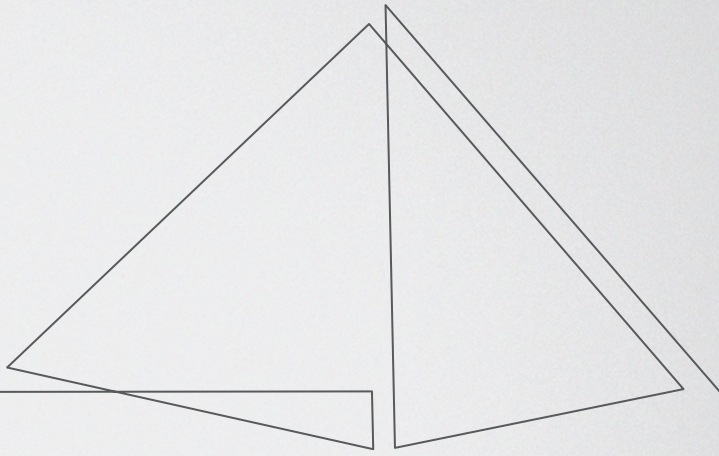
It is a journey of comparison — not only comparing ideas, but weighing their outcomes; evaluating approaches not merely by what they achieve, but by what they cultivate in the soul truthfulness or heedlessness.

It is a journey that asks: Does what we call success lead us toward tranquility, or pull us further away? Does what we name happiness bring us closer to our true selves, or sever that connection? And does being fully present in the moment draw us nearer to ourselves... or to God?

Enter these chapters with a spirit of contemplation, not mere scrutiny.

In every idea, seek its impact on your intention, your presence, and your ultimate destiny.

For not every dazzling notion is truly radiant, nor every effective model truly meaningful, especially when we close our eyes in the darkness of night and ask God to be pleased with us.



Chapter Nine

# **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**

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### Part One: Maslow's Hierarchy — Analysis and Critique

#### **■ Introductory Note: Why Begin with Maslow?**

In our journey to understand the human being and nurture the soul, we cannot overlook the foundational theories that have shaped the

consciousness of modern generations about the self, needs, and motivations. Among these, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs stands out as one of the most influential and widely embraced models—not only within psychology but also in education, management, and personal development.

The reader would not be mistaken to feel that, over the years, this model has evolved into something like a “universal psychological map” used to interpret human behavior and guide individual ambitions. It is the framework that tells us—whether explicitly or implicitly—that a person cannot truly reach their full self, nor aspire to “higher” levels, without first satisfying the more basic needs below.

At this point, a vital pause for reflection arises: Is this map truly valid for every human being? Can human dignity be confined to a strict hierarchy ascending from mere instinct to “self-actualization”? Is the self we seek to “actualize” something innate and discovered from within, or is it imposed from external influences? And what of the person who lacks material security—does that mean they are deprived of the right to spiritual striving?

These questions hold a central place in the purpose of this book, for we are not merely seeking methods for self-development, but rather pursuing honesty with the self—a meaning that turns every step in life into a journey toward God, not just a climb up a worldly ladder of needs.

That is why we begin with Maslow—not to refute him from the very first line, but because we recognize the depth of his influence and believe in the importance of sincere dialogue with the achievements of modern human intellect. We read his theory as it is, analyze it, honor its truths, and shed light on its limitations... then we open a wider horizon, rebuilding the human being not as an instinct-driven creature ascending toward self-actualization, but as an innate being walking toward God from within.

# **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: A Psychological Perspective on the Sequence of Needs and Self-Actualization**

In the mid-20th century, the American psychologist Abraham Maslow introduced his renowned theory of the “hierarchy of needs,” which later became one of the most influential frameworks in human psychology and personal development.

Maslow posited that human needs are organized in a hierarchical structure, beginning with basic physiological necessities such as food, water, and sleep, and progressively ascending through stages of safety, belonging, and esteem, culminating in “self-actualization” as the highest level of psychological growth.

According to this model, a person cannot pursue self-actualization or realize their full potential without first satisfying the preceding needs in the hierarchy. Today, this model is widely taught in schools, universities, and organizations as a tool to understand human motivation, explain behavior, and guide individuals toward personal growth.

At first glance, Maslow's model appears simple and appealing—it resembles a natural ascent through the stages of life: from survival, to safety, to love, to dignity, and finally to the self. Yet, over time, it becomes clear that this seemingly straightforward framework deeply reduces the complexity of the human being and overlooks crucial dimensions of existence—most notably the spiritual, the innate (fitrah), and the process of purification (tazkiyah).

Therefore, in the following pages, we will strive to approach this model with fairness and reflection, recognizing its limits and asking: Is the “self-actualization” Maslow describes truly the ultimate goal of human life? And is there another path to realizing the self—one that

begins not merely with satisfying needs, but with honesty and alignment with our innate nature?

## **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Analyzing the Gradation of Human Needs**

Having outlined the general framework of Maslow's theory, it is essential to delve into its five levels in detail—not merely as abstract behavioral categories, but as reflections of an implicit vision of humanity: How is a person constructed? What motivates them? And how is their value and selfhood realized?

This hierarchy carries a silent assumption: that a person does not contemplate meaning or higher purpose until their more basic needs are satisfied. This makes each level in the hierarchy a window into Maslow's understanding of the human being, rather than just a step in a developmental pathway.

In the following pages, we will analyze each level of the hierarchy, highlighting its psychological content, the underlying value system it assumes, and the existential dimensions it overlooks.

### **► Level One: Physiological Needs**

Physiological needs form the very foundation of Maslow's hierarchy. They encompass the essential bodily requirements for human survival, such as food, water, air, sleep, physical balance, and the fulfillment of basic biological necessities.

Maslow posits that these needs are the most urgent and fundamental; an individual cannot meaningfully consider any higher-level needs until these primary ones are satisfied.

For example, a hungry person remains driven by the imperative to find food until that need is met. They simply lack the psychological or mental energy to focus on concerns like safety, belonging, or esteem.

Thus, fulfilling these physiological needs is a necessary prerequisite for moving upward to the next level in the hierarchy—security and safety.

## ► **Level Two: Safety Needs**

Safety needs occupy the second tier of Maslow's hierarchy, following the fulfillment of basic physiological requirements. This level encompasses everything that provides a person with a sense of stability and reassurance about their future, spanning various aspects of life.

Safety needs include multiple elements, such as:

- ♦ **Physical safety:** Protection from accidents, harm, or threats.
- ♦ **Health security:** Feeling stable both physically and mentally.
- ♦ **Financial security:** Having a steady income or stable employment.
- ♦ **Family and social security:** The sense of being in an environment that does not threaten one's existence or stability.

Maslow emphasizes that a person cannot fully focus on relationships, achievement, or personal growth unless they first feel that their environment is relatively safe and protected from threats.

Therefore, this level serves as a crucial foundation for social belonging and self-esteem, as it grants individuals a sense of control and the ability to plan for the future.

## ► **Level Three: The Needs for Belonging and Connection**

Occupying the third tier in Maslow's hierarchy, this level illuminates the profound human yearning for meaningful relationships and a sense of social belonging. Once the body's basic needs are met and a foundation of safety established, the soul naturally seeks the warmth of companionship — the tender bonds that affirm our place within the human family.

This deep need manifests through:

- ♦ The intimate ties of family.
- ♦ Friendships.
- ♦ The sacred covenant of romantic and marital love.
- ♦ A broader belonging to communities, institutions, or collectives.

Maslow recognized these connections as vital to our psychological well-being. The absence of love or acceptance can lead the spirit into solitude, anxiety, or a diminished sense of self-worth.

This stage serves as a gateway, preparing the heart for the higher quests ahead — such as the need for esteem. For it is through the experience of being loved and accepted that confidence blossoms, empowering the individual to pursue true achievement and to unfold the authentic self-entrusted by the Creator.

## ► **Level Four: The Needs of Esteem**

Having found belonging and fulfilled the yearning for social connection, the human spirit ascends to the fourth level of Maslow's hierarchy— the realm of esteem. Here lies the profound need to feel worthy, respected, and recognized for one's accomplishments.

Esteem unfolds in two interwoven dimensions:

1. **Self-Esteem:** the inner conviction of one's own value, marked by confidence, competence, autonomy, and a sense of personal mastery.
2. **Esteem from others:** the heartfelt desire to be honored, respected, and acknowledged by those around us, to have our place and efforts recognized and valued.

This level holds great significance in nurturing a positive self-image and directly shapes the individual's drive and aspirations. Maslow cautions that when these needs remain unmet, the soul may wrestle with feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, or worthlessness, casting shadows that hinder the journey toward the highest summit — self-actualization.

## ► **Level Five: Self-Actualization**

At the pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy rests **Self-Actualization**, the highest and most profound stage of personal growth within this model. Maslow posits that this aspiration emerges realistically only after all preceding levels— from the most basic needs to esteem— have been sufficiently fulfilled.

At this summit, the human soul seeks to:

- ♦ Uncover the vast potentials lying dormant within.
- ♦ Express itself with authenticity and freedom.
- ♦ Realize the grandest ambitions and dreams.
- ♦ Cultivate creative and intellectual capacities to their fullest.

- ♦ Pursue the deep quest for life's meaning and purpose.

Maslow describes this stage as the harmonious integration of “what a person is” with “what they might become”— the moment when the individual unfolds fully into the highest expression of their innate capabilities.

Maslow further observes that those who reach this exalted level often embody distinctive qualities, including:

- ♦ A profound love for truth and authenticity.
- ♦ Genuine independence and self-reliance.
- ♦ A deep appreciation for beauty in all its forms.
- ♦ A focus on higher purposes and transcendent goals beyond immediate needs.
- ♦ A tendency toward “peak experiences”— moments of profound immersion where the individual feels wholly united with a meaningful or creative reality.

While Maslow acknowledges that few reach the full realization of self-actualization, he emphasizes that the very striving toward this summit imbues life with its deepest significance and purpose.

## ► Conclusion:

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs offers a sequential vision of the human journey toward self-actualization, beginning with the fundamental quest for physical survival, progressing through the needs for safety, belonging, and esteem, and culminating in the pinnacle of personal and human growth.

This model has profoundly contributed to our understanding of a wide array of behaviors and motivations, whether in everyday life or within the realms of education, management, and personal development. Its strength lies in its elegant simplicity and internal coherence, providing a versatile framework that can be applied across diverse contexts.

Yet, when placed against the rich tapestry of human experience—marked by cultural diversity and varied life circumstances—its universal applicability has sparked extensive scholarly debate. Questions remain about how well this framework can truly capture the complexity of the human spirit across different settings.

In the following section, we will briefly explore the key applications that have embraced this model, along with studies that have sought to test its validity, setting the stage for a critical examination of its limits and the variations in its outcomes across cultures and fields.

## **Empirical Support and Contemporary Applications of Maslow's Theory**

Although Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was not originally founded on extensive empirical research, the model has maintained a powerful presence across numerous fields such as education, management, personal development, and human resources. Subsequent studies have sought to validate and test the theory through quantitative data, yielding mixed but insightful results.

### **1. Broad Practical Applications Across Various Fields:**

The model has been widely adopted in education to enhance learning environments by emphasizing the importance of fulfilling basic conditions—such as nourishment, psychological safety, and social belonging—before progressing toward fostering critical thinking or

creativity. Similarly, in the business world, it has been applied to analyze employee motivation and to design more effective incentive systems.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Partial Empirical Support Through Cross-Cultural Studies:**

A comprehensive global study conducted by Louis Tay and Ed Diener, encompassing over 60,000 individuals across more than 120 countries, revealed that fulfilling needs at various levels of Maslow's hierarchy generally correlates with overall well-being. However, the strict sequential order proposed by the model was not consistently observed. Notably, many people reported life satisfaction even when some needs, particularly those related to self-actualization, remained unfulfilled.<sup>2</sup>

## **3. Critical Reviews and Alternative Models:**

Psychologist Clayton Alderfer proposed an alternative framework known as the ERG Theory, condensing Maslow's five levels into three core categories: Existence, Relatedness, and Growth. Alderfer emphasized that human needs do not necessarily follow a strict hierarchy; rather, individuals can pursue multiple needs simultaneously and in varying sequences. This more flexible model challenges the rigid stepwise ascent implied by Maslow.<sup>3</sup>

## **4. Cultural Variability in the Ordering of Needs:**

Multiple cross-cultural studies have demonstrated that the prioritization of needs varies significantly among societies. For example, a study by Shin-Kie Lee and colleagues in China revealed

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1 Huitt, W. (2007). "Maslow's hierarchy of needs." *Educational Psychology Interactive*. Valdosta, GA: Valdosta State University.

2 Tay, L., & Diener, E. (2011). Needs and subjective well-being around the world. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101(2), 354–365. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023779>

3 Alderfer, C. P. (1969). An empirical test of a new theory of human needs. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 4(2), 142–175.

that social needs such as belongingness and family take precedence over esteem or independence, contradicting Maslow's proposed hierarchy. This underscores the importance of cultural context in shaping human motivation and challenges any universal, one-size-fits-all model.<sup>4</sup>

## **5. Partial Endorsement from Positive and Evolutionary Psychology:**

Martin Seligman, founder of Positive Psychology, has observed that some individuals strive to realize personal meaning and creativity even when certain basic needs remain unmet. This insight suggests that human motivation may transcend a fixed sequence, allowing for self-transcendence and growth despite external challenges. Such a perspective invites us to consider spiritual and existential dimensions alongside psychological needs.<sup>5</sup>

## **► Conclusion:**

These studies reveal that Maslow's hierarchy, despite its widespread recognition and valuable applications, does not constitute a universal psychological law. Rather, it serves as a partial interpretive model, better suited to certain cultural and individual contexts than others. Its true value lies in illuminating the dynamic interplay between human needs and motivation—provided it is approached with flexibility and considered alongside broader, more profound frameworks.

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4 Li, S., Leung, K., & Chen, C. C. (2010). Learning to work in a different culture: East-West intracultural management. *Journal of World Business*, 45(1), 18–27.

5 Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York: Free Press.

# **Critique of Maslow's Hierarchy – Between Limited Empirical Support and Cultural Variability**

Despite the widespread popularity of Maslow's theory of needs and its diverse applications in education, management, and personal development, its academic reception has not been without critical scrutiny. This theory has sparked ongoing scientific debate regarding its empirical validity, its interpretive adequacy across cultures, and its coherence with the complex reality of human experience.

In this section, our aim is not to hastily reject the theory but to carefully examine the nature of the critiques it has received within Western scientific discourse itself—whether concerning the limitations of its empirical foundation, the variability in the ordering of needs across societies and cultures, or the methodological and philosophical challenges arising from reducing the human being to a hierarchy of ascending material and psychological needs.

We will address these critiques by drawing upon well-documented academic sources, reviewing how studies in psychology, neuroscience, and cultural anthropology have engaged with Maslow's model. This will pave the way for presenting a broader, more integrated perspective—one that embraces the spiritual and innate dimensions of human nature and transcends the rigid, hierarchical frameworks.

## **1. Critiques Regarding the Hierarchical Sequence of Needs**

One of the most prominent points of contention in Maslow's theory is the assumption of a strict, fixed hierarchical order of human needs — whereby an individual cannot progress to a higher level without first satisfying the preceding, lower one. Although this sequence appears logically coherent, it lacks sufficient empirical support to establish it as a universal law.

Multiple studies have demonstrated that individuals do not always adhere rigidly to this sequence. People may seek social connections or strive for self-actualization even while living under unstable material or security conditions.

For instance, in a comprehensive analytical review of nine empirical studies testing the hierarchy hypothesis, Wahba and Bridwell (1976) concluded that the experimental evidence does not support the existence of a rigid hierarchical order of needs. Their findings revealed that many individuals exhibited behaviors that diverged from the proposed sequence.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. Cultural Critiques – Variability in the Hierarchy of Needs Across Societies**

One of the most prominent criticisms directed at Maslow's hierarchy lies in its assumption that the sequence of needs applies universally, regardless of cultural or societal backgrounds. However, numerous studies have revealed that this ordering is far from universal. Instead, it is profoundly shaped by cultural and social contexts, reflecting primarily a Western, individualistic model.

In collectivist cultures such as those of China, Japan, and India, social and familial needs — including belonging and collective commitment — tend to take precedence over esteem or autonomy. In contrast, Western cultures often prioritize self-actualization, sometimes even at the expense of social relationships.

A seminal study by Geert Hofstede in 1984 demonstrated that individuals in collectivist cultures place greater importance on relationships and belonging, whereas those in individualistic societies emphasize personal achievement. This highlights that the

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<sup>6</sup> Wahba, M. A., & Bridwell, L. G. (1976). Maslow reconsidered: A review of research on the need hierarchy theory. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 15(2), 212–240. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073\(76\)90038-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0030-5073(76)90038-6)

hierarchy of needs is not a fixed blueprint but a social construct shaped within distinct civilizational patterns.<sup>7</sup>

### **3. Methodological Critiques – Weak Empirical Foundations and Sample Bias**

Despite the widespread fame and adoption of Maslow's hierarchy, its methodological roots have sparked considerable debate within academic circles. The model was primarily built upon qualitative observations and personal reflections rather than on systematic quantitative studies. Maslow largely based his theory on biographical analyses of individuals he regarded as “self-actualized” — such as Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln.

This theoretical foundation, lacking representative samples and rigorous statistical methods, has exposed the theory to criticism for relying on an elitist, non-representative group, thereby casting doubt on the generalizability of its conclusions.

Furthermore, researchers have pointed out that Maslow did not provide precise, measurable definitions for each level of need, which complicates empirical testing of the theory under the stringent scientific standards of contemporary psychology.<sup>8</sup>

### **4. Modern Neuroscientific and Psychological Critiques – Reconstructing Human Motivation**

In recent decades, various branches of psychology and neuroscience have undertaken a critical reexamination of classical models of human motivation, including Maslow's hierarchy. These disciplines reveal that the human brain does not process needs in a rigid, linear

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7 Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

8 Kenrick, D. T., Griskevicius, V., Neuberg, S. L., & Schaller, M. (2010). Renovating the pyramid of needs: Contemporary extensions built upon ancient foundations. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5(3), 292–314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691610369469>

sequence as Maslow originally proposed. Instead, it engages with needs in a dynamic, interconnected, and context-dependent manner shaped by personal experience.

For instance, neuroscientific research shows that neural circuits linked to physiological and social needs often operate concurrently rather than sequentially. Psychological needs such as belonging and esteem activate neural pathways closely resembling those involved in fundamental survival mechanisms. This overlap challenges the strict hierarchical progression Maslow envisioned, suggesting instead a more fluid interplay of needs.

Researchers such as Matthew Lieberman from the University of California have demonstrated that social rejection activates the very same brain regions associated with physical pain. This finding powerfully underscores that the need for belonging is not a “secondary” concern, following physiological or safety needs, but rather a fundamental neurological imperative on par with them.<sup>9</sup>

## **5. Critiques from Positive and Evolutionary Psychology – Transcending the Traditional Hierarchy of Needs**

With the evolution of psychology over recent decades, particularly through the rise of positive psychology and evolutionary psychology, the foundational assumption that self-actualization can only be pursued after satisfying lower-level needs has come under critical scrutiny.

Researchers have observed that many individuals strive for meaning, higher values, or service to others, even amid harsh material or psychological conditions, thereby challenging the essential premise of a rigid hierarchical progression.

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9 Lieberman, M. D., & Eisenberger, N. I. (2009). Pains and pleasures of social life. *Science*, 323(5916), 890–891. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1170008>

In this vein, Martin Seligman, the founder of positive psychology, emphasizes that some individuals possess the remarkable capacity to cultivate a life rich in meaning and well-being despite lacking many forms of comfort or security. He argues that the sense of achievement and purpose is not always grounded in material or social foundations but often springs from the profound depths of personal values and one's unique life mission.

On another front, evolutionary psychology invites us to reconsider the notion of “priority.” It proposes that needs tied to survival—such as social bonds, reproduction, and cooperation—may hold greater centrality within the biological and behavioral architecture of human nature than the pursuit of self-actualization.

David Buss, a leading figure in evolutionary psychology, highlights that many drives related to reputation, social alliances, and affiliation are deeply rooted evolutionary motivations. These imperatives can often supersede the hierarchical progression that Maslow originally envisioned.<sup>10</sup>

## ► Conclusion:

The critical review of Maslow's hierarchy theory reveals that, despite its elegant simplicity and explanatory appeal, the model does not constitute a rigid psychological law. Rather, it reflects a culturally partial perspective on the nature of human motivation. Empirical studies, cultural analyses, neuroscientific research, and approaches from positive and evolutionary psychology have uncovered methodological gaps, cultural biases, and limitations in its universal depiction of human behavior.

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10 Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York: Free Press.  
Buss, D. M. (2015). *Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind* (5th ed.). New York: Routledge.

The model overlooks several fundamental dimensions:

- ♦ The inherent flexibility in the prioritization of needs, which varies according to context and personal experience;
- ♦ The uniquely human capacity to seek meaning, sacrifice, and spirituality even amidst material deprivation;
- ♦ And the essential spiritual and innate dimension that forms the very core of human nature.

These challenges invite us to reconsider a broader, more nuanced conception of human needs—one that transcends the simplistic hierarchy from instinct to self-actualization. Instead, it places authentic alignment with our innate nature at the center, integrating body, mind, heart, and spirit into a harmonious, unified whole.

In the following section, we will explore this alternative framework, which we call the **Integrative Pyramid of Needs—The Law of Authentic Selfhood**. This model reconstructs the understanding of the human being from within, rather than solely from the outside of their needs. It connects the pursuit of selfhood with the spiritual journey toward God, rather than merely the gratification of the ego's desires.

## Part Two: The Integrative Pyramid of Needs — The Law of Authentic Selfhood

### **An Introductory Reflection: From Hierarchy to Harmony... From Desire to Innate Truth**

When we reflect on the critique of Maslow's hierarchical model, we do not limit ourselves to pointing out its empirical shortcomings or cultural variability. Rather, we come to realize that the deeper problem lies in its very philosophical foundation: the assumption that human beings are driven primarily by their desires, beginning

with survival and climbing through their needs until they “reach self-actualization.”

But what if the self is not something we attain from the outside, but rather something we return to from within? What if the ultimate purpose of human existence is not merely the fulfillment of needs, but the harmonization of our four dimensions: body, heart, mind, and spirit? Is a human being merely a biological creature striving upwards? Or rather, is he a primordial being, breathed into by the Divine Spirit, whose dignity neither begins with food nor ends with achievement?

For this reason, Islam does not present an “alternative pyramid” following Maslow’s linear logic. Instead, it transforms the perspective from a hierarchical sequence into an integrative vision—shifting the focus from desire to authenticity... authenticity with oneself, with one’s innate nature, and with God.

In this section of the chapter, we will explore the “Integrative Pyramid of Needs,” which emerges from the “Law of Authenticity of the Self.” This is an innate, existential conception that measures self-realization not by a hierarchy of needs, but by the harmony of one’s inner dimensions with one’s original nature. True human striving begins not when a particular need is fulfilled, but when this profound authenticity is attained.

## **The Law of Authenticity of the Self — An Innate Holistic Vision of Self-Realization**

While Maslow’s theory views self-actualization as a gradual ascent up the ladder of needs, the spiritual and ethical perspective offers an entirely different paradigm:

The self is not constructed from the outside but uncovered from within; its realization is not merely the fulfillment of instincts, but the sincere harmony with the innate nature — the *fitrah* — bestowed upon humanity the moment the soul was breathed into it.

The soul is the essence of the human being, and the *fitrah* is the divine imprint embedded within it through the soul. This intrinsic nature grants the human an innate inclination toward truth, a natural response to beauty, the conscience's purity when it errs, and the tranquility of submission when it is on the right path.

The more the four dimensions of the human — body, heart, mind, and soul — align with this *fitrah*, the greater the authenticity, and the closer one draws to one's true self and ultimately, to the Divine.

Here unfolds the essence of the "Law of Authenticity of the Self": a person attains completeness and tranquility only when living in profound harmony between their instincts, emotions, thoughts, and actions on one hand, and their original innate nature (*fitrah*) on the other.

This alignment dissolves contradiction in behavior, arrogance in the mind, confusion in the heart, and domination in the body, allowing the entire human being to resonate in unison — the melody of sincerity with the Divine.

Thus, self-realization ceases to be a selfish goal or a mere psychological benchmark; it becomes a path of spiritual refinement that reconnects the individual to their origin, guides them toward their ultimate purpose, and frees them from the slavery of superficial images and external standards.

It is not a journey of "ascending" to the peak of worldly success, but a return to the simplicity of truth.

## Axis One: The Fitrah — The Compass of Authenticity and the Source of Harmony

At the heart of the Law of Authenticity lies the *fitrah* — not as a vague inclination or an impulsive emotion, but as an inner compass, intricately embedded in the human essence from the very moment the Divine breath breathed life into it. It is the truth known to the human soul before learning, the guidance sought before reading, and the awakening that stirs when the noise of desires calms and the clamor of the world fades away.

As God Almighty says:

*“Set your face firmly toward the religion, as one who is devoted to the natural disposition (fitrah) upon which God created mankind—there is no altering God’s creation. That is the correct religion, but most people do not know.”* (Ar rum, 30)

In this context, the *fitrah* is not merely a stage in the human journey, but the very essence and the abiding core within the depths of the soul. It is the innate capacity to discern truth from falsehood, sincerity from deception, and tranquility from turmoil. It is what causes the human being to feel a deep sense of dissonance whenever they act against what they intrinsically know to be right, even if this truth escapes the grasp of pure reason.

Within the framework of the Law of Authenticity, the *fitrah* stands as the supreme standard by which all that emanates from a person— their behavior, thoughts, emotions, and even aspirations— is measured and judged.

Not everything that the body desires is legitimate unless it is sanctioned by the light of the *fitrah*.

Not every stirring of the emotions is noble unless it aligns with the original nature of creation.

Not every reasoning that the mind finds logical is truly purposeful unless it serves the ultimate goal of existence.

Herein lies authenticity: to live according to the truth planted within you, not according to what has been imposed upon you from without.

The closer a person draws to their *fitrah*, the greater their inner harmony becomes—bringing clarity to their vision and peace to their heart—because their self is no longer torn between what is imposed upon it, what it desires, and what it was originally created to be.

This profound Qur’anic truth is beautifully expressed in the verse:

***“But Allah has endeared to you the faith and has made it pleasing in your hearts, and has made hatred to you for disbelief, wickedness, and disobedience. Those are the rightly guided.”*** (Al-Hujurat, 7)

True self-authenticity does not arise from the intellect alone, but from a heart in which faith has firmly settled—not through external compulsion, but through the irresistible attraction of the *fitrah*; and from an innate aversion to deviation, which requires no constant logical justification.

This is genuine guidance: that a person lives in harmony with the true nature of their self, as created by God.

## Axis Two: The Four Dimensions of the Human Being — An Integrated Unity, Not a Hierarchical Ladder

The Law of Self-Authenticity does not view the human being as a creature ascending from instinct to reason, or from need to fulfillment, as Western hierarchical models might suggest. Rather, it perceives humanity as a composite of four intertwined and equal dimensions: the body, the heart, the mind, and the soul.

These dimensions are not discrete layers that can be separated or addressed independently; they form a singular existential web, whose completeness depends on their profound harmony centered around the axis of *fitrah*—the innate natural disposition.

### 1. The Body

The body embodies our natural instincts and biological needs—such as nourishment, rest, intimacy, and movement. It is the vessel of the soul, not its adversary; a source of vitality when guided with balance, yet it can become a prison should one become enslaved to its demands.

### 2. The Heart

The heart represents the emotional and sensory dimension, the seat of feelings, longing, love, fear, and contentment. It is the mirror of authenticity, the sanctuary of tranquility, and the realm of initial purification. The heart finds peace in the remembrance of God and grows restless when distanced from truth, even if outward success may mask this inner turmoil.

### **3. The Mind**

The mind is the seat of thought, knowledge, understanding, and reflection. It guides when illuminated by innate nature (fitrah), yet it can stray when severed from it, no matter the height of its intelligence or analytical prowess. The mind is tasked with organizing life, comprehending reality, and linking means to ends—but its true authenticity is realized only when it submits to the light of the soul and the sincerity of the heart.

### **4. The Spirit**

The spirit is the essence of the human being and their extension toward the Divine. It is not merely a dimension but the divine breath that bestowed dignity and the secret of existence upon humanity. The spirit cannot be grasped by the senses, yet it is deeply felt in moments of revelation, truthfulness, repentance, and prayer.

When the spirit is forgotten, the human being becomes fragmented in their other dimensions, lost and adrift despite outward appearances of success.

### **5. Integration, Not Hierarchy**

Within this framework, these dimensions are not treated as a linear ladder, ascending from the base to the pinnacle, nor as a sequence from the physical, through the mental, to the emotional or spiritual. Rather, they form an integrated circle revolving around a single core: the fitrah, the innate nature.

Any behavior that disrupts this circle creates inner turmoil; any choice that marginalizes one dimension leads to imbalance—no matter how logical or effective it may seem.

Thus, self-actualization is not a gradual climb up external needs but an arrival at a state of profound inner authenticity—where the body speaks the language of fitrah, the heart resonates with sincere intention, the mind reflects in the light of purpose, and the spirit yearns for the Divine.

## ■ **Reconstructing Needs: From Hierarchy to Harmony**

In the Western paradigm, human needs are often portrayed as a ladder—one that a person climbs from bodily survival to the exaltation of self-actualization. Yet, beneath this seemingly simple model lies a profound oversight about human nature: that a person is not merely a “project of ascent,” but a complex being composed of multiple dimensions whose true wholeness emerges not through sequential stages, but through harmonious integration.

The “Law of Self-Authenticity” views needs not as isolated layers, but as vital spheres of existence that converge around a single center: the fitrah, the innate nature.

Thus, the physical need is not inherently inferior, nor the spiritual need inherently superior—unless each is understood and honored within the context of its balanced relationship with the others.

Within this framework, **self-actualization** ceases to be the pinnacle of a hierarchy and instead becomes the fruit borne from the sincere interplay of these dimensions—when a person’s striving aligns authentically with the truth of their creation and the essence of their existence.

From this perspective, the understanding of needs is reconstructed as an integrative system, where each need is analyzed as a realm of self-authenticity, rather than merely an instinctual drive or psychological demand.

## 1. Preserving the Body and Moderation in Its Fulfillment — The Body as a Trust, Not a Burden or a Centerpiece

In the Western model, physical needs are placed at the base of the pyramid, viewed as the starting point of the human “ascent” as if they represent the lowest drive that must be surpassed for one to reach the self. Yet, from the intrinsic spiritual-purification perspective, the body is neither lowest nor highest. Rather, it is a divine trust, created to serve the soul—not to dominate it. It is an integral part of the whole being whose authenticity is only fulfilled through honoring without exaggeration and organizing without oppression.

In the framework of the **Law of Authenticity**, the physical need is understood as:

- ♦ A realm of personal responsibility toward oneself;
- ♦ A means to acquire the necessary energy to fulfill moral and spiritual duties;
- ♦ A field for purification and moderation, rather than indulgence or neglect.

As God Almighty says: ***“Eat and drink, but do not waste; indeed, He does not like the wasteful.”*** (Al-A'raf, 31)

This single verse profoundly redefines our relationship with the body:

- ♦ We satisfy its needs with justice and fairness;
- ♦ We neither allow it to dominate us nor neglect it to our detriment;
- ♦ Instead, we harness it within a greater context — that of servitude and the journey toward God.

The Qur'an further affirms this understanding by forbidding the disparagement of what is wholesome or the prohibition of adornment, stating:

***"Say, 'Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good things of provision?' Say, 'They are for those who believe during the life of this world, pure [for them], on the Day of Resurrection.'"*** (Al-A'raf, 32)

Adornment and provision are blessings when sought with sincerity and moderation—not faults to be ashamed of, nor ends to be worshipped.

This lies at the heart of authentic self-honesty with the body: to enjoy what Allah has permitted without excess or forced abstinence, while always keeping the compass pointed toward the natural disposition (fitrah), not merely the body itself.

This meaning is beautifully echoed in the Prophet's (peace be upon him) saying:

***"Whoever marries has completed half of his religion, so let him fear Allah regarding the remaining half."***

The bodily needs — including the sexual instinct — are neither shameful nor sinful. Rather, they represent a pathway to human perfection when governed by sincere intention and sought within the limits ordained by God.

Every impulse of the body, when embraced under the shelter of spiritual purification and pure intention, transforms into an act of worship that strengthens the journey toward the Divine, rather than weakening it.

To be truthful with the body means:

- ♦ To satisfy its needs without becoming enslaved to them;
- ♦ To care for it without idolizing it;
- ♦ To treat it neither as an adversary nor as an overwhelming instinct, but as a trusted vessel entrusted with the secret of the soul.

## **2. Heartfelt and Spiritual Security – Tranquility as the Root of True Safety**

In many Western psychological models, security is often presented as a stage that follows the fulfillment of bodily needs, primarily understood as external stability: job security, financial steadiness, physical safety, and a secure environment. Yet, within the spiritual and purifying worldview, true security does not arise from external conditions but originates deep within the heart.

It is not merely the absence of threats, but the presence of profound tranquility — the comforting assurance that one is held safely within the care of God, even amid life's fiercest storms.

According to the "Law of Authenticity," security is not attained simply through the abundance of resources, but when the heart feels at peace with the reality that the world, in all its complexity, remains within God's knowledge and decree. It comes from releasing the illusion of controlling every detail, embracing sincerity of intention, and trusting in divine wisdom.

Allah, the Exalted, says:

***"Those who believe and do not mix their belief with injustice — those will have security, and they are [rightly] guided." (Al-An'ām, 82)***

Thus, security is not merely the absence of fear, but the fruit of sincere faith—when the soul harbors no doubt about the One who manages its affairs, and firmly believes that whatever befalls it is ultimately good from God, even if its meaning remains concealed.

Therefore, in the Islamic vision, security is not tied to walls, locks, or financial protection, but to a conscious surrender and absolute trust in God's care—expressed beautifully in the Qur'anic statement:

***"And whoever relies upon Allah — then He is sufficient for him."***(At-Talāq, 3)

This profound sense of security reaches its pinnacle when the heart is freed from the need to control every outcome and surrenders itself fully to the wisdom of God. The Qur'an beautifully expresses this state at its highest form:

***"Say, "Nothing will ever befall us except what Allah has destined for us. He is our Protector." And upon Allah let the believers rely."***  
(At-Tawbah, 51)

Everything that happens to a person is written "for" them, not "against" them, as long as their faith is sincere.

This story reaches its climax in the moment of Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) when Pharaoh's soldiers closed in, and the Israelites trembled, saying: ***"Indeed, we are to be overtaken."*** (Ash-Shu'arā', 61)

Yet Moses, in the height of his truthfulness with God, responded with absolute faith:

***"No! Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me."*** (Ash-Shu'arā', 62)

Here, security was not a physical fortress, but a certainty dwelling in the heart that changes the entire equation.

Self-honesty in this context means:

- ♦ That the heart finds peace in the depth of *tawakkul* (reliance on God), not in the illusion of control;
- ♦ That it is freed from the chronic anxiety fueled by consumerist systems, insurance obsessions, and fear of the future;
- ♦ That it surrenders—not out of weakness, but from the strength that comes with knowing God.

Just as the body cannot be truly free unless guided by sincere intention, the heart cannot be truly secure unless it places its trust in the One who never disappoints those who hope in Him.

### **3. Belonging in its Value-Based Sense – From the Need for Connection to the Awareness of Purpose**

In Western psychological models, the need for belonging is presented as a fundamental social need—born of a human desire for love, support, and acceptance. But in the spiritual and innate (*fitri*) paradigm, belonging does not stem from a lack or deficiency; it arises from a need for meaning.

The human being does not belong because he is incomplete, but because he is created upon a *fitrah* that seeks connection with what transcends the self: with God, with a divine mission, and with a universe that echoes his own inner glorification.

In the Law of Self-Honesty, relationships are not seen as compensations for inner fragility, but as reflections of a sincere, innate desire to connect—with those who support your journey, who remind you of who you are, and where you are headed. In this light, relationship is not emotional consumption, but an integrative responsibility rooted in man's belonging to his existential role.

God Almighty says: ***“Indeed, the believers are but brothers.”*** (Al-Ḥujurāt, 10) Brotherhood in Islam is not a fleeting emotional bond, but a deep-rooted affiliation to a shared system of values—one that transcends tribe and race, and is anchored in the very purpose of creation.

The Qur’an deepens this dimension in another verse: ***“O mankind, We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous among you.”*** (Al-Ḥujurāt, 13) Here, belonging does not erase distinction; rather, it reorients it toward a higher end: mutual recognition instead of pride, piety instead of domination.

Self-honesty in this context means:

- ♦ Not seeking people to complete you, but to share with them what you are entrusted with.
- ♦ Not entering relationships to conceal your emptiness, but to realize your awareness.
- ♦ Seeing every relationship as a bridge to God—not as an obstacle, nor merely a psychological mirror.

Thus, in the framework of the **Law of Self-Honesty**, belonging becomes a reflection of a deeper connection: to God, to the purpose of existence, and to the network of goodness woven through this world. You do not belong because you are fragile, but because you are commanded to integrate. And you do not love to be filled, but to live truthfully in your bond with those who return you to your essence.

#### **4. Esteem Rooted in Innate Dignity**

In traditional psychological models, the “need for esteem” is presented as a fundamental need that follows belonging. It is the

human desire to feel self-worth, to gain the respect of others, and to be recognized for one's abilities and social standing.

However, in the **Law of Self-Honesty**, value does not begin from the outside, nor is it measured by the words of others or one's position in their eyes. Rather, it springs from a profound awareness that dignity is embedded in our very creation—not earned through performance or success.

God Almighty says:

***"Indeed, We have honored the children of Adam" (Al-Isra, 70)***

Here, dignity precedes achievement, transcends occupation, and rises above social standards of esteem. It is not something we gain, but something we learn to reclaim when we live in accordance with our natural disposition.

In this context, a person is not asked to prove themselves to others, but rather to be honest with God and with their own soul—so that their true worth may be revealed to them.

**Self-honesty** means knowing that your value is not granted by anyone, nor can it be taken away by circumstances, nor does it diminish if the crowds do not applaud you.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him and his family) expressed this meaning when he said:

***"Whoever seeks the pleasure of God at the risk of displeasing people, God will be pleased with him and will cause the people to be pleased with him. And whoever seeks to please people at the risk of displeasing God, God will be displeased with him and will cause the people to be displeased with him."***

So, the true source of satisfaction and esteem lies in being loyal to inner truth—not in chasing the ever-changing tides of public opinion.

Thus, those who live trapped in cycles of constant comparison or in perpetual waiting for others' recognition gradually lose their inner balance. They begin to shape their identity according to standards that do not reflect their true selves.

But the one who is content with themselves because they have aligned with their innate nature and have strived sincerely—such a person is calmer, more grounded, and better equipped to face life without compromising who they are.

Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) captured the essence of this self-honesty in a whispered prayer that touches the core of sincerity:

***“My God, it is enough of an honor for me that I am Your servant, and enough of a pride for me that You are my Lord.”***

What greater sense of worth could one seek? What nobler dignity than to be claimed by God and upheld by Him?

Here, self-honesty with God frees you from the need for human approval. Your dignity becomes your true self—not your reflection in the eyes of others.

## **5. Self-Actualization as the Fruit of Sincerity, Not the Peak of the Pyramid**

In the Western model, ***self-actualization*** is often depicted as the ultimate summit—the final goal of the human being, where one reaches their highest potential, expresses their independence and uniqueness, and frees themselves from dependence on others.

But despite its apparent appeal, this concept suffers from a profound disconnection from the human origin and the true purpose of existence.

In the **Law of Self-Honesty**, self-actualization is not a peak one ascends to, but a state of deep harmony with one's innate nature. It emerges when your four dimensions come into alignment and are liberated from inner conflict.

The self is not fulfilled by separating from others or imposing itself upon the world, but by knowing its truth and walking toward its ultimate purpose—in the light of sincerity and servitude.

God Almighty says: ***“I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me.”*** (Adh-Dhariyat, 56)

This does not negate ambition or competence—it redirects them within a broader vision, where every action becomes a path to God, not merely to the self.

Self-honesty in actualizing the self means:

- ♦ That you are not measured by your achievements, but by the sincerity with which you walk toward God as you achieve.
- ♦ That you do not see yourself in the mirror of society or success, but in the mirror of your innate nature and your Lord's satisfaction.
- ♦ That your self is not a project for display, but a trust you carry with awareness and nurture with gradual refinement.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) expressed this meaning when he said:

***“May God have mercy on one who knows where he came from, where he is, and where he is going.”***

This is the true self-actualization: to be conscious of your origin, your place, and your destination—and to weave from your days an honest journey that reflects that awareness.

Thus, the self is not a project to construct an “independent identity” or pursue “personal success,” but a manifestation of honesty with one’s innate nature, and a reflection of the soul in everything one does and says.

And since the human being was not created in vain, any pursuit of self-actualization outside the context of returning to God loses its meaning—no matter how successful it may appear. God says:

***“Did you think that We created you in vain and that you would not be returned to Us?”*** (Al-Mu’minun, 115)

The self is not built to be worshiped, but to be returned.

Every striving that is not a ***toil toward God*** remains confused and misaligned from the fitrah, no matter how polished its surface. As He says:

***“O human being, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet Him.”*** (Al-Inshiqaq, 6)

Herein lies complete honesty: to see every effort you make as a step on the path of return, not a path of self-sufficiency.

## ► **Conclusion – From Need to Meaning: Balance Is Honesty**

The core issue is not that Maslow presented a hierarchy of needs, but that he separated them and arranged them as if they were steps on a ladder, starting from the body and rising to the self.

But the human being is not like a pyramid; rather, they resemble the spirit flowing through a living body, the heart beating with intention, the mind contemplating its path, and the body rising with the trust of existence.

In the “Law of Self-Honesty,” needs are not classified by their apparent priority or psychological function, but by how honestly they align with the innate nature (fitrah) and their harmony with the ultimate purpose. A person may satisfy all their needs yet remain disturbed, or be deprived of some and attain tranquility. The secret lies not in quantity, but in honesty... not in fulfillment, but in direction.

When needs are reconstructed according to this law, the self no longer becomes an individual goal but a mirror of honesty and purification; the body ceases to be an adversary and becomes a means; relationships are not lived as an escape but as a connection; appreciation is not sought for appearance but for integration; and the self is not pursued to be built, but to be returned to its origin.

Here, the human being is not “progressing” toward their self, but rather integrating fully in their honesty with their Creator.

## **When Truth Blossoms Amidst Trials: Living Examples of Self-Realization Through the Lens of Innate Nature**

The highest meanings of sincerity and faith in God come to life in the timeless acts of the righteous—those who stood firm against oppression and faced hardships with souls deeply connected to the Divine and hearts unshaken by the harshness of their circumstances. In their steadfastness, they found the path to authentic self-fulfillment and attained the loftiest heights of contentment and inner peace.

## **1. The Story of Lady Zainab (peace be upon her) in the Court of Ibn Ziyad**

Contrary to the Western psychological model that demands the fulfillment of basic needs before one can attain meaning or balance, the experience of Lady Zainab (peace be upon her) stands as a profound testament that sincerity with one's innate nature and trust in God alone are sufficient for a person to realize their true self, even when deprived of everything.

In the tyrant Ibn Ziyad's court, the highest meanings of honesty and surrender to God were embodied in Lady Zainab's unwavering stance and deep faith. Her presence and words reflected the strength of a spirit firmly connected to the Divine. When Ibn Ziyad mockingly confronted her after the tragedy of Karbala, asking, "What did you see as God's action upon your brother?" she replied with profound confidence and resolve: "I saw nothing but beauty."

These simple words captured the deepest meaning of acceptance and satisfaction with the divine will's exquisite design, perceiving in those tragic moments a divine wisdom that transcended all physical suffering.

Her words were not merely a reaction; they embodied a profound understanding of faith in God, enabling her to perceive beauty and tranquility amid her tragedy. She transformed pain into complete surrender to divine wisdom and stood steadfast before the tyrants. Her example teaches us how faith can refine the soul and elevate it to lofty heights. Her words have inspired generations with the strength of the spirit, revealing that true self-realization transcends the fulfillment of material needs and finds in hardship an opportunity to draw nearer to God, living the values of patience and beauty in divine contentment.

## **2. The Companions of the Prophet (PBUH): From Outward Poverty to Inner Greatness**

At the dawn of the message, the Companions of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his family) did not live in comfort or abundance. They teetered on the brink of destruction—surviving on scraps, eating leaves, pursued relentlessly by the swords of Quraysh, besieged by hunger, and subjected to harsh exile and rejection.

Yet, from this harsh reality, they forged a spiritual school, reaching the highest levels of dignity and honor, because they never compromised their sincerity nor bargained with their innate nature.

They understood that “self-realization” does not mean luxury or ease, but fulfilling the purpose for which they were created. They consciously chose the path of sacrifice, abandoning worldly attachments—not out of weakness or inability, but because they knew that what is with God is more enduring, truer, and more perfect.

Bilal ibn Rabah, once an oppressed slave, transformed into a symbol of steadfastness and an unquenchable, truthful voice that no whip could silence. Ammar ibn Yasir, who witnessed his parents tortured to death, rose to a level of sincerity with God in every breath and in every tremor of his weary body. Mus’ab ibn Umair, the noble youth of Mecca, exemplified one who traded the adornments of status for the battlefield, luxury for the message—and never saw poverty as humiliation, but as freedom.

According to Maslow’s scale, these men had not reached “self-actualization,” because their worldly needs remained unmet. Yet from the perspective of innate nature (fitrah), they were towering peaks of light, mirrors of authentic truthfulness, having achieved complete harmony among soul, mind, heart, and body in the presence of their ultimate purpose.

### **3. Contemporary Resisters — Steadfastness When Guarantees Are Absent**

In an age where value is measured by appearances, and success is reduced to abundance and security, the resisters in Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq stand as the most striking counterexamples to the Western psychological model. They live without apparent safety, without material stability, and without plentiful resources... yet their hearts are as strong as steel, their faces radiate unwavering certainty, and their eyes do not blink in the presence of death.

According to Maslow's hierarchy, these individuals should not have reached the pinnacle of self-actualization. But in the scale of authentic self-truth, they are among the most sincere with themselves, their mission, and their God.

They are not driven by the obsession with stability or personal superiority, but propelled by an inner call that makes them see sacrifice as the essence of life, pain as the path to transcendence, and wounds as gateways to light.

They embody meaning in the harshest moments of absurdity, proving that true security lies not in walls, but in the heart, and that dignity is not granted by anyone, but drawn from God.

When a child in Gaza lifts stones against planes, or a young man in Yemen stands on the ruins of his home shouting "Allahu Akbar," or a martyr's mother in Iraq faces her son's killer and says, "Praise be to God, we gave him as He gave us," we witness not only heroism but a profound vision of humanity: how one truly realizes the self by being truthful to God, even when owning nothing.

These individuals lacked the most basic material needs, yet they fulfilled the deepest call within their nature—the call of truthfulness, freedom, dignity, and closeness to God.

Thus, they perfectly embody what it means to “achieve yourself” through the lens of the Law of Authentic Selfhood.

## **Conclusion:**

In these stories, we find a true embodiment of the concept of self-realization in Islam—where honesty and faith in God are the wellsprings of inner steadfastness and greatness, far removed from attachment to material needs or personal ambitions. These heroes stand as living examples inspiring us to understand that true greatness does not arise from worldly luxury, but from a person’s connection to their Lord, acceptance of His wisdom, and striving to uphold the values of truth, goodness, and justice.

## A systematic comparison between Maslow's hierarchy and the integrative hierarchy of needs

Aspect	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Integrative Hierarchy of Needs (Law of Authenticity)
Philosophical Foundation	Humans strive to satisfy needs from the lowest to highest.	Humans seek harmony among their four dimensions (spirit, mind, heart, body) in accordance with their innate nature (fitra).
Structural Model	A hierarchical pyramid ascending from bodily needs to self-actualization.	An integrative circular structure centered on fitra and authenticity with overlapping and synergistic dimensions.
Concept of Self-Actualization	The ultimate peak characterized by independence, distinction, and creativity.	A fruit of sincerity with fitra; a state of deep harmony and awareness rather than a separate goal.
Priority of Needs	Strict sequential order starting with bodily needs, then psychological and social needs.	Needs are intertwined; no single need can be genuinely fulfilled without balance among others.
Role of the Spirit	Completely absent; focus is on body, psyche, and behavior.	The essence and guiding force behind all dimensions and needs; spirit is central to integration and authenticity.

Aspect	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Integrative Hierarchy of Needs (Law of Authenticity)
Relationship with Others	Means to achieve acceptance and emotional support.	Relationships are a means of spiritual purification reflecting allegiance to higher values and mission, not mere fulfillment.
Esteem/Recognition	A psychological need satisfied by social acknowledgment and status.	Rooted in innate dignity and self-approval before God; external recognition is secondary.
Source of Value	Personal achievement, superiority, and social recognition.	Truthfulness with self, integrity, and closeness to God as the true source of value.
Tool for Inner Balance	Gradual satisfaction of needs according to hierarchy.	Sincerity with fitra and harmonizing the four dimensions (spirit, mind, heart, body).
Cosmic Vision	No clear ultimate purpose; emphasis on self-actualization as an end.	Humans are in continuous striving toward God; every effort is directed toward returning to the origin and ultimate purpose.

This table reveals that the difference between Maslow's hierarchy and the integrative hierarchy of needs lies not merely in the order of needs or how they are fulfilled, but in the comprehensive vision of what it means to be human: Who is the human? What is their purpose? And what grants them balance and true value?

While Maslow's model starts from the premise of a person striving to build the self by gradually mastering their needs step by step, the integrative hierarchy begins with the understanding of the human as a being endowed with an innate nature—carrying within a spiritual compass—and achieves self-realization only when in harmony with this nature, rather than soaring above it.

The comparison here does not reveal a mere technical weakness in the Western model, but rather illuminates an existential depth within the Qur'anic vision: that the human being is not “hierarchical” in their needs, but “integrated” in their sincerity; and that the self is not a separate project of construction, but a mirror of innate nature and a trust in their striving toward their Lord.

## **Conclusion: When the Self Is Built from Within**

The purpose of this integrative vision of needs is not to contradict Western psychological models merely for the sake of argument, but to return humanity to its original point of balance — that the self is not constructed upon what it lacks, but upon the light with which it was created; and it is not realized through external climbing toward achievement, but through inner harmony with innate nature, and an honest journey toward God.

The “Law of Self-Truth” reveals that each dimension of the human being — body, heart, mind, and spirit — carries a need, yet these needs are not to be understood as problems awaiting solutions, but as realms of sincerity and purification.

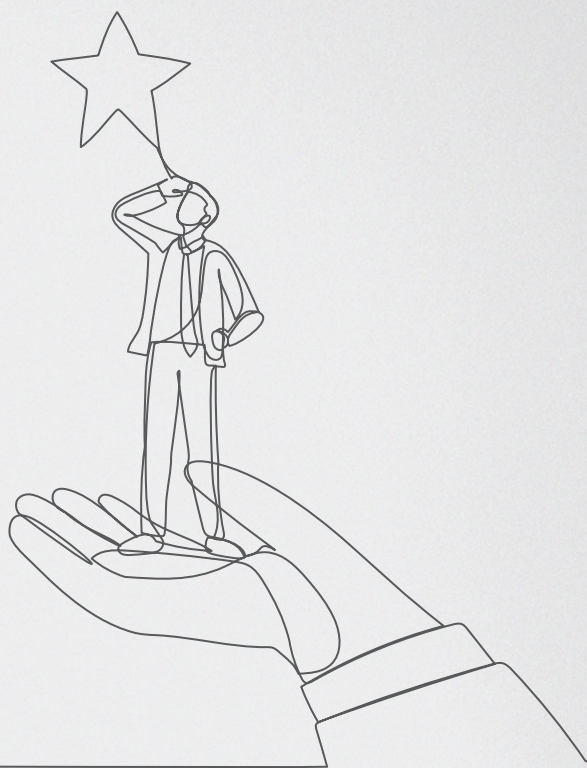
True self-realization does not come from suppressing or fleeing these needs, but by integrating them within a holistic path that transforms them into steps on a journey of awareness, rather than mere rungs on a solitary ladder.

In a world where success is measured by appearance, individual superiority, and isolated achievements, this law reaffirms that the highest attainment for a human being is to be truthful to oneself... and to God.

When a person is honest with their body, they nourish it without becoming its slave. When truthful with their heart, they feel a purity that cannot be feigned. When sincere with their mind, they think with purpose, not aimlessness. And when authentic with their soul, they remember where they came from, why they exist, and where they are ultimately destined to return.

Thus, self-realization is not a peak to be reached, but a state to be lived.

The path has no end... only truthfulness in every step along the way.



Chapter Ten

# **The Law of Attraction**

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# The Law of Attraction

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### Part One: The Law of Attraction – Between Concept, Applications, and Scientific Debate

#### **Introductory Prelude: Why Discuss the Law of Attraction?**

In our journey to understand and purify the self, it is not enough to merely reflect on the nature of the soul and its purposes. We must

also consciously engage with contemporary ideas that have profoundly influenced how people think and pursue their lives. Among these, the “Law of Attraction” stands out as one of the most widespread concepts in recent decades, promising millions of followers the ability to “attract” success, happiness, and wealth... simply by focusing their thoughts with enough intensity.

But what if the idea runs deeper than mere “positive thinking”?

What if it shifts from being a genuine catalyst for change to a cleverly disguised illusion?

And is it possible to reconcile this popular concept with the Islamic philosophy of striving, intention, trust, and contentment?

In this chapter, we do not merely present the Law of Attraction as it is popularly promoted; rather, we examine it through a critical lens. We review supporting studies alongside systematic criticisms, then open a new spiritual horizon that reconstructs the notion of “attraction” within the framework of Islamic purification (tazkiyah).

Here, the intended outcome is not achieved by the sheer power of thought alone, but through sincere intention, meticulous effort, and profound reliance on God.

## **Attraction as a Mental Force — Between Hope and Reality**

The Law of Attraction is presented as a cornerstone of the philosophy of “positive thinking,” fundamentally based on the idea that a person can draw events and opportunities into their life by intensely focusing their mind on them. Thought, it is said, carries an energy that influences reality; the clearer the mental image and the stronger the

feeling of the goal's fulfillment, the higher the likelihood of it actually occurring.

From this premise, the law encourages individuals to vividly imagine their goals, immerse themselves in the emotions of anticipated success, and abstain from any doubt or worry that might “scatter energy” and weaken the process of manifestation.

This concept has enjoyed widespread popularity through media channels, training programs, and self-development workshops, relying—at least in part—on studies that link optimism and mental visualization with improved psychological performance and resilience in the face of stress. Research published in *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* has found that optimistic individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of psychological stability. Likewise, scholars such as Carol Dweck have emphasized the crucial role of a growing positive mindset in fostering intrinsic motivation and sustained effort.

Yet, despite its allure, this idea has not been free from scientific debate. Researchers like Barbara Fredrickson have raised critical questions about the effectiveness of “intention alone” to influence reality, pointing out that while positive thinking may prepare the internal environment for action, it does not directly alter external circumstances.

## ■ How to Activate the Law of Attraction

Although the Law of Attraction is often presented in a simplified, motivational style, it is based on a deeper premise (not always explicitly stated): that reality responds to an individual's mental and emotional state—not merely to their efforts or actions. Therefore, activating this law involves more than just specifying what one wishes to achieve; it requires cultivating a harmonious emotional and intellectual state aligned with the goal, as if it has already come to pass.

Accordingly, individuals are encouraged to engage in daily practices aimed at “attracting” the desired outcome by reshaping their inner world: their thoughts, mental imagery, and feelings. What follows is an overview of the most prominent steps recommended by the Law of Attraction literature, accompanied by an explanation of their psychological foundations, the scientific evidence supporting them, and the aspects that remain open to question.

## ► **Step One: Clearly and Specifically Defining Goals** — **Desire as a Cosmic Signal**

Advocates of the Law of Attraction believe that everything begins with mental clarity. If a person does not precisely know what they want, they will be unable to “send clear signals” to the universe, and thus will not receive the results they aspire to. Therefore, individuals are urged to formulate their goals in a specific, positive, and detailed manner: What do you want? When? What does the final form look like? What feelings will arise when it is achieved?

Despite differences among various schools of thought, most agree that ambiguity in the goal is tantamount to its complete absence. A scattered desire does not generate focused energy; rather, it sends contradictory messages that may hinder the “manifestation of the outcome.”<sup>11</sup>

### ♦ **Background of this Hypothesis:**

This concept rests on an almost “mechanistic” assumption that a disciplined human intention generates mental vibrations that travel to the “universal energy field,” initiating the calling forth of events and circumstances aligned with the essence of that intention.

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11 (Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P., 2002. *Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation: A 35-year odyssey*. *American Psychologist*, 57(9), 705–717.)

Although there is no direct scientific evidence supporting this notion, the idea is connected to a well-known concept in cognitive psychology: **“the effect of a clear goal on focus and behavioral attention.”** Several studies have demonstrated that precisely defining goals increases the likelihood of taking concrete steps toward achieving them.

- ♦ **The Difference between Psychological Goal-Setting and Energetic Intention:**

It is important to distinguish here between:

- ♦ Setting goals as a psychological and managerial tool that aids focus and decision-making (this is scientifically supported).
- ♦ And setting goals as an energetic signal with a metaphysical influence on external reality (this lacks scientific proof and remains a subject of debate).

In the literature of the law of attraction, it is not enough for a person to simply know what they want; they must fully believe that they deserve it and that it will inevitably come to them. This belief then opens the door to visualization and emotional charging, which are complementary steps in activating the intention.

- ▶ **Step Two: Mental Visualization — Creating Reality Through Imagination**

After precisely defining the goal, practitioners of the law of attraction move to what many consider the “most essential pillar” in the attraction process: mental visualization. The individual is asked to create a vivid mental image of themselves having already achieved their desire, capturing every detail of the moment: What do they see? Hear? Feel? Who is around them? How do they behave? The

clearer and more deeply felt this image is, the greater — it is believed — the likelihood of its manifestation in reality.

### ♦ **The Underlying Psychological Assumption:**

This concept is based on the premise that the brain does not fully distinguish between an actual experience and a vividly imagined one. Therefore, daily recall of a success scenario “reprograms the subconscious mind” and prepares the body, mind, and behavior to act as if the goal has already been achieved.

This idea is partially supported by studies in cognitive neuroscience, some of which indicate that mental practice can activate neural pathways associated with real actions, potentially enhancing performance. Richard Bartlett, in his book *The Success Principles*, highlights the role of visualization in “reprogramming the mind toward success.”<sup>12</sup>

### ♦ **From Athletic Performance to Attracting Events?**

However, moving from these findings to the claim that visualization alone is sufficient to “attract” money, a partner, or a job remains an unjustified leap scientifically. There is a vast gap between preparing the mind and reshaping reality, which cannot be bridged by belief or imagination alone.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that conscious visualization—when paired with a concrete action plan—can contribute to increased confidence, stabilization of mental focus, and reduction of anxiety, all of which indirectly influence real-world behavior.

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12 Driskell, J. E., Copper, C., & Moran, A. (1994). Does mental practice enhance performance? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(4), 481–492.  
Decety, J. (1996). The neurophysiological basis of motor imagery. *Behavioural Brain Research*, 77(1-2), 45–52.

### ♦ **Important Note:**

In some Law of Attraction literature, individuals are advised not to engage too much logical reasoning at this stage. “Realistic thinking,” or simply questioning, “How will this goal be achieved?” is considered a “negative mental interference” that may hinder attraction. Here arises a significant psychological paradox: unconditional faith in the outcome is encouraged, without regard for obstacles or plans—something that will later give rise to some of the criticisms we will discuss.

### ▶ **Step Three: Charging the Emotions – Transforming Feeling into Attractive Energy**

In the third step of applying the Law of Attraction, it is not enough for a person to merely set a goal and visualize it; they must feel as if the goal has already been achieved.

Emotion — according to this approach — is the crucial element because it gives the “energy vibration” its power and activates attraction more than mere abstract thought.

The individual is encouraged here to emotionally live in the future: to immerse themselves in feelings of joy, gratitude, contentment, and confidence, as if what they aspire to has already become part of their life, without waiting for any tangible proof.

### ♦ **Underlying Hypothesis:**

According to proponents of the Law of Attraction, the universe responds to emotional vibrations, not to words. Thus, negative emotions—such as fear, anxiety, and doubt—are considered confusing signals that hinder the “manifestation” of the desired outcome, because they express a lack of faith and a continuation of deficiency. Meanwhile, positive emotions are seen as an “effective

magnet” that attracts circumstances and events harmonious with them.

#### ♦ **Psychological Analysis:**

From a psychological perspective, there is a partially understandable aspect:

Positive emotions can enhance psychological resilience, self-confidence, and endurance—factors that often translate into better behavior, more effective communication, and a higher readiness to take initiative.

Researcher Barbara Fredrickson pointed out that positive emotions broaden the horizons of thinking and help in making better decisions. However, she also emphasized that this effect mostly remains internal and does not directly change the external world but rather prepares the individual to deal with it.

#### ♦ **Philosophical Point of Confusion:**

In much of the Law of Attraction literature, the boundary is often blurred between:

- ♦ Feeling as an internal factor that supports behavior,
- ♦ And feeling as an independent force that creates events.

Here lies one of the most critical methodological leaps: the feeling shifts from being a means of self-regulation to a tool that is assumed to reshape external reality without the need for planning, effort, or understanding of natural laws.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). *The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions*. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 218–226.  
Oettingen, G. (2014). *Rethinking Positive Thinking: Inside the New Science of Motivation*.

- ♦ **From Visualization to Actualization – What Is Missing from the Picture?**

The three steps to activating the Law of Attraction reveal an internally coherent logic on the surface: clarity of desire, precise visualization of the outcome, and strong emotional charge that keeps the individual in a positive mental state. Although these processes may produce a real internal psychological shift—in terms of motivation, confidence, and openness to possibilities—the fundamental question remains:

- ♦ **Is this internal state sufficient to shape external reality?**

And can feelings and visualizations transcend their psychological role to become a “cosmic” force that influences the course of events independently of effort, laws, and circumstances?

Although these hypotheses are psychologically appealing, they require deeper scientific and logical scrutiny—something that recent critical research in psychology has begun to raise. While some studies emphasize the importance of intention and optimism, they also stress the necessity of actual work, planning, and awareness of obstacles. In fact, some researchers argue that focusing solely on “ideal visualization” may sometimes lead to frustration if it is not paired with a realistic view of the path ahead.

## **The Impact of Positive Thinking: What Do the Research Studies Confirm?**

Many proponents of the Law of Attraction believe that positive thinking not only provides temporary psychological comfort but also possesses a real ability to improve a person’s quality of life and increase their chances of success. Some psychological studies have supported this hypothesis, albeit partially, by linking positive thinking

with mental health, resilience, perseverance, and adaptability. Below are the key findings of these studies:

## **1. Positive Thinking and Mental and Physical Well-being**

Research consistently suggests that optimistic individuals tend to enjoy higher levels of both psychological and physical well-being. They also demonstrate a greater capacity to adapt to stress, especially when compared to those who adopt negative or pessimistic thought patterns.

This beneficial effect is attributed, at least in part, to the role of positive thinking in reducing anxiety and stress levels. It also encourages a more flexible and constructive explanatory style—one that allows individuals to interpret daily events with greater openness, resilience, and emotional stability.<sup>14</sup>

## **2. Positive Thinking and Mental Perseverance – The Growth Mindset Theory**

From a complementary yet distinct perspective, renowned psychologist Carol Dweck advanced this understanding through her groundbreaking concept of the ***Growth Mindset***.

According to this theory, individuals who believe that their abilities are not fixed but can be cultivated over time tend to approach challenges not as threats to their self-worth, but as valuable opportunities for learning and self-improvement.

Dweck argues that when positive thinking is grounded in reality—and paired with a deep-seated belief in personal development

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<sup>14</sup> Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., & Segerstrom, S. C. (2010). *Optimism. Clinical Psychology Review*, 30(7), 879–889.

through effort—it fosters greater perseverance, higher tolerance for failure, and a resilient drive toward long-term success.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Positive Emotions and Psychological Adaptation - The Broaden-and-Build Theory

In a parallel psychological framework, Barbara Fredrickson introduced the ***Broaden-and-Build Theory***—a seminal contribution to the science of emotions.

According to this theory, positive emotions do more than merely induce a fleeting sense of well-being. They serve to broaden an individual's cognitive repertoire, enhance creative thinking, and foster more fluid and open social interactions. In essence, such emotions expand the mind's capacity to explore, connect, and grow.

Yet Fredrickson is careful to underscore a crucial caveat: while positive emotions can prime the inner landscape—cultivating mental readiness, emotional resilience, and adaptive flexibility—they do not, by themselves, enact direct change in the external world. Their power lies in their preparatory role, not in an inherent ability to manifest outcomes without deliberate, grounded action.<sup>16</sup>

#### ► Synthesis of the Findings

Cumulatively, these studies illuminate a nuanced reality: positive thinking and supportive emotional states play a vital role in fortifying psychological resilience, enhancing performance, and cultivating adaptive capacities. They act as internal catalysts—mobilizing the mind and spirit toward growth, perseverance, and more effective engagement with life's demands.

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15 Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Random House.

16 Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). *The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions*. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 218–226.

However, their influence remains incomplete in isolation. Optimism and emotional uplift do not, in themselves, guarantee the realization of goals or the transformation of external circumstances. Rather, they prepare the individual for action; they *prime* the psyche, but do not replace the necessity for concrete strategies, developed skills, or sustained effort.

This distinction forms a crucial gateway into a more critical examination of the Law of Attraction—particularly in its absolutist form, which often overlooks the indispensable role of grounded, goal-oriented action in shaping outcomes.

## ■ Critiques of the Law of Attraction

Despite the widespread popularity the Law of Attraction has enjoyed, it has been met with substantial criticism from psychologists and researchers in the fields of self-development and motivational psychology. These critiques center on its detachment of thought from action, its disregard for the natural laws that govern reality, and its neglect of the complex social and psychological obstacles that individuals may face. The most prominent objections include:

### 1. The Emphasis on Wishing Without Action

This is perhaps the most recurrent criticism leveled against the Law of Attraction: its tendency to underplay the essential role of structured effort and deliberate action in achieving meaningful goals. Positive thinking—no matter how vivid or powerful—does not, in and of itself, yield tangible results unless it is translated into purposeful steps and sustained endeavor.

Psychologist Gabriele Oettingen has drawn attention to this issue, arguing that relying solely on visualization and wishful ideation may generate a false sense of satisfaction—one that can dampen motivation and reduce the likelihood of concrete achievement.

Rather than propelling individuals forward, this psychological comfort may, paradoxically, lead to inertia and a decline in real-world performance.<sup>17</sup>

## **2. The Psychological Consequences of Excessive Wishful Thinking**

Psychologists warn that overly idealized visualization may foster unrealistic expectations, setting the stage for deep emotional disappointment when faced with real-world challenges. Instead of fostering psychological resilience, this pattern can undermine one's ability to tolerate failure or adapt effectively when plans go awry.

Gabriele Oettingen's research has shown that individuals who indulge in mental fantasies without accounting for potential obstacles often exhibit a measurable decline in their actual commitment to their goals. In other words, immersing oneself in a dream-like future may ironically erode the very motivation needed to make that future real.<sup>18</sup>

## **3. Ignoring Life Circumstances and Social Complexity**

Many scholars have pointed out that the simplified version of the Law of Attraction tends to overlook the structural and socio-economic realities that shape human lives. It is hardly reasonable, they argue, to suggest that someone grappling with extreme poverty, systemic marginalization, or chronic adversity can simply "attract" wealth or success through the power of thought alone.

In her incisive critique, Barbara Ehrenreich noted that such unbridled optimism often reframes systemic failure as a personal flaw—placing

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17 Oettingen, G. (2014). *Rethinking Positive Thinking: Inside the New Science of Motivation*

18 Oettingen, G., & Mayer, D. (2002). *The motivating function of thinking about the future: Expectations versus fantasies*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(5), 1198–1212.

the blame on the individual for not “thinking positively enough,” while conveniently sidestepping the broader forces at play.<sup>19</sup>

#### **4. Misleading Individuals About the Value of Growth Mindset and Hard Work**

Some psychologists argue that the classical formulation of the Law of Attraction stands in stark contrast to the foundational principles of the **Growth Mindset**—a concept that emphasizes perseverance, resilience in the face of difficulty, and the transformative power of learning through failure.

Carol Dweck, the scholar behind this paradigm, maintains that while positive thinking can serve as an initial spark, it should never replace the disciplined process of consistent effort. Replacing strategic labor with passive optimism, she warns, risks turning motivation into illusion.<sup>20</sup>

#### **► Conclusion: A Cautionary Note on the Law of Attraction**

The critique of the Law of Attraction is not rooted merely in its departure from rationality, but in its potential to promote an alluring illusion—one that may ultimately dilute intrinsic motivation, distort personal responsibility, and distance individuals from a mature, grounded engagement with the world.

Rather than rejecting positivity outright, this chapter argues for a more integrated view—one in which intention is not severed from action, and hope is tempered by realism. In the next section, we explore how positivity can become a genuinely empowering force—when framed within a broader paradigm that honors personal effort,

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19 Ehrenreich, B. (2009). *Bright-sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*

20 Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Random House.

life's natural laws, and a faith-informed understanding of trust (*tawakkul*) and divine causality (*sunan*).

## **Positive Thinking as a Tool—Not a Substitute for Effort**

Despite the critiques discussed earlier, it would be a mistake to dismiss positive thinking entirely. When framed within a comprehensive and grounded vision, it can serve as a powerful catalyst—activating inner motivation, increasing psychological resilience, and fostering a readiness to engage challenges constructively.

Angela Duckworth, in her seminal work on *grit*, highlights this dynamic. She shows that a positive mindset can significantly enhance an individual's capacity to persist through hardship—but only as part of a broader equation. Mental optimism may raise the odds of perseverance, but it cannot, on its own, ensure success.<sup>21</sup>

Carol Dweck echoes this view through her *growth mindset* theory, which links achievement not to innate talent but to the belief in one's capacity to grow. Yet this belief must be anchored in concrete behavior—deliberate practice, strategic effort, and a willingness to learn from failure. Without such engagement, optimism becomes little more than wishful thinking.<sup>22</sup>

## **Toward a Deeper Vision: Beyond Motivation and Belief**

While the spiritual and theological dimensions of these ideas will be explored more fully in a dedicated chapter, our aim here is not merely to amplify motivation or cultivate belief in success. What we seek is a

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21 Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. Scribner.

22 Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Random House.

holistic framework—one that reweaves intention with purpose, effort with reliance on God (tawakkul), and ambition with inner peace.

This is not a vision that treats positive thinking as a replacement for action, but rather as a single thread in a broader, faith-rooted tapestry of achievement. It is a vision that understands human striving as part of a greater system of divine laws and universal principles—where success is not summoned by thoughts alone, but by thoughts aligned with values, effort, and trust in God.

This is the path we now begin to explore in the next section of this chapter.

## Part Two: The Law of Striving and Reliance – An Integrated Islamic Vision for Achieving Goals

When a person looks ahead with hope—longing to reach a goal or transform their condition—the very first stirrings begin within: the awakening of *intention*.

Many modern philosophies, such as the Law of Attraction, have sought to elevate the status of intention, attributing to it an almost autonomous power to shape reality through focused thought, vivid visualization, and charged emotion.

Yet the Islamic worldview offers a perspective that is both broader and deeper. It does not deny the influence of intention, nor does it

diminish the value of optimism. Instead, it reorders the internal compass: realigning intention with action, trust in God (*tawakkul*) with diligent striving (*sa'y*), and personal desire with divine contentment (*riḍā*).

This is not a vision of passivity cloaked in hope, but a dynamic, spiritually rooted framework in which human effort harmonizes with divine wisdom—and success becomes not merely a matter of attraction, but of sincere alignment, disciplined effort, and profound trust.

In this perspective, outcomes are not drawn into being through the “magnetism of thought,” but rather through sincere intention, dedicated effort, supplication that connects the heart to the Divine, and surrender to His wisdom.

This framework may be aptly described as the ***Law of Striving and Reliance***—not as a metaphysical formula, but as a devotional and practical methodology. It links the human being to God, urges action, and frees the soul from the illusion of absolute control over outcomes.

This approach does not reject positive thinking, but places it in its rightful position: a helpful companion, not the engine of destiny; a motivator for action, not a creator of fate.

In the pages that follow, we will explore the core elements of this Qur’anic and spiritual vision, as they are reflected in concepts such as:

- ♦ **Tawakkul (Trust in God):** Confidence in the Divine without abandoning the means.
- ♦ **Du’ā (Supplication):** Drawing strength from above, not merely from within.
- ♦ **‘Amal (Action):** A form of worship and a divine law of life.

- ♦ **Riḍā (Contentment):** Inner peace amid uncertainty.
- ♦ **Positive Thinking:** An act of good faith in God—not a substitute for divine laws with mere wishes.

Thus, striving in Islam transforms into a path toward God before it becomes a path toward worldly goals, and success shifts from being merely an outcome to a sign of sincerity and devotion in the pursuit.

## **Tawakkul: Liberation from Attachment, Not from Effort**

At the heart of the Islamic methodology for achieving goals stands Tawakkul — not as a vague emotional state, nor as a substitute for planning, but as a profound existential stance that reorients the heart toward God and frees the will from the illusion of absolute control.

Tawakkul is not the opposite of striving; rather, it is what gives striving its true meaning and balance. The believer plans, exerts effort, and perseveres, yet does not attach their heart to results beyond their control. Instead, they entrust those outcomes to the One who governs all with wisdom: *“And rely upon Allah if you should be believers”* (Al-Ma’idah, 23)

### ► **How Does Tawakkul Differ from the Law of Attraction?**

In the **Law of Attraction**, one is told to **control outcomes** by mastering their thoughts and emotions—believing that reality will bend to the frequency of their desires. Success, in that view, depends on mental control and personal projection.

In contrast, **faith-based tawakkul (reliance upon God)** teaches the heart to **let go of attachment to results**—not as a form of passivity, but as a path to live with deeper trust and calm surrender. The believer enters each moment fully engaged, not withdrawn from life, but empowered—knowing that the matter has been entrusted to God, without ever halting their own effort.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) beautifully captured this balance in his saying: ***“If you were to rely on God with true reliance, He would provide for you as He provides for the birds—they go out hungry in the morning and return full in the evening.”***

This hadith reveals that tawakkul is not about waiting—it’s about moving forward with trust, taking the means while knowing that sustenance and outcomes do not flow from the means, but from God Himself.

### ► **Tawakkul Is an Inner Power That Cultivates Peace and Steadfastness**

When a believer **fully realizes that outcomes are not in their own hands, but in the hands of God**, the pressure of fearing failure begins to lift. Emotional burdens soften, and spiritual energy is renewed. The believer no longer relies on “energy” or “the universe,” but on a **Wise and Merciful Lord**—One who knows what to grant, what to delay, and what to withhold out of loving care.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) captured this truth with eloquent precision: ***“The root of a strong heart is reliance upon God.”***

The more a heart **leans upon its Lord**, the more it becomes anchored, composed, and aligned. Restlessness fades, not because the journey becomes easy, but because the soul is no longer gambling on its own strength—it is placing its hope in the One **who never disappoints those who trust in Him**.

As the Qur'an assures us: *"And whoever places their trust in God—He is sufficient for them."* (At-Ṭalāq, 3)

This doesn't mean that God will always grant us exactly what we desire. Rather, it means **He will give us what will truly benefit us**—what will elevate us, purify us, and gently guide us along the path of wisdom and growth.

God's sufficiency lies not in fulfilling our limited expectations, but in offering us what our hearts need—**even before we realize it ourselves.**

## **Du'ā': When Desire Becomes a Heartfelt Turning Toward God**

In the Islamic worldview, **du'ā' (supplication)** is not merely a means of requesting material outcomes—it is a **sincere, inward turning of the heart toward God.** It is an ongoing affirmation that **all power belongs to Him alone.**

Du'ā' is not a message sent to the universe; it is an **intimate conversation with the Creator.** It is not a tool to "program reality" through mental force, but a sacred connection that **nourishes faith, reorders priorities, and keeps the heart alive with its need for God.**

God says in the Qur'an: *"Say: My Lord would not care for you were it not for your supplication."* (Al-Furqān, 77)

This verse gives du'ā' **existential weight.** It is not a mere ritual—it is the **very signature of the relationship** between the servant and their Lord.

## ► From a Spiritual Perspective: Certainty and Divine Unity

When a believer raises their hands in **du'ā'**, they are not addressing a vague or abstract force in the universe—they are **affirming their deepest creed**: that nothing they seek can come to pass except by God's permission, and nothing they fear can be repelled except by His mercy.

This simple act of supplication **frees the heart from anxiety**, reminding the soul that its path is not governed by chaos, but lovingly directed by **the One who is more merciful to them than they are to themselves**. They are not walking alone.

God declares in the Qur'an: *"And when My servants ask you concerning Me—indeed, I am near. I respond to the call of the supplicant when he calls upon Me."* (Al-Baqarah, 186)

In this light, **du'ā'** is **not merely the listing of desires**—it is a profound act of **faith**, a renewal of hope, a restoration of spiritual connection, and a deepening of **trust in the Divine**.

## ► From a Practical Perspective: Motivation and Sustained Effort

**Du'ā' does not replace action—it empowers it.** It prepares the soul to act with greater sincerity, deeper awareness, and a stronger connection to God. The believer does not pray instead of striving; they pray **so they never fall into the illusion that striving alone is enough**.

And when the specific outcome is not granted in the way they hoped, the believer is not consumed by despair. They trust that the answer may come in **another form, at another time**, or perhaps through the quiet removal of a harm they will never even see.

**Du'ā' keeps the journey alive with hope.** It protects the goal from becoming a source of pressure or obsession. It ensures that ambition remains **liberating**, not enslaving—and that every step forward is infused with meaning, rather than burdened by expectation.

### ► **Du'ā' Is Not Clinging—It Is Surrender**

In the spiritual philosophy of du'ā', the believer does not remain confined to **what they want**—they open themselves to **what God wants for them**. And in this sacred shift lies the deepest freedom: **freedom from anxious attachment**, and from the fear of unfulfilled outcomes.

Lady Fatimah Al-Zahra (peace be upon her) expressed this truth with luminous clarity: ***"Whoever raises their pure worship up to God, God will send down upon them what is most beneficial."***

True supplication is not an attempt to **impose our will upon destiny**. It is a doorway into the realm of **Divine Oneness**, where we pray with full trust, strive with sincerity, and surrender with serenity—believing that **whatever comes from God is best**, even if it is delayed or arrives in a form we did not expect.

## **Action: Walking the Earth with a Heaven-Focused Intention**

In the Islamic worldview, action is not merely a tool for achieving ambitions—it is a **manifestation of servitude to God** and a fulfillment of the human role as **a vicegerent upon the earth**.

The purpose of our creation is not to remain idle or indulge in wishful thinking—it is to strive, to build, and to purify the soul through movement and responsibility.

God commands: *“Say: Work, for God will see your deeds.”*  
(At-Tawbah, 105)

Here, the call to action is not solely about results. Rather, the act itself is **an act of devotion**, a spiritual responsibility, and a testament to the sincerity of intention.

### ► **Action vs. “Passive Attraction”**

In the Law of Attraction, **mental visualization and emotional intensity** are often presented as sufficient for manifesting outcomes—even in the absence of concrete steps.

But from a faith-based perspective, **intention bears fruit only when joined with effort**, and supplication is not fulfilled unless it is backed by action.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) beautifully summarized this principle when he said: *“Tie your camel, and trust in God.”*

**Tawakkul does not mean abandoning the means**—it means **beginning the work**, continuing the effort, and holding a firm conviction that God will bless the sincere struggle.

### ► **Striving Is an Existential Responsibility**

When God declared the human being as His vicegerent on Earth, He bound that sacred role to effort and cultivation.

He said: *“Indeed, I will place upon the earth a successor.”*(Al-Baqarah, 30)

And He also said: *“It is He who made the earth manageable for you—so walk among its paths and eat of His provision. And to Him is the resurrection.”* (Al-Mulk, 15)

Thus, striving upon the earth is not a luxury nor a personal pursuit of status—it is a response to a divine command. Every step taken in work and effort is a reminder that the ultimate destination is not provision, but returning to God.

## ► **Striving—Not Wishing—Defines Worth**

While some philosophies suggest that “you will attract what you deserve,” Islam teaches a different standard: **you deserve what you strive for**, with sincerity and persistent action.

As the Qur’an states: *“And that there is not for man except what he strives for, And that his effort will be seen.”* (An-Najm, 39–40)

The earth itself was fashioned as a testing ground—not for idle desires, but for truthful effort: *“Indeed, We have made whatever is on the earth an adornment for it, that We may test them—which of them is best in deeds.”* (Al-Kahf, 7)

This divine logic reshapes how we understand success:

Success is not a gift reserved for the intellect alone. It is the **fruit of a delicate balance**—between reason and heart, effort and surrender, sincerity and alignment with divine laws.

## **Contentment: Inner Tranquility in the Presence of Divine Wisdom**

In the spiritual philosophy of striving and trust, **success is not measured solely by outward achievements**, but also by the serenity and satisfaction that settle within the soul.

The believer does not tie their happiness to the fulfillment of every goal exactly as imagined. Instead, they live in a state of **conscious**

**surrender**, anchored in the certainty that **God knows what is best**, and is more merciful to them than even their highest hopes.

## ► **Contentment Is Not Defeat—It Is a Station of Faith**

In the Islamic worldview, **riḍā (contentment)** is not a passive resignation, nor is it an excuse for laziness or failure. Rather, it is a **noble spiritual station**—a balance between continuous striving and peaceful acceptance; between passionate effort and calm trust; between desiring noble ends and surrendering to the One who holds all outcomes.

As the Qur'an affirms: ***"No misfortune strikes except by permission of God. And whoever believes in God—He guides their heart. And God is Knowing of all things."*** (At-Taghābun, 11)

In this sacred balance, the heart of the believer **finds its stillness**—knowing that even when life unfolds differently than planned, **it unfolds in perfect wisdom**.

When a believer sincerely entrusts their affairs to God, He grants a radiant light within the heart—an inner illumination that guides one gently toward contentment. This divine light reassures the soul that nothing occurs beyond the scope of God's knowledge; every event unfolds with wisdom and mercy, even if its purpose remains veiled from human eyes in the moment.

The Qur'an beautifully captures this exalted state of submission and tranquility in the words: ***"But no, by your Lord, they will not [truly] believe until they make you, [O Muhammad], judge concerning that over which they dispute among themselves and then find within themselves no discomfort from what you have judged and submit in [full, willing] submission."*** (An-Nisa, 65)

True faith, therefore, is not a mere outward profession of words, but a profound acceptance arising deep within the heart. The soul surrenders, not from helplessness or compulsion, but from the unwavering certainty that God's decree is more just than one's desires, and more compassionate than one's hopes.

► **Contentment liberates from anxiety... and keeps the heart alive with God.**

In a world that glorifies achievement and measures worth by outcomes, contentment arrives to redefine the dignity that dwells within. The believer's true dignity does not rest upon what they have attained, but in their steadfastness along the path, their serene surrender, and their sincere orientation—whether God opens before them the doors of their desires or redirects them to something deeper and more beneficial.

Imam Zain al-Abidin (peace be upon him) eloquently expressed this state of the heart in his supplication:

***"O God, make me content with what You have apportioned to me, so that I neither hasten what You delay nor delay what You hasten."***

Here, contentment is not a reluctant acceptance of imposed circumstances, but a profound trust in divine timing—an unconditional submission to a will that never errs, never delays unjustly, and never neglects.

God Almighty declares: ***"Say, 'Nothing will ever befall us except what Allah has decreed for us.'"*** (At-Tawbah, 51)

Notice He says ***"for us"*** and not ***"upon us"***—everything that comes from God, even if it appears harsh, is for our own good: to nurture us, to purify our hearts, to elevate our spirits. This is the very essence of contentment.

► **Contentment does not erase sorrow... but it narrows it with faith.**

When a desire remains unfulfilled or a wish is delayed, the believer is not called to deny their pain. Rather, they are invited to dwell within their grief in the presence of God—not in the isolation of despair. They echo the words of those who have grasped the secret of true reliance:

***“I am content with Allah as my Lord, with Islam as my religion, and with Muhammad as my Prophet.”***

For such a soul, success is no longer measured by outward fulfillment, but by the sincerity of intention, the tranquility of heart, and the willing submission to the will of the One whose wisdom never errs.

## **Positive Thinking: Trusting in God, Not Programming the Universe**

Within the Islamic worldview, the power of positive thinking on the soul and conduct is neither denied nor dismissed; rather, it is affirmed—yet from a fundamentally different standpoint. Islam does not present positive thinking as a tool to program reality or attract desired outcomes, but as a profound spiritual and ethical stance rooted in good expectation of God, trust in His kindness, certainty in His justice, and contentment with His decree.

God Almighty declares in a sacred hadith Qudsi: ***“I am as My servant thinks of Me, so let him think of Me as he wishes.”***

When a person nurtures good thoughts of their Lord, their heart opens wide to hope, drawing strength not merely from within themselves, but from the boundless heavens above.

## ► **Positivity in Islam: Fuel for Intention, Not a Substitute for Effort**

Positive thinking in Islam is closely tied to focusing on possible good, anticipating relief, and recalling blessings—without denying pain or ignoring reality. A Muslim's optimism is not born from trust in the universe, but from trust in God, knowing that whatever befalls them is what God has decreed for them, not against them.

As the Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) said:

*“Train yourself to hold good intentions and noble aims, and you will find success arriving unexpectedly.”*

Here, positivity serves as the springboard for earnest striving—not a replacement for it. Good expectation fuels the will; it does not dull it.

## ► **The Fundamental Difference: From Attachment to Outcomes to Sincerity in Effort**

In the law of attraction, success is often tied to a continuous feeling of confidence and achievement, which may quietly breed anxiety whenever results are delayed. In the faith-based perspective, however, trust in God frees one from attachment to outcomes and invites a spirit of openness toward life—without wagering one's inner dignity on the fulfillment of hopes.

God Almighty declares:

*“And their Lord responded to them, ‘Indeed, I do not allow the work of any worker among you to be lost.’”* (Al-Imran, 195)

Positivity, then, is not a promise that results will unfold as one imagines, but a sacred assurance that God sees, values, and never lets sincere effort go to waste.

## ► **Conclusion: From Attraction to Reliance... Reconstructing the Vision**

The Law of Attraction sought to restore value to intention, power to thoughts, and purpose to imagination in a world overwhelmed by relentless pace and material pursuits.

It partially succeeded in reviving a sense of personal responsibility and recognizing the role that thoughts and emotions play in shaping behavior. Yet, in its absolute form, it burdened humanity with an unbearable weight—separating intention from divine laws, vision from action, and self-confidence from trust in God.

The faith-based vision presented here neither opposes optimism nor diminishes the worth of positive thinking. Rather, it returns all these elements to the true balance of spiritual purification, the framework of servitude, and the path of stewardship entrusted to humanity.

Success in Islam is not measured solely by what is achieved, but by the sincerity of one's effort, the purity of intention, and the tranquility of the heart in the presence of the outcome—whether it unfolds according to our wishes or according to God's divine wisdom.

In the Law of Attraction, the individual is the center, and the universe serves as their servant. In the Law of Striving and Reliance, the human is a servant, the world a testing ground, and God the Planner, the Helper, and the Just Rewarder.

Human dignity lies not in the power to "attract what one desires," but in the sincerity of one's longing, the integrity of one's pursuit, freedom from attachment, and contentment with whatever God has apportioned.

God Almighty declares: *“Perhaps you hate a thing while it is good for you, and perhaps you love a thing while it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you do not know.”* (Al-Baqarah, 216)

This verse captures the essence of contentment—the final cornerstone in the faith-filled architecture of striving:

To act as if everything is within our grasp, yet place our trust as if nothing is truly in our control, And then walk toward God with unwavering confidence—not because we hold the path, But because we trust the One who guides us along it.

### ► **How Does the Faith-Based Perspective Address the Methodological Gaps in the Philosophy of Attraction?**

When we reflect on the scientific and philosophical critiques directed at the Law of Attraction—ranging from its neglect of divine laws, attachment to outcomes, to its fragile psychological sustainability—we find that the faith-based approach does more than merely respond to these gaps. It transcends them by reconstructing the very foundations of the concepts involved.

While the Law of Attraction promises results through focused intention and positive thinking, the Islamic methodology situates intention within the framework of servitude to God, balances optimism with reliance on Him, anchors action in the context of stewardship, and centers contentment in wholehearted submission.

Therefore, the call to reliance on God (tawakkul), prayer, diligent effort, and contentment is not merely an alternative to positive thinking. Rather, it is a profound and grounded response to all the questions that the Law of Attraction fails to resolve.

Islam does not ask a person to “attract” success but to walk toward it with sincere intention, steady steps, and a heart reassured by God—not by oneself.

## ► **Conclusion: The Balance Between Heaven and Earth... in the Pursuit of Goals**

In a world prone to swinging between stark materialism and idealistic illusions, Islam offers a unique path in approaching one’s goals: to strive as if you alone bear responsibility, and to rely on God as if He alone directs all affairs.

To dream, plan, and labor—yet never let your dream become an idol, your planning a shackle, or your striving a burden upon your soul.

The **“Law of Striving and Reliance”** does not exclude positive thinking; rather, it integrates it with reliance on God and prayer, grounding it in sincerity and contentment. From the faith-based perspective, success is not merely a result—it is a sign of sincere intention, purity of purpose, and a heart steadfast amid hope and action.

Contrasting with the Law of Attraction, which promises that the universe will grant one’s thoughts, Islam teaches that God grants what truly benefits a person—when they are sincere in their effort, content with His decree, and maintain good expectations of Him.

Thus, the journey toward achieving goals becomes a path to God before it is a path to results. Contentment within the work itself becomes greater than any outcome attained, for you live in tranquility amid striving—not merely in anticipation of fruition.

## Attraction and the Law of Effort and Reliance (Sincere Endeavor and Tawakkul):

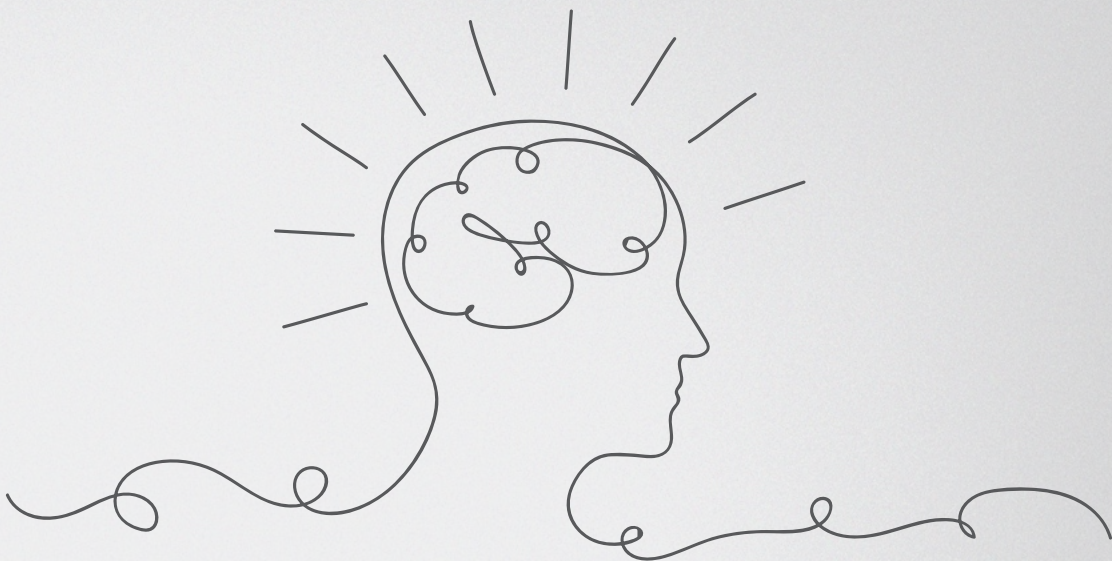
Aspect	Law of Attraction	Law of Striving and Reliance (Sincere Endeavor and Tawakkul)
Underlying Philosophy	Relies on cosmic energy and the power of thought to shape reality.	Rooted in monotheism: God is the Planner, and humans are servants commanded to strive.
Intention	Central and considered sufficient if strong and clear.	Important, but does not replace action; measured by sincerity in turning to God.
Mental Visualization	A core tool to achieve goals; emotions are to be embodied as if the goal is already attained.	Encouraged but coupled with prayer, action, and submission to God's wisdom.
Action	Not central; sometimes can be overlooked or bypassed.	A fundamental pillar of servitude and stewardship; reliance is only valid alongside effort.
Positive Emotions	Means of attraction; continuous maintenance is required.	A grace from God, lived with contentment and tranquility—not as a controlling tool.
Role of the Individual	The center of existence, capable of attracting whatever they desire.	A striving servant, commanded to act, reliant on God, detached from outcomes.

Aspect	Law of Attraction	Law of Striving and Reliance (Sincere Endeavor and Tawakkul)
Role of the Universe	Responsive to human thought, reflecting its vibrations.	A realm of testing, created and governed by God's command, not by human will.
Outcomes	Assumed to be controlled by intention and visualization.	Left to God; pursued sincerely and accepted with a peaceful heart.
Psychological State	Unstable: attachment to results creates anxiety if delayed.	Stable: contentment and submission ease tension and foster tranquility.
Ultimate Goal	Fulfillment of personal desires.	Attainment of God's pleasure and spiritual purification through striving and contentment.

This comparison reveals that the difference between the two models lies not merely in the means, but fundamentally in how one perceives oneself, the Divine, and the very purpose of striving in life.

The Law of Attraction elevates the power of thought, placing the burden of shaping reality squarely on the individual's shoulders. In contrast, the Law of Striving and Reliance restores balance to the human condition: to think, act, and dream, yet never to worship one's desires or judge oneself solely by outcomes. Rather, one entrusts the heart to God, transforming every step in life into an act of worship and a pursuit toward a light far greater than any earthly goal.





Chapter Eleven

# **The Power of Now – Between the Philosophy of the Moment and Conscious Presence**

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Part One: The Power of Now – The  
Philosophy of the Moment and a  
Temporary Liberation from Time

## A Contemplative Introduction – When the Moment Becomes a Psychological Refuge

In a world where rhythms quicken and tasks and pressures intertwine, many find themselves detached from their present moments—immersed either in past memories that no longer return, or anxieties over a future yet to arrive. Between an irretrievable past and an unborn future arises a profound need for a space of calm, a presence that restores balance to the self.

From this emerged the idea of “living in the moment” as both a psychological and spiritual tool aimed at drawing one back to the Now. It is proposed as a means to alleviate tension, sharpen focus, and attain a certain measure of temporary inner peace.

This concept found wide expression in *The Power of Now*, by the German thinker Eckhart Tolle, one of the foremost voices advocating the necessity of liberation from past and future, and of grounding oneself firmly in the present moment. He asserts that the human mind is among the greatest obstacles to true contentment, as it drowns us in regrets of yesterday and anxieties over tomorrow, depriving us of full engagement with the here and now.

Tolle holds that true happiness does not reside in achieving future goals, but in the profound ability to savor the present moment. He states, “When you allow yourself to focus on the now, you break free from the chains of the past and the expectations of the future.”

Yet, the lingering question remains: Is simply living in the moment enough to find tranquility? Can the Now alone bestow meaning? Or does the human soul require seeing the present in the light of what has passed and what is yet to come—finding balance through a

holistic vision of time that weaves together lessons learned, purposeful action, and ultimate purpose?

In this chapter, we delve into the concept of the “Power of Now” as presented by Eckhart Tolle. We will examine the main criticisms leveled against it by scholars of psychology and philosophy, and then offer a balanced Islamic perspective that reconstructs the idea of “presence” within a broader epistemological and spiritual framework. This approach harmonizes benefiting from the present moment, reflecting on the past, and aspiring toward the future—all within a conscious presence that seeks equilibrium rather than isolation, and understanding rather than mere silence.

## **Practices for Reaching Presence – Applications of “The Power of Now”**

### **► From Mindfulness to the Liberation of Consciousness**

Eckhart Tolle argues that psychological suffering does not arise from the actual conditions of life, but rather from the mind’s habitual entanglement with the past and the future.

Human beings, as he describes them, do not truly live in the now—they mentally reside in times they cannot change or control.

Thus, the first step toward liberation—and toward inner peace itself—is to return to the present moment and to inhabit the “now” with full awareness.

But this “presence” is not merely momentary focus. It carries within it a far-reaching existential vision—one that transforms the way a person thinks about time, about the self, and about the meaning of happiness.

## ► The Philosophy of the Moment in Tolle's View

The philosophy of *The Power of Now* centers on the idea that time is not merely an external framework—but an internal prison, unless we free ourselves from it.

Tolle believes that the human mind, when left unchecked, generates an endless stream of thoughts—most of which are either tied to the past (regret, sorrow, over analysis) or to the future (anxiety, expectation, relentless planning).

This constant preoccupation, he argues, renders a person absent from the only moment they truly possess: the now.

Accordingly, Tolle calls for a conscious detachment from psychological time.

He urges the individual to realize that the past is but memory, and the future mere anticipation— while the only truth we truly inhabit lies in this very moment.

In this light, the “Now” is not just a point in time, but a gateway to inner peace—a space in which painful identities, conflicting desires, and the old narratives of the self begin to dissolve.

Living in the moment, according to Tolle, liberates the individual from the burden of psychological identity, returning them to the simplicity of being, the stillness of awareness, and the purity of experience.

Thus, the “Now” transforms from a mere point in time into a new dimension of consciousness— where life is no longer measured by years, but by the depth of presence, the calm of spirit, and the release from the whirlpools of thought.<sup>23</sup>

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23 Tolle, E. (1997). *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. New World Library.

## ► **Breath: The Silent Gateway to Presence**

In Eckhart Tolle's philosophy, breathing is more than a biological process—it is a natural window into pure awareness.

Tolle suggests that simply observing the breath, without trying to change or control it, helps the individual break free from the repetitive currents of thought and enter a moment of true presence.

According to Tolle, the mind cannot be fully present while it is entangled in memories and expectations—and this presence cannot be forced, but rather accessed through gentle attention to something living, simple, and immediate... like the breath.

Focusing on inhalation and exhalation, according to Tolle, slows down the pace of thought, calms the nervous system, and brings the individual back into the direct bodily realm—away from mental noise.

This type of breath-centered presence is used as an initial entry point before moving into deeper practices such as meditation and quiet observation of thoughts.

A study by Zeidan et al. (2010) indicated that breath-focused mindfulness meditation significantly contributes to reducing anxiety levels and improving cognitive attention, even after short-term training.<sup>24</sup>

## ► **Observe thoughts without judgment**

In the heart of the “Power of Now” philosophy stands the concept of “watching the mind.”

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<sup>24</sup> Zeidan, F., Johnson, S. K., Diamond, B. J., David, Z., & Goolkasian, P. (2010). Mindfulness meditation improves cognition: Evidence of brief mental training. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 19(2), 597–605. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2010.03.014>

Eckhart Tolle encourages individuals to break free from identification with their thoughts, to realize that the mind is not the self, and that what stirs within is not necessarily a reflection of one's truth.

He asserts that much of our psychological suffering arises from emotional entanglement with streams of thought — especially those rooted in regret, fear, or judgment.

To counter this, he proposes the practice of “the watcher awareness”: a state in which one trains the self to stand at the edge of thoughts without being swept into them — observing them as if they were clouds drifting across a still sky.

This does not mean that one must deny their emotions or suppress the self, but rather grant themselves enough distance to see each thought for what it truly is—neither magnified nor denied.

Such mindful presence, anchored in quiet observation, is said to ease inner tension, restore emotional equilibrium, and allow the individual to dwell in the present moment without being swept away by mental or emotional currents.

A study by Brown and Ryan (2003) affirms that individuals who cultivate mindfulness—and relate to their thoughts as observers rather than participants—tend to experience heightened self-awareness, greater emotional stability, and more mature behavioral responses.<sup>25</sup>

## ► **Daily Meditation: Anchoring Presence and Disciplining the Mind**

In the philosophy of “The Power of Now,” meditation is far more than a mental exercise;

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25 Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(4), 822–848. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.4.822>

it is the sacred space where one trains the mind to stop leaping between the past and the future, to learn simply how to “be” — without the constant compulsion to “think.”

Eckhart Tolle sees daily meditation as a foundational practice for embedding presence into everyday life.

Through it, the individual learns to sit in silence, observing the breath, thoughts, and emotions — without resistance, without entanglement, and without the urge to fix or alter anything in the moment.

The essence of meditation does not lie in forcefully silencing the mind, but rather in gently diminishing its dominion over the self. Through brief yet consistent daily practices, meditation gently guides one back to the serene core of their being, sparing the soul from being swept away by every passing thought or fleeting emotion.

Tolle advocates engaging in meditation once or twice a day, even if only for a few minutes, portraying it as a mental discipline that cultivates a fertile ground for the blossoming of presence. This practice nurtures the ability to fully inhabit the present moment, extending its grace far beyond the confines of the meditation session itself.

A meta-analytic review conducted by Hofmann and colleagues in 2010 substantiates these insights, revealing that mindfulness meditation yields a moderate reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression. Moreover, it fosters a deepening sense of inner peace—an effect most profound when the practice is embraced with regularity.<sup>26</sup>

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26 Hofmann, S. G., Sawyer, A. T., Witt, A. A., & Oh, D. (2010). *The effect of mindfulness-based therapy on anxiety and depression: A meta-analytic review*. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 78(2), 169–183. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018555>

## ► **Conscious Engagement in Daily Tasks: Transforming Routine into a Practice of Presence**

One of the most profound applications of the philosophy of *The Power of Now* unfolds not in formal meditation sessions, but within the very fabric of everyday life. Eckhart Tolle emphasizes that presence should not be confined to moments of silence; rather, it must permeate the heart of ordinary action.

Walking, eating, washing hands, tidying up—each of these seemingly mundane acts becomes, in this perspective, a daily opportunity to reconnect with the present moment. The instant one brings full awareness to these simple deeds, they transcend mechanical routine and blossom into rich sensory and spiritual experiences. Time slows down within, and the soul regains its equilibrium.

Tolle holds that every task, no matter how small, harbors within it a seed of meditation. Living with focused attention—free from haste or distraction—not only cultivates a profound sense of peace but also restores to the individual a sovereign command over the flow of their day.

This form of “active meditation” extends the practice of presence beyond formal sessions, weaving it into the fabric of daily life as a gradual, simple, yet potent way of being.

A study by Lindsay (2015) supports this view, demonstrating that mindful engagement in everyday activities enhances the quality of attention and interpersonal connection. It also alleviates the stress associated with repetitive tasks, while enriching the enjoyment of the present experience.<sup>27</sup>

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27 Lindsay, M. (2015). *The Social Psychology of Connection and Empathy*. Harvard Press.

## ► Conclusion:

Through these varied practices—whether sitting in silent stillness, walking with mindful awareness, observing the breath, or witnessing thoughts without attachment—Tolle seeks to cultivate a state of presence that restores one's inner equilibrium and lightens the weight of psychological time.

These tools are offered as practical means to attain inner peace, deliberately distanced from the complexities of psychoanalysis or religious dogma. They are championed across therapeutic and educational literature as repeatable, measurable exercises—accessible gateways to lasting calm and centeredness.

Yet, despite its simplicity and allure, this approach is not without its questions:

- ♦ Is such continuous presence truly attainable at all times?
- ♦ Can one truly separate oneself from memory and aspiration without harm?
- ♦ And do these practices suffice to fulfill the deeper needs for meaning, purpose, and ethical engagement with the world?

In the following section, we will examine the most prominent scientific and philosophical critiques directed at *The Power of Now*, paving the way for an alternative perspective—one that aspires to be more holistic and attuned to the human condition and its existential needs.

# Critical Studies on the Concept of The Power of Now

Despite the widespread appeal of *The Power of Now* within self-development and psychotherapy circles, and despite evidence from certain studies indicating potential positive effects of this form of mindful presence, an increasing number of researchers in cognitive and existential psychology, as well as psychiatry, have begun to reexamine the concept through a multi-dimensional critical lens.

These critiques do not deny the benefits outright; rather, they raise fundamental questions concerning:

- ♦ The realism of this approach in light of the psychological and cognitive needs of the human being,
- ♦ Its impact on emotional and social interaction,
- ♦ And its influence on the capacity for learning, planning, and achieving a balanced harmony between temporal and spiritual dimensions of life.

In the following sections, we will explore the most significant critical observations, supported by recent Western research, in an effort to delineate the boundaries of this concept and to consider the potential consequences of adopting it as a comprehensive existential principle.

## ► Critique One: Overlooking the Emotional and Cognitive Impact of Past and Future

Eckhart Tolle's concept of *The Power of Now* is founded on the premise that the past and future hold no true existence, asserting that only the present moment is the authentic realm of peace and being.

Yet, an increasing number of scholars argue that an exclusive focus on the present may risk neglecting fundamental psychological and cognitive dimensions of human development—particularly those tied to past experiences, future aspirations, and the emotional functions intertwined with them.

John Boyers of the University of Chicago asserts that “living without recalling the past is tantamount to relinquishing one of the most vital tools for learning.” He emphasizes that memory is not merely a psychological burden, but a repository of experience, identity, and wisdom—enabling individuals to avoid repeating mistakes and to forge a more mature understanding of themselves and their life’s journey.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, Richard E. Murphy argues that “the future is not an illusion, as some philosophies suggest, but rather a fundamental psychological organizing tool.” Without contemplation of the future, individuals cannot effectively prioritize, make informed decisions, or construct a meaningful vision for their lives.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, the past and future serve essential emotional functions that cannot be overlooked. The past is not merely a wellspring of pain; it is also a reservoir of cherished memories that provide solace during moments of loneliness or loss.

Likewise, looking toward the future does not solely evoke anxiety—it stands as one of the most vital sources of hope, meaning, and perseverance, especially when the present feels burdensome or harsh.

In moments of separation, loss, or hardship, the present may offer little but emptiness. Yet within memory, one finds those they love; within the future, those who resemble and inspire them; and on the horizon, forces that move them forward. In such times, the past

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28 Boyers, J. (2014). *The Role of Reflective Thought in Self-Development*. Chicago University Press.

29 Murphy, R. E. (2016). *The Psychology of Achievement*. Oxford University Press.

ceases to be a burden and becomes a steadfast companion that fortifies resilience. Likewise, the future is not a threat but a horizon that grants the strength to keep walking.

Neglecting these dimensions, some researchers argue, is a harmful reduction of the intricate human psyche—reducing a complex being to one compelled to gaze through a single mirror, while within lies an interwoven array of windows framed by time, memory, and hope.

### ► **Summary of This Critique:**

Living fully in the present may bring temporary relief to the mind, yet relying solely on it while excluding past and future diminishes the fullness of the human existential experience. It sidelines essential tools for learning, motivation, and consolation.

Time, in human consciousness, is not a mere external sequence but an intricate, integrated fabric. To tear it apart in the name of the “Now” produces a fragmented awareness—one that falls short of genuine, holistic peace.

### ► **Critique Two: The Erosion of Drive and Ambition Under Exclusive Focus on the Present**

Several motivational psychology scholars argue that an exclusive focus on the present moment, as advocated by *The Power of Now*, may undermine one of the most vital psychological energies that propel human growth: the desire to pursue future goals.

Gabrielle Oettingen of New York University notes that “positive visualization of future success not only fails to strengthen commitment if unaccompanied by planning, but the complete exclusion of the future from conscious awareness—as suggested by some philosophies of absolute presence—weakens the very roots of ambition.”

In her book *Rethinking Positive Thinking*, Oettingen explains that achieving goals demands a delicate balance between optimism and realism. While excessive immersion in the now may provide a fleeting sense of comfort, it often sidelines the essential elements of planning, commitment, and long-term vision.

<sup>30</sup>Edwin Locke, the pioneering psychologist behind the *Goal-Setting Theory*, emphasizes that “living solely in the present diminishes one’s effectiveness in achievement, as it erases the temporal scope required to build a project or accomplish a significant goal.” He adds that ambitious goals form the cornerstone of human motivation, and that disregarding the future strips the present of direction, thereby weakening the drive to progress or overcome challenges.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, behavioral psychologists note that many profound successes in life do not arise from the “Now,” but rather from persistent dedication to a future goal, despite the pain of the present moment.

### ► Summary of This Critique:

Immersion in the present moment may alleviate stress, yet confining oneself to it risks stripping away one’s dreams and weakening the will to achieve. The future is not a threat but a compass, and distant goals are not burdens but internal driving forces that enrich and mature the very fabric of the present.

Thus, any philosophy that confines human existence solely to the “Now” threatens a profound loss: ambition, vision, and the realization of meaning that transcends momentary comfort.

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30 Oettingen, G. (2014). *Rethinking Positive Thinking: Inside the New Science of Motivation*. Penguin Random House.

31 Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2002). *Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation: A 35-year odyssey*. *American Psychologist*.

## ► Critique Three: The Challenge of Sustaining Present-Moment Living

Despite the psychological allure of living fully in the present, many scholars argue that complete presence in the “Now” is not always a sustainable state. Rather, it may represent an unrealistic demand that conflicts with the nature of the human psyche and its cognitive and temporal workings.

Nobel laureate psychologist Daniel Kahneman explains that “the ability to sustain continuous focus on the present contradicts human nature, which leans toward planning, analysis, and decision-making rooted in memory and anticipation.” He emphasizes that temporal awareness—especially of the future—is an indispensable cognitive tool for regulating behavior, and that future-oriented thinking does not disrupt the present but rather organizes and guides it.<sup>32</sup>

Robert M. Ellis, a professor of social psychology, observes that complete immersion in the present moment is ill-suited to most complex social and practical environments. He notes that humans must continually consider the future: What needs to be accomplished? When is the next deadline? How do I plan for my children? He states, “Living solely in the present does not align with the rhythm of modern society; daily life is structured around temporal commitments and expectations.”<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, sustaining full mindful presence demands significant psychological effort, rendering many individuals—especially those facing mental health challenges or high stress—unable to engage in or maintain this state effectively.

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32 Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

33 Ellis, R. M. (2013). *The Importance of Future Planning in Social Contexts*. Princeton University Press.

## ► **Summary of This Critique:**

While *The Power of Now* is presented as a pathway to tranquility, exclusive immersion in the present moment can become an exhausting or unattainable demand over the long term.

By nature, human beings are temporal creatures, living in constant dialogue with their past, their plans, and their present reality. They need to distribute their awareness across what was, what is, and what will be—not to freeze themselves in the “Now” as if suspended outside of time.

## ► **Critique Four: The Psychological Perils of Overlooking Deep Emotional Healing**

A number of researchers—particularly in the fields of psychotherapy and memory science—warn against an exclusive emphasis on the “present moment,” cautioning that such a stance may encourage an unhealthy form of bypassing the past. This is not freedom from what has been, but rather a quiet refusal to confront or work through it in any meaningful depth. By privileging the “now” while neglecting the emotional undercurrents of “then,” we risk silencing wounds that still demand to be heard.

Cognitive psychologist Elizabeth Loftus offers a powerful analogy for this psychological risk. She argues that emotions bound to past experiences—especially those shaped by pain or trauma—do not vanish simply because we divert our attention. Ignoring them, she suggests, is akin to placing a cover over a wound that has never been properly cleaned: it may look hidden, but beneath the surface it remains raw, reactive, and prone to flare up with greater force when least expected.<sup>34</sup>

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34 Loftus, E. F. (2005). *Memory and Mental Health*. University of California Press

## ► Summary of the Critique

The “now” alone is not enough to heal old wounds. The soul does not recover through silence alone, but through understanding, acknowledgment, dissection, and the painstaking work of reconstruction. To ignore deep emotional processing is not to find peace, but to settle for a fragile calm—one that shatters at the slightest tremor within.

## ► Critique Five: The Adverse Impact on Social Connection and Human Relationships

While the philosophy of *The Power of Now* aspires to ease anxiety and foster mindful presence, some scholars caution that, when interpreted in an overly individualistic or isolated manner, it may inadvertently erode the very fabric of human connection. In prioritizing the present moment to the exclusion of past and future, one risks weakening the interpersonal bonds that thrive on shared memory, emotional resonance, and collective meaning.

Dr. Mark Lindsay of the University of California emphasizes this concern, stating that “successful social interaction relies on recalling past experiences, planning for future engagements, and participating in mutual emotional exchange.” He stresses that relationships—particularly deep and lasting ones—are built on a foundation of shared history, collaborative planning, and a mutual investment in what lies ahead. In contrast, the notion of complete individual presence in the moment can, when taken to an extreme, lead to a subtle withdrawal from others—an emotional retreat disguised as “serenity.”

Some studies further suggest that long-term practitioners of meditation may exhibit a diminished interest in group interaction, and that an overemphasis on inner stillness may gradually shift from a state of peaceful centeredness to one of emotional seclusion.

## ► **Summary of the Critique**

While mindful presence seeks to purify the inner self, in the absence of balance it may quietly drift into detachment from social life—diminishing one's capacity to remain an engaged and responsive part of a living human network.

Solitude is not always serenity, and presence within the self should never come at the cost of openness to the other—nor should it silence the impulse to share in another's sorrow or joy.

## ► **Conclusion of the Critical Studies on the Concept of “The Power of Now”**

There is no denying the psychological allure of the “living in the moment” philosophy—especially in an age marked by relentless pressure and mental fragmentation. Yet, scientific reviews make it increasingly clear that an exclusive fixation on the present, severed from both past and future, can lead to a deep disturbance in the existential fabric of the human being.

Without reverence for the past, without orientation toward the future, and without meaningful social engagement, a person risks losing their sense of temporal belonging, of purpose, and of connection to others. What begins as temporary relief may evolve into isolation; what seems like contemplation may become avoidance; and what appears to be silence may hollow into emptiness.

What emerges, then, is the need for a more balanced and expansive model—one that does not reject the moment, but refuses to make it an absolute. A model that integrates the present into a broader spiritual-temporal awareness—one that honors the fullness of the human experience: memory, emotion, aspiration, and the enduring call to connect.

## **Part Two: The Power of Purposeful Presence – An Integrated Islamic Perspective on Time and Inner Peace**

### **■ Introductory Prelude**

In contrast to the philosophy of *The Power of Now*, which advocates detachment from both past and future in pursuit of tranquility through immersion in the present moment, Islam offers a fundamentally different vision—one that does not dismiss the moment, but redirects its purpose.

In this vision, the “now” is not a rupture from the flow of time, but a living link—bound to all that came before and all that is yet to unfold.

It is not an escape from thought, but a conscious presence in the arena of time: with sincerity of intention, clarity of purpose, and a heart anchored in trust in the One who ordains all affairs.

This vision may be called ***The Power of Purposeful Presence***—a faith-centered perspective that redefines presence in the moment as a time infused with divine responsibility and eternal purpose. Here, the human being does not dwell in the present by severing ties with the past or future, but by fully engaging with life’s mission—anchored in trust (*tawakkul*), remembrance (*dhikr*), intentional planning, and sincere action for the sake of God.

It is a spiritual-temporal capacity to transform the moment into a space of inner refinement and outward movement—a balanced field where remembrance, insight, resolve, and tranquility coexist. It is presence not as detachment, but as a conscious flow within the unfolding will of God, illuminated by awareness of one’s destiny and the sacred meaning of every step taken.

Moreover, this presence does not arise in a vacuum; it is born of a deep awareness of time’s dimensions as seen through the lens of innate human nature (*fitrah*) and divine purpose (*risalah*). In this sense, it harmonizes with what was introduced in Chapter Nine under the concept of the “Law of Self-Honesty”—where alignment between past, present, and future reflects an inner truthfulness with the self, with God, and with meaning itself.

In the following section, we will reconstruct the notion of presence-in-the-moment within a holistic spiritual-temporal framework—one inspired by prayer (*ṣalāh*), remembrance (*dhikr*), reflection, trust in God (*tawakkul*), and the eternal aim of the hereafter. In this vision, the present is no longer merely a unit of time, but a bridge between awareness and purification, between striving and serenity, between the moment and eternity.

## Presence with Awareness and Harmony Across the Dimensions of Time

In Islam, presence in the current moment is considered one of the foundations of inner peace—but it does not entail disconnecting the self from the wisdom of the past or the aspirations of the future. The believer is encouraged to draw insight from past experiences, to reflect upon them and extract meaning; just as their daily ambitions are guided by long-term goals—both worldly and eternal—anchoring the present in steadiness and serenity.

The Qur'an reminds humanity of the spiritual value of recalling the past: *"And remember when you were few and oppressed in the land, fearing that people might abduct you, but He sheltered you, supported you with His victory, and provided you with good things—so that you might be grateful"* (Al-Anfāl, 26)

At the same time, it connects us with the future—both in this life and the next—through the divine promise of support and triumph: *"Indeed, the allies of God shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve. Those who believe and remain mindful of Him—there is good news for them in the life of this world and in the Hereafter. No change can there be in the words of God. That is truly the ultimate triumph"* (Yūnus, 62–64)

Thus, our goals in this worldly life take on a moral and spiritual character—rooted in eternity—allowing the present to become a meeting point between reflection, direction, and deep trust in the Divine.

Islam envisions the present not as an isolated fragment of time, but as a bridge—linking the past to the future—within the scope of a higher purpose: attaining God's pleasure and ultimate success in Paradise. This profound connection between time's dimensions

cultivates a deep sense of inner peace in the believer, offering a steady tranquility in which the present becomes a sacred opportunity to prepare for eternity, rather than a burdensome moment detached from one's spiritual journey.

Indeed, through the Qur'an and prophetic guidance, Islam offers a holistic temporal vision that connects the human being to all three dimensions of time—past, present, and future—not merely on the level of personal growth, but within the broader framework of one's essential role in the unfolding journey of humanity toward its ultimate meeting with God.

This vision places every individual as an essential participant in humanity's ongoing journey toward goodness, and its relentless struggle against the forces of evil led by Satan—from his attempt to seduce Adam (peace be upon him) and expel him from Paradise, to the missions of the prophets and messengers who followed, culminating in the final chapter of earthly life.

God Almighty warns humanity of Satan and his temptations: ***“O Children of Adam, let not Satan tempt you as he removed your parents from Paradise, stripping them of their garments to expose their shame. Indeed, he sees you—and his tribe—where you do not see them. Indeed, We have made the devils allies to those who do not believe.”*** (Al-A'rāf, 27)

This divine warning places humanity before its great responsibility as part of the collective movement toward good, reminding each individual of their role in confronting evils and striving to realize the noble purposes ordained by God for mankind.

On a personal level, Islam entrusts every believer with the duty to uphold justice and goodness, yet it does not leave them without divine promises of victory and empowerment. As God Almighty declares:

*“And thus We have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you.”* (Al-Baqarah, 143)

God promises His righteous servants triumph and empowerment, declaring:

*“God has decreed, ‘Indeed, I and My messengers will surely prevail.’ Indeed, God is Powerful and Exalted in Might.”* (Al-Mujādalah, 21)

He further affirms the ultimate promise that the earth will be inherited by the righteous:

*“Indeed, the earth will be inherited by My righteous servants.”* (Al-Anbiyā’, 105)

This holistic vision transforms the present moment into an opportunity for action and contribution—advancing humanity toward its grandest purpose. The believer thus lives with confidence and serenity, anchored in God’s promise and warning, balancing personal responsibility with their role as part of a community that bears witness to the world.

### ► **Paths to Fulfilling the Mission-Driven Presence in the Here and Now: Between Body, Soul, and Mind**

Mission-driven presence is not merely a mental stance but a lived daily reality manifested in balanced behavior, sincere worship, and a heartfelt connection with God. To realize this presence, one must activate practical tools that restore the self’s equilibrium in the moment, transforming time into a dynamic force of meaning rather than a mere vessel for passing events.

This presence is not simply mental stillness or fleeting emotions; rather, it is the fruit of profound harmony among the four dimensions

of the human being—body, heart, mind, and soul—as outlined in the Law of Self-Honesty. Each of these dimensions does not act in isolation but contributes to reshaping the moment into a sacred arena of worship and sincere journeying toward God.

Among these tools, Islam offers four primary pathways: balance between body and soul, prayer, remembrance (dhikr), and contemplation.

### ► **Achieving Balance Between Body and Soul in the Present Moment**

In Islam, living fully in the present requires achieving harmony between the needs of the body and the soul—without excess or neglect. As the Quran commands:

*“And seek, through that which Allah has given you, the abode of the Hereafter; and do not forget your share of the world, and do good as Allah has done good to you.”* (Al-Qasas, 77)

Islam emphasizes the importance of moderation in fulfilling both physical and spiritual needs. Thus, inner peace is not attained by focusing solely on the present moment in isolation, but rather through practicing presence in a way that blends body and soul harmoniously. Each moment thereby aligns with faith-based principles, reflecting upon the soul's health and stability.

### ► **Prayer as a Means to Achieve Presence and Tranquility Through Time**

Prayer stands as one of the most vital practices granting the Muslim deep peace and serenity. Distributed throughout the day, the prescribed prayers create regular intervals wherein the believer reconnects with God, restoring inner balance. Prayer is far from a fleeting moment; it is a profound spiritual meditation that binds the

worshipper to their Lord, realigning intentions and actions with the tenets of faith. The Prophet (PBUH) once said, ***“Relieve us with it, O Bilal,”*** expressing prayer as a refuge from life’s burdens and a return to clarity.

The Qur’an highlights prayer’s power to refine the soul, stating: ***“Indeed, mankind was created anxious— When evil touches him, impatient, And when good touches him, withholding— Except for those who pray.”*** (Al-Ma’ārij, 19-22)

This passage illustrates how prayer shields the soul from its turbulence and cultivates it, enabling the believer to face life’s trials with tranquility and steadfastness.

### ► **Dhikr as a Power to Achieve Inner Peace and Spiritual Balance**

In Islam, ***dhikr***—the remembrance of God—is a potent means to attain true presence and tranquility. It is far more than mere verbal repetition; it is a deep, contemplative act in which the soul is brought before the majesty and mercy of the Divine, restoring its balance and soothing the heart. Allah declares:

***“Those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], ‘Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire.’”***(Al-Imran, 191)

The remembrance of God serves as a cleansing tool, liberating the self from anxieties tied to future expectations or excessive attachment to the past. By living each moment connected to Allah through ***dhikr***, the believer is freed from tension, strengthening their certainty that God is always near. Thus, inner peace manifests as a daily reality,

flowing from the continual remembrance of God and the profound awareness of His presence. As the Qur'an encourages:

*"So when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah, and remember Allah often that you may succeed."*(Al-Jumu'ah, 10)

## ► **Contemplation on the Majesty of Creation: Deepening Conscious Presence**

Contemplation on the grandeur of creation is one of the means by which a Muslim strengthens their connection to God, appreciating every moment as a blessing worthy of praise and gratitude. Reflecting on God's creation—the universe and its wondrous design—deepens conscious presence and instills in the believer a sense that each moment is imbued with signs of the Creator's majesty. As Allah says: *"Say, 'Observe what is in the heavens and the earth.' But of no avail will be signs or warner to a people who do not believe."*(Yunus, 101)

Thus, the Muslim lives the moment not merely by focusing inwardly on the self, but through an awareness of God's greatness manifest in all that surrounds them. This awareness enhances spiritual presence, making contemplation a powerful means to bring peace to the soul and support its stability.

## ► **Conclusion:**

When bodily balance, heartfelt humility, living remembrance, and profound reflection converge, the *missionary presence*—the presence grounded in divine purpose—manifests in its most radiant form. It is a presence that does not flee from the moment, but rather transforms it into a sanctuary, a sacred appointment with meaning, and a testament to the servant's sincerity before their Lord.

Yet, no matter how steadfast these tools may be, they alone cannot suffice unless they rest upon a firm foundation of self-honesty, reliance on God, and resilience amid life's vicissitudes. The *missionary presence* is not merely the invocation of God in a still moment; it is a deeply rooted internal stance, lived through times of ease and hardship, through moments of contentment and trial alike. It is expressed by the believer's steadfastness, sincere intention, patience, and unwavering trust in the Divine.

Now we turn to the second pillar of this presence:

## **Sincerity and Reliance: Standing Firm Amid the Challenges of the Moment**

If the *missionary presence* is realized through the balance of body and soul, through prayer, remembrance, and contemplation, then this presence cannot be firmly established without being built upon two essential foundations: sincerity with the self and reliance upon God.

The moment a person lives is not always one of calm or stability; it may be a moment of fear, trial, or confusion... Here is where true presence is tested: is it a presence that exists only in stillness, or one that endures through turmoil and unrest?

### **► Self-Sincerity: Living the Present with Truth and Harmony**

In the principle of self-sincerity, honesty with oneself is not merely an emotional confession or personal admission. Rather, it is an existential state of wholeness, where body, heart, mind, and soul align around the axis of innate nature (*fitrah*), illuminated by the divine purpose of existence.

Sincerity here means living each moment with full awareness of who one truly is, where one has come from, and the direction in which one is headed. It is not wearing a mask to please others, nor deceiving oneself with false pretenses. Instead, one's behavior harmonizes with their core values, their innate nature shines through their choices, and their presence in time becomes a genuine reflection of the inner self—not a mere external performance crafted for social approval.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: ***“Train yourself to have good intentions and noble aims, and success will meet you unexpectedly.”*** Intention is not a fleeting wish but a spiritual compass that guides both body and mind in moments of sincerity, turning every action into a mirror of innate nature, every word into an extension of truth, and every stillness into meaning itself.

Honesty with oneself does not merely bring inner peace; it liberates the soul from anxiety, fragmentation, and contradiction. When a person lives their present moment in harmony with the truth planted deep within, rather than with imposed external narratives, tranquility arises—not from circumstances, but from inner alignment.

Thus, sincerity in presence is not simply a harmony between intention and deed; it is an ongoing striving to live according to the melody of ***fitrah***—in every feeling, every choice, and every passing moment.

### ► **Patience and Reliance: Steadfastly Facing the Challenges of the Present**

Islamic teaching places great emphasis on ***tawakkul*** — reliance upon God — and ***sabr*** — patience — as two foundational pillars for living with tranquility in the present moment, free from anxiety. As the Qur'an commands:

***“And seek help through patience and prayer; indeed, prayer is difficult except for the humbly submissive.”*** (Al-Baqarah, 45)

A believer understands that the present moment, whether filled with joy or trials, is part of God’s divine decree and wise planning. This realization brings solace to the soul and calmness to the heart. God Almighty says:

***“Give good tidings to the patient, Who, when disaster strikes them, say, ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.’”***

***Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided.”*** (Al-Baqarah, 155-157)

God Almighty declares: ***“And whoever relies upon Allah — then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose. Allah has already set for everything a [decreed] extent.”*** (At-Talaq, 2-3)

This profound trust—*tawakkul*—infuses the believer with a positive, empowering energy that enables them to face the present moment with courage and mindful awareness. It lightens the burden of excessive worry over outcomes, thereby strengthening their ability to fully inhabit the “now” with wholehearted presence.

## ► **Conclusion:**

The measure of Mission-Driven amid challenges is not found in the calmness of the moment, but in the sincerity of intention within it, and the heart’s unwavering trust in God despite its turmoil. It is an existential stance embodied by one who walks the edge of trial yet remains steadfast; by one who sees the horizon shrouded in uncertainty yet whose heart is tranquil; by one who does not know when the crisis will resolve, yet knows the One who holds relief in His hand.

Yet, even this steadfastness is incomplete unless it is connected to a clear, transcendent horizon—one that grants the moment its true value through the lens of ultimate destiny, and directs presence in the “now” to harmonize with “eternity.” Herein reveals the final dimension of prophetic presence: **a presence that extends toward the ultimate purpose—living the moment illumined by the light of the Hereafter.**

## **Presence Extended Toward the Ultimate Goal: Living the Moment by the Light of the Hereafter**

Mission-Driven remains incomplete unless it is connected to a clear and radiant eschatological horizon—one that transforms every moment in this worldly life into a continuation of a greater journey, a journey that does not end within the confines of time but transcends into eternity.

In the Islamic worldview, the present is never detached from destiny; rather, the current moment is continually reshaped in the light of what lies beyond. Daily deeds become provisions for the journey, intention becomes the guiding path, and tranquility emerges as the fruit of firm certainty in the divine promise.

The Qur’an does not call upon humanity merely to live in the present moment; rather, it urges us to anchor every decision, action, and thought in the reality of the Hereafter. As it declares:

*“Whoever desires the fleeting life, We hasten for him therein what We will to whom We intend. Then We have destined for him Hell, wherein he will burn, censured and banished. But whoever desires the Hereafter and strives for it with sincere faith—those their efforts are truly appreciated.”* (Al-Isra, 18–19)

Thus, will, striving, and faith—all commence in the “now,” yet they are always directed toward the “then,” where true life unfolds.

In this extended presence, one is not asked to flee from the reality of this world toward the Hereafter, but rather to live fully in the present life with an eye fixed on eternity. The believer carries out earthly duties with a spirit anchored in the heavens. Thus, the present moment becomes not an obstacle to the ultimate goal, but the very path leading toward it.

### ► **From the Moment to Eternity: How the Present Becomes Provision**

Every moment lived with sincere intention becomes a step toward God, and every simple deed coupled with true devotion gains weight in the scale of eternity. As Allah says: ***“So whoever does an atom’s weight of good will see it”*** (Az-Zalzalah, 7)

No moment is insignificant in the reckoning of the Divine; rather, it is profound by virtue of its purpose and direction.

Therefore, Allah commands us to view life as a journey toward the Hereafter, preparing for it with a special provision:

***“And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of Allah”***  
(Al-Baqarah, 197)

This piety is not merely stored in the heart, but is crafted in the details of each moment—in patience, sincerity, truthfulness, and quiet striving for the sake of God.

When the presence of the Hereafter takes on this profound meaning, time no longer feels like a burden, nor does the future remain an enigma. Instead, it becomes a horizon from which the heart gazes upon the promises Allah has made to His believing servants:

*“For them is glad tidings in the life of this world and in the Hereafter”*  
(Yunus, 64)

These glad tidings do not erase the challenges, but rather give them meaning and cloak them in the garment of hope.

### ► **The Message of the Hereafter: From Individual Presence to a Collective Testimony**

When presence in the moment is linked to ultimate destiny, it transforms from a personal emotional state into a communal mission and responsibility. The Muslim does not live merely to find peace, but to bear witness to humanity, to contribute to the movement of goodness, and to strengthen the threads of justice woven into the fabric of the world. Allah declares:

*“Thus We have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people”* (Al-Baqarah, 143)

This profound connection between presence in this world and bearing witness to humanity means that the believer is fully engaged in their community, actively shaping their reality. Yet, they never lose sight of their ultimate destiny or forget their true direction. In every moment, they remember the purpose, reflect on the final outcome, and strive to leave behind in the present a weighty contribution that will enrich their balance on the Day of Judgment.

### ► **Conclusion:**

Mission-driven presence is not satisfied with merely mastering the moment; it fills it with sincere intention, supports it with clear vision, and directs it toward eternity. It is a deep awareness that everything we experience—no matter how small—can bear fruit in the Hereafter, and that the moment lived for God does not pass away but is stored in light, blossoming when we meet Him.

## **The Islamic Response to Critiques of the Philosophy of “The Power of Now”**

The philosophy of “The Power of Now” has not been immune to rigorous scientific and philosophical critique, raising profound questions about its views on time, selfhood, ambition, wounds, and relationships.

As we have seen in this chapter, the Islamic perspective—embodied in the concept of the “Power of Mission-Driven Presence”—is not merely a spiritual alternative or another meditative technique. Rather, it presents a holistic vision rooted in innate human nature (fitrah), reconstructing the relationship between the individual and the moment through the lens of purpose, meaning, and sincerity.

In the following pages, we pause to examine the most prominent critical issues raised against the philosophy of “The Power of Now.” We analyze these critiques through the lens of the Islamic worldview—not from a defensive stance, but from a constructive perspective—where Islam reconfigures the notion of presence in time within a holistic system of spiritual refinement, integrating intention, insight, and responsibility.

### **► First Critique: The Neglect of Past and Future, Focusing Solely on the Present**

One of the most prominent criticisms directed at the philosophy of “The Power of Now” is that, despite its promise of tranquility, it severs the individual from their natural temporal fabric. It explicitly or implicitly urges one to shut the doors of the past—as if memory were a burden—and to disregard the future, as if looking ahead were a danger.

However, as we explained in the Law of Self-Honesty, a human being is not merely a momentary existence but an integrated being with multiple dimensions — body, mind, heart, and soul — that can only harmonize when consciously extended through time with spiritual awareness.

Innate nature (fitra) is not confined to the present moment; rather, it perceives all time as a mirror reflecting meaning:

- ♦ The **past** is a domain for repentance and lessons learned,
- ♦ The **present** is a field for action and spiritual refinement,
- ♦ And the **future** is the horizon of vision and the eternal destiny.

This is why the Islamic perspective does not call for “escaping the past,” but rather purifying it through honesty; nor does it advocate “freezing the future,” but preparing for it with piety.

God Almighty says: *“And remember when you were few and oppressed in the land, fearing that people might abduct you, but He sheltered you...”* (Al-Anfal, 26) — A reminder of the past not to lament losses but to build gratitude.

And He also says: *“And take provision, but indeed, the best provision is fear of Allah...”* (Al-Baqarah, 197) — A call to keep the future in mind, not to heighten anxiety, but to align the present with the compass of the Hereafter.

When we spoke of the “Power of Missionary Presence,” we did not exclude the past or the future from the sphere of presence; rather, we reordered the moment as a link in a continuous journey—not as a psychological refuge from the burdens of memory or the anxieties of expectation.

Thus, Islamic presence is not a detachment from time, but a conscious integration within it, where every moment becomes a field of honesty:

Have you repented for what has passed? Are you acting faithfully in the present? Are you preparing sincerely for what is to come?

This spiritual-temporal awareness does not burden the soul; instead, it restores it to its natural state. It does not demand liberation from the past, but reconciliation with it; nor does it deny the future, but teaches how to participate in shaping it while purifying the heart along the way.

## ► **Second Critique: The Weakening of Ambition and Drive Under Exclusive Focus on the Present Moment**

One of the fundamental challenges posed to the philosophy of the “Power of Now” is that, despite its intention to ease burdens, it can inadvertently dull the very energy that propels long-term effort and achievement. When a person is told, “Do not think about tomorrow, live only in the moment,” this does not necessarily free them from anxiety; rather, it may strip them of vision, weaken their connection to purpose, and flatten their will to a temporary comfort zone.

Yet, ambition in Islam is not a mere psychological luxury—it is an integral part of the process of spiritual refinement itself. According to the law of authentic self-honesty, true inner harmony is attained only when a person links their innate yearning for meaning with a conscious, purposeful movement toward the future.

A sincere intention, as previously discussed, does not stop at the present moment; rather, it illuminates it with profound meaning, transforming it into the starting point of a journey extending toward the ultimate goal. As God Almighty says: ***“But whoever desires the Hereafter and strives for it with faith – their effort is truly appreciated.”*** (Al-Isra, 19)

Here, will, striving, and faith are inseparable. The intention is not a mere inward wish but an ethical and forward-moving force that directs the present and imbues every action with a lasting connection to the Hereafter.

Within the prophetic presence, one does not remain motionless in the moment; instead, one moves with it—and through it—toward a higher purpose. The believer neither flees from the future nor falls captive to it but governs it with the “piety of insight,” transforming what could be scattered anxiety into a clear and purposeful roadmap.

Thus, presence transforms from a mere emotional stillness into a dynamic will; from self-centeredness to openness toward the ultimate purpose; from preoccupation with the “now” to a deep concern for the person one will become when meeting God.

As God Almighty declares: *“And seek, through what Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world.”* (Al-Qasas, 77)

This Quranic equation guarantees the vitality of the present, the direction of ambition, and the meaning of life itself.

### ► **Critique Three: The Challenge of Sustaining Presence in the Now**

Among the practical challenges posed by the philosophy of “The Power of Now” is its call for a constant, unwavering mental presence—an ideal that burdens the human soul beyond its natural capacity. By its very design, the human being does not exist outside the flow of time; rather, it moves naturally between memory and foresight, between moments of contemplation and bursts of worldly engagement, between conscious presence and inevitable distraction.

Cognitive psychology research—such as the work of Daniel Kahneman—has shown that the attempt to anchor the mind perpetually in an unbroken present often results in mental fatigue or a disruption of life’s natural rhythm. Life is not lived solely in silent meditation or isolated moments of stillness; it unfolds in meetings, decisions, responsibilities, and interactions—a constant movement that calls for a flexible awareness, not a frozen state of being.

In Islam, presence is not understood as a perpetual emotional state, but rather as a continuous cultivation that unfolds across time and renews itself through moments of return. As God Almighty declares: ***“Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon the believers a decree of specified times.”*** (An-Nisa, 103)

Presence, therefore, is not demanded every single moment without respite; it is a sacred ritual wisely distributed throughout day and night, awakening the soul and restoring it gently, without burdening it with the impossible demand for constant steadiness.

In the law of authentic sincerity, true presence does not mean “being always present” without fail, but rather the ability to return when absent, to remember when forgetful, and to renew one’s intention when scattered. Sincerity is measured not by unbroken continuity, but by the fidelity of returning wholeheartedly.

Thus, the Mission-Driven in Islam neither demands of the soul more than it can bear nor condemns distraction as a fault. Instead, it nurtures a realistic cycle of awareness: heedlessness, awakening, refinement, presence, and return whenever the soul grows weary.

This is why presence in Islam is understood as a way of life, not a mental state we force ourselves to maintain unceasingly. As the Qur’an declares: ***“Those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides...”*** (Al-Imran, 191)

The multiplicity of conditions and diversity of moments of presence are embraced, rather than confining it to a single, rigid mold.

### ► **Critique Four: Avoiding Emotional Wounds Without Healing Them**

One of the most sensitive critiques of the philosophy of “The Power of Now” lies in its tendency to freeze pain rather than unpack it. It encourages one to “observe feelings without judgment or engagement.” While this technique may bring momentary calm, it does not truly heal wounds; instead, it suspends them, leaving the person standing at the edge of their pain rather than courageously entering it to purify the soul.

In the Islamic worldview, pain is not seen as a mere transient emotional disturbance but as an essential part of the path to spiritual refinement. God Almighty does not deny sorrow to the Prophets; rather, He acknowledges and embraces it within a meaningful context. As He says to His Messenger: ***“We know that it saddens you...”*** (Al-An’am, 33), and as the lament of Jacob (peace be upon him): ***“I only complain of my suffering and my grief to Allah...”*** (Yusuf, 86)

This acknowledgment does not weaken the human soul; rather, it opens a window of sincerity and teaches how to bring one’s feelings from shadow into light—not through explosion, nor suppression, but through legitimate expression, gradual awareness, and heartfelt supplication.

Herein lies the profound difference between merely “observing grief” and “purifying grief”: silent observation may stave off collapse, but conscious purification produces meaning, transforming the wound into a bridge toward God.

In the Law of True Sincerity, tranquility is not measured by the absence of pain, but by honest engagement with it: Have you faced it? Have you admitted it? Have you directed it toward the doors of repentance, patience, or heartfelt complaint to God? Have you emerged from it purified, or buried it deep within only to have it return stronger?

The missional presence does not demand that one extinguish their emotions, but rather to purify them, strengthen them, and restore them to their natural state. The soul, as the Qur'an teaches, is not healed through silence alone, but through remembrance, tears, prostration, seeking forgiveness, and sincere return to God.

As Allah says: ***"Indeed, the patient will be given their reward without account."*** (Az-Zumar, 10)

And this patience is not born from mere observation, but from deep understanding, active healing, and hopeful trust.

### ► **Fifth Critique: The Weakening of Social Engagement Due to Self-Centered Presence**

When the philosophy of presence narrows its focus solely to the "self-contained moment," the other becomes a faint, distant echo. Social psychologists have observed this phenomenon in studies of deep meditation practices: the more one becomes absorbed in the internal experience of the "Now," the more diminished their capacity for empathy, meaningful interaction, and responsibility within relationships.

Yet, in the Qur'anic vision, the human being is not an isolated entity seeking solitary peace, but a vicegerent entrusted by God to establish just relationships, to reform wherever possible, and to bear witness to humanity with fairness and equity.

Presence, therefore, does not begin solely from external engagement, nor does it end within the self; it is a dynamic interplay between inner awareness and outward responsibility.

In the philosophy of “Mission-Driven Presence” as presented in this chapter, presence is not an internal silence enclosed by psychological walls; rather, it is a vigilant awareness that perceives the suffering of others and responds with empathy, action, and ethical stance.

God Almighty declares: ***“The believers are but brothers”*** (Al-Hujurat, 10) Brotherhood here is not merely an emotional feeling, but a moral covenant encompassing both sentiment and deed.

He also says: ***“And they give [them] preference over themselves, even though they are in privation”*** (Al-Hashr, 9) Altruism is not simply a state of self-presence, but a transcendence from self to other — in God’s name and with sincere intention.

In the Law of Authentic Selfhood, the self is not completed in isolation but is purified and elevated through its relationship with others: when it advises, reconciles, comforts, and humbly yields out of love—not weakness.

True purification is not fulfilled through solitary contemplation alone, but through patient endurance with people. It is not found in withdrawal, but in compassionate engagement.

Indeed, relationships in the Islamic vision are an integral part of the journey back to God: ***“So fear God and reconcile between yourselves”*** (Al-Anfal, 1)

Reconciliation is not merely a social act, but a living extension of God-consciousness (taqwa) and a testament to the sincerity of one’s faithful presence.

Thus, presence transforms from a personal experience into a purposeful mission; from isolation into meaningful participation; from silent inner witnessing to active giving, inhabited by God and testified to both in this world and the Hereafter.

## ► **Conclusion: Mission-Driven Presence as a Foundational Alternative, Not a Situational Response**

The five critiques leveled against the philosophy of “The Power of Now” reveal a deeper existential dilemma—one that goes beyond mere meditation tools or calming techniques.

They expose a fragmented understanding of the human being, severed from their history, moral capacity, innate suffering, and their sacred responsibility toward others.

**“The Power of Mission-Driven Presence”** does not respond to these gaps with superficial fixes, but offers a comprehensive vision rooted deeply in innate human nature, oriented toward the horizon of ultimate purpose, and activates presence within a framework of spiritual purification, sincerity, and temporal awareness.

- ♦ Instead of denying the past, it restores its role in gratitude and repentance.
- ♦ Instead of extinguishing ambition, it redirects it with the light of the Hereafter.
- ♦ Instead of demanding presence as a taxing mental state, it segments it into a nurturing daily rhythm.
- ♦ Instead of merely observing wounds, it heals them through knowledge, return, and supplication.

- ◆ Instead of withdrawing into the self, it expands presence outward toward others as a field of sincerity and responsibility.

Presence in Islam is neither retreat into the inner self nor freezing of the moment, but a conscious stance in the heart of time, with a sincere intention, expansive insight, and a mission that links the servant to their Lord, and the moment to the ultimate destiny.

Thus, this vision is not merely a patch for an existing philosophy, but a fundamental re-establishment of the starting point: Who am I? Why am I called to be present? And for whom do I truly show up?

Thus, man reclaims his moment—not to dissolve into it, but to shape from it a path toward God: with a mind that contemplates, a heart that is purified, a soul that remembers, a conduct that mends, and a hope that never fades.

**“The Power of Now” and “The Power of Prophetic Presence”:**

Axis	The Power of Now (Eckhart Tolle)	The Power of Mission-Driven(Islamic Perspective)
Philosophical Foundation	Rooted in detachment from the past and future, focusing exclusively on the present moment.	Anchored in a balanced view of time: reflecting on the past with gratitude, living the present through purification, and moving toward the future with purpose.
Approach to Time	The past is but a memory, the future an illusion—only the present is real.	Time is a seamless fabric of spiritual growth: every moment is lived through the light of experience, hope, and accountability.

Axis	The Power of Now (Eckhart Tolle)	The Power of Mission-Driven(Islamic Perspective)
Presence in the Moment	Silent self-observation to liberate awareness from thought.	Conscious engagement in the moment with sincere intention, purposeful action, and connection to God.
Ambition and Motivation	Tends to suppress long-term aspirations and discourages focus on final goals.	Refines ambition by orienting it toward the Hereafter, making it a driving force for meaningful striving.
Dealing with Pain	Non-reactive observation of emotions without deep processing.	Honest confrontation with wounds through patience, supplication, and spiritual purification—pain becomes part of the journey toward God.
Social Dimension	Can lead to emotional detachment and self-centeredness.	Cultivates compassionate and active engagement with others—driven by mercy, moral responsibility, and bearing witness to truth.
Sustainability	Difficult to maintain a constant state of presence.	Presence is distributed across daily acts of worship and spiritual renewal—realistic and sustaining.
Ultimate Aim	Inner liberation and personal tranquility.	A sincere journey toward God—where tranquility is rooted in eternal purpose and sacred responsibility.

## Reflective Conclusion: From the Moment to Consciousness... From Presence to Contemplation

As this chapter draws to a close, it becomes clear that *The Power of Now*, despite its promises of serenity, offers little more than emotional isolation, temporary tools, and experimental remedies for a far deeper existential unease.

*The Power of Prophetic Presence*, by contrast, is not a therapeutic alternative—it is a path of life. It cultivates in the believer a sacred awareness of time, a balanced relationship with the self, an openness toward others, and a tranquil yet purposeful journey toward the ultimate destination.

This chapter has sought to open a new window onto the present moment—not as a psychological retreat, but as a spiritual trust and a prophetic calling. A moment in which balance is restored between action and reflection, between inner calm and sincere striving, between presence within the self, presence with God, and presence among people.

And yet, presence in the moment remains incomplete unless it opens to its deeper core: How is it governed from within? How is the mind refined, and the awareness purified? What is the connection between reflection and serenity? Between contemplation and inner peace?

These questions prepare the path for Chapter Twelve, where we turn to explore the concept of *meditation and mindfulness*, and from there, begin to shape an authentic Islamic vision titled *Conscious Reflection*. This vision will serve as a natural extension of the philosophy of Prophetic Presence—this time from the vantage point of mental depth and spiritual interiority.



Chapter Twelve

# **Meditation and Mindfulness**

## Chapter Twelve

# Meditation and Mindfulness

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### Part One: Between Quieting the Mind and the Soul's Search for Stillness

#### **■ The Human Being in Search of a Lost Stillness**

In a world where rhythms accelerate and pressures intertwine, the modern human finds themselves yearning for something unseen—yet deeply felt: stillness.

A stillness not measured by idle hours or the weight of accomplishments, but by something inward—something that resembles grounding, balance, or “a return to the self.”

Amid the clutter of screens, the avalanche of tasks, and the rising tide of noise, many feel they are living outside themselves. Consciously or not, they begin to search—for a moment of silence, for harmony, for a point of contact between the inner and the outer worlds.

In this context, *meditation* and *mindfulness* have emerged as contemporary practices that promise to bring the human being back to the present moment—offering tools to reclaim focus and self-awareness in a world marked by distraction and inner disconnection. These practices have garnered increasing global attention, seen as practical psychological responses to a deep human longing: the quieting of the mind and the cultivation of inner clarity.

At their core, such methods rely on behavioral techniques like deep breathing, attunement to bodily sensations, and a conscious, nonjudgmental observation of present experience—encouraging stillness without suppression, and awareness without entanglement in thought.

The practitioner is typically invited to sit in a comfortable position, gently directing attention to the breath—breathing slowly, mindfully tracing the movement of air through the body, and softly returning focus whenever the mind wanders. The aim is not to empty the mind, but to arrive at a state of inner stillness and momentary harmony.

Proponents of these techniques believe that anchoring oneself in the *now* can ease anxiety, sharpen concentration, and cultivate a sense of grounded stability—even amid external pressures. As such, mindfulness is presented not merely as a therapeutic remedy, but as

a daily discipline for preserving mental well-being and nurturing a quiet inner balance.

In this chapter, we will explore these approaches as they have been presented, while pausing to contemplate the deeper questions they often leave unanswered: Is presence in the moment sufficient to attain inner peace? Can the calming of the mind alone bring true tranquility to the soul? And does the human being, in isolation, possess the full capacity to generate serenity—or is what he longs for too profound to be restored by technique alone?

## **The Western Perspective: From Meditation to Mindfulness**

Meditation and mindfulness are often seen as interwoven tools in the pursuit of inner calm and conscious presence. Both stem from a desire to quiet the ever-racing mind and to ease the grip of mental distraction. Both seek to return the individual to their present moment—but each follows a slightly distinct path.

**Meditation**, as practiced in many psychological and spiritual traditions, is a guided technique wherein the practitioner is asked to focus intently on a single point—be it the breath, a positive thought, or a mental image. The aim is to soothe the mind, slow the stream of thought, and enter a state of inner clarity and stillness.

This form of practice typically calls for a quiet environment and a dedicated space, where the external world is gently set aside to allow for inward stillness.

On the other hand, **mindfulness** is not confined to a specific time or posture. It is a mental state in which one trains oneself to remain attentive to the present moment during any activity—whether eating, walking, listening, or even speaking. The essence lies in

“observing” what unfolds within and around you—your thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations—without passing judgment or interpreting them, but simply allowing yourself to be with them: aware, not entangled.

Although meditation and mindfulness are not identical, they share a common purposeful structure: to strengthen mental presence, deepen awareness, and ease the tension caused by clinging to the past or worrying about the future.

Meditation is often employed as an entry point to mindfulness, while mindfulness helps extend the effect of meditation to encompass everyday life—without the need for a formal session.

One might say that meditation teaches the mind to be silent, whereas mindfulness teaches it to listen. Meditation soothes the mind... mindfulness harmonizes with life.

## **■ Psychological Promises Backed by Research**

Over the past decades, meditation and mindfulness practices have gained increasing attention within psychology and behavioral health fields. Gradually, they have been integrated into psychotherapy programs, mental training, and stress management protocols.

This growing interest has been accompanied by numerous Western studies highlighting the potential psychological and physiological benefits of these practices, particularly in areas such as stress reduction, improved sleep quality, enhanced concentration, and bolstered psychological resilience.

Hereafter, we present a summary of the most prominent benefits documented in rigorous scientific studies, along with their sources, paving the way for a critical evaluation of the consistency and effectiveness of these approaches in the sections to follow.

## 1. Reduction of Stress and Anxiety Levels

Numerous studies suggest that the practice of meditation and mindfulness can help lower cortisol levels—the hormone of stress—and enhance the brain's ability to regulate emotions. In a clinical trial conducted by researchers at Harvard University, participants who engaged in meditation for eight weeks exhibited a significant decrease in self-reported stress markers, alongside improved resilience to psychological pressure.<sup>35</sup>

## 2. Alleviation of Anxiety and Depression Symptoms

A systematic review published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* highlights that mindfulness-based interventions lead to moderate improvements in symptoms of anxiety and depression among individuals, compared to control groups who did not receive such interventions.<sup>36</sup>

## 3. Enhancement of Focus and Attention

Cognitive neuroscience research indicates that regular meditation practitioners possess a greater capacity to sustain concentration over extended periods. Meditation also activates brain regions associated with executive attention, sharpening mental clarity and control.<sup>37</sup>

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35 Hölzel, B. K., et al. (2011). "Mindfulness practice leads to increases in regional brain gray matter density." *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging*, 191(1), 36–43. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pscychresns.2010.08.006>

36 Goyal, M., et al. (2014). "Meditation programs for psychological stress and well-being: a systematic review and meta-analysis." *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 174(3), 357–368. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.13018>

37 Zeidan, F., et al. (2010). "Mindfulness meditation improves cognition: Evidence of brief mental training." *Consciousness and Cognition*, 19(2), 597–605. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.concog.2010.03.014>

## 4. Improvement of Sleep Quality

A clinical study conducted at the University of Southern California involving elderly individuals suffering from sleep disturbances revealed that meditation significantly enhanced sleep quality and reduced insomnia, outperforming general health education programs.<sup>38</sup>

## 5. Supporting Psychological Resilience and Adaptation

Multiple studies demonstrate that mindfulness practitioners exhibit greater resilience in facing daily challenges and an enhanced ability to manage change and stress compared to others. Meditation is often employed in programs designed for trauma recovery and coping with chronic illness.<sup>39</sup>

Despite these encouraging findings, the effectiveness of such practices—like any psychological intervention—depends on multiple factors. The consistency and applicability of these results will be critically examined in the following section.

# A Scientific Critique of the Concepts of Meditation and Mindfulness

Despite the widespread adoption of meditation and mindfulness practices within psychological and health programs, an increasing number of researchers have begun to critically reassess these approaches. Their critiques are grounded in scientific studies revealing that such methods are not always effective or free from

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38 Black, D. S., et al. (2015). "Mindfulness meditation and improvement in sleep quality and daytime impairment among older adults with sleep disturbances." *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 175(4), 494–501. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2014.8081>

39 Creswell, J. D. (2017). "Mindfulness interventions." *Annual Review of Psychology*, 68, 491–516. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-042716-051139>

challenges. Below are some of the key observations raised by Western literature on this subject:

### 1. Overestimation of Psychological Benefits

While some evidence supports certain benefits, a comprehensive review published in *Perspectives on Psychological Science* points out that many studies tend to exaggerate the positive outcomes of meditation. This is often due to publication bias favoring positive results, methodological weaknesses in some research, and the lack of robust control groups.<sup>40</sup>

### 2. The Possibility of Negative Symptoms in Some Individuals

A study published in *PLOS ONE* revealed that certain meditation practitioners may experience adverse psychological effects, such as heightened anxiety, panic attacks, and even distressing memories. Remarkably, 25% of the study participants reported episodes they described as “undesirable or troubling” during meditation sessions.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. The Challenge of Achieving “Full Mindfulness” in Daily Practice

A review published in *American Psychologist* suggests that most of the expected benefits from meditation demand long-term, consistent practice. Short or irregular sessions often fail to produce comparable results. Moreover, many participants report difficulties in maintaining the intensive routine required to truly cultivate mindfulness.<sup>42</sup>

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40 Van Dam, N. T., et al. (2018). “Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation and Prescriptive Agenda for Research on Mindfulness and Meditation.” *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 13(1), 36–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617709589>

41 Lindahl, J. R., et al. (2017). “The varieties of contemplative experience: A mixed-methods study of meditation-related challenges in Western Buddhists.” *PLOS ONE*, 12(5), e0176239. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0176239>

42 Tang, Y.-Y., et al. (2015). “The neuroscience of mindfulness meditation.” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 16(4), 213–225. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn3916>

## 4. The Potential Use of Meditation as an Emotional Avoidance Mechanism

Some studies have indicated that meditation can, unintentionally, become a means of escaping from confronting emotional or life challenges. Researchers have warned that these practices may sometimes reinforce “avoidance” rather than fostering genuine psychological resilience.<sup>43</sup>

## 5. Unintended Social Effects

Certain research findings suggest that excessive focus on inner experience during meditation sessions may lead some individuals to reduce their social engagement and interaction with others. A review in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* notes that, when practiced excessively, meditation can sometimes result in withdrawal or psychological isolation.<sup>44</sup>

## 6. Summary

While many researchers acknowledge the potential benefits of meditation and mindfulness—particularly in addressing mild psychological disturbances or as adjuncts within broader therapeutic programs—growing evidence suggests these practices are neither universally safe nor uniformly effective for all individuals. They should not be viewed as a “one-size-fits-all” remedy or a substitute for comprehensive psychological treatment. Rather, their efficacy hinges on various factors: the context in which they are applied, the individual’s personality, the specific nature of the intervention, and the degree of commitment to sustained practice. These critical considerations must be kept in mind when evaluating the true value of these tools.

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43 Britton, W. B. (2019). “Can mindfulness be too much of a good thing? The value of a middle way.” *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 28, 159–165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2018.12.011>

44 Davidson, R. J., & Kaszniak, A. W. (2015). “Conceptual and methodological issues in research on mindfulness and meditation.” *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 15(3), 70–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100614546565>

## Part Two: Conscious Reflection — An Islamic Vision for Inner Peace and the Tranquility of Awareness

### **From Momentary Presence to Presence with God**

When a person seeks calm, they may turn to silence. When overwhelmed by the weight of thoughts, they may retreat to slow, mindful breathing. When time feels scarce, they may grasp for a fleeting moment of “presence.”

But what if this moment of presence is without a true destination? What if the silence is empty of meaning? And what if the focus on the

“now” is merely another form of separation — a distancing from the ultimate “Reality”?

In the Islamic vision, tranquility is not merely a calming of the mind; it is a sacred station inhabited by the heart when it is steadfast in the remembrance of God, aligned with its ultimate purpose, and journeying through life with the certainty that the moment is not complete in itself, but only through its Lord.

Reflection (tafakkur) in Islam is not a psychological technique; it is a mental and spiritual act of worship. It is not a means to shut down the mind, but rather a key to open it to the signs (ayat) of God. It is not contemplation of the self alone, but a gaze upon God’s creation, a deep pondering over destiny, and a connection to a meaning that transcends the moment.

This is what can be called “conscious reflection” within the realm of faith: a state of pure presence, but not merely a self-centered presence—rather, a presence with God, from God, and toward God.

In this presence, the past blends with its lessons, and the future with its insight.

Here, the “now” is no longer a moment to flee to in times of turmoil, but a bridge we cross toward serenity—because we behold it in the light of eternity, not confined to the limits of the moment alone.

## **The Concept of Conscious Reflection in the Qur’an and Sunnah**

In the Islamic worldview, reflection is not merely a mental exercise or a brief respite for the mind, but rather an intellectual and spiritual act rooted deeply within the core of the Divine message. It is an engagement of both heart and mind aimed at the highest purpose:

to connect the human being with their Creator, deepen awareness of their existence, and restore harmony with their innate nature and life's responsibilities.

Conscious reflection, as envisioned by Islam, does not exist in isolation from the world or the sacred text. Instead, it is an interactive process that weaves together self-examination, contemplation of the universe, pondering the signs of revelation, and an ever-present consciousness of the ultimate purpose beyond this life. Thus, the essence of reflection transcends mere inner calm; it opens onto a profound awareness of God, a wise submission to His laws, and a continual questioning of one's intentions and direction.

The Qur'an repeatedly urges this practice of reflection, highlighting it as a noble pursuit. Among the most profound verses is the Divine declaration:

***"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day are signs for those of understanding—Who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth..."***  
(Al-Imran, 190–191)

This reflection is not mere admiration of the beauty of creation, but a deep engagement with its meanings—recognizing that behind the diversity and intricacy lies divine wisdom, that life itself has a purpose, and that every moment calls one back to God. Thus, Islamic contemplation transcends simple mental clarity; it purifies the soul, sharpens insight, and anchors the individual to the Absolute—without confining them to the moment or the self alone.

Thus, reflection becomes a means to renew faith, steady the moral compass, nurture the conscience, and make balanced decisions guided by the light of God's guidance—rather than by fleeting emotions or momentary pressures.

# Dimensions of Conscious Reflection and Its Role in Attaining Tranquility and Purification

If reflection in the Islamic worldview stands among the highest acts of intellectual and spiritual worship, its greatness lies not merely in its mental effect but in the vastness and integration of its dimensions.

It is not confined to pondering the present moment, nor limited to observing fleeting feelings, but extends to encompass the self and the cosmos, the sacred text and time itself, meaning and ultimate purpose.

In doing so, it forms a holistic system for nurturing the human being from within—a consciousness rooted in faith, a balance founded upon natural disposition, and a profound serenity born from divine significance.

In the following pages, we will explore these five dimensions of conscious reflection, observing how each integrates with the others, and how they all converge toward a single purpose: that the heart may awaken, the awareness be rectified, the soul find rest in the remembrance of its Lord, and be purified in its journey toward Him.

## ► **First: Reflecting on the Self – From Self-Knowledge to Spiritual Purification**

Within the faith-based perspective, the human self is never seen merely as a vessel for fleeting thoughts and emotions. Rather, it is a sacred trust, a battlefield of the soul, and a lifelong journey of purification. Reflection on the self is not an abstract meditation nor a shallow behavioral analysis; it is an act of worship that returns the believer to a profound awareness of their own frailty and innate

nature, their divine mission, their desires, and their authentic self—complete with flaws and mistakes.

When a believer turns their gaze inward, they do not simply observe their feelings as detached phenomena. Instead, they seek to understand their origins, their purpose, and what truly moves them at their core: Is it the pleasure of God? The whims of the self? The pressures of habit? Or the echoes of the outside world?

This profound form of reflection awakens deep insight and shatters the illusion of mental neutrality promised by some schools of meditation. It does not settle for mere observation but demands accountability; it does not stop at understanding but calls for sincere reform.

The Qur'an beautifully to this profound contemplative journey in the verse: ***"And within yourselves—do you not then see?"*** (Adh-Dhariyat, 21)

True insight begins from within, and the path to inner peace is not paved solely by calming the emotions. Rather, it flows through the purification of intentions, the liberation of the will, and the constant remembrance of the sacred trust entrusted to humanity when it accepted the role of vicegerent of God on Earth.

Whoever sincerely reflects upon the self realizes that life's journey is not a quest for fleeting comfort, but rather a pursuit of inner harmony—a state where the soul is at peace, not because thought has ceased, but because it has found its true direction, reconciled with its natural disposition, and anchored its strength in God.

Thus, mindful reflection on the self becomes the essential first step toward the soul's purification. Without this, a person may appear calm on the surface, yet remain trapped in a spiral of anxiety—

observing the self without questioning it, soothing the heart without cleansing it.

The Qur'an beautifully encapsulates this profound dimension with the words:

***"Nay! Man, indeed, is a witness against himself, even though he may put forth his excuses."*** (Al-Qiyamah, 14-15)

This reveals that the depths of the human soul are not shrouded in darkness, but may be veiled by excuses and justifications. Mindful reflection, then, is the moment when this veil is lifted—not to chastise the self, but to purify and elevate it.

Perhaps the most eloquent expression of the intimate link between self-knowledge and knowledge of God is found in the words attributed to Imam Ali (peace be upon him): ***"He who knows himself knows his Lord."***

This knowledge is not mere intellectual understanding, but an inner witnessing—one that unveils to the servant their weakness, drawing them toward God's strength; reveals their incompleteness, inspiring the pursuit of divine perfection; and awakens their servitude, igniting a longing for the Face of God.

## ► **Secondly: Reflecting on the Universe — From Awe of Beauty to Witnessing Wisdom**

In the Islamic worldview, the universe is far more than a breathtaking visual spectacle or a silent mass moving within a closed system. It is a **sign** (āyah). And every sign carries a message. Every message leads to a Sender.

Thus, reflection upon the cosmos is not merely an aesthetic contemplation, but a deliberate invitation to discern the wisdom

behind the beauty, the lesson within the order, and the purpose underlying the diversity.

God Almighty commands: *“Say, ‘Look at what is in the heavens and the earth.’”* (Yunus, 101)

Notice He does not say, “Look at the heavens,” but rather, “Look *what is in* them”—calling us not just to behold their form, but to seek their meaning, their message, and the insight they beckon us to embrace.

In another verse, God beautifully combines *remembrance* and *reflection*, laying the foundation for a state of heartfelt and intellectual presence together:

*“Those who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth...”* (Al-Imran, 191)

Reflecting on the universe is not a silent moment of mere admiration; it is a conscious, speaking awareness— An awareness that this intricate order cannot be accidental, That beauty cannot exist without purpose, That in the cycle of night and day, in the play of colors and shadows, and in the harmony of laws, There resounds a profound wisdom calling out to humanity:

Return to your Lord, for everything is woven to guide you back to Him.

While mere contemplation may rest at the experience of harmony, **conscious reflection** goes further—it leads to a heartfelt acknowledgment: of the Creator, of divine wisdom, and of ultimate purpose.

From this recognition arises a deep-seated tranquility, for the human being comes to understand that they do not exist in a chaotic or

meaningless universe, but within a divine order woven with mercy and precision.

They realize their unique place within this intricate fabric, along with the ethical responsibility it entails.

Thus, in the Islamic worldview, reflecting on the cosmos is a gateway to *Tawhid*—the affirmation of Divine Oneness—not merely a means of relaxation.

It is a way to cultivate a balanced, purposeful vision of the world, rather than a fleeting escape from it.

### ► **Third: Reflection on the Divine Texts – From Knowledge to Guidance**

In the Islamic vision, reflection is never separated from divine revelation, nor reduced merely to inner experience or sensory data. Rather, *Tadabbur* — deep contemplation of the Quranic verses — is among the highest forms of reflection. It elevates the seeker beyond the limits of intellectual comprehension to the expansive horizons of divine guidance, forging a living connection between the sacred text and the heart.

As Allah commands:

*“Do they not then ponder on the Qur’an? Or are there locks upon [their] hearts?”* (Muhammad, 24)

Here, the call is not to a hurried or superficial reading, but to a thoughtful engagement—asking: Why was this revealed? Why in this context? What does this mean for me, for my life, for my choices, for nurturing my inner self?

Reflection on the sacred texts is not merely an exercise in accumulating knowledge or dissecting language. Rather, it is a transformative journey—turning revelation into awareness, knowledge into action, and each verse into a mirror where the believer beholds their own soul, destiny, and direction.

The verses of the Qur'an are not neutral data; they are living messages. In every story, there is guidance; in every command, mercy; in every warning, a reminder; and in every promise, a source of profound tranquility.

Therefore, whoever reads the Qur'an without reflecting upon it, without embodying its guidance, and without being enlightened by its light, risks losing the very essence of the message. Allah describes those who came before us in this regard, saying:

***"The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and then did not take it on is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books]." (Al-Jumu'ah, 5)***

They bear the texts, yet fail to carry their guidance or act upon their meanings, as if gaining no benefit from them at all.

Thus, reflection upon the sacred texts is a vital pillar of conscious contemplation—reviving faith, directing the will, freeing the soul from randomness, and granting a horizon anchored not in fleeting whims but in divine revelation.

#### **► Fourth: Contemplation on Time — From Momentary Awareness to Eternal Meaning**

In Chapter Eleven of this book, we explored the concept of the "Power of Conscious Presence" as a faith-based alternative to the popular notion of the "Power of Now." We demonstrated how Islam does not

isolate itself in the present moment alone, but rather balances the past and future as interconnected dimensions of time.

Here, we delve even deeper into the dimension of time—not merely as a container for awareness, but as a profound subject of reflective purification, one that realigns the human soul within the entirety of its existential journey.

In the faith-based vision, a person is not called to remain trapped in the present moment, nor to summon the past with regret, nor the future with anxiety. Rather, one is invited to regard all of time as a sacred trust, a revealing unveiling, and a ladder leading to God.

The past is a domain of lessons learned, not of drowning in what has been. The present is the place of intention and action, not of distraction or detachment. The future is the horizon of hope, insight, and resurrection—not merely worldly planning.

Allah Almighty says: ***“And remember when you were few and oppressed in the land...”*** (Al-Anfal, 26) — a call to reflect deeply on the past.

He also says: ***“They will have good news in this worldly life and in the Hereafter”*** (Yunus, 64) — a linking of the present with ultimate destiny.

And regarding the future in the Hereafter, He states: ***“Then, behold, they will see”*** (As-Saffat, 179) — after a long heedlessness.

Conscious reflection on time is not an escape from the noise of life, but a quest to uncover meaning; not to freeze a person in the “now,” but to see the “now” as a bridge between the origin of creation and the reunion to come.

Every moment lived in this light no longer becomes a source of anxiety, but rather an opportunity for purification; and every moment

understood in the light of purpose ceases to be a burden, becoming instead a part of the journey.

It is here that true tranquility is born—not crafted by mere exercises, but shaped by conscious awareness of God within time, and through time, toward eternity.

### ► **Fifth: Contemplation on Purpose and Mission – From Fleeting Meaning to Eternal Significance**

At the culmination of the dimensions of mindful contemplation emerges the deepest and most exalted aspect: the human reflection on their ultimate purpose in existence and their mission in life. Without anchoring contemplation in this profound dimension, it remains a mere mental flow without direction, a suspended meditation on the moment that yields neither steadfast awareness nor true tranquility.

Contemplating purpose is not merely asking, “Why am I here?” but involves reviewing all that one does, feels, and imagines through the lens of this question.

For the believer, when reflecting on purpose, the gaze does not close inwardly on the self or worldly matters alone; rather, it opens toward the meaning of servitude — the reality that one is a creation of God, accountable before Him, entrusted as a steward on earth, and inevitably heading toward a resurrection that admits no doubt.

*“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.”*  
(Adh-Dhariyat, 51-56)

When a believer truly internalizes this fundamental truth, contemplation transcends mere intellectual exercise and becomes a realignment of the soul’s compass. Every moment of life can then be reshaped and reframed in light of this ultimate purpose:

Am I seeking God in this step? Do these feelings please Him? Does this decision purify my soul?

Within this framework, tranquility is no longer a fleeting feeling of calm but the natural fruit of harmony between one's inner self and one's divine destination. This peace is not a mere psychological respite—it is stability on the path, acceptance of fate, and a profound assurance that everything one does and endures carries eternal significance and will not be lost.

In contrast, reflection that ignores this purpose may temporarily ease anxiety but ultimately fails to grant true meaning. Without meaning, the cycle of restlessness returns—because physical comfort cannot substitute for the awakening of the heart, and presence in the moment is futile if that moment does not carry you closer to God.

### ► **Conclusion: Conscious Reflection as a Holistic Pathway to Tranquility and Purification**

Through these five profound dimensions—knowing the self, contemplating the cosmos, pondering the sacred text, awakening to the flow of time, and grasping the ultimate purpose—reflection in the Islamic worldview transforms from a mere intellectual exercise into a comprehensive way of life. It evolves from a mental technique into a holistic act of spiritual purification, and from a fleeting moment of mindful presence into an ongoing journey toward peace, serenity, and contentment.

This is a form of reflection that does not seek silence for its own sake, but rather calls forth meaning. It does not settle for passive observation, but urges accountability, self-examination, and purposeful guidance. It does not isolate the individual from the world, but rather enlists them as a responsible, accountable servant and steward in the grand tapestry of creation under God's command.

Hence, the Islamic vision of reflection distinguishes itself from many contemporary meditative practices—not by outright rejection of their forms, but by rooting them deeply in spiritual foundation, endowing them with profound ethical horizons and a unifying compass.

This transforms tranquility from a mere mental state into a living faith-born reality—an effect that springs from harmony with God, with the self, and with all of creation.

## **Extensions of Conscious Reflection: Between Worship and Daily Practice**

Having explored the five dimensions of conscious reflection in the Islamic perspective — from contemplation of the self and the cosmos, to pondering the sacred text, time, and the ultimate purpose —it becomes clear that reflection in Islam is neither a detached intellectual exercise nor a momentary meditation isolated from life's context. Rather, it is a holistic way of life that permeates the fabric of daily existence, intertwines with acts of worship, and weaves a continuous presence of the individual in the world through an ongoing awareness of God and the self.

This unit sheds light on the extensions of conscious reflection across three interconnected spheres:

- ♦ In worship, which transforms into moments of vivid contemplation;
- ♦ In daily life, where each moment becomes an opportunity for self-accountability and guidance;
- ♦ In thought and creativity, emerging from deep pondering of creation, revelation, and divine laws.

Thus, reflection becomes a powerful tool for cultivating a balanced human being—humble in worship, vigilant in conduct, discerning in thought, and tranquil in heart.

## ► **First: Reflection and Spiritual Practices – The Presence of the Heart in Worship**

In Islam, worship is never separated from reflection; rituals are not mere physical motions but rather stations of awareness, moments of heartfelt presence with God, and living spaces for activating conscious reflection.

The Qur'an beautifully highlights this profound truth: ***"Not their meat nor their blood reaches Allah, but it is your piety that reaches Him."*** (Al-Hajj, 37)

Thus, worship, at its core, becomes a measure of God-consciousness (taqwa), a manifestation of the heart's presence rather than simply the body's attendance.

Prayer — the Pillar of Worship — is not merely a ritual bound by time and place; it is a concentrated moment of presence where the entire being gathers: the body standing, the tongue remembering, the mind reflecting, and the heart turned toward God.

As Allah declares: ***"Indeed, I am Allah; there is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance."*** (Taha, 14)

In this profound sense, prayer is not simply a source of tranquility, but a daily school of reflection and purification — a moment to realign the compass, to clarify intention, and to rekindle the ultimate purpose.

Similarly, **dhikr (remembrance)** is far from a mechanical repetition; it is a living invocation of God within the soul.

“SubhanAllah” (Glory be to God) is not merely a phrase, but a vision awakened.

“Alhamdulillah” (Praise be to God) is not just a refrain, but a heartfelt awareness of a present grace.

“Allahu Akbar” (God is the Greatest) is not merely a slogan, but a recalibration of one’s values amid moments of heedlessness.

As Allah declares: *“Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.”* (Ar-Ra’d, 28)

Thus, reflection in Islam is never a detached mental exercise but deeply woven into the fabric of worship. In prayer, remembrance, recitation, and glorification, the heart trains in presence, the mind nurtures contemplation, and the soul is purified through sincerity and humility.

## ► **Second: Reflection in Daily Life and the Refinement of the Self**

Allah Almighty says: *“O you who have believed, fear Allah. And let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow.”* (Al-Hashr, 18)

This is a direct Qur’anic exhortation to every believing soul to contemplate the impact of its conduct and to link daily actions with their eternal significance—not as a paralyzing fear, but as an awakening that sharpens intention and illuminates the path.

In Islam, reflection is not a seasonal practice nor a rare moment set apart from the flow of life. Rather, it is a way of life that permeates daily situations, transforming into a lens through which one sees oneself and one’s behavior. Through it, one re-examines mistakes

and successes, words and intentions—guided by Divine guidance, not by fleeting moods or habits.

In every situation he experiences, every decision he makes, and every emotion he feels, there lies space for sincere reflection:

***Why did I get angry? Why did I rejoice? What did I mean when I said that? Does this action bring me closer to God or take me further away? How can I repair the impact I've left? What wisdom can I draw from this mistake?***

This kind of reflective practice makes a person more self-aware and more inclined toward the self-accountability the Prophet (peace be upon him) urged when he said:

***"Take account of yourselves before you are taken to account, and weigh your deeds before they are weighed for you."***

This self-accountability is not a form of harshness or self-punishment, but rather a continuous state of awareness, a gentle self-review, and a training ground for spiritual and behavioral maturity.

The conscious reflective person does not live driven by habits, but examines and refines them. He does not react blindly to emotions, but questions them and redirects them toward inner purification.

In this way, daily life becomes a field for moral growth and spiritual cleansing—not just a series of experiences. Every situation becomes a chance to rise, every emotional response a doorway to self-understanding, and every challenge a path to deeper insight.

Thus, reflection is no longer confined to moments of silence, but stretches across all moments of life—from the home to the street, from the workplace to solitude—because it lives within the person's awareness. It reconnects actions with their intentions, and reactions

with their inner motives, gradually guiding the person toward balance, toward sincerity, and toward inner peace.

### ► **Third: Reflection as a Horizon for Creativity and Intellectual Insight**

In Islam, reflection is not a spiritual activity isolated from the intellect; it is a gateway to awareness, a key to creativity, and a generator of balanced critical thinking.

In a moment of sincere contemplation, a person breaks free from the grip of habit and repetition, sees things as they truly are, and rediscovers their relationship with themselves, the world, and the truth.

God Almighty says: ***“We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.”***  
(Fussilat, 53)

This contemplative vision is not merely descriptive—it is a divine promise that the path to clarity passes through reflection, and that the truth is not imposed by force, but unveiled through thoughtful contemplation and insight, by observing both the cosmic and inner signs.

Thus, reflection becomes a path to liberation from passive indoctrination, a means to independent thinking, and a way to rebuild understanding through both revelation and reason.

The Qur’an guides the human being to reflect even on the simplest scenes in nature. It says:

***“Do they not look at the camels—how they are created?”***  
(Al-Ghashiyah, 17)

The aim is not to describe the camel's biological structure, but to provoke deeper questions: Who created this? Why? What is the wisdom behind it?

This is the essence of *tawhidi* (monotheistic) creativity: to see the depth behind the surface, and meaning behind the familiar.

In this context, creativity is not born out of a vacuum, but from reflection on creation, contemplation of divine wisdom, and intellectual striving to uncover truth and move beyond conjecture.

This type of thinking does not lead a person away from faith; rather, it deepens it, strengthens it, and transforms the intellect into a means of spiritual purification—not an adversary of the soul.

Conscious reflection, then, does not distance the Muslim from religiosity—it liberates them from rigidity, repetition, and improvisation, and elevates them toward a horizon of rooted understanding, insight, and responsible creativity.

## ► **Conclusion:**

Conscious reflection is not measured by how much a person withdraws from reality, but by their ability to penetrate the depth of the moment and direct it toward purification and balance.

In every prayer, every decision, and every thought, there lies an opportunity for reflection—not for escaping the noise of the outside world, but for rebuilding the inner self. Not to observe life from a distance, but to engage in it with insight, awareness, and serenity.

And when the roots of reflection extend from worship into daily life, awareness transforms into a way of living. Tranquility is no longer a temporary station... but a lasting fruit that renews itself each time

the servant purifies their intention, activates their awareness, and connects their soul to God in every state.

## **The Islamic Perspective in Response to Critiques of Meditation and Mindfulness**

Upon examining the critical reflections brought forth by Western studies on meditation and mindfulness, it becomes evident that the core challenge extends far beyond mere shortcomings in practice, overstated benefits, or the struggle to maintain consistency. Rather, the problem lies fundamentally in the very essence of these concepts—when they are severed from the higher moral and spiritual purpose that defines human existence.

The question, then, is not merely: “Is meditation beneficial for mental well-being?” but rather: “Does it help a person truly know who they are, understand why they meditate, and discern what to do with the inner realities they uncover?”

When meditation is presented as a neutral tool solely for managing anxiety or calming emotions, the practice loses its deeper meaning. It devolves into a refuge or a detached observation—suspended in limbo without guiding one toward a purposeful end.

This is precisely why some researchers have candidly acknowledged that meditation can sometimes produce adverse effects: it may weaken resolve, isolate the individual, or lead them away from meaningful engagement, rather than guide them out of themselves toward the world, people, and purpose.

In contrast, Islam does not present reflection merely as a mental exercise or an emotional technique. Rather, it offers a comprehensive educational path—one that reconstructs consciousness, purifies the

heart, and authentically connects the individual with God, with others, and with oneself, grounded in sincerity and responsibility.

Thus, mindful reflection in Islam goes beyond merely addressing these critiques. It fundamentally redefines the purpose of presence, the meaning behind silence, and the mission embedded in our relationship with the self, the universe, and the hereafter.

In the following pages, we do not simply present criticism to then refute it; rather, we illuminate how each challenge within the philosophy of contemporary meditation is met in Islam by a coherent framework that anchors the soul to its creed. This framework enlivens reflection—not as a mere refuge—but as a means of sincerity, growth, and spiritual purification.

### ► **First Critique: The Overestimation of the Psychological Benefits of Meditation and Mindfulness**

Western criticism points out that many studies on meditation and mindfulness suffer from inflated results, weak methodologies, and a publication bias favoring positive outcomes. This casts doubt on the universality and reliability of the psychological effects attributed to these practices. Yet, this raises a deeper question: Is the value of a spiritual practice measured merely by its ability to reduce stress? Or by its power to build and transform the human being from within?

From the Islamic perspective, reflection does not begin with the pursuit of quick emotional relief but with a profound redefinition of the self in light of its ultimate purpose and servitude to God. The tranquility of the heart, as Allah says, ***“Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah...”*** (Ar-Ra’d, 28), is not a mere psychological effect or technique, but the fruit of faith, connection, and surrender to the Divine.

Reflection is not merely a means of calming the mind, but a path of spiritual purification; it is practiced within the framework of remembrance, self-accountability, and sincere intention—leading not just to relaxation, but to uprightness and steadfastness.

♦ **Summary of the Response:**

While the philosophy of meditation often remains confined to its apparent psychological effects, Islam anchors tranquility in the profound sincerity of one's relationship with God, not merely in the reduction of anxiety.

The true benefit is not a fleeting feeling but a profound transformation; and peace of heart is not a momentary emotion, but a lasting impact on a soul purified by the light of meaning and steadfastly established upon the path of God.

► **Second Criticism: Negative Effects Experienced by Some Meditation Practitioners**

Reliable scientific studies have highlighted that some individuals practicing meditation and mindfulness may encounter unexpected psychological side effects. These can include anxiety attacks, the resurfacing of painful memories, identity disturbances, or emotional detachment.

One notable study published in *PLOS ONE* revealed that nearly 25% of practitioners reported “distressing” experiences during their sessions, particularly when guidance was lacking or when there was a complex psychological history involved.

These distressing symptoms are not inherently linked to meditation itself, but rather arise from the absence of a guiding framework for the experience—treating meditation as a neutral tool that opens the doors of the soul without clear boundaries or a purposeful direction.

Herein lies a profound distinction: Should the soul be left to confront its depths alone, or should it be led into those depths under the care of a guiding light filled with mercy?

In the Islamic perspective, the reflective soul is never abandoned to face its inner world in isolation. From the very outset, it is enveloped by a compassionate divine companionship that directs, embraces, and draws forth light from the shadows. God in Islam is never absent from the moment of contemplation; rather, He is the ever-present reality within it, the ultimate aim, and the steadfast helper through every unveiling that takes place therein.

Allah Almighty says: ***“Indeed, Allah is with those who fear Him and those who are doers of good.”*** (An-Nahl, 128) a constant presence amid effort, intention, weakness, and humility.

Therefore, reflection is never practiced in a void or isolation, but always in the divine presence, invoking His names and observing the etiquette of servitude.

When wounds are revealed or emotions rise, the believer is not merely asked to “observe” them as mindfulness might suggest, but rather to engage with them from a stance of repentance, hope, seeking forgiveness, and surrender to Allah.

Allah the Exalted says: ***“Say, O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah...”*** (Az-Zumar, 53) a divine reassurance that does not deny the weight of sin, but transforms the feeling of guilt into an open door toward return and redemption.

He also says: ***“Indeed, those who fear Allah ... when they remember, they see clearly.”*** (Al-A'raf, 201) —for true insight does not arise from merely observing feelings, but from the remembrance of Allah within them.

In this context, the supplication of Imam Al-Sajjad (peace be upon him) stands as a profound expression of this approach:

***“My God, through You I have come to know You; You have guided me to You; You have called me to You; and were it not for You, O Lord, I would never have known who You are.”***

The soul does not reach God by its own effort alone, but through His call that guides, His light that unveils, and His mercy that accompanies the moment of unveiling.

And because Islam does not burden the soul beyond its capacity, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned against excess in spiritual paths that lack proper guidance, saying:

***“Do not be like a plant that has neither a stable trunk nor roots in the earth.”***

In other words, do not exhaust yourself without a clear purpose or wise progression, lest you neither settle nor advance.

For all these reasons, God has promised those who sincerely strive in His cause with a comprehensive assurance:

***“And those who strive for Us – We will surely guide them to Our ways.”***  
(Al-Ankabut, 69)

Thus, when contemplation is a genuine struggle—an earnest jihad—it is met with divine guidance, not confusion; with victory, not wandering.

♦ **Summary of the response:**

While meditation in some contexts may lead to turmoil or loss, conscious reflection in Islam offers a safe and well-framed spiritual experience, grounded in remembrance, purification, and divine companionship. It does not leave the soul open to be overwhelmed by its own darkness, but rather opens it to be illuminated by God's light, returning it to Him purer and closer than before.

► **Third Criticism: The Difficulty of Achieving and Sustaining “Full Mindfulness” in Daily Life**

Numerous Western studies have revealed that maintaining “complete mindfulness” outside structured meditation sessions is nearly impossible in everyday life. The relentless pressures, distractions, and mental interruptions inevitably pull the individual back into automatic, habitual patterns of thinking, distancing them from the full presence they are supposed to embody.

Moreover, a study published in *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* emphasizes that the tangible benefits of mindfulness only emerge after extensive, long-term training, rendering the ideal of “continuous attention” more a theoretical aspiration than a practical reality.

In the Islamic perspective, this difficulty simply does not arise. Islam never demands from the soul what exceeds its natural capacity, nor does it present presence as a mental state that must be sustained incessantly. Rather, it offers mindfulness as a gradual path of purification, built step by step, wisely balanced, and nourished by returning again and again—not by relentless continuous effort.

- ♦ **How does Islam address this challenge? Through three practical pillars:**

### **1. Dividing Presence Across the Day's Stations:**

Rather than demanding that a person “remain fully present at all times,” Islam provides structured moments of mindfulness woven into daily life. The five daily prayers punctuate the day, remembrance (dhikr) is spread across morning and evening, and supplication (du‘ā’) remains accessible at every moment.

God Almighty says: *“So when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah... and remember Allah often...”* (Al-Jumu‘ah, 10)

This is a tangible model: moments dedicated to worship, followed by moments of work, with remembrance nourishing the spirit throughout activity. Islam does not require one to detach from reality in order to be present; rather, it grounds presence within reality itself, charging the heart with worship so that awareness remains alive amidst life’s busyness.

### **2. Conscious Reflection as a Repeated Habit, Not a Constant Burden:**

In the Islamic philosophy of contemplation, presence is not measured by unbroken vigilance, but by the ability to return.

Being present does not mean never losing focus; rather, it means knowing how to come back when distraction occurs.

This transforms moments of lapse into opportunities for growth and self-discipline, not reasons for despair or failure.

Therefore, the believer is not drained by the unrealistic demand of “perfect attention,” but is gently trained to renew their intention before each action, to revisit their heart afterward, and to realign their path regularly, step by step.

### **3. Forgetfulness as Part of the Plan, Not Its Enemy:**

In the Islamic framework, forgetfulness is not a betrayal of contemplation but a natural aspect of the human soul.

Thus, the Qur’anic texts and Prophetic teachings do not rebuke forgetfulness; rather, they open it as a door to repentance and a manifestation of God’s kindness toward His servant.

The Prophet (PBUH) said: *“Every son of Adam makes mistakes, and the best of those who err are those who repent.”*

Mistakes and lapses are not failures in presence but fresh opportunities for return and spiritual refinement.

#### **♦ Islamic Response Summary:**

While the models of “perfect mindfulness” impose a continuous mental burden, Islam offers a gradual, balanced path that respects the human soul and gently guides it:

It does not demand absolute attention, but distributes presence throughout the day, Anchors it in intention, remembrance, and stations of return, And transforms forgetfulness itself into a motivation for comeback rather than a cause for despair.

Thus, in Islam, presence is not experienced as a tense psychological state but as a spiritual-practical system that yields lasting tranquility and profound awareness—without conflict with human nature.

## ► Fourth Critique: The Use of Meditation as a Mechanism to Avoid Emotional and Real-Life Problems

Several psychologists warn that meditation, when practiced without proper awareness, can become a psychological escape. It may serve as a way for a person to soothe anxiety or sadness without truly addressing their root causes.

Researcher William B. Britton described this pattern as “emotional avoidance”—using meditation to numb feelings rather than to engage with them honestly.

The longer the meditation sessions extend, the greater the risk of inward withdrawal, and the weaker the motivation to make meaningful changes or engage in constructive confrontation with oneself or reality.

This brings us back to a fundamental question: Is meditation merely a refuge from pain, or is it a path for genuine growth and elevation?

In Islam, reflection is not sanctioned as an escape but is presented as a tool for sincere self-accountability, compassionate confrontation, and earnest striving toward reform. Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said, ***“Blessed is the one whose own faults occupy him more than the faults of others.”***

Thus, contemplation is not wasted on mere observation of fleeting emotions but is dedicated to examining their roots and consequences, always connected to the ultimate purpose of existence.

When anger arises, you are not merely told to observe the feeling. Instead, you are asked: Why did you become angry? Was it for a righteous cause, or driven by selfishness? What should you do next? Should you seek forgiveness, apologize, exercise patience, or make a

change? Reflection in that moment is not calmness—it is awakening. It is not passive observation—it is deliberate action.

Here lies the crucial difference: meditation might help you accept the feeling as it is, but Islamic reflection urges you to evaluate it, purify it, and transform it into insight.

In the Qur'an, emotions are never separated from responsibility. God says:

***“Do not follow your desires, lest they lead you away from the path of Allah.”*** (Şād, 26)

Desires are not merely observed—they are guided and judged.

He also says:

***“And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it \* And inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness \* He has succeeded who purifies it.”*** (Ash-Shams, 7–9)

The soul is not purified by mere observation but through sincere purification, correction, and responsible transcendence.

### ♦ **Summary of the Response:**

While meditation is sometimes used as an escape from inner conflict, conscious reflection in Islam offers a path to confront the self rather than flee from it—a way to understand emotions rather than numb them, and to elevate pain rather than bury it.

In this model, tranquility is not the fruit of withdrawal, but of sincerity, courage, and a deep connection with God—opening the door to transformation, not denial.

## ► Fifth Critique: Negative Social Effects and Withdrawal from Relationships

Some psychological and social studies warn that deep meditation practices, when severed from a humane or ethical purpose, can lead to gradual detachment from social bonds.

In models of “constant inward retreat,” the other becomes a burden, relationships turn into noise, and the desire for emotional engagement or contributing to the repair of reality diminishes.

Studies such as the review by Davidson & Kaszniak (2015) have shown that some long-term meditation practitioners exhibit a marked decline in interest toward social connection and emotional listening, due to their persistent self-centered experiential focus.

### ♦ How does Islam address this issue?

In Islam, honesty with oneself is never separated from honesty with others, and heartfelt presence is not isolation, but preparation to re-engage with the world carrying a purposeful message.

Every moment of sincere reflection is, at its core, a step toward greater mercy, openness, and reform.

As God Almighty says: ***“The believers are but brothers, so make peace between your brothers.”*** (Al-Hujurat, 10)

Brotherhood here is not merely an internal feeling but a responsible relationship that demands ongoing reconciliation—an active expression that transforms inner tranquility into outward giving.

And in Surat Al-‘Asr, God says: ***“By time, indeed, mankind is in loss except for those who believe and do righteous deeds and encourage***

*one another to truth and encourage one another to patience.”*  
(Al-‘Asr, 1–3)

In this faith-based framework, it is not mere belief or inner presence that saves a person, but rather the pursuit of righteous action, active engagement with others, and mutual encouragement in truth and perseverance.

Thus, reflection in Islam is not understood as a silent spiritual retreat, but as a moral-spiritual training of the heart—one that prepares the soul to be more truthful with people and more aware of its social responsibilities.

- ♦ **The Prophet’s Model (PBUH): Presence with God and Presence among People**

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was the most reflective and God-conscious of people, yet he was never isolated or withdrawn. He was at the heart of his community—listening to their pains, supporting the weak, reconciling between those in conflict, and building a nation.

God says of him: *“There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; [he is] concerned over you and to the believers is kind and merciful.”* (At-Tawbah, 128)

Thus, Islam teaches us that being present with God does not diminish one’s presence with people—it deepens it, purifies it, and expands its reach.

- ♦ **The Model of Imam Ali (A): A Prayer That Gives, Not Isolates**

When Imam Ali (peace be upon him) was in the midst of his prayer, bowing in deep devotion, a beggar entered the mosque seeking help. None responded to him—except Imam Ali, who, while still in his bow, gestured toward the man and gave him his ring as charity.

In honor of this act, God revealed:

***“Your ally is none but Allah and [therefore] His Messenger and those who have believed—those who establish prayer and give zakah while they bow [in worship].”*** (Al-Ma'idah, 55)

This moment—combining the highest form of spiritual presence with the noblest act of generosity—captures the essence of conscious reflection in Islam: true spiritual presence does not shut itself off; it overflows. Worship, in this vision, does not isolate—it bears fruit

#### ♦ **From “Silent Interior” to “Responsible Engagement”**

In certain philosophies, the human being is trained to be “self-sufficient”—But in Islam, the self does not reach wholeness in isolation; it is completed when it excels in doing good to others, and when it engages them with truth and mercy.

God says: ***“Let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.”*** (Aal 'Imran, 104)

Such a call does not emerge from emptiness, but from hearts shaped by reflection, souls refined through discipline, and minds fully present with God—and fully present for people.

#### ♦ **Summary of the Response:**

While excessive meditation may lead to emotional withdrawal or relational detachment, conscious reflection in Islam binds the purification of the self to the service of others—linking inner clarity to outward sincerity. It does not close a person off within themselves, but returns them to the world bearing insight, charged with compassion, and capable of becoming a building block in the reform of existence.

## ♦ **Conclusion: From Soothing to Purification, From Observation to Guidance**

Western studies—marked by scientific fairness—have shown that despite certain benefits, meditation and mindfulness are not always safe or stable. They may produce side effects, weaken social engagement, and sometimes lead to emotional withdrawal, neutrality, or settling for observation instead of action, for acceptance instead of transformation.

In contrast, Islam does not present reflection as a tool to numb anxiety, but as a comprehensive path for self-development. It begins with faith, is nourished by remembrance, expands through reason, is refined by conduct, and culminates in a state of tranquility drawn not from silence, but from sincerity with God, engagement with people, and the connection between presence and purpose, between the moment and the message.

In mindful reflection within Islam:

- ♦ You do not observe anxiety merely to soothe it, but to transcend it—and remember who you are and why you were created.
- ♦ You do not simply notice your emotions, but hold their motives accountable and guide them toward what is right.
- ♦ You are not confined to the present moment, but connected to your roots, your purpose, and your safety with God.
- ♦ You do not retreat into yourself, but emerge with a broader horizon—carrying meaning and contributing to the world's renewal.

And when emotions crowd in and intentions become entangled, you are not asked merely to observe, but to **remember**—so you may see, to **see**, so you may return, and to **return**, so you may be purified.

God Almighty says: **“So flee to Allah”** (Adh-Dhariyat, 50)

This is the ultimate end of mindful reflection—not a withdrawal into the self, but a flight to God; a migration from confusion to guidance, from heedlessness to light.

Thus, reflection in Islam is not a stillness trapped within, but a return to the Divine, a radiance within the soul, and a journey of action stretching through time bearing witness in this world, and leading to salvation in the next.

## ► Conclusion of Chapter Twelve:

After this in-depth exploration of the concepts of meditation and mindfulness, along with a critical review of scientific objections and a presentation of the Islamic response through conscious reflection (**tafakkur**), it becomes clear that the issue lies not merely in the technique itself, but in the worldview from which it arises, the purpose it seeks, and the context in which it is practiced.

While mental meditation may offer certain useful tools, when stripped of meaning, intention, and an ethical compass, it is at risk of devolving into a state of mental neutrality, emotional detachment, or a fleeting neurological exercise whose effects quickly dissipate.

Reflecting on the Islamic vision, is an integral part of the human journey—one that seeks a return to innate purity (**fitrah**), the attainment of inner peace, and a conscious walk toward God with light and insight. At its core, **tafakkur** is a tool for self-construction on the path to the Divine, not merely a technique for momentary calm.

To highlight this essential distinction, the following table presents a focused comparison between the key features of both models:

The comparison table between Traditional Meditation and Conscious Reflection

Aspect	Traditional Meditation (Meditation & Mindfulness)	Conscious Reflection (Islamic Mindful Contemplation)
Purpose	To calm the mind and reduce stress	To attain deep tranquility through profound awareness of life and its divine purpose
Philosophical Roots	Drawn from Eastern and Western spiritual philosophies (Buddhism, Hinduism, Positive Psychology)	Rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, a reflective practice that nurtures the soul's purification and connection to God
Method of Practice	Calming the mind, observing the breath, noticing thoughts without interference	Contemplation on the creation of God, self-examination, Qur'anic reflection, remembrance (dhikr), and conscious engagement with life
Engagement with Thoughts	Observing thoughts without judgment or analysis	Reflecting deeply on meanings, discerning wisdom, and extracting lessons to refine the self
Engagement with Emotions	Accepting feelings as they arise, without seeking to change them	Analyzing emotions, understanding their causes, and rectifying them in accordance with faith
Impact on Behavior	Focused on inner peace without clear moral or behavioral guidance	Deepens ethical insight and manifests in conduct disciplined by revealed values

Aspect	Traditional Meditation (Meditation & Mindfulness)	Conscious Reflection (Islamic Mindful Contemplation)
Engagement with Reality	May lead to withdrawal or disengagement from life's challenges	Encourages active participation in society, striving for reform and growth
Balance of Body, Mind, and Spirit	Emphasizes mind and intellect, often disconnected from the soul	Integrates body, mind, and spirit within a framework of faith and spiritual purification
Temporal Perspective	Centered on the present moment, with less emphasis on past or future	Balances reflection on the past, awareness of the present, and preparation for the Hereafter
Spiritual Dimension	Often employed as relaxation without a comprehensive spiritual vision	Strengthens faith, deepens connection with God, and links the moment to ultimate destiny
Path to Inner Peace	Mental exercises aimed at soothing the nervous system	Deep, contemplative reflection that blends intellect with faith, resulting in tranquility rooted in remembrance and meaning

The comparison between meditation and mindfulness on one side, and conscious reflection on the other, is not merely a contrast between two methods or techniques. Rather, it reveals two distinct visions of humanity, two understandings of tranquility, and two paths for the cultivation of the self.

Whereas many contemporary meditative practices focus on controlling attention, calming anxiety, or cleansing the mind of the impurities of stress, conscious reflection in Islam springs from a

profound awareness of the meaning of existence, the dignity of the soul, and the true essence of presence in this life.

In meditation, one is asked to observe the self without questioning it. But in reflection, one is called to behold the self by the light of God, to purify it, and to reconnect it with its ultimate purpose.

In meditation, tranquility may be but a fleeting mental state... yet in reflection, it is a fruit borne of sincerity with God, divine unity, remembrance, and righteous deeds.

Thus, reflection does not merely soothe the mind; it directs the will, awakens the conscience, and nurtures the human being to be fully present in this world ready for the meeting with their Lord, aware of the self without confinement, and responsible for it without negligence.

Whoever seeks a tranquility that does not fade when the session ends, Whoever desires an awareness that endures beyond closed eyes, Whoever longs for a balanced life stretching from the present moment to the ultimate destiny—Let them meditate as God intended, Reflect as the Quran guides, And let the presence of the mind become the gateway to the presence of the heart... in the light of God.



Chapter Thirteen

# **Neuro- Linguistic Programming (NLP)**

## Chapter Thirteen

# Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)

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### Part One: Neuro-Linguistic Programming – Concept, Applications, and Critique

#### **■ Introduction to Part One: Why Discuss NLP?**

In the world of self-development, few methods have sparked as much simultaneous controversy and fascination as Neuro-Linguistic

Programming (NLP). On one hand, this technique promises rapid and effective transformation in patterns of thinking and behavior. On the other hand, it faces scientific and ethical criticisms regarding its efficacy and credibility.

Since our book does not aim merely to present a neutral theoretical overview, but rather to sift through modern approaches in light of faith-based purification (tazkiyah), it was necessary to first present NLP as it is, then critically evaluate it scientifically, before moving on to introduce an authentic and comprehensive alternative: Integrated Faith Programming (IFP).

## ■ Definition of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP):

Neuro-Linguistic Programming is a methodology aimed at enhancing thinking and developing behaviors through understanding the connection between the subconscious mind, language, and behavior. It originated in the 1970s by Richard Bandler and John Grinder, who developed this approach based on studying the psychological and linguistic patterns used by successful individuals in their lives. This system is founded on the idea that linguistic thinking can be programmed and directed to reshape how one interacts with life situations. In other words, the concept seeks to equip individuals with tools through which they can redirect their emotional and behavioral responses to be more positive and effective.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming works by transforming fears and negative habits into motivating experiences. It achieves this through various techniques, such as **Reframing**, which helps individuals view situations from a new perspective, and **Anchoring**, which stabilizes positive emotions to maintain emotional balance during moments of stress. Practitioners of NLP believe that these techniques enable individuals to reach a mental state that allows them to harness their full cognitive and emotional potential.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming has garnered widespread attention in fields such as personal development, psychotherapy, and performance enhancement at work. Although there remains scientific debate regarding its effectiveness, many individuals feel that these techniques help them improve their abilities and boost their productivity. This widespread interest makes NLP a compelling subject of exploration and discussion within psychology and self-development arenas.

## **Mechanisms and Techniques of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)**

Neuro-Linguistic Programming encompasses a range of techniques aimed at enhancing thought patterns and behaviors. Among the most common methods are **Reframing** and **Anchoring**, which assist individuals in transforming negative thoughts and replacing them with positive feelings and ideas that motivate improved interaction with various situations. Below is an explanation of some of these key techniques:

### **1. Reframing:**

The Reframing technique involves changing one's personal perception of negative situations by viewing them from a positive perspective. For example, if someone is struggling with a difficult task, reframing helps them focus on the learning aspect of the challenge, enabling them to approach the situation more positively and effectively. This technique is a powerful tool for transforming challenges into opportunities for personal growth.

### **2. Anchoring:**

The Anchoring technique involves associating specific emotional states with particular triggers, such as touching the fingertips,

repeating a motivational word, or holding a pen. The goal is to anchor a positive emotional state so that the individual can recall it when needed, especially during moments of stress or pressure. This technique was developed to help people feel confident or relaxed in situations that demand it, thereby enhancing their effectiveness and emotional control.

### **3. Sensory Representation:**

This technique focuses on utilizing the senses in the process of thinking and decision-making. According to Neuro-Linguistic Programming, individuals tend to rely more heavily on one primary sense—such as sight or hearing—when interpreting and interacting with the world around them. By identifying the sense that most strongly influences a person, internal dialogue can be guided in a way that enhances the impact of positive thinking.

### **4. Modeling:**

Modeling is one of the fundamental techniques in Neuro-Linguistic Programming. It involves studying the behaviors and thought patterns of successful individuals—whether colleagues or others—and attempting to replicate them. By imitating positive models, a person can learn effective strategies of thinking and actions that lead to success.

## **Applications of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) in Personal Development**

Neuro-Linguistic Programming stands out for its ability to assist individuals across various aspects of their lives, ranging from enhancing job performance to boosting self-confidence and communication skills. NLP employs its techniques effectively for self-

development, helping people overcome personal obstacles and increase their adaptability to life's challenges. Below are some practical applications where NLP can contribute to improving the quality of life:

### **1. Overcoming Fears and Anxiety:**

NLP is used to reprogram the mind to handle fears, whether related to public speaking, fear of failure, or other challenges. Techniques like anchoring help evoke feelings of confidence and calmness, enabling individuals to face their fears effectively. The reframing technique also assists in transforming fear into a positive challenge that can be confronted and learned from.

### **2. Enhancing Communication Skills:**

Neuro-Linguistic Programming relies on understanding how individuals process information—whether visually, auditorily, or kinesthetically—which helps improve communication skills. By analyzing sensory interaction styles, a person can communicate more effectively and build stronger relationships. This understanding allows the individual to grasp and respond to the needs of others, facilitating smoother communication and increasing positive engagement.

### **3. Achieving Personal and Professional Goals:**

NLP focuses on developing goal-setting skills and employing effective strategies to reach them. For example, the modeling technique enables individuals to study successful personalities and learn their strategies, helping them adopt thought and behavior patterns that lead to goal attainment. By imitating specific steps toward success or career advancement, individuals boost their motivation and preparedness.

#### **4. Increasing Self-Confidence and Positive Thinking:**

Through anchoring and reframing techniques, individuals can strengthen their self-confidence. Reframing helps transform negative thoughts into positive ones, enhancing a person's sense of capability to face challenges. Alongside this, techniques that reduce intrusive thoughts and reinforce encouraging attitudes contribute positively to self-esteem and overall mental well-being.

#### **5. Flexibility in Facing Challenges:**

Neuro-Linguistic Programming empowers individuals to develop mental flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances. Techniques such as anchoring and modeling help a person maintain calm and self-motivation when confronting new challenges. This application enhances the ability to focus on solutions rather than getting caught up in problems, thereby increasing effectiveness in managing life's pressures.

These applications make NLP a valuable tool for personal development and for creating meaningful change in both personal and professional life.

## **Supportive Studies on Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) Techniques**

Despite the widespread scientific criticisms of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), some Western studies have pointed to potential positive effects of these techniques in areas such as communication, self-motivation, and psychological support. Below is a brief overview of some notable studies:

## **1. The Impact of NLP Techniques on Improving Social Communication**

A study published in the *British Journal of General Practice* indicated that certain NLP applications, such as “anchoring” and “modeling,” may be beneficial in enhancing the quality of interactions between individuals, particularly in therapeutic and medical contexts. The researchers found that using NLP techniques in communication training contributed to improving listening skills, providing emotional support, and strengthening the doctor-patient relationship.<sup>45</sup>

## **2. The Effect of NLP Techniques on Goal Setting and Self-Motivation**

A study published in the *Journal of Counseling Psychology* indicated that the NLP technique of “modeling” can be used to develop successful strategies for self-motivation and goal setting. Researchers Einspruch and Forman observed that participants who received training in NLP techniques demonstrated improved clarity of goals and cognitive flexibility in educational settings.<sup>46</sup>

## **3. NLP Techniques and Mood Improvement & Psychological Support**

In a comprehensive review published by Witkowski, over 30 years of research related to NLP were examined. The analysis highlighted that some participants reported improvements in mood and reductions in anxiety levels following the use of techniques such as “reframing” and “anchoring.” However, the researcher noted that

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45 Sturt, J., Ali, S., Robertson, W., Metcalfe, D., Grove, A., & Bourne, C. (2008). Neurolinguistic programming: A systematic review of the effects on health outcomes. *British Journal of General Practice*, 58(556), 119–122. <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp08X277254>

46 Einspruch, E. L., & Forman, B. D. (1985). Observations concerning research literature on Neuro-Linguistic Programming. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 32(4), 589–596. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.32.4.589>

these improvements were often temporary and highly dependent on the context.<sup>47</sup>

#### **4. The Conceptual Overlap Between NLP and the Growth Mindset**

Although Carol Dweck did not directly study NLP, some researchers have noted conceptual intersections between NLP techniques and Dweck's notion of the "growth mindset," particularly regarding the encouragement of positive thinking and overcoming internal challenges.<sup>48</sup>

#### **5. Summary**

These studies suggest that certain NLP techniques may contribute to enhancing communication skills, goal setting, and mood improvement under specific conditions. However, most of these findings remain context-dependent and suffer from weaknesses in experimental design, rendering them open to debate, as we detailed in the "Scientific Critique" section of this chapter.

## **Critical Studies on Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) Techniques**

Despite the widespread popularity of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) in the fields of self-development and training, it has faced extensive scientific criticism due to the lack of solid theoretical foundations, insufficient empirical evidence, and poor reproducibility and measurability. Below are some of the most prominent academic critiques supported by reputable Western references:

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47 Witkowski, T. (2010). Thirty-five years of research on Neuro-Linguistic Programming: NLP Research Data Base. *Current Research in Psychology*, 1(2), 60–78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3844/crpsp.2010.60.78>

48 Dweck, C. S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Random House. <https://www.randomhouse.com>

## 1. Lack of Rigorous Empirical Evidence

A comprehensive critical review conducted by Witkowski (2010) indicates that most research on NLP suffers from weak scientific design, such as the absence of control groups, poor reproducibility, and small sample sizes. He concluded that NLP lacks a scientific basis to support its effectiveness.<sup>49</sup>

## 2. Doubts About Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Models

A study published in *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* pointed out that the core concepts underlying NLP—such as “sensory representation systems” and “emotional anchoring”—lack reliable scientific support. Heap and Aravind (2002) noted that NLP is based on hypotheses that are not scientifically testable.<sup>50</sup>

## 3. Limited Sustainability and Long-Term Impact

A review published in *Journal of Counseling Psychology* revealed that some effects of NLP on performance and motivation may be temporary and unsustainable, and are difficult to replicate in other experiments. The researchers recommended caution in generalizing results from studies based on uncontrolled trials.<sup>51</sup>

## 4. Excessive Promotion and Unrealistic Expectations

Researchers in *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* have warned that some NLP trainers promote their techniques as all-encompassing solutions without sufficient evidence to back such

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49 Witkowski, T. (2010). Thirty-Five Years of Research on Neuro-Linguistic Programming: NLP Research Data Base. *Current Research in Psychology*, 1(2), 60–78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3844/crpsp.2010.60.78>

50 Heap, M., & Aravind, K. K. (2002). Evaluating the claims and evidence in NLP. *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 42(3), 34–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167802423003>

51 Sharpley, C. F. (1987). Research findings on Neurolinguistic Programming: Non-supportive data or an untestable theory? *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 34(1), 103–107. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.34.1.103> Excessive Promotion and Unrealistic Expectations

claims. They emphasized that this oversimplification risks misleading the public or fostering reliance on ineffective tools.<sup>52</sup>

## 5. Comparison with Established Therapeutic Approaches

A comparative study published in *Clinical Psychology Review* noted that NLP does not match the effectiveness of well-established therapies such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). The study recommended that NLP be used cautiously and only as a complementary approach rather than as a substitute for evidence-based psychotherapy.<sup>53</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

While Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) continues to enjoy widespread popularity, scholarly consensus maintains that it lacks the rigorous scientific foundation required to qualify as a credible tool for therapy or personal development.

Though some individuals may experience temporary benefit from its techniques, the academic community remains cautious—urging against presenting NLP as a proven method of transformation unless it is subjected to robust, repeatable, and peer-reviewed research. Until such validation is attained, promoting it as a reliable path to healing or growth remains premature and potentially misleading.

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52 Lilienfeld, S. O., Lynn, S. J., & Lohr, J. M. (2003). Science and Pseudoscience in Clinical Psychology. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1529-1006.01421>

53 Devilly, G. J. (2005). Power therapies and possible threats to the science of psychology and psychiatry. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 25(3), 329–343. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2004.05.001>

## Part Two: Integrated Faith Programming (IFP) – Self-Purification as a Path to Deep Transformation

### Introduction: From Programming the Mind to Purifying the Heart

Having explored Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) with fairness—not as a wholly flawed technique, but rather as a paradigm that remains limited in scope, fragmented in vision, and detached from the soul's deeper dimensions—we now turn to a faith-centered framework. This alternative vision seeks to reimagine personal development through the lens of *tazkiyah* (self-purification), sincere intention, and an awareness of life's greater spiritual purpose.

Amid the rising tide of self-help discourse and the growing fascination with mental programming and motivational tools, more profound questions inevitably arise—questions that transcend methods and mechanics:

Can reason alone transform the human being? Does momentary motivation yield lasting change? Or does true transformation spring from something deeper—from a purification that flows from within, from an intention rooted in sincerity, from a spiritual connection that illuminates the path of change and infuses it with meaning?

Experience and indeed, numerous studies have shown that many modern change methodologies, despite their apparent effectiveness, often leave the individual with a lingering sense of emptiness once goals are achieved. This void stems from a fundamental disconnection: a pursuit unanchored in a purpose greater than the self.

It is from this realization that Integrated Faith Programming (IFP) emerges—not as a mere technical alternative to NLP, but as a holistic worldview that returns the human being to the heart, and repositions change within its true context: *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification).

In IFP, the human being is not reduced to cognitive patterns or mental constructs; rather, they are re-rooted in their innate nature (*fitrah*), their faith, and their connection to the Divine. Success is no longer viewed merely as achievement, but as a devotional journey toward contentment and inner tranquility. Happiness is not measured by emotional regulation alone, but by the nearness of the heart to God, and its stillness in His presence.

IFP does not reject the tools of NLP; rather, it subjects them to the higher criteria of *tawheed* (Divine Oneness) and sincerity of intention.

Where NLP places the mind at the center of control, IFP places the heart at the center of purification, and faith at the center of balance.

In doing so, it offers a holistic path for human elevation—one that does not begin with thought alone, but with intention, and does not end with success alone, but with the nearness of God and the pursuit of His pleasure.

## **The Concept of Success and Goal Achievement in Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)**

In the Islamic worldview, success is not a moment of arrival, nor is it defined by numbers or worldly milestones. Rather, it is a state of inner balance that manifests outwardly through purposeful action. It is the harmony between striving and sincerity, between effort and reliance on God, between external achievement and inner tranquility.

As the Qur'an states: ***"Whoever desires the reward of this world—then with Allah is the reward of this world and the Hereafter. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing."*** (An-Nisa', 134)

From this profound Qur'anic vision, Integrated Faith Programming (IFP) emerges as a model that redefines our understanding of success. It does not reduce success to material accomplishments or performance metrics alone, but measures it by the contentment of the heart, the purity of intention, and the alignment of one's striving with a higher purpose—the pleasure of God, as echoed in the verse: ***"But the approval of Allah is greater. That is the supreme triumph."*** (At-Tawbah, 72)

In Integrated Faith Programming (IFP), goal-setting does not begin with desire or ambition—it begins with intention, with a fundamental question: ***Why am I striving?***

When the intention is directed toward God, every effort becomes an act of worship, every step a means of purification, and every

outcome—regardless of its form—a doorway to contentment and surrender.

As the Qur'an declares: *"Say, indeed my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds."* (Al-An'am, 162)

By contrast, in **Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)**, success is typically framed through self-motivation, mental reprogramming, and the achievement of goals via cognitive and behavioral strategies.

And while such approaches may offer practical benefits, research suggests that they often lack the **spiritual depth** and rootedness that give transformation its **meaning** and **sustainability**.

A study published in the *Journal of Behavioral Science* (2021) revealed that individuals who rely solely on mental motivation may achieve apparent success, yet remain vulnerable to a sense of inner emptiness after reaching their goals. This is often because their striving was not anchored in a higher existential purpose.

In this context, Integrated Faith Programming (IFP) introduces a vital dimension often absent from many self-development models: that success is not measured solely by what is achieved, but by *how* one strives—and by the *heart* that strives.

As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: *"The intention of the believer is better than his action."*

And God Almighty reminds us in the Qur'an: *"It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah, but it is the piety from you that reaches Him. Thus has He subjected them to you so that you may glorify Allah for what He has guided you to, and give glad tidings to the doers of good."* (Al-Hajj, 37)

The believer knows that no sincere effort is ever lost, that what appears as failure may in fact be hidden mercy, and that the truest fruit lies not in swift arrival, but in steadfastness along the path.

As the Qur'an affirms: *"So their Lord answered them: I do not let the work of any worker among you go to waste, whether male or female."* (Aal-Imran, 195)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also said: *"Wondrous is the affair of the believer—for there is good for him in every matter—and that is not the case with anyone but the believer: if he experiences prosperity, he is grateful, and that is good for him; and if he is afflicted with hardship, he is patient, and that too is good for him."* (Reported by Muslim)

Herein lies a fundamental distinction: **In NLP, failure is cognitively reframed**—seen as a lesson to enhance performance. Yet in **Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)**, failure is viewed not merely as a setback, but as a divine trial, a means to draw closer to God, and a moment to cultivate surrender and contentment. It is a perspective that nurtures an inner serenity **not** measured by outcomes, but by the depth of faith.

The Qur'an alludes to this sanctifying outlook: *"And whoever is mindful of God—He will make a way out for them, and provide for them from sources they could never imagine."* (At-Talaq, 2–3)

The believer does not pursue with anxiety, nor does their heart cling to results. They walk with trust, knowing that success lies not in the might of the mind or motivation, but in the grace and decree of God. *"Say, nothing will ever befall us except what God has destined for us. He is our Protector. So in God let the believers place their trust."* (At-Tawbah, 51)

Perhaps the most profound expression that encapsulates this faith-based concept of success is the declaration of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) at the moment of his martyrdom: ***“I have triumphed, by the Lord of the Kaaba.”***

This was neither a metaphor nor a rhetorical flourish. Rather, it was a heartfelt proclamation born from the certainty of a soul that lived for God, sought Him earnestly, and struggled in His cause.

When death came, he saw it not as loss, but as a gateway to ultimate victory—a passage to eternal bliss rather than the end of aspiration.

The eminent thinker Abbas Mahmoud Al-Aqqad eloquently captured the depth of this stance when he said: ***“If all the dictionaries of politics and governance in the world were gathered, they still would not encompass the true meaning of this victory.”***

He further added, ***“I have never heard of a ruler assassinated in his own capital who, invoking the Lord of the Kaaba, declares: ‘I have triumphed!’—except Ali ibn Abi Talib.”***

For, in Imam Ali’s measure, victory was not in kingship, nor in conquest, nor in numbers, but in sincerity toward God, steadfastness to principle, and complete submission to divine decree.

In summary, **Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)** does not negate achievement; rather, it elevates it. It does not reject ambition; it balances it on the scale of piety. It does not diminish the value of success; it redefines it as striving with a believing heart, working diligently, and surrendering to God—thus receiving a tranquility granted not by outcomes, but by certainty.

**Comparison table between NLP and IFP regarding success and goal achievement:**

Aspect	NLP	IFP
Concept of Success	Achieving results and improving performance	Heartfelt contentment rooted in purification; success as part of an integrated faith system
Motivation for Pursuit	Self-motivation and mental reprogramming	Sincere intention, devotion, and reliance on God
Individual's Response to Failure	Reframed as a mental lesson	Considered a divine trial, used for spiritual elevation
Source of Value	Tangible achievements and outcomes	Purity of heart, God's satisfaction, and the positive impact of striving on self and society
Sustainability of Success	Temporary, requiring constant renewal	Enduring, sustained through connection with God and the Hereafter

## From Mental Reprogramming to Purification: The IFP Vision for Deep Psychological Transformation

Human beings are not merely minds, nor just bodies; they are holistic entities—comprising spirit, heart, body, and mind. Therefore, any genuine attempt at transformation must begin from within, reaching the very depths of the self, rather than merely skimming the surface of thoughts.

In Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), change is primarily viewed as a cognitive and behavioral process, achievable through techniques such as reframing, emotional anchoring, modeling, and others.

These methods may help in altering perception, regulating emotions, and producing tangible results in the short term.

However, as numerous studies indicate, such mental techniques remain limited unless supported by ethical and spiritual roots. A study published in the *American Journal of Psychology* (2021) emphasized that relying solely on mental motivation as a means of change produces temporary effects that quickly crumble when faced with crises or setbacks, because the deep structure of the soul remains untouched.

In contrast, **Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)** views change primarily as a journey of the heart before it is a mental technique. It begins with the purification of the soul, the refinement of intentions, the cleansing of purposes, and the cultivation of the will toward patience, contentment, and surrender. IFP does not settle for merely rearranging thoughts but rebuilds the human being from within, so that transformation flows from living faith—not just a mental exercise.

As Allah Almighty says: ***“O you who have believed, persevere and endure and remain stationed and fear Allah that you may be successful”*** (Al-Imran, 200)

Here lies the fundamental difference: In NLP, change depends on reframing reality and events. But in IFP, change hinges on returning to God, moving beyond the self toward the horizon of servitude, and shifting from the burden of control to the peace of surrender.

In the faith-based model, the person is not asked to deny their pain or falsify their emotions, but rather taught how to embrace their suffering, transform their fear into prayer, and their brokenness into a gateway of hope.

As Allah Almighty says: ***“And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give***

*good tidings to the patient, Who, when disaster strikes them, say, "Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return." Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided."* (Al-Baqarah, 155-157)

Change in IFP does not require repeated external motivators because it is connected to a lasting internal meaning: faith. When the source of transformation is the heart, its impact is deeper, its stability longer-lasting, and its resilience to hardships stronger.

In short, IFP does not offer a quick-fix recipe for change; rather, it crafts a profound path toward true transformation. While NLP trains a person to modify their thoughts, IFP nurtures the heart's refinement, so that change becomes enduring—not through pressure, but through light.

**A Brief Comparison between NLP and IFP in the Perspective of Psychological Change:**

Aspect	Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)	Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)
Approach to Change	Mental and behavioral techniques aimed at reshaping thoughts and regulating emotions to improve self and modify outward behavior.	A spiritual purification of the heart that begins with sincere intention and culminates in righteous conduct, nurturing transformation from within.
Focus of Change	Centers on the mind, its cognition, and how information is processed and patterns of thinking are altered.	Originates from the heart, grounded in deep faith and continual connection to God—the source of strength and tranquility.

Aspect	Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)	Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)
Tools of Motivation	Relies on mental repetition, positive affirmations, and cognitive programming to embed behaviors and achievements.	Based on prayer, patient endurance, remembrance of God (dhikr), and having good trust in Him, filling the soul with enduring peace and contentment.
Response to Crises	Addresses pain by reframing mental perspectives to lessen psychological distress, turning hardships into lessons.	Embraces pain as a divine test and an opportunity to draw nearer to God, surrendering to His wisdom, thus transforming trials into paths of light and guidance.
Sustainability of Change	Often temporary, requiring continual renewal of motivation and maintenance of results.	Rooted in certainty and trust in God, making change lasting, stable, and unshaken by life's fluctuations.

# Purification of the Soul and Regulation of Behavior — The IFP Approach to Self-Development from Within Outward

In the philosophy of *Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)*, self-development does not begin with mental techniques or external stimuli, but with the purification of the soul. This is because the essence of human transformation is not in behavior alone, but in intention, motivation, and purpose. As God Almighty says: ***“He has certainly succeeded who purifies it, And he has certainly failed who instills it [with corruption].”*** (Ash-Shams, 9–10)

While *Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)* relies on modifying behavior through tools such as mental repetition, emotional

anchoring, and sensory programming, IFP holds that any behavior not rooted in a sincere heart and firm values remains fragile, easily broken when faced with challenges.

The fundamental difference is that NLP seeks to control behavior through external techniques, whereas IFP refines the soul from within, producing a sincere and lasting transformation that begins in the heart and manifests in behavior.

Since IFP draws its roots from divine revelation, it holds that the greatest tools for change are not motivational words or conditioned responses, but acts of worship that purify the soul and strengthen the will: Prayer teaches discipline—both temporal and spiritual; fasting trains restraint over desires and regulates emotions; remembrance (dhikr) rearranges feelings and fills the heart with tranquility; and patience solidifies the ability to remain steadfast and endure psychological pressure.

Allah Almighty says: ***“Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows what you do.”*** (Al-Ankabut, 45)

And He also says: ***“And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is difficult except for the humbly submissive [to Allah].”*** (Al-Baqarah, 45)

In NLP, emotions are linked to temporary sensory triggers such as a movement, a sound, or a repeated phrase. But in IFP, a person is connected to Allah, resulting in deep emotional and spiritual stability that does not fade with the disappearance of external stimuli.

A study published in the ***Journal of Clinical Psychology*** (2022) showed that individuals who regularly engage in acts of worship possess

greater self-control and better regulation of stress and emotions compared to those who rely solely on mental motivation techniques.

In IFP, a person is not asked to convince themselves that they are “capable,” but rather to place their trust in Allah with certainty, and from the depths of their heart to say: ***“Sufficient for me is Allah; there is no deity except Him. On Him I have relied, and He is the Lord of the Great Throne.”*** (At-Tawbah, 129)

And in this reliance, they find a strength greater than that granted by a thousand motivational training sessions.

In short, IFP does not change a person from the outside in, but begins with the soul first. It reforms the heart, so the limbs are guided rightly; it purifies the intention, so habits transform; it nurtures the self, so life is elevated.

It is a transformation not built on fleeting motivation, but on knowing Allah, striving against the self, and the certainty that purification (tazkiyah) is the true path to success.

**Brief Comparison between NLP and IFP in Self-Control and Behavior Development:**

Aspect	NLP	IFP
Source of Self-Control	Mind and mental programming	Heart, piety (taqwa), and striving against the self (mujahada)
Means of Change	Repetition, motivation, sensory cues	Prayer, remembrance (dhikr), fasting, patience (sabr)
Ultimate Goal	Enhancing performance and emotional regulation	Refining the soul and attaining Allah’s pleasure

Aspect	NLP	IFP
Sustainability	Short-term, requiring constant renewal	Long-lasting, connected to faith and spiritual purification
Core Focus	Conscious control over behavior	Reforming the inner self to rightly regulate outward actions

# Re-Rooting NLP Techniques in the Light of Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) offers a set of psychological and behavioral tools to modify patterns of thinking and interaction. Among the most prominent are reframing, emotional anchoring, modeling, and sensory representation. These tools have gained widespread popularity due to their simplicity and their relatively quick impact in certain contexts.

However, the core issue often does not lie in the tools themselves, but in the foundational framework that guides their use: when these techniques are detached from their ethical and spiritual purposes, they risk becoming superficial methods that can be employed for legitimate aims or even manipulation. Their effects remain temporary unless firmly rooted in deep, internal, and lasting foundations.

A study published in the *Journal of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (2022) showed that many users of NLP techniques achieve short-term improvements, yet they lack deep and lasting transformation due to the absence of connection to a higher meaning or spiritual purpose.

This is where **Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)** plays its crucial role. IFP does not reject these tools; rather, it re-roots them within a comprehensive framework that unites psychological effectiveness

with spiritual sincerity. It views these techniques not merely as clever methods, but as means that can be guided to serve self-purification, reform, and moral growth—provided they are nourished by sincere intention and attachment to God.

In NLP, “Reframing” means looking at situations from a new perspective to lessen their impact. But in IFP, this reframing goes beyond the mental dimension to embrace the spiritual one. The believer perceives trials through the lens of divine wisdom, firmly believing that everything happens by divine decree, and that God does not let the reward of the righteous go to waste.

As for “Anchoring” in NLP, it involves using sensory cues to trigger positive emotions. In IFP, however, emotions are anchored through far more profound means: humility in prayer, sincerity in remembrance (dhikr), and the sweetness of intimate supplication. As God Almighty says: ***“Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured”*** (Ar-Ra’d, 28)

As for “Modeling,” NLP encourages imitating successful individuals without necessarily distinguishing between the essence of the role model and their underlying purposes. In contrast, IFP holds the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the righteous as the true exemplars, for they embody not only practical success but also moral purity and the pleasure of God.

In short, IFP does not reject these tools but rather elevates them. It does not focus solely on behavior but addresses intention and purpose. It re-engineers these techniques to serve a higher goal: the purification of the soul, attaining closeness to God, and establishing a true balance between the outward and the inward.

**Comparison between NLP Techniques and Their Counterparts  
in IFP:**

Technique	In NLP	In IFP
Reframing	Changing the perspective to reduce the impact of an event	Viewing the event through divine wisdom and surrendering to God's decree
Anchoring	Linking positive emotions to external sensory triggers	Achieving inner peace through remembrance (dhikr), reflection, and reliance on God
Sensory Representation	Recalling positive sensory images to influence emotions	Contemplating God's creation and signs as a means to refine perception and strengthen faith
Modeling	Imitating the behaviors of successful people to gain their outcomes	Emulating the Prophets and the righteous in behavior, intention, and purpose

**Effective Communication and  
Compassionate Listening – Building  
Relationships in IFP**

In **Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)**, communication is not merely viewed as a social skill or a tool for persuasion. Rather, it is a human bridge and a moral trust through which the soul expresses its sincerity and translates values into words and actions.

Unlike **Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)**, which teaches you how to speak to influence, listen to read emotions, and reframe to gain acceptance, IFP teaches you to speak with sincerity and wisdom,

to listen with compassion, and to heal with words—not to win arguments, but to draw hearts closer to the truth.

***“And be guided to the good speech and be guided to the path of the Praiseworthy.”*** (Al-Hajj, 24)

And He also said: ***“And tell My servants to say that which is best. Indeed, Satan induces [dissension] among them. Indeed Satan is ever, to mankind, a clear enemy.”*** (Al-Isra, 53)

In **IFP**, listening is not a mere analytical technique but a heartfelt worship, where the speaker humbles themselves, and the listener opens their heart to receive goodness. It is an expression of respect for the other, a sincere effort to grasp what lies beyond words—not with the intention to dominate, but to heal and bring hearts closer.

The Qur’an praises those who listen with fairness: ***“Those who listen to speech and follow the best of it. Those are the ones Allah has guided, and those are people of understanding.”*** (Az-Zumar, 18)

As for **empathy**, it is not merely a tool for building rapport, but a reflection of a faith-based brotherhood that urges mercy, concealment of faults, and overlooking mistakes. Allah Almighty says:

***“The believers are but brothers, so make peace between your brothers.”*** (Al-Hujurat, 10)

While NLP trains individuals to **manage conflict** with tactful techniques, IFP teaches how to truly reconcile, to hold good assumptions of others, and to avoid disputes even when one is right. Allah the Exalted commands: ***“Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided.”*** (An-Nahl, 125)

In short, **IFP** does not teach you how to persuade people with polished words, but how to speak truth gently, listen with love, and mend relations with kindness.

In this approach, sincere words illuminate hearts, humble listening repairs souls, and communication becomes an act of worship seeking the pleasure of Allah, not merely a means to an end.

**A brief comparison between NLP and IFP in communication and reform:**

Element	In NLP	In IFP
Purpose of Communication	Focused on influence, persuasion, and achieving personal or strategic outcomes.	Rooted in sincere reconciliation, honesty, and strengthening human bonds under the guidance of piety.
Listening	A cognitive tool to analyze messages and emotional cues, aimed at better understanding and response.	A devotional practice embodying humility and a genuine desire for the good of others.
Empathy	A technique to build trust and gain acceptance by connecting emotionally.	A heartfelt expression of spiritual brotherhood, compassion, and forgiveness.
Conflict Management	Refining language and softening confrontation to navigate disputes effectively.	Genuine peacemaking, avoiding injustice, and consciously rejecting argumentation even when justified.
Building Trust	Achieved through body language mastery and emotional regulation to inspire confidence.	Founded on truthfulness, integrity, and sincere advice offered with pure intentions.

## True Happiness and Inner Peace in IFP – From Mental Achievement to Heartfelt Contentment

In the framework of *Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)*, happiness is often portrayed as a mental state attainable through cognitive control, perceptual shifts, and the repetition of positive affirmations. While such techniques may offer temporary relief from stress and a fleeting sense of satisfaction, they remain confined to the surface of human experience.

Yet, as growing research reveals, this form of happiness—rooted solely in the intellect—proves fragile when untethered from a deeper spiritual foundation. A recent study published in the *Journal of Psychological Well-being* (2022) found that individuals who rely exclusively on mental stimulation and self-talk, without an anchoring in faith or transcendent meaning, are significantly more vulnerable to anxiety and existential emptiness, especially in the face of life's profound trials.

In Integrated Faith Programming (IFP), Happiness Blossoms from the Heart, Not the Mind

Unlike in *Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)*—where happiness is crafted through mental constructs and cognitive techniques—in *Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)*, happiness is not manufactured by thought, but planted in the heart through faith, nurtured by contentment, and brought to bloom through unshakable certainty. It is not a fleeting emotional surge, but a lasting fruit of knowing God, trusting in His wisdom, and surrendering to His decree.

As the Almighty says: *“By this [Scripture], God guides those who seek His pleasure to the ways of peace, brings them out of darkness into*

***light by His permission, and guides them to a straight path.”***  
(Al-Ma'idah, 16)

In NLP, happiness is often conditional—tied to external achievements and visible success. But in IFP, happiness requires no grand accomplishment. It only asks for a heart at peace—one that sees grace in giving, wisdom in withholding, and divine gentleness in every state of being.

As Allah declares: ***“Whoever does good, whether male or female, and is a believer—We will surely grant them a good life, and We will certainly reward them according to the best of what they used to do.”***  
(An-Nahl, 97)

Integrated Faith Programming (IFP) does not demand that one suppress pain or feign emotional strength. Rather, it invites the soul to carry its burdens with the heart of a believer—transforming fear into supplication, anxiety into surrender, and brokenness into nearness to God.

In this framework, serenity is not born from controlling one's circumstances, but from yielding to the One who controls all circumstances.

As Allah, the Most High, says: ***“Be patient, for your patience is not but through Allah. Do not grieve over them, and do not be in distress over what they plot. Indeed, Allah is with those who fear Him and those who are doers of good.”*** (An-Nahl, 127–128)

In essence, IFP does not promise you artificial joy—it opens to you the door of true inner peace. A peace not measured by the quantity of your achievements, but by the steadiness of a heart anchored in contentment, and a soul at peace with God's decree.

Happiness, in the worldview of IFP, is not a fleeting moment of triumph, but a lifelong journey of surrender. It flourishes every time the heart settles into the conviction that *whatever comes from God is good*, and that *what is lost in this world is never lost in the scale of the Hereafter*.

**A Brief Comparison Between NLP and IFP in the Concept of Happiness and Tranquility**

Aspect	In NLP	In IFP
Source of Happiness	Achievement, and control over thoughts and emotions	Closeness to God, contentment with His decree, and certainty in His wisdom
Path to Contentment	Reframing reality and improving mental interpretation of situations	Surrender to God, supplication, remembrance, and reflection upon Divine blessings
Response to Pain	Mentally reframing or neutralizing it through positive thinking	Embracing it as a means of purification and a path to draw nearer to God
Sustainability of Joy	Temporary, requiring constant renewal	Lasting, as it is rooted in faith and conviction
Ultimate Outcome	A fleeting sense of improvement	Enduring tranquility and inner serenity untouched by external turmoil

**Critique of the Western Framework and the Islamic Response**

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) emerged in the 1970s as a promising tool for self-development, grounded in a compelling notion: *“Change the way you think, and your reality will change.”* Its

appeal lay in its simplicity and seemingly quick results, leading to its widespread adoption in the realms of coaching, performance enhancement, and personal growth.

However, decades into its application, deeper challenges have surfaced—challenges that reach beyond technique. Scientific scrutiny has increasingly questioned the fragile theoretical foundations of NLP, casting doubt on its long-term effectiveness. More critically, there are growing concerns about its detachment from ethical grounding and the deeper existential and spiritual dimensions of the human experience.

While NLP promises cognitive and behavioral transformation, it rarely speaks to the heart—or heals at the root. This is why many who practice it, after an initial surge of motivation, are left facing an inner void, a sense of disappointment, or the lingering question: ***What comes after achievement? Where is the peace I sought? And why does this quiet anxiety still remain?***

From such questioning arises the need for a deeper model—one that reconstructs change from within, anchoring it in intention, purpose, contentment, and, ultimately, in God.

This is the essence of **Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)**: not as a combative alternative, but as a unifying continuation that completes what NLP falls short of achieving. IFP brings the human soul back to its **primordial center**, aligning development not merely with success, but with transcendence—restoring the self to its spiritual axis and to the purifying path of divine connection.

### ► **First Critique: From Shaky Mental Assumptions to a Deep-rooted Path of Purification – A Response to the Fragile Scientific Foundation of NLP**

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) emerged outside the bounds of rigorous academia and rests on unverified assumptions. It lacks a mature explanatory theory and a coherent experimental structure. Instead, it leans heavily on anecdotal experiences and fleeting effects—more often echoed in motivational literature than tested in scientific laboratories.

Yet, the deeper concern goes beyond the absence of empirical evidence. At its core, NLP adopts a reductionist view of the human being—treating the soul as a programmable machine, where altering language, thoughts, or sensory responses is assumed sufficient for transformation. Identity, in this view, is reduced to a cognitive operating system; and change becomes a mere software update.

By contrast, Islam does not view transformation as a mere adjustment of emotions or performance. Rather, it sees it as a profound existential shift that begins in the heart—rooted in sincerity, intention, and awareness of God—and unfolds through striving (*mujāhadah*), repentance, and gradual spiritual refinement (*tazkiyah*).

Allah Almighty says: ***“He has indeed succeeded who purifies it [the soul].”*** (Ash-Shams, 9)

In Islam, success is not measured by what you accomplish outwardly, but by what you rectify within.

And here lies the essential distinction:

- ♦ NLP promises swift change... Islam nurtures true transformation.
- ♦ NLP works from the outside in... Islam begins from the inside out.
- ♦ NLP leans on technique... Islam instills intention, trust in God, truthfulness, and patient perseverance.

As the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: **“The true warrior is the one who strives against his own soul for the sake of Allah.”**

This is no mere exercise—it is a spiritual struggle fought in the arena of the heart, a journey toward God walked with footsteps of light.

♦ **Summary of the Response:**

Change in NLP is built upon fragile tools and circumstantial experiences. But in Islam, transformation is founded upon *fitrah*—the innate nature endowed by God—upon the light of divine revelation, and upon an unshakable covenant:

*That you are a servant of Allah, who mends the heart so that life may follow—not the other way around.* NLP may convince you that you are in control... But **Islam teaches you to be honest with yourself**, to be **patient in your inner striving**, and to place your **trust in Allah as He reshapes your soul**.

▶ **Second Critique: From Hollow Achievement to Rooted Fulfillment — In Response to the Absence of Spiritual and Purpose-Driven Depth in NLP**

One of the most profound shortcomings of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is its tendency to promote *change for the sake of change*, and to celebrate the *achievement of goals*—regardless of their meaning, moral weight, or ultimate direction.

In the NLP model, you are taught how to master your emotions, reframe your behaviors, and reprogram your mindset to get what you want...

But almost no one pauses to ask: Why? For whom? And does this transformation truly bring you closer to contentment, or simply throw you into yet another race?

These existential voids are not mere details to be overlooked; they lie at the very heart of true transformation. For human change is never solely about improving performance—it is a quest for purpose, for ultimate success, for meaning that gives life its true value.

In contrast, Islam does not present change as mere self-improvement or behavioral control. From the very outset, it anchors transformation in the profound question of purpose: Who am I? Why was I created? The answer is not philosophical speculation, but a deep, unshakable creed — a unity of existence grounded in faith:

***“Say, Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds.”*** (Al-An’ām, 162)

This is the essence of Integrated Faith Programming (IFP): transformation is not merely a tool for achievement, but a sacred journey toward God. In NLP, the aim is to become “the best version of yourself.” In IFP, however, the pursuit is to become more sincere before God, closer to Him, and more obedient to His will.

Success in NLP is an end goal. In Islam, success is a means—while the ultimate purpose is true fulfillment and salvation:

***“Indeed, successful is the one who purifies it.”*** (Ash-Shams, 9)

Thus, accomplishments are not measured by what you do, but by the intention behind it and for whom it is done.

Summary of the Response:

While NLP promises you control over your life, IFP teaches you to surrender your life to God, linking every change to intention, every goal to a higher purpose, and every effort to a single profound question: ***Does this bring me closer to God, or does it distance me from Him?***

Here, the very essence of transformation shifts—from control to spiritual refinement, from “achievement for myself” to “reform for the sake of God,” and from mere self-discipline to a journey of purification and growth.

### ► **Third Critique: From Temporary Motivation to Deep-Rooted Steadfastness — In Response to the Lack of Sustainability in NLP Techniques**

Many researchers agree that Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques—such as “anchoring,” “reframing,” and “neurological programming”—may spark moments of motivation, enthusiasm, or decisive action. However, these effects are often fleeting, failing to cultivate profound or lasting transformation because they address only the surface rather than the roots of the human experience.

As long as the motivation depends on a trainer, a session, or a specific technique, its impact fades with the passing of those conditions. Thus, many who engage with NLP report rapid initial improvements—only to find themselves returning to square one within weeks, or sometimes even sooner.

In Islam, transformation is not built upon fleeting emotional surges but on a heart intimately connected to God, a behavior steadily progressing in obedience, and an intention renewed each day.

Where NLP’s motivation is a momentary spark, Islam’s motivation is a path of steadfastness. As Allah declares:

***“Indeed, those who say, “Our Lord is Allah” and then remain steadfast...”*** (Fussilat, 30)

Here, steadfastness is not merely a decision but a continuous journey of sincerity, gradual growth, repentance, and spiritual striving.

Therefore, Integrated Faith Programming (IFP) does not offer you a mere exercise to change you—it nurtures you in worship, remembrance, repeated repentance, and the purification of intention. The transformation it fosters is not a fleeting surge of enthusiasm but a calm, steady, and ever-renewing inner construction.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “The most beloved deeds to Allah are those done consistently, even if they are small.” For Allah does not desire that you blaze fiercely only to burn out quickly, but rather that you remain steadfast, enduring, purified, and drawing ever closer step by step.

♦ **Summary of the response:**

While NLP may spark a short-lived effect, IFP cultivates a lasting, gradual, and realistic transformation deeply rooted in faith. NLP gives you a burst of momentum; IFP offers you a lifelong path. NLP moves you from the outside in, whereas IFP changes you from within—nourishing you through worship, striving, and sincere intention—so that change becomes not a fleeting act but a steady journey toward Allah.

► **Fourth Critique: From Tools of Influence to the Trustworthiness of the Word — In Response to the Ethical Vulnerability of NLP’s Utilitarian Use**

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) markets its techniques as neutral tools — ones you can wield to persuade, to influence, to bolster your self-image, or to convince others of your desires.

Yet this apparent “neutrality” masks a profound ethical void: what safeguards prevent these tools from being exploited for manipulation, control, or unethical psychological influence?

Researchers like Lilienfeld and others have warned that the absence of a guiding moral framework renders NLP a purely utilitarian instrument, susceptible to any purpose — persuasion without sincerity, influence without wisdom, and marketing at the expense of truth.

The problem here lies not merely in the technique itself, but in its separation from intention, responsibility, and accountability.

In Islam, influence is not a mere skill—it is a trust for which one will be held accountable. Words are not simply tools to achieve ends; they are testimonies of the heart and means of reform. As Allah Almighty says: ***“And speak to people good [words].”*** (Al-Baqarah, 83), ***“No word does he (a person) utter but there is a watcher by him ready (to record it).”*** (Qaf, 18)

In Integrated Faith Programming (IFP), no performance holds true value unless its intention is pure, its purpose monitored, and its direction aimed solely at Allah.

Skill is not merely competence; it is a means of guidance and mercy, purified by sincerity and governed by piety. The Prophet ﷺ said: ***“Indeed, eloquence is a kind of magic.”***

But he did not say, ***“Use it however you wish.”*** Rather, he taught us that sincerity is the foundation, wisdom is the framework, and intention is the ultimate judge.

#### ♦ **Summary of the Response:**

While NLP opens the door to wielding influence without clear ethical boundaries, Islam establishes moral limits for every form of communication, making the word a responsibility—not merely a tool of persuasion or cleverness.

NLP may teach you *how* to convince others, but Integrated Faith Programming (IFP) teaches you *to speak the truth*, to reform, to advise, and to cultivate your own soul before seeking to influence others. Every word in IFP either draws you closer to Allah or becomes a matter for which you will be held accountable before Him.

### ► **Fifth Critique: From Anxious Peaks to Rooted Tranquility — A Response to the Absence of True Serenity in the NLP Model**

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) promises individuals success: to be more influential, more in control of themselves, and more capable of achievement. Yet, many who have embarked on this journey have found that success alone is not enough.

You may reach your goal... but feel no peace. You may become the “best version of yourself”... only to wonder: what comes next?

Many psychologists have pointed out that although NLP techniques may enhance performance, they fall short in providing meaningful fulfillment beyond achievement, and fail to foster lasting psychological balance.

In fact, some practitioners develop chronic stress, feeling perpetually pressured to perform, to excel, to maintain control—while being denied the grace of vulnerability, contentment, sufficiency, or the spiritual closeness to God even amid their shortcomings.

In contrast, Islam does not merely direct a person to be “more successful,” but to be more tranquil in their faith, more content with Divine decree, and ever closer to God in every circumstance.

As Allah says: ***“Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.”*** (Ar-Ra’d, 28)

Serenity in Islam is not gained through mere exercises or techniques, but is deeply planted by faith, nourished by remembrance, and firmly rooted in acceptance.

Success in Islam is not an end in itself, but a means to draw nearer to God, fulfill one's trust, and nurture both the soul and society.

The Prophet (PBUH) said: **"Be content with what Allah has allotted to you, and you will be the richest of people."**

In Integrated Faith Programming (IFP), your true worth is not measured by what you achieve, but by the sincerity of your intentions, the truthfulness of your heart, and how close you draw to Allah whether in sorrow or in joy.

#### ♦ **Summary of the Response:**

NLP keeps you busy chasing achievements, but IFP brings you peace through closeness to God.

NLP promises you control, yet IFP teaches you trust, surrender, and reliance on Allah.

True success does not grant you peace unless it is rooted in sincerity, remembrance, contentment, and monotheism.

Only then does life become tranquility—not competition—and a journey toward Allah—not a race for the self.

#### ► **Conclusion: From Programming to Insight... From Temporary Motivation to Lasting Purification**

The problem with Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) lies not merely in its tools or outcomes, but in the vision it springs from, the purpose it remains silent about, and the ethical void it leaves behind.

It promises influence without defining its direction, trains for achievement without questioning the intention, and fuels change without rooting it in the meaning of true success or the path to inner peace.

In contrast, Islam teaches that every transformation begins with the question of purpose, every skill is weighed by its intention, and no accomplishment holds value unless it draws you closer to God.

Against the hollow promise of becoming “the best version of yourself,” the divine call resounds: *(He indeed succeeds who purifies it)* — success is not in control, but in sincerity; not in performance, but in purification; not in reaching, but in closeness.

Integrated Faith Programming (IFP) does not promise you control, but purification; it does not promise persuasion, but truthfulness; it does not promise worldly gain, but contentment, perseverance, and spiritual growth.

Thus, change in Islam is not a reaction to external motivation, but an inward journey—from the heart to God—step by step, intention by intention, until the journey is embraced with sincerity, the soul is straightened, and life blossoms in true fulfillment.

## **Conclusion of the Chapter: IFP as an Authentic and Balanced Model in the Path of Self-Development**

In an age crowded with endless motivational techniques and packaged success formulas, one may find themselves drowning in tools for change—yet lacking true meaning. They strive, plan, and perform, but remain uncertain of their direction or why an emptiness lingers after achievement.

It is here that **Integrated Faith Programming (IFP)** emerges—not as a mere technical alternative, but as an existential vision that reshapes the relationship between the individual, their life, and their Lord.

In IFP, change does not begin with reshaping words, but with purifying intentions. Success is not measured by what you achieve, but by what you are freed from, and by the values and contentment you firmly establish within yourself. Communication is not used to gain or manipulate, but to draw closer, to mend, and to build.

IFP guides a person along an integrated path: from reflection to reliance on God, from achievement to satisfaction, from mental repetition to heartfelt remembrance, and from controlling circumstances to surrendering to the One who holds all things in His hands.

It is not merely a “training program,” but a life philosophy, a path of purification, and a call to return to the human being as God intended: a free, active, balanced, and tranquil servant.

While NLP teaches you to tell yourself, “I am capable,” IFP whispers to your heart, “There is no power nor strength except through God.” In that whisper lies an undefeatable strength, an enduring serenity, and an eternal light. As Allah says:

***“And my success is not but through Allah. Upon Him I have relied, and to Him I repent.”*** (Hud, 88)

So whoever seeks true transformation must begin with the heart; whoever desires genuine happiness must seek it through contentment; and whoever wishes to “triumph by the Lord of the Ka’bah” must walk the path of purification, the path of faith, the path of IFP.

**Comparative Table Between NLP and IFP**

Aspect	NLP – Neuro-Linguistic Programming	IFP – Integrated Faith Programming
Starting Point	Changing thoughts and language to alter behavior	Purifying intention and heart to transform the person from within
Purpose of Change	Success, control, and improving performance	Closeness to God, self-contentment, and moral reform with a devotional intent
Philosophical Framework	Psychological rationalism – utilitarian – non-religious	Faith-based – Quranic – innate – linking this life with the Hereafter
Tools of Influence	Reframing, anchoring, modeling, sensory representation	Remembrance (Dhikr), prayer, reliance on God (Tawakkul), patience, sincerity, intention
Inner Motivator	Mind and cognition	Heart and faith
Source of Serenity	Managing emotional reactions	Contentment, surrender, remembrance, and God’s companionship
Intention and Purpose	Undefined, tools can be used for any purpose	Intention is the essence of change and accountable to the self
Impact of Change	Often temporary, tied to the technique’s effectiveness	Deep and lasting, rooted in sincerity and spiritual purification
Definition of Success	Achieving personal goals efficiently	True success = spiritual prosperity (Falah) = sincere striving on God’s path

Aspect	NLP – Neuro-Linguistic Programming	IFP – Integrated Faith Programming
Concept of Communication	Skill for influence and persuasion	Worship and trustworthiness, based on truthfulness, mercy, and reform
Model of the Human Being	Programmable entity through language and behavior	A responsible creation, journeying toward God, reforming self with devotion
Handling Emotions	Managed through anchoring and cognitive control	Refined through faith, prayer, remembrance, patience, and contentment
Higher Ideal	Successful individuals in performance and behavior	Prophets, righteous people, those who sincerely unify with God and walk toward Him
Sustainability and Resilience	Requires repeated stimuli and supportive environment	Sustained by purification and worship even in solitude and hardship

NLP focuses on mastering the skill of change, while IFP restores the very essence and meaning of transformation. NLP cultivates the mind and behavior; IFP purifies the soul and the heart. NLP trains you to succeed, but IFP refines you to truly prevail — in the sight of God.

For those who seek profound transformation rather than fleeting improvement, let them purify their hearts before training their minds, and connect with their Lord before mastering any tools. It is only from that sacred place that the true journey toward divine success begins.



Chapter Fourteen

# **The Growing Mindset**

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# The Growing Mindset

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### Part One: The Growing Mindset — The Western Model

#### **Introduction: Why Reflect on the “Growing Mindset”?**

From the very beginning of this book, the journey has revolved around the self in light of purpose, innate nature, and the path to God. We have pondered concepts such as purification, balance, inner

sincerity, faith, and the transformation of knowledge into action — all ideas that place human growth at the heart of the divine trust, beyond mere achievement.

Within this framework arises a fundamental question: How do we view ourselves when we err? How do we understand progress? And can failure itself be part of true success?

Here, modern psychology offers a profound yet simple concept: the **“growth mindset”** — a mindset that does not regard abilities as fixed or sealed but as a vast field open to development. It redefines mistakes not as final verdicts, but as precious opportunities for learning.

Although this theory — developed by Carol Dweck — emerged within a purely psychological and educational context, it resonates in part with the spirit of **tazkiyah** (purification) we hold dear: the soul is transformable, effort outweighs outcome, and sincere perseverance is the path to true awareness.

But what does this theory lack? Why is it insufficient as a comprehensive perspective on human growth? And how might we reconstruct this concept from within—rooted in innate nature (fitrah), intention (niyyah), striving (jihad), trust in God (tawakkul), trials (ibtila’), and the ultimate eternal goal?

From these questions begins this chapter. It first reflects on the growth mindset as presented in psychology, then examines its scientific strengths and practical applications alongside its limitations. Finally, it redefines the concept anew through what we call the **“Purifying Growth Mindset” (PGM)**—a mindset that sees growth not as an end in itself, but as a means of drawing nearer to God, a path toward true success (falah), and a mirror reflecting the sincerity of intention on an endless journey.

# The Concept of the Growth Mindset: A Scientific and Psychological Introduction

The term “growth mindset” refers to the belief that mental abilities and personal skills are not fixed traits but can be continuously developed and enhanced through persistent effort and learning from experience.

This theory was introduced by American psychologist Carol Dweck, who observed how individuals’ beliefs about their own abilities profoundly shape their behaviors and responses to challenges.

Based on her research, Dweck categorized these patterns of thinking into two primary types:

## ♦ **Fixed Mindset:**

Those who hold a fixed mindset believe that intelligence and abilities are innate, unchangeable traits determined at birth. They tend to avoid challenges for fear that failure will expose their limitations, and they become easily discouraged when faced with difficulties.

## ♦ **Growth Mindset:**

In contrast, individuals with a growth mindset believe that skills can be cultivated through consistent practice and learning. They embrace challenges as opportunities for development, regard mistakes as essential steps in the learning process, and view failure as a chance to enhance their abilities.

# Comparison Between Fixed Mindset and Growth Mindset

The mindset one adopts profoundly shapes their decisions, behaviors, and responses to challenges. The following table highlights the fundamental differences between the fixed mindset and the growth mindset:

Aspect	Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
Learning & Growth	Believe intelligence and abilities are fixed traits that cannot change.	Believe abilities can develop through effort and learning.
Challenges	Avoid challenges out of fear of failure and frustration.	Embrace challenges as opportunities for growth and learning.
Failure & Mistakes	View failure as a sign of lack of ability or incompetence.	See failure as a valuable learning experience for self-improvement.
Effort & Perseverance	Devalue effort and focus on immediate results.	Regard effort as essential for achieving lasting success.
Feedback	Avoid criticism to protect their self-esteem.	Welcome feedback as a means to learn and improve performance.

## The Characteristics and Significance of a Growth Mindset

The growth mindset stands as a vital foundation for continuous self-development and the cultivation of one’s capabilities. This mindset embodies essential qualities that distinguish it sharply from a fixed mindset, rendering it a powerful instrument for achieving success,

fostering creativity, and nurturing resilience in the face of challenges. The true importance of this mindset is revealed through its defining characteristics, which serve to enhance personal growth and skill refinement in profound and lasting ways.

## **1. Belief in the Malleability of Abilities**

At the heart of the growth mindset lies the conviction that abilities and skills are not fixed traits but can be cultivated through effort and continuous learning. In contrast to the fixed mindset—which views intelligence and talent as unchangeable—the growth mindset maintains that every individual possesses the capacity for improvement, regardless of where they begin.

**Significance:** This belief opens new horizons for individuals, freeing them from the paralyzing fear of failure. In this light, failure is no longer a definitive end but a necessary step in the journey of learning. It fosters hope, encourages perseverance, and transforms setbacks into stepping stones toward progress.

## **2. Emphasis on Effort and Lifelong Learning**

The growth mindset places high value on hard work and persistent effort, considering continuous learning as a cornerstone of self-development and skill enhancement. Here, success is not simply the result of innate talent but the fruit of determination, resilience, and repeated striving.

**Significance:** This focus nurtures inner motivation and instills in individuals a proactive spirit, enabling them to face challenges with optimism and commitment. It shifts the emphasis from outcomes to the process, making personal growth a sustained and meaningful pursuit.

### 3. Resilience in the Face of Failure and Adversity

Resilience stands as a defining feature of the growth mindset. Individuals with this outlook approach setbacks not as signs of inadequacy but as opportunities for self-awareness and refinement. Challenges are not roadblocks—they are invitations to grow deeper, stronger, and wiser.

**Significance:** Such resilience allows individuals to adapt to changing circumstances with grace and determination. It reinforces their belief in their capacity to overcome difficulties, strengthening both courage and clarity as they move toward their goals.

### 4. Self-Motivation and Strengthened Self-Belief

The growth mindset is anchored in the individual's ability to ignite and sustain inner motivation. It nurtures a conscious awareness of one's responsibility for self-development, recognizing that true progress springs from personal intention and sustained effort.

**Significance:** Self-motivation fortifies willpower, empowering individuals to pursue their aims with confidence and perseverance. This inward drive cultivates independence and clarity of purpose, allowing one to walk the path of growth with steady steps and a hopeful heart.

### 5. A Lifelong Passion for Learning and an Embrace of Change

Those with a growth mindset never cease to learn. They view knowledge not as a finite goal, but as a continual path toward personal refinement and a more meaningful life. With openness and humility, they welcome change, adapting to new ideas without resistance or fear.

**Significance:** This thirst for learning equips them to navigate life's rapid transformations with agility and grace. It grants them a quiet strength—the ability to remain rooted in purpose while moving fluidly through changing circumstances.

## 6. A Focus on Progress Rather Than Perfection

Unlike the fixed mindset, which often strives for unattainable perfection, the growth mindset values steady progress and consistent effort. Small victories and incremental steps are celebrated as meaningful milestones on the journey toward success.

**Significance:** This perspective softens the weight of unrealistic expectations and nurtures contentment with one's current stage. It inspires sustainable ambition and fosters a healthy, forward-moving rhythm of achievement that aligns with one's evolving purpose.

# ■ The Importance of a Growth Mindset

The true value of a growth mindset lies in its profound impact on every dimension of one's life—from personal performance to social relationships, and from inner resilience to one's ability to navigate hardship. Among its most significant benefits are:

- ♦ **Enhanced Academic and Professional Performance:** A commitment to ongoing self-improvement fosters the acquisition of new skills and leads to more meaningful and consistent achievements.
- ♦ **Greater Self-Confidence and Personal Fulfillment:** As individuals witness the fruits of their efforts, a sense of accomplishment naturally nurtures deeper self-belief and fuels a continuous drive for excellence.

- ♦ **Strengthened Social Relationships:** The ability to receive and learn from feedback fosters open communication and mutual growth, laying the foundation for relationships marked by empathy, trust, and encouragement.
- ♦ **Overcoming Emotional and Psychological Challenges:** Belief in the capacity to grow helps soften the sting of failure and discouragement. Challenges are no longer threats, but invitations—opportunities for learning, strength, and renewal.

## Cultivating a Growth Mindset: Practical Pathways for Daily Life

Embracing a growth mindset is not a theoretical ideal—it is a lived discipline, shaped by intentional strategies that nurture flexible thinking, purposeful learning, and conscious development. Whether in the workplace, academic settings, or personal life, this mindset can be anchored and sustained through practical, mindful habits. Below are key mechanisms for fostering a growth-oriented approach to life:

### 1. Embracing Challenges and Seeing Opportunity in Obstacles

At the heart of the growth mindset lies a powerful belief: challenges are not threats to avoid, but stepping stones toward development. Life presents us daily with complex, often disheartening situations that test our resilience. A growth mindset reorients us—to view these moments not as setbacks, but as invitations to grow, stretch, and evolve.

**Practical Insight:** Reframe difficulties as learning opportunities. This simple shift cultivates a positive outlook that emphasizes growth over discouragement, progress over perfection.

## 2. Valuing Effort Over Mere Outcomes

A growth mindset places enduring value on sincere, consistent effort—recognizing it as the essence of meaningful learning and personal development. Here, success is not defined solely by final results, but by the journey itself: the perseverance, the honest striving, and the willingness to rise again after each setback. In this paradigm, progress is measured not only by what is achieved, but by how faithfully one walks the path.

**Practical Reflection:** Celebrate the effort, regardless of the outcome. This nurtures self-worth from within and prepares the heart to face future trials with resilience and hope—trusting that no sincere exertion goes unnoticed in the sight of God.

## 3. Learning from Criticism and Turning Feedback into Growth

A heart trained in growth welcomes criticism not as an attack, but as a gift—an opportunity for insight and refinement. In this light, feedback is no longer a threat to the ego, but a compass guiding one closer to excellence and integrity. The growth-oriented soul listens not to defend, but to transform.

**Practical Reflection:** Cultivate the ability to receive constructive feedback with humility and openness. Silence the inner defensiveness, and instead translate observations into deliberate action—seeing in every critique a chance to polish the self for a higher purpose.

## 4. Drawing Inspiration from the Success of Others

Those with a growth mindset do not perceive the success of others as a threat or a source of envy, but as a beacon of inspiration—a living testimony that growth is possible and attainable. The stories of others' triumphs become maps, rich with strategies and lessons that illuminate our own paths forward.

**Practical Reflection:** Let the achievements of others awaken within you hope, not comparison. See in their journeys a reflection of possibility, and remind yourself that the doors of progress remain open to all who strive with sincerity.

## **5. Committing to Skill-Building and Expanding One's Capacity**

A growth-oriented individual is ever in pursuit of knowledge, constantly seeking to develop new skills and broaden inner horizons. This mindset is marked by intentional learning—through reading, structured training, and engagement in activities that refine both thought and character.

**Practical Reflection:** Dedicate consistent time to learning something new. Let skill-building become a habit—one that strengthens your ability to adapt, grow, and respond wisely to the ever-changing demands of life.

## **6. Cultivating a Supportive Environment for Growth and Motivation**

The environment in which we live and interact holds profound influence over the development of a growth mindset. Surrounding oneself with individuals who share a commitment to continuous learning, or engaging in communities that foster personal and intellectual growth, helps sustain one's motivation and nourishes the spirit of perseverance.

**Practical Reflection:** Be intentional in choosing a supportive social circle—those who lift, not limit. Leverage online learning platforms and professional networks as spaces of inspiration, connection, and expansion.

## 7. Practicing Self-Reflection and Regular Progress Evaluation

Consistent self-reflection is a spiritual and practical compass—it deepens awareness of one’s journey and clarifies the meaning behind both success and setbacks. Setting aside time to review goals, assess challenges, and recalibrate direction is essential for sustained and purposeful growth.

**Practical Reflection:** Establish a weekly or monthly rhythm of reflection. Let it be a sacred pause in which you acknowledge progress, harvest lessons, and realign your efforts with intention and clarity.

## ■ Practical Applications of the Growth Mindset

The growth mindset is not merely a psychological theory—it is a lived philosophy that can be meaningfully woven into every sphere of life, nurturing steady and purposeful progress. Here are key domains where its impact becomes most tangible:

### 1. In Education:

Adopting a growth mindset cultivates critical thinking and resilience in the face of academic challenges. It reframes difficulties not as barriers, but as opportunities for exploration and inner expansion. Students learn to view their struggles as stepping stones, and their efforts as seeds of long-term growth.

### 2. In the Workplace:

When embraced within professional environments, the growth mindset fosters innovation and adaptability. It equips employees with the drive to continuously refine their skills and welcome change

with open hands. More than individual success, it contributes to building collaborative, forward-moving teams that align with the evolving goals of the organization.

### **3. In Personal Life:**

Embracing a growth mindset deeply enhances one's sense of self-worth and inner contentment. It empowers individuals to see failure not as a verdict of inadequacy, but as an invitation to evolve. Rather than succumbing to discouragement, the heart is trained to extract wisdom from each fall. This outlook also nourishes relationships, fostering bonds rooted in empathy, mutual growth, and the humility to learn from one another.

## **Research and Reflections: From Concept to Empirical Insight**

Though the idea of a “growth mindset” may appear simple on the surface, it has attracted substantial academic attention. Numerous studies—particularly in Western contexts—have explored its tangible effects on performance, emotional resilience, and innovation across diverse fields. These findings continue to affirm that the way we *think* about our capacity shapes not just our outcomes, but our very ability to rise, transform, and flourish.

### **► Key Empirical and Neurological Findings Supporting the Growth Mindset**

#### **1. In Education: Elevating Academic Attainment**

A landmark study involving over 160,000 students across Chilean schools revealed a compelling truth: students who believed their abilities could grow through effort consistently achieved higher

academic outcomes—even in environments marked by economic hardship.

This insight reaffirms a profound principle: when the heart embraces effort as a path, the mind responds by rising to the challenge. The soil of perseverance often yields the richest harvests, regardless of one's starting point.<sup>54</sup>

## 2. In Neuroscience: Neuroplasticity and Cognitive Flourishing

Longitudinal research has demonstrated that guiding adolescents toward a growth-oriented mindset not only improved their academic performance, but also activated regions in the brain associated with decision-making and deep learning. These findings unveil the biological dimension of mental growth—the brain, by divine design, is not static but capable of renewal.

When intention meets effort, even the architecture of the mind shifts toward excellence. This is a reminder that growth is not just a metaphor—it is a physical, measurable, and sacred potential embedded within us.<sup>55</sup>

## 3. In the Workplace: Cultivating a Learning-Oriented and Collaborative Culture

An applied study revealed that organizations which embed a **growth mindset** within their teams foster a workplace culture that thrives on collaboration and adaptability. In such environments, employees become more open to learning from mistakes, viewing setbacks not

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54 Claro, S., Paunesku, D., & Dweck, C. S. (2016). *Mindsets and Academic Achievement: A Large-Scale Study of Chilean Students*. *Psychological Science*, 27(1), 65–74.

55 Blackwell, L. S., Trzesniewski, K. H., & Dweck, C. S. (2007). *Implicit Theories of Intelligence Predict Achievement Across an Adolescent Transition*. *Child Development*, 78(1), 246–263.

as failures, but as stepping stones toward refinement and collective excellence.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4. In Mental Health: Resilience in the Face of Pressure

A field study involving school students found that nurturing a growth mindset—even through a brief psychological intervention—significantly reduced anxiety and enhanced students' ability to navigate academic pressures with composure and resilience.<sup>57</sup>

#### 5. Summary of Findings:

These collective studies affirm that the *growth mindset* is far more than a motivational slogan or an inspirational ideal. It is, in essence, a scientifically grounded framework—one that demonstrably influences cognitive performance, emotional resilience, and long-term personal development. When nurtured within a supportive and intentional environment, the growth mindset becomes a transformative force, guiding individuals toward continuous evolution and inner stability.

## Critical Reflections on the Growth Mindset: Scholarly Reviews and Practical Limitations

Despite the widespread acclaim surrounding the concept of the growth mindset in educational and developmental circles, a number of peer-reviewed studies from the West have raised important, sober questions about its practical effectiveness, long-term sustainability, and universal applicability. These critiques—grounded in empirical

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56 Murphy, M. C., & Dweck, C. S. (2016). *Mindsets Shape Consumer Behavior and Organizational Culture*. *Harvard Business Review / Organizational Behavior*.

57 Yeager, D. S., et al. (2016). *Using Design Thinking to Improve Psychological Interventions: The Case of the Growth Mindset During the Transition to High School*. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113(36), 10208–10215.

research rather than anecdotal skepticism—offer a more nuanced view of the theory's reach and reveal the contextual boundaries that shape its success.

## **1. The Limited Influence of Growth Mindset on Academic Performance**

In a sweeping meta-analytic review encompassing dozens of prior studies, researchers found that growth mindset interventions did not yield a significant impact on students' academic performance in certain contexts—particularly in intellectually demanding subjects like mathematics.

This suggests that while the concept of a growth mindset holds inspirational appeal, it alone cannot carry the weight of academic success. Instead, more decisive factors such as the quality of teaching, familial support, and the overall school environment seem to shape actual performance far more profoundly.

The findings remind us, through a lens of humility, that human effort—no matter how earnest—must be supported by conducive conditions and divine facilitation to bear fruit.<sup>58</sup>

## **2. The Hidden Psychological Toll of Excessive Motivation**

Psychological research has illuminated a subtle but potent paradox: while the promotion of a growth mindset is often well-intentioned, its excessive emphasis may inadvertently place a quiet but heavy burden upon individuals.

In environments charged with high expectations or fierce competition, the internalized pressure to “always be improving” can lead not to flourishing, but to psychological fatigue and spiritual strain.

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58 (Sisk, V. F., Burgoyne, A. P., Sun, J., Butler, J. L., & Macnamara, B. N. (2018). *To what extent and under which circumstances are growth mind-sets important to academic achievement?* *Psychological Science*, 29(4), 549–571.)

The human soul, though resilient, is not meant to carry the weight of constant self-improvement alone. Without moments of grace, rest, and acceptance of divine will, even noble aspirations may become a source of inner exhaustion.<sup>59</sup>

### **3. The Limits of Self-Motivation in the Absence of Environmental Support**

While the belief in one's potential for growth is foundational to the growth mindset philosophy, research indicates that this belief alone is not sufficient to drive meaningful behavioral change. Without an enabling environment—one that provides encouragement, structure, and effective pedagogical strategies—self-motivation may falter or even dissipate in the face of adversity.<sup>60</sup>

### **4. Overestimating the Role of Neuroplasticity**

Though growth mindset theory draws much of its scientific credibility from the concept of neuroplasticity, some neuroscientists caution against overstating the brain's capacity for rewiring. The human brain's ability to restructure itself varies significantly across individuals and is shaped by a constellation of factors—including genetics, environment, and stress exposure. Such variability imposes natural limits on the universal application of the growth mindset framework.<sup>61</sup>

### **5. Practical Challenges in Educational Implementation**

Educational research has brought to light the many hurdles that accompany efforts to instill a “growth mindset” in students. Among

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59 (King, R. B., & McInerney, D. M. (2019). *Examining the costs of growth mindset interventions. Educational Psychologist, 54*(3), 190–205.)

60 Boaler, J., & Selling, S. K. (2017). *Limitations of motivational theory in applied settings. Educational Leadership, 74*(6), 54–59.

61 Lilienfeld, S. O., Lynn, S. J., & Lohr, J. M. (2015). *Neuroplasticity: fact, fiction, and the growth mindset narrative. Perspectives on Psychological Science, 10*(6), 851–864.

these are the insufficient training of teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and the inherent difficulty of crafting curricula that genuinely foster intellectual growth.

Moreover, some students may misinterpret the intended messages about growth, rendering the intervention less effective—or even counterproductive.<sup>62</sup>

## 6. Conclusion:

These studies converge upon a sobering yet enlightening truth: though the concept of a “growth mindset” is deeply inspiring, it is neither a universal remedy nor an infallible path to success.

To harness its true power, one must engage with it through deep contextual understanding, supported educational and social environments, and carefully attuned messaging.

Otherwise, what was meant to be a gentle invitation to grow may quietly become another weight upon the soul—a pressure rather than a promise.

In this, we are reminded that real transformation blossoms not from slogans, but from sincerity, patience, and the mercy of the One who knows the potential of every heart.

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62 (Rattan, A., Good, C., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). “It’s OK—Not Everyone Can Be Good at Math”: Instructors with an entity theory comfort (and demotivate) student. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(7), 968–978.)

## Part Two: The Purification-Growth Mindset (PGM) – An Islamic Vision of Growth and Wholeness

Having explored the scientific foundations and critical perspectives surrounding the theory of the growth mindset, we now turn to a deeper, more contemplative vision—one rooted in faith—that reconstructs the very meaning of growth from within, elevating it from the ceiling of achievement to the horizon of *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification and moral refinement).

While modern theories such as the growth mindset rightly emphasize the human capacity for learning and development, they often remain confined to psychological and behavioral frameworks, limited by the boundaries of material success and skill mastery.

Islam, however, offers a far more expansive and transformative paradigm—one that redefines self-growth through the lens of divine purpose and the higher objectives of human existence. In this sacred vision, growth is not merely about doing more or achieving better; it is about becoming more aligned with truth, more anchored in virtue, and more attuned to the ultimate calling of the soul.

In the Islamic worldview, life is not merely a journey of improving performance or acquiring skills. Rather, it is a continuous, holistic path toward **tazkiyah**—the purification and elevation of the self—one that reshapes the human being in mind, soul, and behavior alike.

From this sacred perspective emerges the concept of the Purification-Growth Mindset (PGM)—a spiritually grounded, integrative approach that transcends cognitive development and reaches into the very essence of the human fitrah. It is a mindset rooted in **tawakkul** (trust in God) and directed toward human perfection under the shade of divine pleasure.

The PGM is not merely a motivational model; it is a spiritual-ethical framework. It sees true growth as inseparable from the ongoing purification of the soul, the diligent pursuit of knowledge, the struggle against the lower self (**nafs**), and the transformative encounter with life's challenges as opportunities to refine the spirit and reconstruct the inner self.

In this vision, self-development is not an end in itself, nor a worldly ambition. It is a means of drawing nearer to God, attaining wisdom, and fulfilling one's higher purpose through an unbroken journey of inward reform and outward engagement.

As the Qur'an beautifully declares: ***"And say: My Lord, increase me in knowledge."*** (Tāhā, 114)

And in another verse: *“He has indeed succeeded who purifies it [the soul].”* (Ash-Shams, 9)

In these two verses, the call of Islam is made unmistakably clear: to rise in both knowledge and purification—reflecting the indivisible path where faith and understanding walk hand in hand, and where growth is united with *taqwa* (God-consciousness).

Seen through this lens, the Purification-Growth Mindset (PGM) is not merely an alternative to the Western concept of the growth mindset—it is a comprehensive framework that reorients human development around the ultimate purpose of creation. It forges a path of growth that harmonizes human will with divine guidance, grounding personal transformation in both spiritual intention and sacred direction.

## **The Relationship Between the PGM and the Human Fitrah**

At the core of every human soul lies an innate yearning—to seek, to learn, to grow, and to strive toward goodness. This *fitrah* (natural disposition), as vividly portrayed in the Qur’an, forms the foundation from which the journey of *tazkiyah* and authentic growth begins.

Allah says: *“So set your face toward the religion, inclining to truth—[in accordance with] the natural disposition (fitrah) of Allah upon which He has created [all] people.”* (Ar-Rūm, 30)

And in another verse: *“But Allah has made faith beloved to you and beautified it in your hearts, and made disbelief, defiance, and disobedience hateful to you. These are the rightly guided.”* (Al-Hujurāt, 7)

These two verses affirm a timeless truth: that faith, growth, and purification are not foreign impositions upon the human soul—they are embedded within the very blueprint of creation. The sound soul is naturally inclined toward goodness, instinctively drawn to faith, and repelled by corruption.

The Purification-Growth Mindset (PGM) emerges from this profound understanding of the *fitrah*—the innate moral and spiritual compass with which every human being is born. It seeks to realign the human spirit with its divine origin, channeling this inner energy into a lifelong journey of awareness, refinement, and spiritual elevation.

It is a mindset that believes the human being is not a static creature, but one divinely designed for holistic growth—from within and across all dimensions: intellectual, spiritual, and behavioral.

In contrast to many modern frameworks that often separate self-motivation from the spiritual realm, Islam unites **free will**, **innate drive**, and **reliance on God** within a balanced paradigm that fosters genuine and enduring development. The believer does not operate from a vacuum; rather, they are animated by an authentic inner force—regulated by divine law, refined by faith, and nourished by knowledge.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) beautifully encapsulated the essence of the **Purification-Growth Mindset (PGM)** in a profound and comprehensive saying:

*“The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, though there is good in both. Strive for that which benefits you, seek help from Allah, and do not give up.”* (Narrated by Muslim)

This hadith masterfully weaves together the core dimensions of the PGM:

- ♦ **“The strong believer”** reflects that true faith is inseparable from strength—mental, emotional, and practical.
- ♦ **“Strive for that which benefits you”** calls for clarity of purpose and a sincere, active desire for growth.
- ♦ **“Seek help from Allah”** places divine reliance at the heart of personal development, merging spirituality with self-improvement.
- ♦ **“Do not give up”** rejects defeatism and psychological inertia, affirming the sacredness of continued effort.

This is a mindset born of pure *fitrah*, nourished by faith, guided by knowledge, and empowered by trust in God—a dynamic path toward *tazkiyah* and holistic human fulfillment.

## Seeking Knowledge in Islam: A Journey of Existential Transformation, Not Mere Information Accumulation

Many assume that in Islam, knowledge is simply the gathering of facts, a tool for solving problems, or a ladder to professional success. Yet a deeper reflection on the divine command **“And say, ‘My Lord, increase me in knowledge’”** (Taha, 114) reveals a far more profound reality. This sacred directive was not addressed to an ordinary human being, but to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself—he who had already reached the summit of divine guidance and sacred knowledge.

Why, then, was he commanded to seek *more*?

And why, of all things, was the command for an increase only in *knowledge*—and nothing else?

The secret lies in this: in Islam, knowledge is not merely an external acquisition—it is an inner journey that transforms the very essence of the human being. True knowledge, when accompanied by sincere intention and deep understanding, does not remain a mere concept lodged in the mind. It becomes *awareness*—a living consciousness that reshapes how one thinks, feels, and acts.

He who understands the meaning of *tawakkul* (trust in God) becomes more serene and assured.

He who grasps the value of *ikhlas* (sincerity) becomes purer in intention.

He who learns about *trial and tribulation* becomes more patient, more perceptive.

Thus, the scholars have said: **“Beneficial knowledge is that which transforms you, not merely that which increases what you memorize.”**

Every moment of sincere learning is, in truth, a moment of inner metamorphosis—a step in the soul’s ascending journey toward its fullest potential and nearness to the Divine.

In the framework of the **Purification-Growth Mindset (PGM)**, seeking knowledge is not an intellectual luxury—it is the essential bridge to deep inner transformation. Knowledge, in this mindset, unveils your true self, refines your inner vision, and redefines your understanding of the world and your purpose within it.

This is why God also says: **“Only those of His servants who possess knowledge truly fear Allah.”** (Fatir, 28)

This *khashyah* (reverent awe) is not merely an emotional response—it is the outcome of a profound internal shift brought about by true knowledge.

Thus, within the PGM, knowledge is not just an addition to memory; it is a **foundational movement of the soul**—a transformative force that reshapes awareness, reconstructs the self from within, and propels one along a higher path toward purification, Divine contentment, and ultimate success.

This profound transformation wrought by knowledge naturally leads us to grasp the concept of “**essential motion**”—a principle that reveals how the human being moves deep within their very essence toward their attainable perfection, as we shall explore in the following section.

## **Essential Motion: An Islamic Model of Deep Growth within the Purification-Growth Mindset (PGM)**

### ► **Introduction: Motion in the Essence of Existence and Humanity**

In Islamic philosophy, the concept of *essential motion* stands among the most profound ideas expressing the dynamic nature of human existence. This concept was developed by the great Islamic philosopher Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā), who posited that change is not limited to superficial attributes but extends into the very essence of the being itself.

Just as matter is not a static condition but rather undergoes transformation within its core toward more perfect forms, so too does the human soul move inwardly—undergoing changes in its identity, awareness, and perceptions, not merely in outward behavior.

This vision situates humanity on a progressively ascending existential journey toward its potential perfection and forms the philosophical foundation upon which the Purification-Growth Mindset builds its understanding of growth and transformation.

If the material world is in a constant state of flow toward more complete forms, then so too is the human soul moving inwardly toward its attainable perfection—transforming in its awareness, feelings, and perceptions of itself and existence.

### ► **The Purification—Growth Mindset: Inner Transformation, Not Mere External Improvement**

In modern conceptions, personal growth is often viewed as behavioral improvement, skill development, or the acquisition of tools for external success. However, from the profound Islamic perspective, growth is not merely an adjustment in appearance or performance; it is an inner movement that reconstructs the human being at their very core.

The **Purification-Growth Mindset (PGM)** emerges from this understanding. It does not settle for beautifying the surface but aims to dismantle the closed psychological layers, purify the inner self, and refine both heart and mind together. It does not measure progress by the number of achievements but by the sincerity in confronting oneself, freeing it from impurities, and drawing it closer to its pure essence.

The Qur'an encapsulates this profound meaning in a brief phrase that carries the essence of the entire purification project: ***“Indeed, he succeeds who purifies himself”*** (Al-A'la, 14)

True success is not attained through acquiring skills or accumulating achievements, but through the inner purification of the self—where

transformation begins in the depths of consciousness, manifests in behavior, and shines through insight.

**PGM** does not promise rapid superficial change; rather, it invites you on a silent yet powerful journey that reshapes you from within to become more balanced, purer, and closer to your existential purpose.

### ► **Transformation Happens Only from Within: The Moment of Rupture and Renewal**

This transformation does not occur by chance; rather, it is often born out of inner pressure, a trial that shakes one's very being, or a profound moment of awareness that creates what resembles a "spiritual fissure" in the wall of the soul, allowing light to penetrate. According to the concept of substantial motion, a person does not change at their core unless their roots are shaken, their molds cracked, and they are forced to confront themselves from within—not from the outside. That inner psychological upheaval, which sometimes appears as weakness or confusion, may well be the beginning of the greatest transformation.

The Qur'an vividly depicts this moment in several places, such as in the verse: *"Or do you think that you will enter Paradise while such [trial] has not yet come to you as came to those who passed on before you? They were touched by poverty and hardship and were shaken until [even their] messenger and those who believed with him said, 'When is the help of Allah?' Unquestionably, the help of Allah is near."* (Al-Baqarah, 214)

In another passage, the Qur'an vividly portrays the scene of the upheaval with all its emotional dimensions: *"When they come at you from above you and from below you, and when eyes shift [in fear], and hearts reach the throats, and you assume about Allah [various] assumptions. \*There the believers were tested and shaken with a severe shaking."* (Al-Ahzab, 10–11)

This shaking is not merely an external test but an existential inner quake that shakes the very foundations of the soul—from within—even for those who have reached the highest ranks of faith. It is the moment when the Messenger and those who believed with him ask: “When is the help of Allah?”

Thus, this shaking is not a moment of weakness... but a moment of readiness to receive the inner victory. It is not doubt... but sincere submission that precedes a new rebirth.

In the framework of the “Progressive Growth Mindset” (PGM), this moment is recognized as an essential condition for true inner transformation. The soul does not attain purification by mere adornment or superficial refinement; rather, it is through breaking—through being shattered and then reshaped with sincere willpower and complete surrender to God—that genuine sanctification unfolds.

### ► **Trials and Tribulations: Catalysts for the Soul's Movement**

True intrinsic movement does not arise spontaneously. It is often sparked by trials and tribulations that pierce the very depths of the soul. Challenges, therefore, are not always barriers or hindrances; more often, they serve as instruments of unveiling and tools for profound internal reordering.

Just as essential movement in the physical world requires an inner driving force, so too does the human soul resist transformation until it is confronted with a shock, a hardship, or a struggle that compels it to re-examine itself, dismantle old perceptions, and confront its own truths.

Hence, trials and challenges are not obstacles to be feared or avoided, but divine instruments of renewal and reconstruction. They sculpt the individual anew—deeper, more authentic—and propel

them toward a higher plane of consciousness and harmony with their loftiest principles.

Spiritual struggles, loss, failure, and intellectual shocks emerge as a powerful impetus for redefining the self and reshaping one's relationship with God and life itself. Within the purificatory mindset, trials are not viewed as punishments, but rather as pathways guiding one back to their origin—a realignment of the soul's true direction.

Every moment of pain, every genuine fracture within the heart, holds within it a latent potential for growth—if met with sincerity, translated into awareness, and transformed into mature, sanctifying action.

### ► **From Static Being to Renewed Existence: Humanity's Journey in Motion**

The “Progressive Growth Mindset” does not perceive the human as a fixed entity awaiting external improvement; rather, it embraces humanity as a continual work in progress. Each new insight, every heartfelt experience, and every profound moment of reflection rebuild the self from within—layer by layer, toward deeper authenticity and spiritual renewal.

The soul that grows according to this model does not rest upon its past accomplishments, but rather thrives on what unveils itself in every new moment. It is in a state of continual rebirth—breaking free from rigid molds, and gradually drawing nearer to its pristine, innate truth.

### ► **Conclusion: The Substantial Motion is Not a Concept... but a Way of Being**

At its core, substantial motion is not merely a philosophical theory; it is a profound lens through which to understand humanity, a pathway

of growth, and a method of spiritual purification. It is not mere improvement—it is a perpetual process of recreation.

Each time the soul is shaken and responds with gentleness and patience, it is reshaped anew. Each time illusions are shattered and the soul advances toward the light, a new birth unfolds.

Thus, the Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM) frames essential movement as the cornerstone for truly understanding the self, liberating it, and reshaping it—transforming every moment of awareness, every experience, and every trial into an authentic step toward the realization of attainable perfection.

From this vantage point, awareness is not merely a facet but an inseparable element of this inner formation, and knowledge must rise beyond mere data to become a living, breathing presence within the soul. This profound reality will be explored further in the next section through the concept of the “Union of the Knower and the Known.”

## **The Union of the Knower and the Known: Knowledge as an Existential Experience in the Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM)**

- ▶ **Knowledge is not merely a reflection... but an existential union.**

In Islamic philosophy, the concept of the “union of the knower and the known” stands as one of the most profound insights into the nature of knowledge. Philosophers assert that knowledge is not simply a mirror of reality within the mind, but an existential transformation wherein the knower becomes united with what is known—so that the known becomes an intrinsic part of their very being, not a fleeting thought or abstraction.

This understanding transcends mere philosophical theory and harmonizes deeply with the Islamic vision of learning within the framework of the Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM). Here, learning is not viewed as the mere accumulation of facts, but as an internal realization that reshapes the self. In this context, *tazkiyah* (purification) is not simply behavioral refinement; it is an ongoing path of soul-cultivation and expanding consciousness.

Allah the Exalted says: ***“We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth.”*** (Fussilat, 53)

This verse points to the fact that knowledge is not merely an external perception but an inner journey that unveils profound truths to the human being. Through this process, knowledge transcends its role as a tool for understanding reality and becomes a spiritual experience that matures consciousness, enriches the soul, and reshapes one’s vision of self and existence.

### ► **From Understanding to Union: Knowledge as an Existential Manifestation**

Within the framework of the Purifying Growth Mindset, knowledge is not conceived as mere accumulation of information but as a lived experience encompassing every dimension of the self—intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. True knowledge does not simply lodge itself in memory; it reorganizes the inner being and opens new horizons of understanding and purification.

Allah the Exalted says: ***“Indeed, only those of His servants who are learned fear Allah.”*** (Fāṭir, 28)

Here, the fear mentioned is not the product of mere intellect alone, but the fruit of knowledge that reaches the heart—awakening the soul to sincerely seek God through genuine purification.

In this context, the Prophet's (PBUH) enduring supplication remains a constant reminder:

***"And say, 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge.'"*** (Ṭā Hā, 114)

Knowledge, therefore, is not a mere mental goal but an ongoing path of inner elevation.

Within the framework of Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM), knowledge transforms from mere perception to realization, from rote memorization to living presence, from a concept to radiant light. Knowledge that fails to awaken the heart or transform behavior remains a dim and lifeless fact, no matter how vast or complex it may be.

The Qur'an censures this unactualized knowledge in vivid terms: ***"The example of those who were entrusted with the Torah and did not carry it is like that of a donkey who carries volumes [of books]."*** (Al-Jumu'ah, 5)

Just as purification (tazkiyah) is not complete by merely possessing outward virtues, but through their deep-rooted presence in the heart, so too does knowledge bear fruit only when it becomes an integral part of one's very identity.

At this point, the concept reaches its pinnacle: when the knower and the known become one essence, and knowledge transforms from a detached object into a mirror in which a person sees their own self—drawing closer to their true reality and the spiritual perfection for which they were created.

Allah the Exalted says: ***"Indeed, in that are signs for those of understanding."*** (Ar-Ra'd, 19)

Those endowed with understanding do not settle for mere comprehension; rather, they immerse themselves in the experience and are illumined by knowledge until they illuminate their own souls.

## ► **When Knowledge Transforms into a Way of Life**

When knowledge takes root in the heart and merges with conscious awareness, it no longer lingers as a mere notion in the mind. Instead, it begins to manifest in the subtle details of everyday life.

It becomes an integral part of one's thinking patterns, a lens through which one relates to oneself and others, and a guiding principle in decision-making.

Within the framework of the Purifying Growth Mindset, knowledge is truly understood only when it evolves into a living practice—one that matures the soul and deepens spiritual purification (tazkiyah). From this vantage point, knowledge reveals itself through three fundamental dimensions:

- ♦ **In Learning:** Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself and becomes a means to deeper understanding of the self and existence. The seeker realizes that every idea kindles an inner light, and every piece of information offers an opportunity for growth—not merely for passing tests.
- ♦ **In Work:** The daily task transforms from a mere livelihood into a field of spiritual purification. Work becomes a practice of sincerity, excellence, and service to others, drawing the individual closer to the Divine.
- ♦ **In Relationships:** Connections with others transcend transactional exchanges, becoming mirrors for the soul, arenas for refining character, lessons in patience, and expanding awareness of self and others.

## ► Summary

The Purifying Growth Mindset is not merely an educational method or a self-development technique; it is an existential vision that transforms knowledge into a living experience that reshapes the human identity from within.

In this perspective, learning is not limited to the acquisition of information but becomes a mature journey that moves both the soul and mind toward higher realms of awareness, purification, and perfection.

Every true piece of knowledge is a step along the path of inner growth, and every sincere learning experience is a milestone in humanity's journey toward self-realization and approaching the essence of the truth for which we were created.

## Striving of the Self: The Renewed Pursuit in the Purifying Growth Mindset

In the profound Islamic worldview, jihad is not confined to external battles but begins where no one sees it: within the soul itself. It is the silent, relentless struggle against heedlessness, ingrained habits, desires, and complacency. It is the continuous effort to liberate the self from its burdens and to nurture its innate capacities toward the perfection for which it was created.

Allah the Exalted says: ***“And whoever strives—strives only for [the benefit of] himself. Indeed, Allah is free from need of the worlds.”*** (Al-Ankabut, 6)

Thus, jihad is not a burden imposed upon the individual but an existential opportunity in which one gains one's true self and draws closer to its pure essence.

Within this framework, the Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM) views this inner jihad not merely as a personal endeavor but as a foundational pillar of sustainable growth—an ethical responsibility rooted in one’s awareness of their mission and purpose.

Every failure is reinterpreted as a learning experience, every challenge seen as a step on the path to maturity, and every weakness embraced not to justify it, but to confront it and transform it into constructive energy.

Allah the Exalted says: ***“And those who strive for Us—We will surely guide them to Our ways.”*** (Al-Ankabut, 69)

Guidance is not a promise for the idle, but an inevitable fruit for the sincere warriors within themselves—those truthful in their striving—who make every day an opportunity for elevation and every breath a silent prayer drawing them closer to Allah.

### ► **Intention and Sincerity: The Heart of the Purificatory Jihad**

In Islam, intention is not a mere formality, nor is sincerity a fleeting feeling. They are the essence of every genuine effort toward purification. The Purifying Growth Mindset does not measure growth by results alone, but by the purpose behind them, the clarity that drives them, and the sincerity that fuels their inner energy.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: ***“Actions are but by intentions, and every man shall have only that which he intended.”*** (Narrated by al-Bukhari)

This foundational principle transforms every righteous deed into a means of drawing nearer to God, not merely an external achievement. It grants the doer steadfastness in the face of challenges, for they

know their effort is accounted for by Allah alone, not by the eyes of people.

This truth was magnificently manifested in the immortal stance of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) on the Day of the Trench, when he stepped forward to duel Amr ibn Abd Wad—the warrior whose courage and awe commanded admiration throughout the Arab world.

Ibn al-Hadeed al-Mu'tazili, in his *Sharh Nahj al-Balagha* (5/14), narrates that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said at that decisive moment:

***“The strike of Ali on the Day of the Trench is better than the worship of the two heavy-weighted beings (the heavens and the earth).”***

That strike was not merely a martial act; it was a pure manifestation of sincerity at its highest degree—a single blow born from a heart that sees only Allah, and a soul that fights not for desire or glory, but to raise the banner of truth, defend faith, and draw closer to God through a unique and unrepeatable moment of clarity.

From this radiant light emerges the profound significance of intention in daily life: every effort to learn, every act of patience in the face of obstacles, and every internal hurdle overcome is, in essence, part of a silent worship—a spiritual struggle between the servant and their Lord.

When the intention is purified and the purpose is sincere, the path of self-development transforms into a journey of purification connected to God, returning the person to their pure self and bringing them closer to their ultimate purpose.

## ► Continuity in the Struggle of the Self: An Unending Path

Within the framework of the Purifying Growth Mindset, the struggle of the self is not a fleeting act or a rare moment, but rather a way of life—a continuous progression toward reform and purification.

It is a calm yet persistent confrontation with the impulses of the soul, one that does not end with a momentary victory but renews itself every time the soul awakens from heedlessness or succumbs again to habit and complacency.

Allah Almighty said: ***“And We will surely test you until We know those who strive among you and the patient, and We will test your affairs.”*** (Muhammad, 31)

This striving, at its essence, is a continuous test of the sincerity of the seeker, the patience of the diligent, and the purity of the intention. Every difficulty encountered on this path is not a barrier, but a revealer of the true nature of the self and a means for its purification.

Here shines the value of renewed struggle—one that is not measured by a single moment of victory over the self, but by steadfastness in every situation and returning to Allah after every shortcoming.

Allah also said: ***“So when you have finished [your duties], then stand up [for worship]. And to your Lord, direct [your] longing.”*** (Al-Sharh, 7–8)

This is a call for perseverance, not for rest; for renewal, not for complacency. When you complete a task, do not become complacent; when you finish an act of worship, do not take a break—rather, exert

yourself, turn sincerely to your Lord, and fill your heart with genuine longing for what is with Allah.

The **Purification Mentality** does not perceive daily challenges as obstacles, but rather as stations on the path of ascent—through which the soul is refined, awareness is expanded, and the heart is broadened to receive more light.

### ► **Continuous Self-Challenge: The Key to Deep Growth**

In the Purifying Growth Mindset, true transformation does not begin from external changes, but from a profound internal challenge. It is where the human being confronts their own self, stands before ingrained habits, hidden impulses, and recurring desires.

This is a silent struggle unseen by others, yet it forms the genuine path of growth and purification.

The sincerest forms of self-challenge are not those witnessed by others, but those that quietly unfold between the servant and their soul. These are the moments when a person faces a fierce desire, a deeply rooted habit, or a persistent passion—and they hold themselves accountable, compelling their soul to endure what it dislikes for the sake of what pleases Allah.

And Allah swore in His Book by one of the greatest inner scenes, saying: ***“I swear by the self-reproaching soul”***(Al-Qiyamah, 2)

This is the soul that does not easily surrender its reins; rather, it reflects, reproaches, holds itself accountable, and rises from its stumbles—not to justify itself, but to transcend them.

Then Allah clarified for us the fruit of this sincere struggle, saying: ***“But as for he who feared the position of his Lord and restrained the***

*soul from [inclining to] desire, Then indeed, Paradise will be [his] refuge” (An-Nazi’at, 40–41)*

Whoever fears standing before his Lord, holds his soul at the gates of accountability, and closes off the avenues of desire, is on a profound path toward Paradise—not by outward effort alone, but by sincerity in the battle of the self.

Thus, within the Purifying Growth Mindset, self-challenge is not viewed merely as a means to worldly success, but as a method for liberating the soul from itself—a continual path for refining the spirit, deepening awareness, and anchoring closeness to God, step by step, in pure silence and enduring sincerity.

## ► **When Jihad Becomes a Path to Wisdom**

When the struggle of the self meets the ongoing pursuit of growth, change ceases to be just behavioral improvement or skill acquisition; it transforms into a profound journey that reshapes thought, purifies intention, and sanctifies values.

In the purification perspective, self-development is not a tool for personal glory, but a way to refine the soul, strengthen faith, and draw nearer to the greater purpose for which humanity was created.

Thus, the Purifying Growth Mindset does not merely propel a person toward self-actualization, but invites them to achieve a balance between their worldly ambitions and their eternal purpose; to elevate their efforts not to prove themselves, but to draw closer to God.

In this sense, a person becomes more disciplined, more aware, and more connected—not because they succeeded, but because they purified themselves in the process of striving.

## When Pain Raises Us: Trials from a Purification Perspective

### ► Trials as a Means of Purification, Not Punishment

In the Qur'anic purification worldview, trials are not seen as mere hardships or obstacles, but as revealing stations, fields of nurturing, and refining paths that uncover a person's true nature and bring them back to the center of their awareness.

Allah Almighty says: ***"Do people think that they will be left to say, 'We believe,' and they will not be tested?"***

***"And We certainly tested those before them, and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars."*** (Al-Ankabut, 2–3)

This verse opens the doors of awareness to a clear reality: faith is not a claim to be uttered lightly, but an experience to be tested; a person is not left to live on mere intentions, but is tested so that the essence of those intentions may be brought forth, revealing what is truly in the heart before it is exposed to others.

And because God knows the weakness of souls and their natural dispositions, the Qur'anic revelation clarifies that trials are not exceptional events, but an integral part of life's system—a mercy manifested as a refining test. He, the Exalted, says:

***"And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient."*** (Al-Baqarah, 155)

These are not simply calamities; they are means of purification that strike the soul at the core of its needs, shaking it out of the comfort zones upon which it relies. They reorder priorities, moving the soul

from complacency to repentance, from heedlessness to patience, and from reliance on causes to trust in the Ultimate Cause.

Thus, the purifying growth mindset views trials not as obstacles blocking the path, but as part of the path itself—a tool for elevating the soul, softening the heart, and raising the awareness of both God and the self.

## ► **Welcoming the Trial: From Complaining to Returning**

In the purifying growth mindset, the maturity of a person is not measured solely by how they overcome the trial, but by how they receive it. The ordeal is not merely a passing event, but an opportunity to return—a gentle divine call inviting the soul to come back, reflect, and submit with tranquility.

God Almighty says: ***“Who, when disaster strikes them, say, ‘Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return.’”*** (Al-Baqarah, 156)

This phrase, repeated by the believer upon every affliction, is not just an expression of consolation, but a profound existential declaration: that I do not own myself, nor my fate, nor what I love—and that in returning to God, I find my peace, and in surrendering to Him, I discover my strength.

In the purification mindset, calamities are neither met with objection nor greeted with noise; rather, they are embraced quietly, with a search for their meaning rather than a justification.

Thus, every hardship becomes a window of awareness, every pain a depth to be explored, and every loss an opportunity for purification.

This is the difference between those who break under trials and those who are refined by them; between those who complain and

those who sincerely say: *“Indeed, we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we shall return.”*

## ► **The Beautiful Steadfastness: When Reliance Bears the Fruit of Serenity**

Psychological resilience in the purification mindset is not merely a skill of adaptation; it is a heartfelt fruit born from deep reliance on God. It is the ability to stand firm amidst the winds of trial—not by relying on oneself alone, but by leaning on a pillar that never fades.

God Almighty says: *“And whoever relies upon Allah—then He is sufficient for him”* (At-Talaq, 3)

This verse is not merely a promise of support, but a declaration of the human condition: that in every circumstance—whether hardship or ease, strength or weakness—you are always in need of God.

And whoever hangs their heart upon God—not only momentarily in times of need, but as a constant state in every condition—God bestows upon them a tranquility that overflows from within, drawn not from the circumstance, but from certainty.

In this light, the purification mindset does not view challenges as obstacles to be merely overcome, but as platforms for reliance upon God, and doors to building an inner tranquility. Within this tranquility, trials transform into stations of purification, where the human is tested: will they lean on their own capabilities, or cast their heart at God’s threshold and say, “Allah is sufficient for me”?

And these, as God describes them, are not only patient but also blessed and rightly guided, for He says:

*“Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided”* (Al-Baqarah, 157)

## Faith and Self-Motivation in the “Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM)”

### ► Faith as the Driving Force Behind Continuous Improvement

In the Islamic worldview, faith is not merely a theoretical belief or a fleeting emotion; rather, it is an inner power that awakens the will and moves the person from within toward purification and growth. It is the primary engine of striving, the deepest guarantee for perseverance, and the strongest motivation for self-improvement—not merely for achievement, but for drawing closer to God.

The Qur'an summarizes this purifying equation in His words: *“Indeed, this is a reminder, so whoever wills may take to his Lord a way”* (Al-Insan, 29)

Growth here is neither an automatic process nor merely a reaction to external stimuli, but an existential choice made by the conscious self, based on the light of faith and the awareness of one's responsibility before God.

From this foundation, the Purifying growth mindset (PGM) offers an integrated vision that makes faith, self-motivation, and reliance on God three interwoven pillars, without which sustainable growth cannot be achieved. Thus, self-motivation in this framework becomes a spiritual, intellectual, and ethical energy that nourishes the soul with confidence, grants it patience, and directs it toward the ultimate purpose.

### ► Purification Motivation: Where Effort Meets Reliance

Within the Purifying growth mindset, self-motivation is not understood as total reliance on individual willpower, nor as passive

resignation and waiting for fate. Rather, it is built on a delicate balance that unites inner striving with conscious reliance on God.

The Prophet (PBUH) beautifully summarized this balance in words that unite faith and action: ***“The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, though there is good in both. Strive for what benefits you, seek help from Allah, and do not be helpless.”*** (Narrated by Muslim)

This hadith is not merely a call for activity but an acknowledgment of the profound interconnection between spiritual movement and practical effort. Faith is inseparable from striving, and reliance on God does not negate responsibility; rather, it purifies, disciplines, and elevates it to a higher dimension.

Thus, self-motivation in the purification mindset becomes a state of balanced inner awakening—one that enables a person to act without arrogance, depend without laziness, and move through life knowing that strength comes from God, success is divine facilitation, and sincere effort is an act of worship, not just a personal ambition.

## ► **The Capacity for Change: The Trust of Vicegerency and the Responsibility of Purification**

In the profound Qur’anic vision, personal growth is not seen merely as skill enhancement or a desire for distinction, but as part of an existential trust that Allah has entrusted to humanity since the acceptance of the message. The faculties that Allah has placed within the soul—intellect, will, conscience, and awareness—are not neutral; rather, they are directed toward a purpose: that a person purifies themselves, improves their impact, and cultivates their existence and reality in a way that pleases Allah.

Allah Almighty says: *“Indeed, We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it.”* (Al-Ahzab, 72)

And Allah made self-transformation the gateway to external change, saying: *“Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves.”* (Ar-Ra’d, 11)

In this context, the role of human beings on earth manifests not as mere consumers or reproducers, but as responsible vicegerents entrusted with reform, development, and construction. Allah Almighty says: *“He created you from the earth and made you successors upon it.”* (Hud, 61)

Thus, investing internal resources—intellect, will, creativity, skills—becomes an existential duty within the Islamic worldview, not simply because it leads to worldly success, but because it fulfills the purpose of vicegerency, serves as a condition for purification, and constitutes the trust of divine responsibility.

In the growing purificatory mentality, self-development is not an escape from deficiency but a fulfillment of a covenant and a profound response to an ancient call embedded in human nature: to be in motion, in growth, and in building.

## ► **Conclusion: Purificatory Motivation Between Effort and Tranquility**

In the growing purificatory mindset, motivation does not stem from a fleeting desire for achievement, nor from social pressure to excel, but from a deep-rooted faith that true change begins from within, that striving is an act of worship, and that steadfastness is divine grace.

Here, motivation is not a temporary psychological push, but a conscious response to the trust of vicegerency, yielding calm effort, mature action, and a tranquil spirit.

The Qur'an encapsulates this truth in the verse: *"O mankind, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet it."* (Al-Inshiqaq, 6)

Striving here is not aimless motion, but an existential path toward the Divine Meeting. Every effort made in the way of reform, learning, and purification is a step closer to God.

## **Learning from Mistakes and Repentance in the "Progressive Purification Mindset (PGM)"**

### **► Mistakes and Repentance: The Gateway to Purification and the Path of Growth**

Within the profound Islamic vision, mistakes are not seen as permanent stains upon the soul, nor as failures that bar a person from the path of spiritual purification. Rather, they are integral to the very fabric of the human self—a sacred opportunity to renew one's connection with God and to embark upon a journey of deeper awareness and maturity.

Purification, or *tazkiyah*, does not rest upon the illusion of perfection. It is grounded in the earnest confrontation with one's own self, and in the humble turning back to God whenever a misstep occurs. Thus, repentance (*tawbah*) in the Qur'an is presented not merely as an admission of weakness, but as a profound existential movement—a transformation that begins in the heart and culminates in sincere, purposeful action.

The Divine has flung wide the doors of mercy even to those who have transgressed and exceeded bounds, declaring: ***“Say, ‘O My servants who have transgressed against themselves, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.’”*** (Az-Zumar, 53)

In this light, error is not a fall into the abyss of despair, but rather a bridge to Divine mercy—a seed of light in the darkest night that blossoms through repentance, yields wisdom, and carries the soul upon wings of renewal.

As if speaking directly to every soul who believed their journey ended with their mistake, the Divine call rises anew—lifting their gaze, rebuilding them not from harshness, but from mercy; not from condemnation, but from hope.

God Almighty declares: ***“Except for those who repent, believe, and do righteous deeds—those God will replace their evil deeds with good. And ever is God Forgiving and Merciful.”*** (Al-Furqan, 70)

This transformation is far more than mere erasure of faults; it is a profound metamorphosis of the moral and spiritual essence—where a mistake turns from a heavy burden into a driving force, from a stumbling block into a lesson, from a fall into a rise.

Thus, the Progressive Purification Mindset sees error not as the end of the road, but a necessary stage in the journey of learning and sanctification. Repentance is not only the path to forgiveness; it is a method of renewal and reform, returning the soul to God in a version more radiant, more sincere, and truer.

## ► **Repentance: Conscious Recognition of Shortcomings and the Pursuit of Renewal**

Within the Progressive Purification Mindset, repentance is not merely a fleeting state that follows a misstep or sin. Rather, it is a sustained spiritual condition—an ever-renewing bond with the Divine that recalibrates the soul's compass whenever it falters or drifts.

Repentance here transcends mere retreat from error; it is a deliberate and conscious return to the path. It is accompanied by a sincere reckoning with one's faults and an unwavering resolve to amend them. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) profoundly said, *“Every son of Adam errs, and the best of those who err are those who repent.”* (Tirmidhi)

In this vision, error is not a barrier to growth, but a gateway—when paired with awareness, sincerity, and the readiness to transform pain into insight, and negligence into awakening.

Thus, the Progressive Purification Mindset holds that true elevation is not founded upon infallibility, but upon sincere, repeated repentance—on the courage to acknowledge one's faults, to learn from them, and to renew the journey with a heart more honest and an intention more pure.

## ► **Self-Accountability: The Gateway to Practical Purification**

Within this mindset, repentance is never left to remain a fleeting emotional reaction. Instead, it is translated into a disciplined practice rooted in daily self-examination, honest scrutiny of one's motives, and a continual course correction.

This is what Islamic tradition calls **“muhasaba”** — the self-accountability that stands as a cornerstone of true purification, without which genuine reform remains incomplete.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) captured the essence of this truth when he said: ***“He who does not hold himself accountable will lose the value of his day’s end.”*** (Gharar al-Hikam)

Here, accountability is neither self-flagellation nor drowning in guilt; rather, it is a vigilant spiritual and intellectual awakening—where one reflects deeply on their actions, examines their intentions honestly, and corrects any crookedness in their conduct before it accumulates into a burden too heavy to bear.

The Qur’an itself points to this intimate link between repentance, self-examination, and sincere reform, declaring: ***“But whoever repents after his wrongdoing and reforms, indeed, Allah will turn to him in forgiveness.”*** (Al-Ma’idah, 39)

What is required, then, is not merely an acknowledgment of fault, but a heartfelt renewal—an earnest restoration of the path of growth with a purer intention and a firmer resolve.

Thus, within the Purifying Growth Mindset, **self-accountability** becomes a practical, ongoing tool of reflection—not aimed at perfection, but at honesty, steadfastness, and gradual progress along the path of purification. Mistakes transform from stumbling blocks into lessons; repentance becomes a daily practice for cleansing the heart, refining one’s actions, and drawing ever closer to God.

## ► **Repentance in the Purification Mentality: A Continuous Path of Renewal and Growth**

Within the Purifying Growth Mindset, repentance is not perceived as an exceptional state invoked only upon committing a grave mistake.

Rather, it is embraced as a daily spiritual practice—through which a person reconstructs their intention and resumes their journey toward purification anew.

Purification does not lie in infallibility, but in vigilance; not in being free of faults, but in the sincere capacity to correct them and to return wholeheartedly to God after every slip or shortcoming.

Thus, mistakes are not endings but beginnings. Repentance is not merely a return, but a transformation in vision, an expansion in understanding, and a deepening maturity in the relationship with the Divine.

## **The Pursuit of Spiritual Perfection and Moral Aspiration in the Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM)**

### **► The Purificatory Quest for Perfection: From Deed to Meaning**

Within the Islamic worldview, human beings are not demanded to attain absolute perfection in its fullest sense. Rather, they are called to engage in sincere, ongoing striving toward God—through continuous purification of the self and gradual ascent along the stations of *Ihsan* (excellence in faith and conduct).

In the Purifying Growth Mindset, moral striving is not measured by worldly achievements or social accolades, but by the depth of one's sincerity in self-correction, steadfastness upon one's ultimate purpose, and readiness to amend, reassess, and return whenever error arises.

This pursuit does not stem from mere personal ambition, but from a profound understanding of existence itself: that humanity is

entrusted as a vicegerent on earth, and that purifying the self is the foundational condition for bearing this sacred trust.

The Qur'an beautifully encapsulates this profound truth in the verse: ***"Did you think that We had created you in play (without purpose), and that you would not be returned to Us?"*** (Al-Mu'minun, 115)

In the purificatory vision, perfection is not a final destination to be reached, but an ongoing state of striving—where action transforms into worship, aspiration becomes the means of elevation, and effort serves as sustenance on the path toward closeness to God.

This existential striving is further summarized in the divine words: ***"O man, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord with laborious striving; and you will meet Him."*** (Al-Inshiqaq, 6)

Then, humanity is gently guided toward conscious direction: ***"So flee to Allah."*** (Adh-Dhariyat, 50)

Thus, the journey of purification is not merely a movement toward improvement, but a profound reorientation—a deliberate turning toward God.

This quest, as the spiritual path to God affirms, does not rest upon rigid perfectionism, but upon the sincerity of intention, the love of God, and gentleness with oneself. For God's gaze rests not solely on outcomes, but on the authenticity of the direction and steadfastness upon the path.

## ► **Ihsan: Conscious Presence and the Journey Toward Perfection**

In the growing mindset of spiritual purification, the pursuit of spiritual perfection is never reduced to mere ritual performance or outward conformity. Rather, it is understood as a continuous path of

deepening awareness—a profound unfolding of the true meaning of *ihsan* within the heart and reflected through one's relationship with God and with others.

The Qur'an beautifully maps this ascending journey of purification in the verse: ***"Then fear Allah and believe; then fear Him and do good. Indeed, Allah loves the doers of good."*** (Al-Ma'idah, 93)

The repeated call to *taqwa* (God-consciousness) and *iman* (faith), culminating in *ihsan* (excellence in worship and conduct), reveals that spiritual perfection is not an instantaneous attainment but the fruit of stages—renewed God-consciousness, rooted faith, and sustained righteous action.

Ihsan, as Defined by the Prophet and the Imams: A State of Divine Presence.

Ihsan, as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) described it, is not merely a rank above Islam and faith; it is a profound spiritual state of complete presence before God. He said: ***"Ihsan is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, then indeed He sees you."*** (Narrated by Muslim)

This deep truth was further illuminated by Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) in *Misbāh al-Sharī'ah*: ***"Ihsan is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, then indeed Allah sees you. If you think He does not see you, then you have disbelieved. And if you know He sees you but do not guard your deeds, you have made Him the least attentive of those who watch over you."***

This profound faith-consciousness does not reduce one's actions to mere formalities; rather, it imbues them with the essence of divine proximity, transforming every act into an opportunity for spiritual ascent. One who worships as if truly seeing God will not perfect their

deeds solely for personal gain, but for the radiance of their inner light and the existential direction it provides.

The Qur'an points to the exalted status of Ihsan in the verse: ***"Indeed, Allah is with those who fear Him and those who are doers of good (Muhsineen)."*** (An-Nahl, 128)

Yet, in the journey toward God, Ihsan is not to be understood as harsh rigidity or unattainable perfection beyond the soul's capacity. Rather, it is a gradual awareness, realized through sincerity, steady progress, and gentle compassion with oneself. Allah does not demand that the servant be perfect all at once, but that they be present, sincere, desirous of closeness, and balanced in their striving.

Thus, Ihsan becomes a station lived not through pressure or strain, but through purity of intention and heartfelt orientation.

### ► **Moral Aspiration: An Inner Drive on the Path of Vicegerency**

In the evolving mindset of spiritual purification, moral aspiration is not regarded merely as a social value or a desire to appear ideal. Rather, it is understood as an inner longing to draw nearer to God through self-improvement, cultivating sincerity, and embedding Ihsan (excellence) in every word and deed.

This aspiration is inseparable from an awareness of humanity's divine mission on earth. It is a silent response to the profound realization that God has entrusted you with a sacred trust, and each day you are called to draw closer to fulfilling that trust.

The Qur'an encapsulates this meaning in the verse: ***"And say, 'Do [as you will], for Allah will see your deeds, and [so will] His Messenger and the believers.'"*** (At-Tawbah, 105)

Every deed performed within the framework of spiritual purification is seen, accounted for, and recorded—not based on its size or apparent impact, but on its sincerity, excellence, and direction.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ***“Indeed, Allah loves that when anyone of you does a job, he does it with perfection.”*** (Narrated by At-Tabarani)

From the perspective of the purifying mindset, this hadith is an invitation to move beyond mere outward performance toward a balanced state of sincerity, mastery, and consistency—where action transforms from simple accomplishment into a means for purification, elevation, and service to creation.

Yet, within the path of drawing near to God, this ambition is not forged from rigid perfectionism or harsh self-imposed pressure. Rather, it is nurtured by a profound love for the Divine, tempered by balance, and safeguarded by gentle compassion toward oneself. God does not measure the servant by the magnitude of their accomplishments, but by the sincerity of their effort—by a striving akin to a seed planted in secret: quietly it grows, patiently it strengthens, and by God’s grace, it bears fruit when the soul is ripe.

## ► **Purifying Conduct: Manifesting Spiritual Excellence in Daily Life**

In the evolving mindset of self-purification, spiritual perfection is no longer a distant theoretical ideal or a mere emotional state. It becomes a conscious, living practice—renewed in every detail of existence—and a vivid expression of one’s awareness of their sacred mission, their accountability, and their ultimate purpose: the journey toward God.

These practices come to life when they are infused with sincere intention—not as mere imposed duties, but as conscious, purifying

choices born from the servant's awareness of their direction, love for God, and trust in the transformative power of the journey toward Him.

From this awareness, the contours of such striving reveal themselves in tangible actions, including:

### **1. Worship as a Means to Refine the Heart, Not Merely a Formal Obligation**

Prayer, for example, is not a momentary pause or interruption, but a profound realignment of the inner self with God. As God describes it: *"Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing"* (Al-Ankabut, 45)

Through prayer, the will is disciplined, the purpose is remembered, and the soul is gently brought back to its true center.

### **2. Continuous Self-Improvement: Not for Mere Efficiency, but in Faithful Fulfillment of the Trust**

The cultivation of skills, the refinement of habits, and the mastery of time are not merely tools for worldly success; rather, they are essential forms of purifying the self and completing the ethical portrait of stewardship. As God declares: *"And those who strive for Us – We will surely guide them to Our ways"* (Al-Ankabut, 69)

Here, striving (jihad) transcends the external struggle; it is foremost a battle against the self—against negligence, complacency, and shortcomings.

### **3. Harmonizing Earth and Spirit: Beyond the False Dichotomy of This World and the Hereafter**

Islam does not call for passive asceticism or withdrawal from life, but for the integration of existence in service of the ultimate purpose.

God commands: *“And do not forget your share of the world, and do good as Allah has done good to you”* (Al-Qasas, 77)

#### **4. Relationships as Gateways to Purification, Not Merely Ethical Tests**

Every human interaction offers a precious opportunity to manifest mercy, to restrain the ego, and to refine one’s character. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: *“The most complete of believers in faith is the best in character.”* (At-Tirmidhi)

Thus, relationships are not arenas for mere social niceties; they are fields of inner struggle and arenas where excellence in conduct (Ihsan) is made manifest.

#### **5. Remembrance (Dhikr) as Nourishment for the Soul and Anchor of Direction**

Remembrance is not mere verbal repetition but a heartfelt presence that awakens one to the self, to the Divine, and to the profound meaning of life’s journey. Within the path of purification, dhikr serves as daily nourishment for the soul—restoring the inner, strengthening resolve, and instilling tranquility throughout the laborious journey toward God. As God declares: *“Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured.”* (Ar-Ra’d, 28)

#### **6. Giving and Self-Denial: Inner Maturity and a Purifying Drive**

On the path of purification, the clarity of the heart remains incomplete without transcending the ego and opening oneself to others through sincere giving. One who does not cultivate the habit of prioritizing others—even at the expense of their own comfort or desires—will not reach the heights of spiritual refinement that cleanse the soul of pride, selfishness, and attachment.

As God Almighty says: *“And they give preference over themselves, even though they are in privation. And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul—it is those who will be the successful.”* (Al-Hashr, 9)

In the ethos of purification, altruism is not merely an outward act, but an inner discipline—a liberation from self-centeredness and a learning of how to truly be *for* others, not just *with* them.

### ► **Conclusion: The Journey of Purification: An Unceasing Pursuit of Perfection**

Within the evolving mindset of purification, the quest for perfection is not understood as a race for outcomes or the attainment of an idealized image. Rather, it is recognized as an ongoing inner journey—marked by struggle, humility, and quiet renewal.

The Qur’an alludes to this profound path in a tone of solemn challenge: *“But none shall [finally] overcome the steep path.”* (Al-Balad, 11)

The road to spiritual perfection is fraught with the obstacles of the self—laziness, stinginess, attachment—but God does not burden a soul beyond its capacity. Nor does He measure the speed of one’s progress, but looks instead to the sincerity of the intention, the purity of the aim, and the steadfastness of the direction toward Him.

Thus, every honest moment, every unseen act of giving, every small act of self-repair becomes a building block of perfection—one humble step on an infinite journey... toward God.

# A Critical Examination of the Western Theory and the Islamic Response

Despite the widespread appeal of the “Growth Mindset Theory” across educational, pedagogical, and developmental fields—and the psychological tools it has provided to encourage a more flexible approach to challenges—a number of critical Western studies have raised fundamental questions regarding the theory’s limitations and its practical applicability.

These critiques focus on five key dimensions:

1. The limited impact on actual performance, particularly within complex academic settings.
2. The psychological consequences of excessive motivation, including subtle internal pressures placed on individuals.
3. The diminished effectiveness of self-motivation when not supported by a conducive environment.
4. An overreliance on the concept of neuroplasticity.
5. Practical difficulties in implementing the theory within educational institutions.

Although these critiques do not dismantle the theory outright, they reveal a profound need for a framework more deeply rooted in innate human nature and grounded in a unified, monotheistic vision of humanity.

In the Islamic perspective, growth is not merely intellectual flexibility but a continuous process of spiritual purification—an ongoing connection with God, purpose, and trustworthiness. This process

reconstructs the human being from within, linking them to a meaning that transcends mere performance to embrace divine proximity, and to an ultimate aim that surpasses worldly success to achieve true felicity.

In the following sections, we will reflect on these critiques one by one and demonstrate how the Islamic proposition—embodied in the “Progressive Growth Mindset (PGM)” —not only responds to them but also reorients their significance toward a deeper existential dimension, offering a more stable, comprehensive, and sustainable alternative.

### ► **Critique One: The Limited Impact of the Growth Mindset on Academic Performance**

Analytical studies, such as those conducted by the University of Edinburgh and the research by Sisk et al. (2018), indicate that the effects of “growth mindset” interventions on academic achievement are not always clear or significant—particularly in complex educational settings or subjects like mathematics.

In fact, some students who received motivational messages emphasizing the malleability of intelligence did not demonstrate statistically meaningful improvement compared to control groups.

Researchers have pointed out that other environmental factors—such as the quality of teaching, family support, and educational resources—may play a more substantial role in shaping academic outcomes.

### ♦ **The Islamic Response: Performance as a Fruit of Intention and Purification, Not Mere Mental Stimulation**

Within the Islamic paradigm of self-purification (*tazkiyah*), true growth is not measured solely by test scores or academic achievement.

Rather, it is first and foremost assessed by the sincerity of one's striving, the purity of intention, and the depth of spiritual refinement.

In this light, the concept of a “growth mindset” in Islam transcends the mere enhancement of performance. It is rooted in a divinely entrusted purpose—*istikhlāf* (vicegerency)—and a journey of inner purification, wherein every earnest effort becomes a sacred path toward closeness to God.

### **1. Success in the Sight of God is Measured by Intention and Effort, Not Outcomes**

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, *“Actions are but by intentions, and every person shall have only that which he intended.”* Academic success, therefore, is not a sufficient indicator of educational fulfillment unless it is accompanied by sincere intention, balanced effort, and a sanctified spirit that sees every piece of knowledge not merely as a stepping stone to career advancement, but as a means to deeper self-understanding and insight into the universe.

### **2. The Environment for Growth in Islam Begins with the Heart**

In the Islamic worldview, true growth is an inward journey that begins with the heart. When the heart is purified of arrogance, laziness, and pretension, it becomes fertile ground for authentic learning—more open to correction, more humble in the face of critique, and more steadfast in application.

God Almighty says: *“He has certainly succeeded who purifies it”* (Ash-Shams, 9). Thus, success—whether academic, practical, or in life more broadly—is inseparable from the purification of the soul. It is this inner refinement that nurtures enduring excellence, not fleeting bursts of achievement.

### **3. Growth is Inseparable from Purpose**

In the Islamic tradition, no act of performance holds true value unless it is rooted in sincere intention for God and directed toward the journey to Him. Thus, the spiritually conscious growth mindset does not settle for mere enhancement of performance—it weaves learning into purpose, transforming every act of education into an act of worship, and every skill into a sacred trust.

#### ♦ **The Practical Outcome in the Tazkiyah-Oriented Framework**

In environments where the secular “growth mindset” may falter in delivering improved outcomes, Islam redefines growth as a form of *jihad*—a striving born of soul-purification, not merely psychological optimism. The student whose grades remain unchanged, yet who strives with sincerity, perseveres with patience, and walks upright in devotion, is—in the sight of God—among the truly successful.

In this way, the educational journey shifts from the anxiety of performance to the serenity of servanthood. It yields blessings in one’s lifespan, light within the heart, and knowledge that benefits both this world and the next.

#### ► **Second Critique: The Psychological Toll of Excessive Motivation**

Recent studies, such as that of King & McInerney (2019), have pointed to a subtle yet significant psychological burden that may arise from an overemphasis on the “growth mindset”—particularly within competitive environments.

When individuals are repeatedly exposed to messages such as *“You must always improve,” “Failure is a chance, not an excuse,”* or *“Anything is achievable if you work hard enough,”* the motivational intent behind these phrases can gradually morph into an internalized pressure—a silent demand to constantly succeed, and a tendency to self-blame when progress is not evident.

Research has documented increased levels of anxiety and burnout among students and employees who were continuously subjected to such narratives, especially when those messages failed to account for their psychological boundaries or the realities of their personal circumstances.

- ♦ **The Islamic Response: Tazkiyah-Oriented Growth Is Rooted in Gentleness, Not Pressure**

In the Islamic paradigm of *tazkiyah* (spiritual refinement), self-development is not viewed as an external burden or relentless obligation. Rather, it is an inward, gradual journey—one that begins with love for God, acceptance of divine decree, self-awareness, and compassionate engagement with one's inner being.

### **1. “Do Not Lose Resolve”: Striving Without Pressure or Defeat**

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advised, *“Be keen on what benefits you, seek help from God, and do not give up.”* (Muslim)

This prophetic guidance embodies a balanced ethos: it does not drive the individual toward exhaustion, nor does it permit passive complacency. Instead, it nurtures a path of sincere striving—anchored in reliance on God—without burdening the soul with the weight of feeling it must *always* improve or achieve.

### **2. Islam Cultivates the Soul Through Gentleness**

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, *“Indeed, God is gentle and loves gentleness in all matters.”* (Bukhari)

In Islam, genuine growth is not born from pressure or force, but from a heart in companionship with God—from contentment with each stage of one's journey, from acknowledging one's shortcomings

without self-condemnation, and from advancing—gently—one step at a time.

### **3. Ihsan Does Not Mean Perfection**

In Islamic spirituality, *Ihsan* is the loftiest station, yet it is not to be mistaken for suffocating perfectionism. Rather, it is defined as a constant awareness of God’s presence: *“To worship God as though you see Him...”*

Thus, even *Ihsan* does not demand flawless achievement—it calls instead for sincerity in intention, consistency in striving, and turning to God with all the vulnerability of the human condition.

#### **♦ The Practical Outcome in the Tazkiyah-Oriented Framework**

The Islamic perspective does not burden the soul with the weight of constant transformation, nor does it condemn one for moments of stillness. Rather, it grants the right to grow gradually, the blessing of divine excuse, the freedom to return, and the sacred space for rest, reflection, and self-compassion.

Thus, growth is no longer an exhausting obligation—it becomes a balanced gentleness, a merciful nurturing, and a soft, steady journey toward God.

#### **► Third Critique: The Limits of Self-Motivation Without a Supportive Environment**

Numerous studies—such as that of Boaler & Selling (2017)—have highlighted that the self-motivation inspired by adopting a “growth mindset” may be insufficient if not reinforced by a conducive external environment.

Even when individuals believe in their capacity for growth, the absence of educational support, appropriate teaching methods, or genuine recognition of effort can undermine their motivation, leaving them feeling disempowered or defeated.

This raises a critical question: Is it enough to simply tell people they *can* improve? Or must we also cultivate real environments that *enable* them to do so?

- ♦ **The Islamic Response: Environment Matters—But the Heart’s Connection to God is Central**

In the Islamic worldview, the human being is neither entirely detached from external conditions nor wholly at their mercy. Islam teaches the believer to recognize the influence of the environment, while never surrendering to it as fate.

True motivation, in this light, flows from the heart’s connection to God—from the deep certainty that one’s effort is seen and valued by the Divine, even if unrecognized by anyone else.

## **1. Guidance is Granted Through Striving, Not Perfection**

God says: *“And those who strive for Our sake—We will surely guide them to Our paths.”* (Al-‘Ankabūt, 69)

In Islam, guidance, growth, and inner motivation are promised to those who strive—*even in difficult environments*. Islam does not require ideal conditions; rather, it teaches the believer to transform any setting into a field of spiritual cultivation (*tazkiyah*).

## **2. Spiritual Growth Is Not Dependent on External Recognition**

In the Divine balance of Islam, effort is recorded—even if unrewarded by people. God says: ***“And whatever good you do—surely God is fully aware of it.”*** (Al-Baqarah, 197)

So when your effort goes unseen, or support is absent, you continue to act for the sake of God. Your motivation arises not from applause, but from conviction.

### **3. Du‘ā’ and Reliance: An Inner Refuge Amid Outer Barrenness**

In Islam, when external conditions become harsh, the believer is not simply told to “self-motivate.” Rather, they are invited to rely on God, to pray, and to seek strength from the Divine.

The Prophet (PBUH) said, ***“O Allah, do not leave me to myself even for the blink of an eye.”***

This *tazkiyah*-centered approach nurtures a spiritual environment within the heart—one that sustains the soul even when the world outside offers little nourishment.

#### **♦ The Practical Outcome in the Tazkiyah Framework**

When the environment fails to inspire, Islam does not demand that a person endure through artificial toughness. Rather, one is called to place trust in God, to seek reward in patience, to transform endurance into sustenance, and intention into guiding light.

The *tazkiyah*-based motivation does not deny the influence of the environment, but rather transforms the believer’s heart into an independent realm—one from which meaning, steadfastness, and strength are drawn.

### **► Fourth Critique: Overestimating the Power of Neuroplasticity**

Several researchers in the field of neuropsychology—such as Lilienfeld et al. (2015)—have noted that the growth mindset theory sometimes overextends the concept of *neuroplasticity* to suggest that nearly everyone can equally change their mental and behavioral patterns.

However, neuroscience reveals that neuroplasticity varies significantly among individuals, influenced by genetic, developmental, age-related, and environmental factors, resulting in differing capacities for change.

According to this critique, portraying mental change as universally and effortlessly attainable may foster unrealistic expectations and ultimately lead to frustration among those who struggle to achieve transformation despite sincere efforts.

#### ♦ **The Islamic Response: Change Is Available to All—But According to Readiness, Intention, and Divine Grace**

In the Islamic worldview, change is neither guaranteed as an inherent right nor simply a natural ability. Rather, it is a divine blessing bestowed upon those who seek it sincerely, strive diligently to attain it, and exercise patience in the process.

The human being is not merely a neurological mechanism; they are spirit, intellect, intention, trust in God, and a complex reality shaped by circumstances beyond their control.

#### **1. Not Everyone Possesses Equal Capacity—But All Are Responsible for Striving**

God says: *“God does not burden any soul beyond its capacity.”*  
(Al-Baqarah, 286)

In Islam, the ability to change is not equal among all individuals; however, the divine mandate is flexible, mercy precedes justice, and intention precedes outcome. Therefore, accountability is not based solely on how much one changes, but on the sincerity of one's pursuit of *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification).

## 2. True Transformation Begins with Intention, Not the Brain

Islam emphasizes that fundamental change does not begin in the neural cells first, but in sincere intention, God-consciousness, and hope in His grace. The Prophet (PBUH) said, *"Indeed, deeds are judged by intentions."*

God also says: *"Indeed, God will not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves."* (Ar-Ra'd, 11)

Thus, in Islam, transformation is a shared responsibility between human will and divine facilitation.

### ♦ The Practical Outcome in the Tazkiyah Context

The *Purifying Growth Mindset* (PGM) does not encourage expectations of rapid or complete transformation. Instead, it calls the believer to strive sincerely, place trust in God, seek forgiveness, and exercise patience.

In Islam, change is not merely a biological capacity—it is a spiritual and educational journey grounded in knowledge, intention, sincerity, and a hopeful reliance on God's mercy.

## ► Fifth Critique: Practical Challenges in Implementing the Growth Mindset in Educational Settings

Educational studies—such as the work of Rattan, Good, & Dweck (2012)—have revealed significant obstacles to applying the concept of the “growth mindset” in schools and learning institutions. Among the most notable challenges are:

- ♦ Insufficient teacher training to effectively convey the concept.
- ♦ High student-to-teacher ratios and time constraints.
- ♦ Ambiguity around translating the mindset into concrete teaching practices.
- ♦ Varied student interpretations of growth messages, sometimes resulting in unintended negative effects.

These factors undermine the practical effectiveness of the growth mindset concept, rendering it an appealing theoretical idea but difficult to embed successfully in real-world education.

- ♦ **The Islamic Response: Education as Nurturing and Purification Before Technique**

In the Islamic vision, education is inseparable from *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification) and cannot be reduced to mere skill transmission. It is seen as the crafting of the human being in light of their ultimate purpose, shaping the soul through knowledge, exemplary conduct, prayer, sincere intention, and patience.

## **1. True Education Does Not Require Abundant Resources—But Sincere Intention**

God relates the words of Moses (peace be upon him): *“My Lord, expand for me my breast; And ease for me my task; And untie the knot from my tongue.”* (Ta-Ha, 25–27)

This prayer reveals that nurturing begins from the heart, not from tools or methods, and that a sincere intention for reform outweighs any theoretical curriculum.

## **2. The Teacher in Islam Is a Nurturer, Not Merely an Instructor**

The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“I was sent as a teacher.”*

In Islam, a teacher does more than transmit information; they embody it, purify souls with it, instill confidence, and revive innate nature (*fitrah*), regardless of limited resources.

## **3. Educational Action Begins with the Individual, Not the System**

The *tazkiyah* mindset acknowledges that the environment may complicate change but does not exempt personal initiative. Even a lone teacher can plant sincere intention, connect knowledge to God, and motivate the student toward spiritual striving (*jihad*), not merely academic achievement.

### **♦ The Practical Outcome in the Tazkiyah Context**

When implementing the “growth mindset” proves difficult within educational systems, Islam offers a profound, heart-centered approach grounded in sincere intention, reliance on exemplary role models, and the mindful use of every opportunity—no matter how small—to nourish the spirit and guide the intellect.

This is an education that understands how faithfully planting small seeds can one day bear great awareness in the student’s future, even if unnoticed by others.

### **♦ Summary of the Responses: From Stimulating the Mind to Purifying the Soul**

Upon reviewing the major scientific critiques directed at the theory of the “growth mindset,” it becomes clear that the issue lies not merely in technical details or limited impact, but in the conceptual ceiling where this theory halts: a ceiling focused on performance rather than purpose, motivation rather than meaning, and skill rather than ultimate destiny.

Accordingly, the Islamic response emerges through the ***Purifying Growth Mindset*** (PGM)—not to patch gaps superficially, but to reconstruct the vision from its very foundation.

We do not reject the “growth mindset,” but rather liberate it from the confines of academic achievement and skill development, reconnecting it to its original roots: innate nature (*fitrah*), sincere intention, spiritual striving (*jihad*), trials, reliance on God (*tawakkul*), and trustworthiness (*amanah*).

## ► **Responding to Western Critiques Through the Root of Spiritual Growth**

For every Western critique we encountered, we reinterpreted it in light of this fundamental root:

- ◆ Instead of chasing mere achievement, we asked about the sincerity of intention and steadiness of effort.
- ◆ Instead of fearing the pressure of motivation, we opened the door to gentleness with oneself and balance in striving.
- ◆ Instead of tying motivation solely to environment, we anchored it in trust in God.
- ◆ Instead of relying solely on neural capacity, we depended on intention, sincerity, and divine facilitation.

- ♦ Instead of waiting for an ideal environment, we began with sincere individual influence.

Thus, the “growth mindset” ceases to be merely a positive way of thinking; it transforms into a profound path of *tazkiyah*—purification and growth—that matures the soul, strengthens the will, frees one from anxious perfectionism, and gently propels one toward a serene striving for God.

*“Indeed, successful is the one who purifies it.”* (Ash-Shams, 9)

This is the essence of true growth—not to be better than others, but to be most sincere before God in our striving.

## **Chapter Conclusion: The Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM) as a Comprehensive Islamic Model for Self-Development**

The *Purifying Growth Mindset* (PGM) presents an integrated vision of self-development that transcends mere skill and behavioral improvement to place purification (*tazkiyah*), sincere intention, and meaningfulness at the heart of growth.

In this model, striving for perfection is not simply a personal ambition but a conscious response to the divine mandate of vicegerency (*khilafah*), and a spiritual engagement with the ultimate purpose of creation.

As Allah Almighty declares: *“Indeed, successful is the one who purifies it.”* (Ash-Shams, 9)

Success here is not reaching a final flawless state but the purity of intention, the continuous process of purification, and the constant awareness of drawing near to God in every effort.

And He says: *“And say, ‘My Lord, increase me in knowledge.’”* (Taha, 114) — for knowledge on this path is not for adornment, but for maturity, humility, and deep awareness of the self and one’s ultimate destiny.

And He says: *“And my success is not but through Allah. Upon Him I have relied, and to Him I return.”* (Hud, 88) — teaching us that effort bears fruit only through reliance on God and is sustained solely by sincere devotion.

Thus, the *Purifying Growth Mindset* (PGM) becomes not merely a development project but a journey of purification—one that unites action with intention, growth with humility, ambition with contentment, and transforms every step into an opportunity for elevation, and every sincere effort into closeness to God.

Everything nurtured within the soul—every good that is planted, every inclination that is reformed, every ounce of knowledge or energy invested—when done in light of purification, becomes an act of worship, a ladder toward success in this life and the hereafter.

**Comparative Table: From the “Growth Mindset” to the “Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM)”**

Dimension	Growth Mindset (Western Paradigm)	Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM)
Foundational Premise	A behavioral psychological theory aimed at enhancing performance and learning capacity.	A profound spiritual-philosophical vision rooted in innate human nature (fitrah), aspiring toward purification (tazkiyah) and existential elevation.

Dimension	Growth Mindset (Western Paradigm)	Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM)
Ultimate Purpose	Personal achievement, self-improvement, and enhanced competence.	True success (falāḥ), fulfilling the purpose of creation, and drawing nearer to the Divine Presence.
Understanding Failure	A valuable opportunity for learning and growth through constructive feedback.	A sacred moment of purification, a test of sincerity (niyyah), and a turning point for inner transformation and return to God (tawbah).
Source of Self-Motivation	Personal hope and confidence in one's ability to change.	Sincerity of intention, wholehearted reliance on God's decree (tawakkul), and awareness of divine oversight and mercy.
Approach to Challenges	A mental opportunity requiring cognitive flexibility and resilience.	A divine instrument to refine the soul, opening pathways toward profound spiritual growth.
Sustaining Force	Internal willpower complemented by a supportive environment.	God's grace and guidance, reliance on Him through prayer, perseverance, and steadfastness in the journey of purification.
Criteria for Success	Tangible improvement in skills and behavior.	Purity of intention, steadfastness on the spiritual path, and authenticity in striving.
End Destination	A stronger, more confident, and adaptable self.	A soul refined in purity, illuminated by awareness, and comforted by trust in God.

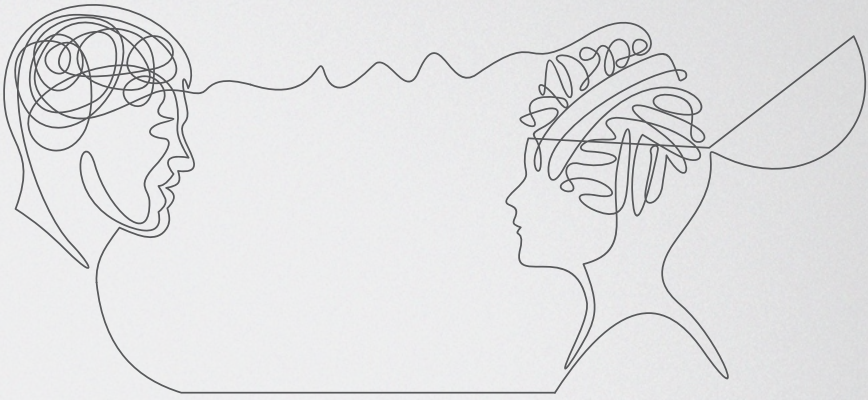
This table reveals that the distinction between the Western growth mindset and the Purifying Growth Mindset (PGM) transcends mere methodology and techniques; it lies fundamentally in the existential vision of humanity itself. Is the human being simply a project of self-improvement, or is he a sacred trust—a journey of purification, vicegerency, and accountability before God?

Within the framework of PGM, growth ceases to be merely a matter of skill acquisition or competence. Rather, it unfolds as an integrative process that embraces the innate nature (*fitrah*), listens attentively to the purity of intention (*niyyah*), remains steadfast in striving (*mujahadah*), draws illumination from the Qur'an, and orients itself unerringly toward the Divine.

Thus, self-development in the spiritual vision transforms into a continual act of worship—one that pursues not just worldly success, but true *falāḥ* (salvation and flourishing). Its measure is not the quantity of accomplishments, but the sincerity of purpose, the firmness of the path, and the clarity of the destination.

On this path, the believer is not called to attain perfection all at once, but rather to embody sincerity in every step, to rise again whenever they stumble, and to illuminate their surroundings by mending what is within themselves.

The Purifying Growth Mindset is not a final destination, but an endless journey—because the journey toward God never ceases, and the soul finds its true fulfillment only in Him.



Chapter Fifteen

# **Positive Psychology**

## Chapter Fifteen

# Positive Psychology

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### Part One: Positive Psychology — Concepts, Applications, and Studies

#### **■ Introduction: What Are We Seeking?**

In a world where achievements accelerate and choices multiply, humanity has never before possessed such an abundance of comforts, nor such freedom to shape the contours of one's life. Yet,

deep within the heart, we witness a growing perplexity, heightened anxiety, and a diminishing sense of stability.

The question of happiness has shifted from a philosophical debate to a daily concern: How can I find greater calm? How do I savor the moment? How can I love myself? How do I resist anxiety without losing my ambition? How can I wake up feeling well — even if nothing around me has changed?

It is in this space that **Positive Psychology** emerged as one of the West's most prominent efforts to redefine mental health — not merely as the absence of illness, but as the presence of meaning, gratitude, contentment, and nurturing relationships.

Humanity no longer seeks only to survive depression but demands a life that **blooms** — rich with fulfillment, purpose, and genuine satisfaction.

## What is Positive Psychology, and Why Did It Emerge?

When mental health was no longer defined merely by the absence of symptoms, and when people left therapy sessions still unsure of why they lived, there arose a need for a science that would redefine the human being — not just through their problems, but through their potential.

Positive Psychology is a modern scientific movement that began in the late 1990s. Its goal is to restore balance to the field of psychology by shifting the focus away from disorders and illnesses toward recognizing and nurturing the positive aspects of the human psyche.

The emergence of Positive Psychology is closely linked to the work of Martin Seligman, who sought to shift the focus of psychology from

“treating illness” to “building a good life.” This science does not deny that humans experience pain, but it holds that people are stronger than their suffering when attention is turned toward happiness, personal virtues, meaning, supportive relationships, and resilience.

Thus, this approach began to shape a new vocabulary for mental health, relying on concepts such as “flourishing,” “well-being,” “meaning,” and “sustainable happiness.”

## Flourishing: Balanced Growth as the Goal of Mental Health

At the heart of Positive Psychology lies the concept of “Flourishing”—the profound answer to the question: *What makes life truly worth living?*

While traditional psychology has focused largely on treating symptoms and crises, the notion of flourishing redefines mental health—not merely as the absence of disorder, but as the active presence of meaning, balance, and growth.

Flourishing, as defined by Seligman, is a state of psychological and social blossoming in which an individual thrives across five fundamental dimensions—captured by the well-known **PERMA model**: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment.

Through these dimensions, flourishing becomes a dual aspiration: to experience deep satisfaction and to perform effectively in daily life.

### ► The Foundations of “Flourishing”

As positive psychology emerged as a distinct field, it did not position itself as a mere reaction against traditional psychology, but rather as

a complementary extension. Instead of focusing solely on pain and suffering, it turned its attention to what nurtures inner growth and enables a life filled with meaning, coherence, and contentment.

Through extensive applied research, this approach outlined a set of core principles deemed fundamental to the state of a “flourishing life.”

These principles are not mere slogans or abstract ideals; rather, they are woven from the fabric of everyday human experience and numerous attempts to understand what truly sustains psychological health over time.

## **1. Cultivating Happiness and Well-Being**

Positive psychology views happiness not as a distant goal to be attained, but as a practice that can emerge from the present moment itself.

This happiness is rooted in nurturing feelings of contentment, gratitude, optimism, and an appreciation for the subtle beauty found in everyday life.

Rather than waiting for perfect circumstances, this approach encourages discovering small pockets of joy within the familiar and ordinary.

Achieving well-being does not imply the absence of pain; rather, it means learning how to carry that pain and continue moving forward without shutting the windows of gratitude.

Research has linked happiness with psychological stability, emotional resilience, and even improved performance at work and in relationships.

In this sense, happiness becomes a mode of engaging with life—a way of being—rather than a reward contingent upon life's conditions.

## **2. Exploring Personal Values and Virtues**

Positive psychology holds that true flourishing arises not only from life experiences but also from uncovering the “points of light” inherent within one's soul. It is through discovering and embracing one's core values, principles, and innate virtues that inner growth is nurtured.

This approach encourages individuals to explore the values that imbue life with meaning—such as honesty, generosity, courage, love, humility, and justice.

These values are regarded as profound psychological and spiritual strengths, serving as an internal compass during moments of complex decision-making. They provide stability and harmony within oneself, especially in times of stress and pressure.

Thus, personal virtues become guiding stars that help navigate life's challenges with integrity and resilience.

Researchers in this field have also developed practical tools such as the “VIA Character Strengths” assessment, which aids individuals in identifying their core value-based strengths—not merely their functional skills or cognitive abilities.

This discovery, as positive psychology emphasizes, contributes significantly to boosting self-confidence, clarifying personal identity, and aligning everyday decisions with one's inner self-image.

What is striking, however, is that although these values are articulated in the language of psychology, they fundamentally reflect a deep,

innate human need: to live in harmony with one's beliefs, not merely to excel at one's competencies.

In this way, the cultivation of personal virtues transcends mere performance; it becomes a profound alignment of being with purpose.

### **3. Resilience and Adaptation to Stress**

Life is not easy, and positive psychology does not promise otherwise. Yet, it affirms that within every person lies a latent energy—when awakened, it enables one to endure hardship, reorganize inner chaos, and persevere without collapse.

Thus, resilience stands as a cornerstone principle in positive psychology. It does not mean denying pain or ignoring loss, but rather possessing the capacity to bear, absorb, learn from, and ultimately emerge stronger from adversity.

Resilience, in this view, is not mere survival; it is a transformative process of growth forged through struggle and tempered by reflection.

To cultivate this capacity, schools of positive psychology encourage the development of a range of cognitive and emotional skills, such as maintaining positive thinking without avoidance, cognitively reappraising difficult events, enhancing problem-solving abilities, expressing emotions in a healthy manner, and building a supportive social network.

Research also affirms that individuals with psychological resilience not only endure hardships but emerge from them with broader horizons and deeper perspectives on life—a phenomenon known as “post-traumatic growth.”

This principle does not deny weakness but calls for its understanding and internal reshaping, so that it does not mark the end of energy but rather its new beginning.

#### **4. Positive Social Relationships**

The soul does not truly flourish in isolation, nor does it grow in emptiness. By nature, human beings are social creatures who need genuine connections that provide a sense of belonging and reflect back their true selves when they are unable to see it.

In positive psychology, nurturing positive social relationships stands as one of the strongest indicators of psychological well-being and emotional stability. Studies reveal that individuals who enjoy relationships grounded in trust, support, and unconditional acceptance are better equipped to face challenges, less vulnerable to anxiety and depression, and report higher life satisfaction.

The role of relationships extends far beyond mere support during crises. They also serve to nurture positive emotions, enhance self-confidence, cultivate a more optimistic worldview, and develop one's ability to express oneself, engage in dialogue, and demonstrate resilience.

For this reason, positive psychology encourages the cultivation of effective communication skills such as active listening, empathy, and expressing appreciation, alongside dedicating regular, meaningful time to important relationships in one's life.

Positive relationships are not merely an emotional luxury; they are a psychological and spiritual necessity. Through these connections, the self is replenished from the outside, just as it is nourished from within by meaning and virtue.

## 5. Living in the Present Moment: Awareness, Not Escape

In a fast-paced world where the mind is often scattered between memories of the past and anxieties about the future, positive psychology presents “living in the present moment” as a fundamental tool for restoring mental and emotional balance.

This concept does not mean detaching from reality or neglecting one’s goals; rather, it simply means living one’s present with full awareness and sincere attention to what lies before them.

This practice is cultivated through techniques such as meditation, mindfulness, pausing briefly to observe the breath, sounds, bodily sensations, or even engaging deeply with a moment of beauty, a quiet conversation, or a passing smile.

Studies have shown that individuals who cultivate this kind of mindful presence tend to experience higher levels of psychological well-being, better stress regulation, a deeper sense of gratitude, and an enhanced ability to adapt to daily fluctuations.

Awareness of the present moment is not an escape from responsibility; rather, it is a disciplined practice of halting the frantic chase and attuning oneself to what is unfolding now—where many moments of tranquility begin, simply through focused attention.

## **Core Techniques in Positive Psychology: From Concepts to Practice**

Positive psychology has not merely introduced fresh concepts about happiness, flourishing, or psychological well-being; it has endeavored to translate these insights into tangible, actionable behaviors that can be observed and consistently practiced.

To achieve this, the field has developed a range of simple yet powerful psychological techniques. Empirical studies have demonstrated that these methods enhance life quality, bolster psychological resilience, and cultivate greater feelings of contentment and emotional balance.

Here are the five fundamental techniques central to this approach, as revealed through research, clinical practice, and everyday use by individuals:

## **1. Gratitude Practice**

Gratitude stands as one of the cornerstone techniques in positive psychology that significantly enhances overall happiness. This practice involves training oneself to recognize and appreciate the positive aspects of life and to acknowledge the blessings one has, rather than dwelling on what is lacking.

### **♦ How it enhances overall happiness:**

Studies have shown that practicing gratitude boosts levels of happiness while reducing feelings of anxiety and depression. This is because it trains the mind to view circumstances from a positive perspective, fostering a deep sense of contentment and satisfaction. Gratitude practice helps diminish negative thinking, improves sleep quality, and strengthens emotional balance, making individuals more resilient in coping with life's stresses.

### **♦ Examples of practicing gratitude:**

- **Gratitude journaling:** Setting aside time daily to write down three to five things one is grateful for—whether small moments or significant achievements—helps maintain a mindset rooted in positivity.

- **Practicing gratitude toward others:** Expressing thanks and appreciation to people who have positively impacted one’s life—whether through spoken words or by sending thank-you notes—strengthens positive social bonds and deepens connections.
- **Reflecting on existing blessings:** Spending time contemplating the blessings one possesses, such as health, family, work, and opportunities, nurtures a profound sense of gratitude and enriches emotional well-being.

## 2. Focusing on Personal Strengths: A New Perspective on the Self

In positive psychology, the self is not viewed through the lens of what is lacking, but rather through the potential and inner strengths that may be latent or yet to be activated. This gave rise to the practical technique of **“identifying personal strengths”** as a means to rediscover oneself from a standpoint of empowerment rather than deficiency.

This technique helps individuals recognize their inherent or developed positive traits—such as leadership, creativity, self-control, love of learning, aesthetic sensitivity, collaborative spirit, courage, or independence—thereby fostering a renewed sense of confidence and purpose.

Well-known scientific tools such as the **VIA Character Strengths assessment** or **StrengthsFinder** are often employed for this purpose. Individuals are also encouraged to reflect on past experiences to identify recurring positive patterns in their behavior and performance.

Following this, the person is asked to consciously plan to apply one of these strengths intentionally during their week or day, whether in their personal or professional life.

The goal is not merely to feel competent but to see oneself through a kinder, more balanced lens—recognizing that there is a foundation to build upon, not just flaws to fix.

### 3. Positive Emotions

Positive emotions are fundamental components in enhancing mental health. Research has consistently shown that cultivating feelings such as joy, love, and gratitude plays a significant role in uplifting mood and increasing overall psychological well-being.

- ♦ **The Role of Positive Emotions in Mental Health:** Positive emotions do more than just improve mood—they substantially boost creative thinking, enhance psychological resilience, and empower individuals to confront challenges more effectively. Moreover, experiencing positive emotions helps reduce stress levels and stimulates the release of “feel-good” hormones like oxytocin and dopamine, which have beneficial effects on both physical and mental health.
- ♦ **How to Cultivate Positive Emotions:**
  - **Practicing Meditation and Mindfulness:** Meditation helps restore emotional balance and frees the mind from stress, creating fertile ground for positive emotions to flourish.
  - **Engaging in Enjoyable Activities:** Setting aside time for activities that bring joy—such as reading, listening to music, or exercising—nurtures happiness and uplifts the spirit.
  - **Expressing Positive Feelings:** Sharing love and care with close ones, whether through words or actions, strengthens positive emotions and deepens bonds of affection and social harmony.

- **Connecting with Nature:** Research shows that spending time in natural settings improves mood and elevates feelings of happiness and calmness, making nature an effective catalyst for fostering positive emotions.

#### **4. Positive Social Engagement**

- ♦ **The Vital Role of Nurturing Relationships in Elevating Life's Quality:**

Positive social bonds form one of the foundational pillars upon which true happiness rests. Research has revealed that those who maintain warm, sincere connections with family, friends, and colleagues enjoy not only enhanced mental well-being but also a deeper, more abiding sense of life's fulfillment.

Such meaningful social engagement breathes life into our existence, offering vital psychological support in moments of hardship, while cultivating feelings of belonging and unconditional acceptance.

Through relationships rooted in mutual respect and trust, we create a nurturing sanctuary—a sacred space that fortifies our resilience against life's trials and gently soothes the ache of solitude and isolation.

Moreover, positive social interaction embodies the virtues of empathy, understanding, and attentive listening—gifts that bring solace to the heart and weave a richer, more harmonious dimension into the fabric of our lives.

In this sacred dance of connection, the soul finds balance, and the spirit discovers profound happiness.

♦ **Guidance for Cultivating Positive Social Engagement:**

- **Dedicate Sacred Time for Meaningful Relationships:** Make it a heartfelt priority to regularly carve out moments for connection with family and friends. This conscious investment of time nourishes the bonds, deepening their strength and resilience.
- **Communicate with Compassion and Genuine Care:** Practice the art of attentive listening, offering not only your ears but your presence and empathy. Such mindful engagement weaves trust and warmth into relationships, amplifying their positive impact on the soul.
- **Engage in Social Activities with Intention:** Participate in community gatherings, volunteer endeavors, or shared-interest groups. These acts of togetherness create fertile ground for belonging, fostering a collective spirit that uplifts and supports each individual.

**5. Pursuing Personal Goals and Cultivating Self-Wellbeing**

♦ **Applying Positive Psychology Principles to Goal Achievement:**

The pursuit and realization of personal goals stand as foundational pillars of inner fulfillment and psychological harmony. They bestow life with purpose and awaken a profound sense of agency and growth.

Within the framework of positive psychology, goals are not merely external challenges to overcome; they are sacred arenas where one can activate latent strengths and rediscover the deeper self.

This approach nurtures self-confidence by inviting individuals to reflect on past triumphs and recognize moments of success, deepening their sense of self-efficacy. Such reflection fuels the

ongoing journey toward growth, encouraging perseverance with renewed passion and clarity.

Positive psychology also encourages setting goals that are both realistic and deeply meaningful—goals rooted in an authentic understanding of oneself, rather than in comparison to others. The true power of this approach lies in its ability to harmonize external achievements with inner significance, transforming progress into a tool for growth rather than a source of pressure.

Thus, personal development and goal attainment become steps toward cultivating a more balanced life—one that emerges from one's strengths instead of chasing weaknesses, yielding a genuine sense of fulfillment grounded not merely in outcomes, but in intention, effort, and profound purpose.

#### ♦ **Guidelines for Achieving Goals and Cultivating Well-Being:**

- **Set both short-term and long-term goals:** Breaking down aspirations into manageable, achievable steps fosters a steady growth of confidence and sustains motivation along the journey.
- **Celebrate personal achievements:** Taking mindful moments to acknowledge even the smallest victories nurtures a deep sense of progress and reinforces one's belief in their own capabilities.
- **Embrace flexibility and adaptability:** Being willing to adjust goals and plans in the face of challenges preserves momentum and strengthens psychological resilience, allowing growth to flourish even amid uncertainty.

## ■ **Supporting Studies in Positive Psychology**

Since its inception, positive psychology has strived to validate its propositions through rigorous experimentation and observation.

This empirical foundation has propelled the movement's academic momentum and secured widespread recognition of many of its practices within therapy, education, and workplace settings. Below is an overview of some of the landmark studies that have underpinned the scientific basis of this approach:

### **1. Gratitude: Enhancing Psychological Well-Being Through Conscious Thankfulness**

In a pioneering study by Emmons and McCullough (2003), participants were instructed to write down three things they felt grateful for each day. After several weeks, the group engaging in gratitude exercises demonstrated significant improvements in positive emotions, sleep quality, and a reduction in physical symptoms associated with stress.<sup>63</sup>

### **2. Harnessing Personal Strengths: Enhancing Life Satisfaction**

In a comprehensive study by Seligman and Peterson (2005), the conscious identification and application of one's personal strengths in daily life was examined. The findings revealed that participants who recognized and regularly utilized their strengths reported notable improvements in self-esteem, increased life satisfaction, and a decrease in negative emotions.<sup>64</sup>

### **3. Positive Emotions: Building Psychological Resilience and Creativity**

Barbara Fredrickson introduced the "Broaden-and-Build Theory," which posits that positive emotions expand one's cognitive flexibility and adaptive capacity. Her research (2001) demonstrated that

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63 Emmons, R. A., & McCullough, M. E. (2003). Counting blessings versus burdens: An experimental investigation of gratitude and subjective well-being in daily life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(2), 377–389.

64 Peterson, C., Park, N., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Orientations to happiness and life satisfaction: The full life versus the empty life. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 6(1), 25–41.

cultivating feelings of joy, hope, and love enhances an individual's ability to face challenges, engage in creative thinking, and build supportive relationships.<sup>65</sup>

#### **4. Mindful Meditation: Reducing Anxiety and Enhancing Self-Awareness**

In a seminal study by Brown and Ryan (2003), the impact of mindfulness meditation on mental health was rigorously examined. The findings revealed that participants who regularly practiced mindful presence experienced significant reductions in anxiety levels, improvements in attentional focus, and heightened emotional balance.<sup>66</sup>

#### **5. Social Connections: A Protective Shield for Mental and Physical Health**

Holt-Lunstad and colleagues (2010) conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis involving over 300,000 participants to explore the relationship between social support and longevity. Their research showed that individuals with strong social bonds had up to a 50% lower risk of premature death, along with better mental health and emotional stability.<sup>67</sup>

## **Critical Perspectives: Testing the Hidden Boundaries of Positive Psychology**

Despite the global acclaim and promising results that positive psychology has garnered, the academic community has approached

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65 Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56(3), 218–226.

66 Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: Mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(4), 822–848.

67 Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, J. B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality risk: A meta-analytic review. *PLOS Medicine*, 7(7), e1000316.

it not as an infallible savior, but with serious and thoughtful questions regarding the depth of its theories, the sustainability of its impact, and the appropriateness of its tools. Below are some of the most significant and carefully considered critiques that have emerged from scholarly discourse:

## **1. Oversimplification of Psychological Solutions**

Paul Wong, a leading figure in existential psychology, pointed out that many applications of positive psychology tend to oversimplify complex psychological challenges with ready-made formulas such as: “Write down what you are grateful for,” “Think positively,” or “Do what you love.” While these approaches may be beneficial for some, they fall short when addressing deeply rooted mental health issues like depression or trauma disorders, which resist such simplistic remedies.<sup>68</sup>

## **2. Limitations in Sustainability and Generalizability**

In a comprehensive critical review by Brown and Rohrer (2020), numerous studies on gratitude, meditation, and optimism techniques were examined, revealing that their effects are often transient or difficult to replicate consistently under experimental conditions. The researchers also highlighted that many of these studies relied on culturally and socially narrow samples, raising important questions about the extent to which their findings can be generalized to broader, more diverse populations and contexts.<sup>69</sup>

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68 Wong, P. T. P. (2011). Positive psychology 2.0: Toward a balanced interactive model of the good life. *Canadian Psychology*, 52(2), 69–81.

69 Brown, N. J. L., & Rohrer, J. M. (2020). Examining the replicability of positive psychology interventions: Evidence from meta-analyses and implications for theory and practice. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15(5), 689–707.

### 3. Individualistic Focus and Neglect of Existential and Spiritual Dimensions

In an early and thorough critique, Barbara Held (2004) questioned whether positive psychology's perspective is overly centered on the individual self, overlooking the existential and spiritual dimensions that provide deeper meaning and direction in human life. She warned that the emphasis on positivity might pressure individuals to suppress their suffering or induce feelings of guilt if they are "not happy enough," thereby masking authentic emotional struggles rather than addressing them.<sup>70</sup>

#### ► Summary of the Section:

Positive psychology has indeed offered valuable tools and insights, yet it does not replace the deeper existential questions that define the human experience. It cannot resolve all struggles through emotional exercises alone, nor does it guarantee lasting impact unless these tools are grounded in a more profound framework of values, intellect, and spirituality.

Thus, the turn toward a "faith-based psychology" (or "spiritual psychology") is not a rejection of these techniques, but rather a pursuit of a broader, more encompassing foundation—one that embraces the human being in their vulnerability, their questioning, and their longing for connection with the Divine.

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<sup>70</sup> Held, B. S. (2004). The negative side of positive psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 44(1), 9–46.

## Part Two: Faith-Based Psychology: The Islamic Vision of Well-being and Spiritual Purification

### **Toward a Deeper Understanding of Well-being and Happiness**

While positive psychology centers on enhancing quality of life by cultivating positive emotions and activating personal virtues, faith-based psychology offers a more profound and expansive perspective. It does not begin with the question, "How does the person feel?" but rather, "Who is the human being? And what is their ultimate purpose?"

Faith-based psychology does not deny the importance of gratitude, optimism, or generosity; rather, it refuses to treat them merely as techniques or functional tools. Instead, it embraces them as existential stances that arise from a profound faith in God, acceptance of His divine decree, and a journey toward Him guided by love and tranquility.

In this vision, happiness is not a fleeting emotional reaction but a natural byproduct of a life rooted in purpose, sincere intention, and connection with the Creator. Likewise, peace of heart is not simply a psychological goal but the fruit of faith—a spiritual provision for the journey and a state that begets serenity rather than mere excitement.

The first chapter of this book offered a profound definition of happiness as an inner harmony that arises when the dimensions of the soul align—when a person lives in accordance with their innate nature, reconciles with their ultimate purpose, and walks a path of integrity.

Here, within the framework of faith-based psychology, we return to these roots to revisit the values presented in positive psychology—not as mere techniques, but as manifestations of a healthy heart, purity of intention, and sincerity of direction.

## **First: Foundational Concepts of Happiness in the Faith-Based Perspective**

### **► Happiness Measured by the Scale of Faithful Tranquility**

Positive psychology views happiness as a measurable positive emotion, arising from moments of achievement, healthy relationships, or gratitude for life's blessings.

Islam, however, presents a fundamentally different understanding: happiness is not an end pursued for its own sake, but rather a byproduct of a soul's tranquility in God, steadfastness in obedience, and acceptance of Divine decree.

As Allah says in the Qur'an: ***"Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer—We will surely cause him to live a good life."*** (An-Nahl, 97)

The Qur'an does not promise happiness as fleeting joy but as a good life—a life suffused with tranquility, contentment, serenity, and inner stability.

In the faith-based psychology, happiness is not a fleeting emotion but a steadfast state cultivated through deep faith in God's wisdom, sincerity with oneself, and contentment with what is decreed for the servant along their journey.

Therefore, pain does not negate happiness, nor does sorrow contradict tranquility. A believer may experience grief yet remain at peace; may face trials yet dwell in serenity; may possess little yet feel rich in God's presence.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) beautifully encapsulated this profound truth, saying:

***"How wonderful is the affair of the believer! For his affairs are all good, and this applies only to the believer. If something good happens to him, he is grateful and that is good for him. If something harmful happens to him, he is patient and that is good for him."*** (Narrated by Muslim)

From this perspective, happiness ceases to be a distant goal pursued relentlessly; instead, it becomes a radiant light that dwells in the heart once its true direction is known.

## ► **Authentic Self-Honesty and Innate Harmony: The Path to Inner Peace**

In positive psychology, well-being is often linked to a sense of balance and internal coherence. Yet, Islam does not settle for balance as an end in itself; rather, it connects true well-being to honesty with the self and alignment with one's innate nature. In other words, a person must harmonize what they feel, what they believe, and what they do.

This is what faith-based psychology calls **“authentic self-honesty rooted in the natural disposition”** — listening deeply to the soul's profound signals, not merely its surface desires; moving through life in consonance with the values God has embedded within it: love of justice, mercy, truth, modesty, inner freedom, and the oneness of the Divine.

God Almighty says: *“[This is] the fitrah of Allah, upon which He has created mankind—there is no change in the creation of Allah.”* (Ar-Rum, 30)

What truly fosters inner peace in Islam is not merely success or achievement, but living in harmony with one's innate nature—faithfully fulfilling one's divine trust, and being sincere with one's own self.

This is what distinguishes authentic self-honesty in Islam from mere “self-expression.” It is not simply venting what lies within, but rather a purification of the heart, a discipline of its course, and a connection to the truth for which it was created.

Thus, psychological peace in faith-based psychology arises from reconciliation with God's natural design, steadfastness upon truth, and the humble acknowledgment of human frailty alongside trust in Divine mercy.

It is not that the human being is free from challenges, but rather that he dwells in a profound inner harmony with the purpose for which he was created. Thus, deviation from the natural path of fitrah is never neutral; it leaves a direct impact on the soul.

No matter how much one appears to succeed outwardly, distancing oneself from spiritual uprightness breeds an inner constriction that circumstances alone cannot explain. This is eloquently captured in the divine verse: *“And whoever turns away from My remembrance—indeed, he will have a depressed life.”* (Ta-Ha, 124)

Hence, misery is not always a lack of achievement, but often a loss of connection to God’s guidance, a confusion of direction, and a disturbance within the natural disposition.

### ► **Contentment: The Depth of Well-Being, Not the Surface of Happiness**

In positive psychology, contentment is often seen as an emotional state achieved when one’s expectations align with lived reality.

However, in the realm of faith-based psychology, contentment transcends a fleeting feeling; it is a deep-rooted state of the heart—born of conviction, tranquility, and certainty that whatever is decreed for the servant is ultimately good in every circumstance.

This form of contentment does not imply resignation or numbness. Rather, it is a conscious acceptance of God’s decree, accompanied by continued striving and effort. It flows from a profound trust that all that comes from the Divine is enveloped in wisdom, and that every moment—even those that seem harsh—is an opportunity for spiritual elevation.

The Qur’an beautifully encapsulates this profound meaning in the words of Allah Almighty: *“No disaster strikes upon the earth or within*

*yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being—so that you may not despair over what has eluded you and not exult [in pride] over what He has given you.” (Al-Hadid, 22–23)*

Contentment in Islam is not the byproduct of favorable circumstances, but rather a steadfast inner orientation toward God—a state of heart that yields a peace unshaken by the vicissitudes of life.

Thus, a content believer may endure pain without breaking; may face trials without collapse—because they know God is with them, and His divine plan is better than their own wishes.

In a profoundly comprehensive saying, the Prophet (PBUH) declared: ***“Whoever is content shall have contentment, and whoever is discontent shall have discontent.”*** (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi) — a timeless reminder that it is not the circumstance itself that shapes the human condition, but one’s response to it.

Contentment, then, is the spiritual shadow of happiness — the root of inner serenity and the gateway to true equilibrium. It marks the distinction between one who finds blessing in the event, and one who sees the blessing in the One who ordained it.

## **Second: Virtues and Psychological Techniques through a Faith-Based Lens**

### **► From Gratitude to Contentment: When Thankfulness Becomes a Way of Life**

In positive psychology, gratitude is often practiced as a technique to boost positive emotions and reduce stress or anxiety. However, in the realm of faith-based psychology, gratitude is not merely a tool for well-being, but a deeply rooted act of worship — a spiritual state

that connects the servant to their Lord, refining their view of blessings, of life, and of themselves.

Allah says: ***“And proclaim the blessing of your Lord.”*** (Ad-Duhaa, 11)

And He also says: ***“[They are] descendants of those We carried [in the ship] with Noah. Indeed, he was a grateful servant.”*** (Al-Israa, 3)

In Islam, gratitude is not a fleeting journaling exercise, but an enduring awareness of divine favor — a continual renewal of the bond with the Bestower. Hence, the Prophet ﷺ taught: ***“He who does not thank people does not thank Allah,”*** for gratitude in Islam is indivisible. It is a comprehensive virtue, a daily behavior, and a spiritual stance.

And if gratitude sharpens inner insight, then contentment lays the foundation for long-term serenity. It is not merely about being pleased with what one possesses, but about being free from the illusion that what one lacks is what one truly needs. The Prophet (PBUH) said: ***“Be content with what Allah has allotted for you, and you will be the richest of people.”*** (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi)

In a society where success is often measured through constant comparison, contentment becomes a revolutionary stance — one that liberates a person from external pressures and returns them to their inner center.

Here, the two virtues work in harmony: gratitude reveals what we already have, and contentment enriches us beyond what we don't. Thus, the feeling of satisfaction evolves from a fleeting response into a state of lasting tranquility — one that nourishes the soul, calms the heart, and frees the individual from an endless pursuit.

## ► Optimism and Positivity: When Hope Becomes a Life Stance

In positive psychology, individuals are encouraged to train themselves in “positive thinking” and “focusing on hope” to reduce psychological stress and improve quality of life.

However, in faith-based psychology, optimism is not understood as merely summoning pleasant emotions — rather, it is a profound existential stance rooted in belief in God’s wisdom, in having good expectations of Him, and in trusting His plan, even when reasons are hidden or relief is delayed.

This form of optimism is not just a mental break, but an inner force that reshapes how a person views the universe and life’s events — granting peace even in the heart of hardship.

The Qur’an encapsulates this deeply rooted meaning in the verse: ***“Indeed, with hardship comes ease. Indeed, with hardship comes ease.”*** (Ash-Sharh, 5–6)

This repetition is not mere emphasis — it is a doubled promise, teaching us that ease does not come only after hardship, but rather accompanies it, intertwines with it, and lightens its burden.

This meaning is powerfully illustrated in the stance of Prophet Musa (Moses), peace be upon him. When his companions cried out, ***“Indeed, we are overtaken!”***, he responded with unwavering faith: ***“No! Indeed, with me is my Lord; He will guide me.”*** (Ash-Shu’arā’, 62)

Here, optimism is not a mere hope for deliverance — it is certainty in divine guidance, even when the path is unclear.

This profound hope reaches its zenith in the words of Prophet Ya’qub (Jacob), peace be upon him:

***“Indeed, none despairs of relief from Allah except the disbelieving people.” (Yūsuf, 87)***

Hope, in the faith-based perspective, is not a psychological preference — it is an article of faith. The more deeply rooted the certainty, the less room there is for fear; the more expansive the hope, the narrower the space for despair.

In this light, positivity is not merely a psychological inclination toward optimism — it is a spiritual station grounded in trust in God, contentment with His decree, and thinking well of Him. It grants the believer a vision wider than the present moment, deeper than fleeting emotions, and more serene than life’s fluctuations.

## ► **Giving and Relationships: From Altruism to Healing**

In positive psychology, *giving* and *supportive relationships* are considered among the most powerful sources of happiness and psychological well-being. But in faith-based psychology, giving is not viewed merely as a noble social act — it is an expression of self-purification, a liberation from selfishness, and a movement toward God through serving people.

Altruism (ṭihār) in Islam is not a passing virtue — it is a measure of a pure heart and a mature soul. Allah praised those who give preference to others even when they themselves are in need:

***“And they give [others] preference over themselves, even though they are in privation.” (Al-Ḥashr, 9)***

He then made it clear that such a rank is only attained by those whom Allah protects from the greed of the soul — the root of all selfishness and emotional coldness:

***“And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul — it is they who will be the successful.”*** (Al-Ḥaṣhr, 9)

In this context, giving is no longer merely an act of kindness toward others — it becomes a liberation from the ego and a sincere pursuit of Allah’s pleasure: ***“We feed you only for the sake of Allah. We seek neither reward nor thanks from you.”*** (Al-Insān, 9)

As for **relationships**, within a faith-based perspective, they are not merely spaces for emotional support, but arenas of spiritual growth and self-purification. Every relationship founded on **mercy, truthfulness, sincere advice**, and **benevolence** becomes a means for the soul to ascend toward Allah.

The Prophet (PBUH) said: ***“The most complete of believers in faith are those with the best character.”*** (Reported by al-Tirmidhi)

Thus, our manners are not superficial adornments — they are mirrors reflecting what we truly believe deep within.

Forgiveness, forbearance, and restraint of anger are not merely tools for peaceful communication — they are spiritual practices that purify the soul and draw the servant nearer to the station of *ihsān* (excellence in worship and conduct). Allah combined these virtues beautifully in His words:

***“Those who restrain their anger and pardon others — and Allah loves the doers of good.”*** (Āl ‘Imrān, 134)

The highest model of human relations appears in the verse: ***“Good and evil are not equal. Repel evil with what is better; then the one you were in enmity with will become like a close friend. But none is granted this except those who are patient — and none is granted it except one blessed with a great portion [of virtue].”*** (Fussilat, 34–35)

This verse captures the essence of the faith-based perspective: that giving and goodness are not contingent on reciprocity, but on sincerity of intention and the pursuit of the station of *ihṣān* — even toward those who do not return your kindness. It is a prophetic model of behavior, where relationships are not arenas for triumph, but spaces for self-purification, stations of patience, and mirrors of the soul.

## ► **Mindful Presence and Contemplation: From Self-Awareness to Witnessing Meaning**

In positive psychology, *mindfulness* is often presented as a technique aimed at freeing oneself from anxiety and distraction, and regaining attention to the present moment. It is typically practiced through deep breathing, observing thoughts without judgment, or focusing on sensory awareness and surroundings.

But in *faith-based psychology*, presence is not understood as a mere psychological goal, but as a gateway to reverence, a space for reflection, and a path to deep connection with God. Awareness here does not stop at *“I am here, now,”* but transcends to *“I am with God... in this very moment.”*

The Qur’an invites us to this kind of presence, not as a mental exercise, but as an essential act of faith: *“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, are signs for people of understanding — those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth...”* (Āl ‘Imrān, 190–191)

Thus, presence here is not merely about being in the moment — it is about being attuned to truth, to **creation**, and to the purpose of existence. It is nourished not only by stillness, but by remembrance, glorification, reflection, and the affirmation of divine oneness.

In Islam, *dhikr* (remembrance of God) is considered the highest form of presence, for it evokes meaning, purifies the mind, and brings the heart into awareness — not merely with itself, but with its Creator.

*“Those who have believed and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah — indeed, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace.”* (Ar-Ra’d, 28)

And while some schools of psychology call for inner silence, faith-based psychology calls for serenity born of connection — not of emptiness.

Thus, in the faith-based perspective, contemplation is not a cessation of thought, but a transformation in the way of seeing; not an absence of concern, but an awareness of purpose; not merely a moment of clarity, but a moment of profound encounter.

In the Islamic worldview, moral virtues are not only means to achieve happiness, but pathways to draw closer to God, to purify the soul, and to earn eternal reward.

Contentment, then, is not just a source of tranquility, but a gateway to true wealth; optimism is not merely resistance to despair, but a good expectation of God, with hope for His mercy.

In this way, every virtue becomes a means of spiritual purification—a *tazkiyah*—rather than just a psychological technique.

## **Critique of the Western Theory and the Islamic Perspective’s Response**

Although positive psychology has made a significant contribution to redefining psychological well-being and expanded the focus of psychology from merely addressing illness and disorders to exploring

meaning, virtues, and positive emotions, it has not been exempt from scientific and philosophical criticism.

Over the past two decades, a series of serious observations have emerged, challenging the foundations, tools, limitations, and resilience of this approach when confronted with the complex psychological and existential realities experienced by modern humans.

In concluding the first part of this chapter, we presented the most prominent criticisms, which can be summarized as follows:

- ♦ **The oversimplification of psychological solutions**, reducing deep-rooted problems to mere behavioral recipes.
- ♦ **Limited sustainability and generalizability**, as studies have shown that many positive psychology techniques lead to temporary improvements that do not last.
- ♦ **An individualistic focus at the expense of existential and spiritual dimensions**, making “happiness” an isolated goal detached from the greater purpose of human existence.

However, the faith-based approach, as developed in this chapter, does not seek to reject or belittle positive psychology, but rather to transcend its limitations by re-rooting its concepts, linking them to the monotheistic dimension of existence, and granting them depth derived from faith, purpose, and the responsibility of humans as God’s vicegerents.

In the following paragraphs, we will revisit these criticisms one by one to demonstrate how the Islamic perspective addresses them—not as mere embellishment or softening, but as a redirection toward the origin: the human being as created by God, seeking tranquility rather than pleasure; contentment rather than excitement; and meaning rather than mere emotional reaction.

## ► **First Critique: The Oversimplification of Psychological Remedies**

Many scholars observe that, despite its noble intentions, positive psychology tends to reduce the intricate fabric of human psychological struggles into overly simplistic solutions. It often offers a set of generic behavioral or emotional exercises—such as “list three blessings each day,” “think positively,” or “practice ten minutes of meditation”—as if these alone could unravel the profound complexities of the human soul.

However, critics like Paul Wong argue that this approach overlooks the deep, underlying structure of human suffering. Such pain and turmoil cannot be dismantled merely through surface-level emotional practices. Instead, they call for a far more profound engagement—one that is existential, intellectual, and spiritual in nature—demanding a rooted and comprehensive understanding of the human condition.

This dilemma becomes especially evident when addressing depression, trauma, or the profound existential questions: What is the meaning of suffering? Why do I exist? Am I accepted as I am?

In such moments, gratitude exercises or deep-breathing techniques fall short, for pain is not merely a mental state—it is a wound in meaning, a question of purpose, and a conflict within one's very identity.

### ♦ **The Islamic Response: From Technique to Spiritual Purification**

Within the faith-based perspective, suffering is not viewed as a mere malfunction to be swiftly fixed, but rather as a sacred space for spiritual purification, a test of intention, and a stage on the journey toward God. Thus, solutions are never reduced to behavioral recipes

alone; they are deeply intertwined with the soul's faith, reflection, awareness, and progression.

## **1. Suffering as an Integral Part of the Human Journey**

From the Quranic viewpoint, pain is not a disruption of the path but an inherent part of it. As it is revealed: ***"Indeed, We have created man into hardship."*** (Al-Balad, 4)

Therefore, humans are not called upon to merely bypass pain with superficial ease but to understand it, contemplate its meaning, endure patiently, and walk steadfastly through it.

## **2. Technique Without Intention Leaves No Mark**

In the faith-based approach, merely writing about gratitude holds little value unless that gratitude is directed toward God. Likewise, reflections and meditations remain fruitless if they do not lead to a conscious presence with the Divine.

The Prophet (PBUH) said, ***"He who does not thank people does not thank God."*** Yet, this gratitude is not a mere emotional exercise; it is a sincere condition of the heart that transforms one's entire perspective—toward oneself, the Creator, and those around them.

## **3. The Solution Is Not Imposed from Without, but Unearthed Within Connected to God**

In Islamic psychology, no "solution" is proposed as something external or detached from the individual. Rather, the person is reconnected to their supreme reference—the Source that imbues existence with meaning: God. Thus, every feeling, every experience, every question is interpreted through the lens of spiritual purification (tazkiyah), not as a simple behavioral drill.

### ♦ **Summary of the Response:**

While some tools of positive psychology tend to simplify suffering into ready-made behavioral techniques, the Islamic perspective reconstructs the concept at its very roots. It understands suffering as an integral part of the journey, not an accidental interruption. Addressing it, therefore, requires a spiritual connection, a purification of the heart, and a unifying contemplation—far beyond mere mental reprogramming.

Thus, healing is not a mere “technique,” but a conscious path toward God. Under His shade, pain is truly understood, the soul refined, and the inner self rebuilt upon the foundation of faith—not merely intellectual awareness.

### ► **Second Critique: Limited Sustainability and Generalizability of Positive Psychology Techniques**

Recent critical reviews have highlighted that many positive psychology techniques—such as gratitude, meditation, and optimism—often demonstrate only temporary effectiveness. Their benefits tend to fade and fail to replicate with the same intensity when applied across diverse contexts.

For instance, in a comprehensive analysis by Brown and Rohrer (2020), it was found that the positive outcomes of many interventions diminish over time, especially when not supported by a nurturing environment or ongoing psychological readiness.

Moreover, most of these studies were conducted on culturally and socially narrow samples, raising important questions about the validity and applicability of these techniques across varied settings—particularly in societies with fundamentally different value systems and understandings of human nature and life.

## ♦ **Islamic Response: Sustainability Rooted in Linking Practice to Purpose**

Within the faith-based worldview, psychological values such as gratitude, meditation, or optimism are not practiced as mere temporary emotional tools, but as heartfelt dispositions and deep-rooted acts of faith connected to God, the Hereafter, and divine purpose. This connection grants their impact a profound depth, enduring presence, and continual renewal—because they are anchored not merely in transient psychological states, but in belief, sincere intention, and worship.

### **1. Practice Is Inseparable from Purpose**

In positive psychology, gratitude is practiced primarily to foster personal happiness. In Islam, however, gratitude is an act performed because God is inherently worthy of thanks, because it is among the lofty stations of faith, and because it opens the door to increasing blessings: *“Indeed, he was a grateful servant”* (Al-Isra, 3) Thus, gratitude’s effectiveness does not rest solely on its immediate emotional benefits, but on its rootedness in the relationship with God—making it sustainable even as feelings and circumstances fluctuate.

### **2. Acts of Worship as Programmed Instruments for Sustainability**

From the Islamic perspective, the soul is never left to swing aimlessly without support. Instead, daily acts of worship—such as prayer, remembrance (dhikr), and fasting—are prescribed as continual means to recharge the inner self. These rituals reconnect the heart to its ultimate Source, remind it of its higher purpose, regulate its emotions, and purify its intentions. This is why tranquility in Islam is not the result of a mere exercise but is sustained through ongoing servitude and devotion.

### 3. Gratitude and Contentment as States Independent of Outcomes

In many Western approaches, gratitude is often practiced because life appears favorable or circumstances are good. In Islam, however, gratitude is embraced even amidst trials and tribulations, rooted in the vision of God's presence in all events, acceptance of His divine decree, and trust in His wisdom. Imam Hussein (peace be upon him), on the immortal day of Ashura, proclaimed: ***"Content with Your decree, resigned to Your command—there is no deity but You."*** It is this profound perspective that makes gratitude enduring and resilient even in the heart of suffering, rather than dependent on it.

#### ♦ Summary of the Response:

While some positive psychology techniques may yield only temporary or context-specific effects, the Islamic approach fundamentally redefines these values as purposeful acts of worship rather than mere psychological tools. It is this profound integration of intention, ultimate purpose, devotion, and connection to the Divine that endows these practices with enduring spiritual continuity, transformative educational power, and resilience amid the fluctuations of the soul and external circumstances.

Thus, the individual no longer relies on external, fleeting motivators but lives sustained by an unwavering inner drive—rooted in an unbroken connection to the eternal Source: God.

#### ► Third Critique: The Individualistic Focus and Neglect of Existential and Spiritual Dimensions

Many critics, both within and beyond the field, observe that despite its emphasis on happiness and well-being, positive psychology centers almost exclusively on the individual, detached from their deeper existential framework. It asks: How can you be happy? How

do you achieve self-actualization? How can you increase your positive emotions? Yet it seldom inquires: Who are you? Why were you created? Where are you ultimately headed?

This intense focus on the self—even when framed as personal development—masks an underlying rational utilitarian philosophy, which views happiness as the cumulative result of positive experiences rather than the fruit of understanding one's ultimate purpose or connection to a Creator or destiny.

Barbara Held and others have warned that such self-centeredness risks denying the reality of suffering or provoking self-reproach in times of sadness, as “happiness” becomes an obligation rather than a free experience, leaving the spirit absent and the sacred displaced.

#### ♦ **Islamic Response: The Human as a Tawhidi Being Journeying Toward God**

In the faith-based perspective, the soul is never isolated from its spiritual essence, nor is the human separated from the Creator. Man is not merely a project of self-improvement; rather, he is a created being, entrusted as a vicegerent, accountable, and on a purposeful journey toward God. He is tested in his soul, in his relationships, and in his ultimate destiny.

### **1. The Beginning Is Not in Feeling, but in Purpose**

In Islam, the quest for happiness does not commence with the question: How do I feel?

Instead, it begins with: Am I on the right path? Am I sincere in my journey? Am I faithful to the trust bestowed upon me?

This shifts the focus from the self to God. As Allah declares: *“Say, indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds.”* (Al-An’ām, 162)

## **2. Meaning Arises Not from Achievement, but from Servitude**

In positive psychology, meaning is often linked to “self-actualization” — the fulfillment of personal potential and accomplishments.

In Islam, however, meaning springs forth from the connection to God, the purity of intention, the station of contentment, and the concept of stewardship. A believer may not accomplish grand deeds, yet walks with certainty, acts with sincere intention, and lives under the shelter of obedience. Thus, their heart finds peace, even if their hands remain empty.

## **3. The Soul Transcends, Rather Than Merely Reflects, Emotions**

In the faith perspective, the self is acknowledged in all its fragility, but the soul is nurtured to lead it toward tranquility.

*“O tranquil soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him].”* (Al-Fajr, 27-28)

Here, wellbeing is not measured by fleeting moments of joy, but by the sincerity of the journey, the depth of contentment, and the heart’s steadfastness in the presence of God.

### **♦ Summary of the Response:**

While positive psychology centers on the notion of the “happy individual,” the Islamic perspective reconstructs the human being as a responsible soul, entrusted with a sacred mission, journeying toward their Lord rather than toward the self. Thus, the aim transcends mere emotional improvement to embrace a profound

tranquility rooted in spiritual purification—a serenity born of obedience, matured in contentment, and anchored in faith.

It is a shift from “psychological well-being” to “existential peace,” from “positive feelings” to “contentment illuminated by meaning.”

### ► **Summary of the Responses: From Momentary Well-being to Existential Serenity**

Upon reviewing the principal critiques leveled against positive psychology and examining the limitations of its tools and frameworks, it becomes clear that the fundamental flaw lies not in its attempt to enhance human life, but in its reduction of the human experience to merely psychological dimensions—condensing suffering into a series of modifiable emotions.

The three main critiques—oversimplification, lack of sustainability, and self-centeredness—reveal that despite its admirable ambitions and valuable initiatives, this approach falls short of embedding a profound, rooted sense of meaning.

The faith-based perspective presented in this chapter does not reject what positive psychology offers; rather, it elevates it to a deeper level of understanding and spiritual refinement. It does not view happiness as a mere technique, but as a reflection of faith. Gratitude is not treated as a simple exercise, but as a state of devoted worship. Optimism is not seen as fleeting positive emotions, but as a steadfast conviction rooted in trust in God.

The psychology of faith goes beyond asking, “How do I feel?”—it journeys with the person toward answering, “Who am I? Why do I live? And what gives this moment significance in the sight of God?”

In a world that oscillates between anxiety and relentless pursuit, this faith-based approach offers a unifying compass that reorganizes the

inner self: it gives suffering a profound meaning, intention a true weight, striving a sacredness, and contentment a stability independent of external circumstances.

Thus, the tools of positive psychology transform from temporary exercises into deeply rooted spiritual practices. Well-being evolves from a mere mental experience into the fruit of a holistic way of life—a sincere journey toward God, and a tranquility not produced by fleeting moments, but bequeathed by steadfast intention.

*“So whoever follows My guidance will neither go astray nor suffer”*  
(Ta-Ha, 123)

## **Chapter Conclusion: From Positive Psychology to Faith-Based Psychology**

The profound distinction between positive psychology and faith-based psychology lies not merely in the tools they employ, but in the very root from which their vision springs, the ultimate purpose toward which the human journey is directed, and the standard by which happiness and well-being are truly measured.

To illuminate these essential differences in their core dimensions, the following table presents a comparison between the Western model and the faith-based model across the key domains of psychology and self-development.

**Comparative Table: From Positive Psychology to Faith-Based Psychology**

Comparative Dimension	Positive Psychology (Western Model)	Faith-Based Psychology (Islamic Perspective)
Theoretical Foundation	A modern scientific approach emerging as a response to the focus on mental disorders	A rooted doctrinal and spiritual vision grounded in the Quran and Sunnah
Definition of Happiness	A feeling of satisfaction, joy, and flourishing resulting from psychological conditions and external factors	A deep, heart-felt tranquility born from faith, acceptance of divine decree, and journeying toward God
Concept of Psychological Well-being	A state of emotional balance and mental comfort that can be enhanced through specific techniques	A spiritual station built on remembrance (dhikr), trust (tawakkul), certainty (yaqin), patience, and good expectations of God
Practice of Gratitude	A tool to improve mood and reduce anxiety and stress	A heartfelt worship and connectedness with God, nurturing humility, contentment, and acknowledgment of divine grace
Optimism and Positivity	A mindset founded on hope and the anticipation of better outcomes	A good opinion of God, certainty in relief from Him, and a spiritual state beyond mere psychological mood
Living in the Present Moment	A technique to overcome distraction and achieve mindfulness and calmness	A spiritual presence with God, humility, awareness of creation and Creator, and reflection on divine signs

Comparative Dimension	Positive Psychology (Western Model)	Faith-Based Psychology (Islamic Perspective)
Positive Relationships	A psychological support factor that reduces loneliness and increases happiness	A gateway to spiritual purification, benevolence, solidarity, and worshipping God through human connections
Giving and Charity	An activity that fosters personal satisfaction and enhances self-worth	An expression of faith, inner growth, purification of the soul, and a source of divine reward and closeness to God
Achievement and Success	A foundation for enhancing meaning and self-actualization	A means of worshipping God and fulfilling stewardship, conditioned by sincere intention, devotion, and contentment
Existential Conclusion	A flourishing mental happiness built on psychological balance	A spiritual serenity flowing from closeness to God, certainty of meeting Him, and tranquility through remembrance and acceptance

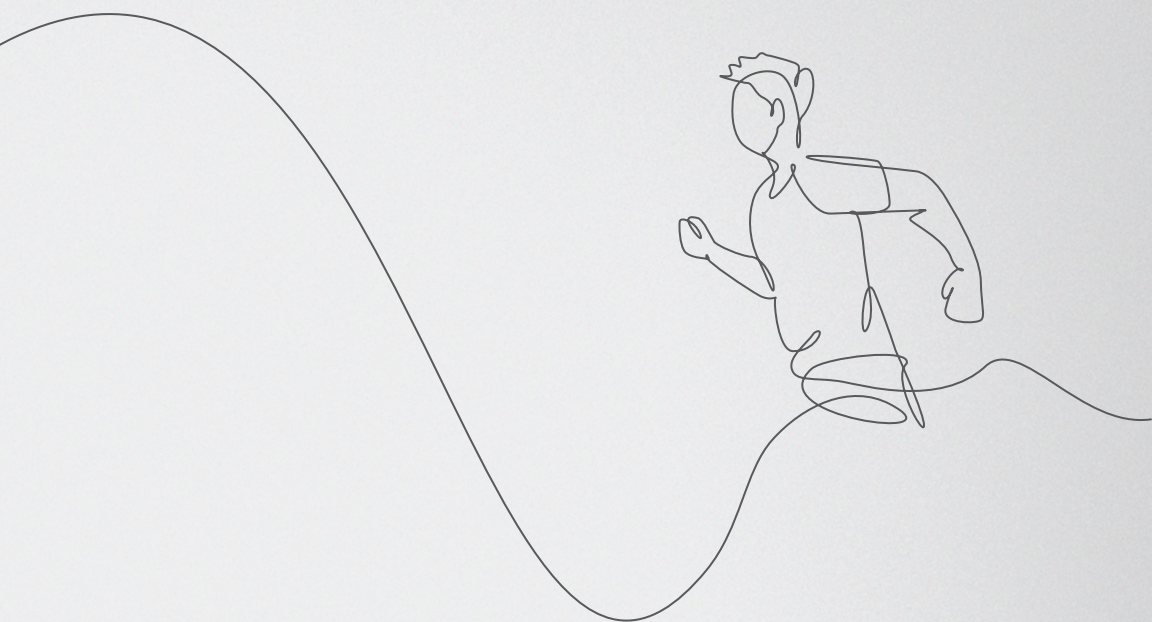
As this table illustrates, the distinction between Positive Psychology and Faith-Based Psychology lies not merely in their methods, but fundamentally in the origin of their concepts, the purpose behind their striving, and the direction toward which the heart is turned.

Positive Psychology offers effective tools to enhance life’s quality, yet remains confined within an individualistic, temporal, and emotional framework. In contrast, Faith-Based Psychology provides deeper roots, a broader horizon, and a sustainable path that elevates the soul from mere balance to spiritual purification, and from fleeting well-being to lasting success and fulfillment.

In the faith-based perspective, the human is not merely called to be happy, but to be sincere, present with God, content with His decree, purposeful in action, and steadily walking toward His pleasure. Thus, well-being transforms into profound tranquility, healing becomes spiritual purification, and growth evolves into worship.

***“Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts are assured” (Ar-Ra’d, 28)***

Having understood how inner peace is truly cultivated from within, we now move to the next chapter to explore how this psychological serenity becomes a driving force—a conscious journey toward God... through the gateway of faith-inspired self-motivation.



Chapter Sixteen

# **Self- Determination Theory**

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# Self-Determination Theory

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## Part One: The Western Framework of Self-Motivation Theory

### **Introduction: The Western Perspective on Self-Determination Theory**

Having reflected in the previous chapter on the concept of well-being and happiness from a faith-based perspective, and seen how tranquility is rooted in remembrance, contentment, and spiritual

purification, we now turn to another equally vital dimension: the source of motivation, the engine of striving, the inner energy that propels a person forward to walk their path and realize their true self in light of their ultimate purpose.

Here, the concept of “self-motivation” emerges—a concept modern psychology approaches from a rational and behavioral standpoint, while the faith-based perspective reinterprets it as a devotional journey, an extension of sincere intention, and a manifestation of one’s divine stewardship on earth.

The foundational contours of this theory began to take shape during the 1970s, culminating in the pioneering work of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. In 1985, they presented a comprehensive framework in their seminal book ***Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior***. This theory emerged as a response to traditional behavioral models that focused primarily on external incentives while neglecting the internal drives. It sought to provide a deeper understanding of the intrinsic motivations that propel individuals toward realizing their latent potential.

At its core, the theory rests on a philosophy that views human beings as autonomous entities naturally inclined to pursue self-actualization, flourishing when granted the freedom to make their own choices. Accordingly, the theory identifies three fundamental pillars of sustainable intrinsic motivation:

- ♦ **Autonomy**, reflected in the individual’s sense of control over their behaviors and decisions;
- ♦ **Competence**, embodied in the desire to master tasks and build confidence in one’s abilities;
- ♦ **Relatedness**, which speaks to the innate need to forge positive relationships, feeling connected and supported by others.

This section of the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the theory within its original framework, addressing:

- ♦ Its fundamental concepts,
- ♦ Practical applications,
- ♦ Supporting and critical studies,

All serving as a foundation for the subsequent integrative section. There, these concepts will be revisited through a holistic spiritual lens, connecting self-motivation with purpose, inner purification, and devoted servitude to God.

## **Definition of Self-Determination Theory**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a scientific framework that seeks to explain how motivations—especially intrinsic ones—influence human behavior and drive the pursuit of one’s latent potential. The foundations of this theory began to take shape in the 1970s and were fully articulated in 1985 through the pioneering work of American psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. Their aim was to understand the factors that propel individuals to act out of intrinsic motivation, rather than relying on external rewards such as money or praise.

SDT emerged as a response to traditional behavioral theories that focused primarily on external incentives while largely overlooking internal drives. Deci and Ryan posited that human beings possess an innate tendency toward growth and self-actualization. They argued that the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—forms the essential foundation for sustained intrinsic motivation.

The theory introduced a novel perspective on human behavior, demonstrating that internal motivations—such as the desire to learn or create—are often more enduring than external incentives. Research has further shown that fulfilling these fundamental needs enhances both psychological well-being and social functioning, making them central to cultivating motivating and supportive environments.

## Core Techniques to Enhance Self-Determination:

Self-Determination Theory aims to construct environments that nurture the three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and social relatedness. Below are practical techniques designed to foster these essential needs:

### 1. Enhancing Autonomy:

- ♦ **Freedom of Choice:** Allowing individuals the liberty to choose the methods or approaches they prefer when performing tasks fosters a sense of control over their decisions, thereby increasing their commitment and satisfaction.
- ♦ **Encouraging Personal Initiative:** Providing space for individuals to express their ideas and propose innovative solutions empowers them and cultivates active participation.
- ♦ **Guidance Instead of Restriction:** Offering general directions rather than imposing rigid rules gives individuals the opportunity to adapt tasks creatively and innovatively.

## 2. Enhancing Competence:

- ♦ **Positive Feedback:** Providing encouraging and focused feedback on achievements strengthens individuals' sense of competence and motivates them to strive for further accomplishments.
- ♦ **Appropriate Challenges:** Designing tasks that align with an individual's skill level—challenging enough to inspire growth but not overwhelming—helps build confidence and steady progress.
- ♦ **Opportunities for Continuous Development:** Offering training and development programs enables individuals to expand their skills and capabilities, thereby enhancing their sense of competence and self-assurance.

## 3. Enhancing Social Connectedness:

- ♦ **Encouraging Teamwork:** Creating work or learning environments that foster collaboration and positive interaction strengthens individuals' sense of belonging.
- ♦ **Appreciation and Recognition:** Expressing gratitude and acknowledging individuals' contributions fortifies social bonds and amplifies intrinsic motivation.
- ♦ **Supportive Communication:** Providing open channels for communication nurtures the feeling that individuals are heard and supported, deepening their sense of social connectedness.

## ► The Significance of These Techniques:

Implementing these methods effectively fulfills the three fundamental psychological needs, thereby elevating intrinsic motivation, enhancing performance, and increasing personal satisfaction. A supportive environment translates into tangible positive outcomes

across diverse fields, ranging from the workplace to education and personal development.

## **Supporting Research on Self-Determination Theory:**

Self-Determination Theory is grounded in a substantial body of research validating its effectiveness in boosting performance and fostering intrinsic motivation across various domains. Below, we highlight some of the most significant findings contributed by scientific studies:

### **1. Enhancing Autonomy in the Workplace:**

A study by Deci and Ryan (2000) demonstrated that employees granted the freedom to make their own decisions exhibit greater commitment and responsibility toward their work. The research also showed that work environments fostering autonomy are linked to improved job performance and higher psychological satisfaction.<sup>71</sup>

### **2. Competence and Academic Achievement:**

Clare and Brian's (2014) study focused on university students who participated in a program designed to enhance academic skills and provide constructive feedback. The findings revealed that students supported in building their competence performed better academically and experienced increased confidence in their abilities.<sup>72</sup>

### **3. Social Connectedness and Workplace Well-being:**

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71 Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268.

72 Clare, B., & Brian, L. (2014). Enhancing academic skills: The impact of constructive feedback on university students' performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 106(3), 849–860.

Heinrich and Gullone (2012) explored the impact of positive social relationships on employee well-being. Their findings revealed that employees who feel a strong sense of connectedness with their colleagues experience higher job satisfaction and lower levels of stress, which positively influences their overall performance.<sup>73</sup>

#### **4. Intrinsic Motivation in Sports:**

Frederick and Ryan (1993) demonstrated that athletes who set personal goals and receive strong social support exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation. The study also highlighted that a sense of competence significantly enhances athletes' sustained performance.<sup>74</sup>

#### **5. Self-Directed Learning and Intrinsic Motivation:**

A study conducted by Tokyo University (2018) found that students who have the freedom to choose their study topics and educational goals demonstrate greater engagement and achieve better outcomes compared to peers with less autonomy. This underscores the importance of providing autonomy to enhance self-directed learning.<sup>75</sup>

#### **► Summary:**

These studies collectively highlight how fulfilling basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and social relatedness—significantly contributes to improved performance and heightened intrinsic motivation. The findings emphasize that enhancing these

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73 Heinrich, L. M., & Gullone, E. (2012). The clinical significance of loneliness: A literature review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 26(6), 695–718.

74 Frederick, C. M., & Ryan, R. M. (1993). Differences in motivation for sport and exercise and their relations with participation and mental health. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 16(3), 124–146.

75 Tanaka, A., & Murayama, K. (2018). Within-person analyses of situational interest and boredom: Interactions between task-specific perceptions and achievement goals. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 110(4), 566–577.

factors can lead to positive transformations across various domains, including education, sports, and the workplace.

## **Critical Readings within the Bounds of Theory and Its Contexts of Application**

Despite the widespread adoption of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) across education, workplace, health, and sports domains, several scholars have raised significant critiques regarding the theory's limitations and its applicability in diverse contexts. Below are key critical observations supported by reputable academic sources:

### **1. Practical Challenges in Highly Regulated Environments**

Some studies indicate that implementing SDT faces considerable difficulties in settings characterized by strict regulatory frameworks, such as military and medical institutions, where opportunities for autonomy are inherently limited. In such contexts, individuals are often required to adhere to precise instructions and protocols, which undermines one of the theory's core pillars—autonomy.<sup>76</sup>

### **2. Limited Generalizability Across Non-Western Cultural Contexts**

Comparative research has indicated that Self-Determination Theory was primarily developed within a Western cultural context that highly values individual autonomy. However, in some cultures—such as Asian or Islamic societies—collective values and social cohesion are prioritized. In these contexts, fostering autonomy may not serve as

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76 Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268.

a strong motivator and can sometimes even be perceived as conflicting with social norms.<sup>77</sup>

### **3. Limits of Intrinsic Motivation in the Face of Economic and Social Crises**

Some scholars argue that intrinsic motivation, despite its effectiveness, is not always sufficient in challenging contexts that demand tangible external incentives. In environments experiencing financial strain or existential threats, external rewards—such as job security or higher salaries—become more influential drivers of motivation.<sup>78</sup>

### **4. Sustainability of Intrinsic Motivation: Theory vs. Practice**

Recent studies have raised questions about the ability of intrinsic motivation to be sustained without regular external support. In the absence of feedback or social recognition, feelings of competence or relatedness may weaken over time, leading to a decline in motivation.<sup>79</sup>

## **► Conclusion**

These critiques reveal that, despite its strong explanatory power, Self-Determination Theory is not a universal framework applicable to all contexts. Its effectiveness is influenced by the nature of social and cultural systems, the level of external pressures, and the presence of

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77 Chirkov, V., Ryan, R. M., Kim, Y., & Kaplan, U. (2003). Differentiating autonomy from individualism and independence: A self-determination theory perspective on internalization of cultural orientations and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(1), 97–110.

78 Baard, P. P., Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2004). Intrinsic need satisfaction: A motivational basis of performance and well-being in two work settings. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 34(10), 2045–2068.

79 Vansteenkiste, M., Niemiec, C. P., & Soenens, B. (2010). The development of the five mini-theories of self-determination theory: An historical overview, emerging trends, and future directions. In T. C. Urdan & S. A. Karabenick (Eds.), *The decade ahead: Theoretical perspectives on motivation and achievement* (Vol. 16, Part A, pp. 105–165). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

a supportive environment. Therefore, integrating SDT with spiritual and value-based frameworks—such as faith-based intrinsic motivation—may be methodologically necessary to overcome these limitations.

Thus, while Self-Determination Theory offers powerful tools for understanding human behavior and motivation, it remains confined within a particular epistemological framework that primarily emphasizes individual performance and well-being. Re-envisioning this theory through a holistic, faith-centered lens opens a far broader horizon—one where motivation is not merely a means to achievement, but a sacred journey of spiritual refinement. In this deeper view, daily work transcends its mundane functions to become a profound expression of servitude to God and a purposeful path toward the Divine.

## Part Two: Faith-Based Self-Motivation (ISP): An Integrated Path of Spiritual Refinement

### **Introduction: The Meaning of Self-Motivation from a Faith Perspective**

Many contemporary theories of self-motivation, such as Self-Determination Theory, rest upon the triad of fundamental human psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and belonging. These are regarded as essential conditions for the emergence of genuine intrinsic motivation.

While these theories succeed in explaining much of human behavior, they often remain confined within a closed humanistic framework—where motivation is viewed primarily as a tool for maximizing performance and self-actualization, detached from destiny, spiritual purification, or the Divine.

In contrast, from a faith-centered perspective, these three needs do not vanish; rather, they are reframed and redirected within a path of spiritual refinement (*tazkiyah*). Here, the inner drive of the human being is inseparable from their ultimate purpose, their Creator, and their eternal accountability.

## ■ Faith-Based Self-Motivation (ISP):

This is an integrated system that transcends the conventional notion of intrinsic motivation as merely a psychological response. Instead, it presents motivation as an essential element of the journey toward God, and a fundamental aspect of servitude (*‘ubūdiyyah*).

Within this faith-inspired framework, autonomy begins with liberation—from the self, from others, and from attachments—achieved through sincere reliance (*tawakkul*) on God. Competence transforms from a mere feeling of capability into a profound sense of divine responsibility and sacred duty. Meanwhile, belonging extends far beyond social acceptance; it is rooted in connection with God, with the community of truth (the *ummah*), with humanity at large, and with the unfolding historical journey toward ultimate realization.

This triad unfolds within a rich tapestry of supportive values and elements—such as gratitude, contentment, balance, mastery, and sincere effort—that together form an inner architecture. This structure preserves motivation, steadies intention, and anchors achievement to one’s ultimate destiny.

In this part of the chapter, we embark on a rediscovery of self-motivation through the lens of faith—not to reject contemporary psychological frameworks, but to elevate them to a broader horizon. Here, motivation is no longer merely a movement toward the self, but a profound journey from the self toward God—through this world, with others, and in every moment of sincere work.

## **Faith-Based Self-Motivation — An Integrative Path of Spiritual Refinement**

### **1. From “Drive” to “Divine Mission”**

Within the Islamic worldview, self-motivation is not merely regarded as an internal energy to achieve goals or enhance performance. Rather, it is understood within a broader, holistic framework that intertwines purpose, intention, and action. The movement of the soul is not simply a response to psychological or environmental stimuli; it is a profound expression of servitude to God, a journey toward Him, and a fulfillment of the sacred trust of stewardship on Earth.

From this understanding emerges the concept of **Faith-Based Self-Motivation** as a comprehensive, spiritual approach—one that integrates faith and deed, effort and contentment, excellence and sincere intention—transforming motivation from a mere tool for success into a transformative path of purification and growth.

### **2. The Ultimate Purpose: Servitude to God and Fulfilling the Divine Mission**

In the faith-based perspective, self-motivation is intrinsically linked to the concept of servitude to God, where all intentions and actions are directed toward seeking His pleasure and approval. From this vantage point, worldly work transcends mere labor to become an act

of worship when performed with sincere intention. The pursuit of goals thus transforms into a means of embodying spiritual values and actualizing one's sacred mission.

As God Almighty declares in the Qur'an: *"Say, 'Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds.'"* (Al-An'ām, 162)

Therefore, the believer's motivations do not stem from worldly allurements alone but arise from a profound awareness that life itself is both a blessing and a test. As the Qur'an states: *"Indeed, We have made that which is on the earth adornment for it that We may test them [as to] which of them is best in deed."* (Al-Kahf, 7)

In Islam, the measure of motivation is not the quantity of accomplishments but the sincerity of intention and excellence in conduct. Daily performance becomes a sacred arena for drawing closer to God, attaining the station of *Ihsan* (excellence in worship), and embodying the profound responsibility of stewardship on earth.

### 3. Dimensions of Faith-Based Self-Motivation

Faith-based self-motivation is characterized by its holistic and balanced nature, transcending mere psychological or behavioral aspects to deeply permeate the human soul through three interrelated dimensions:

- ♦ **First, the spiritual dimension:** This dimension is nurtured through acts of worship and obedience, which strengthen the bond with God. Such spiritual practices infuse the soul with tranquility and certainty, transforming faith into a perpetual inner driving force.
- ♦ **Second, the ethical dimension:** Here, motivation is grounded in elevated virtues such as honesty, trustworthiness, and excellence

(*Ihsan*). The driving force is thus linked not merely to achievement but to the sincere pursuit of goodness for oneself and others.

- ♦ **Third, the practical dimension:** This dimension manifests through diligent work and the pursuit of worldly goals that contribute to the cultivation of the earth and the service of humanity—so long as such efforts are firmly grounded in Islamic values.

#### 4. Faith as the Inner Driving Force

In the faith-based perspective, motivation does not arise from fleeting desires or temporary psychological impulses. Rather, it is deeply rooted in unwavering belief in God and a conscious awareness of the existential responsibility entrusted to humanity on this earth.

When a believer realizes that life is a sacred trust and that their efforts are observed by God, His Messenger, and the community of the faithful, a pure and sincere drive emerges from within—one that propels action not for praise or reward, but purely to seek the pleasure of God. As Allah declares: ***“And say, ‘Do [as you will], for Allah will see your deeds, and [so will] His Messenger and the believers.’”*** (At-Tawbah, 105)

This verse encapsulates the Qur’anic vision of motivation: God sees, the Messenger sees, and the believers see. Such awareness elevates one’s work to a mission-driven act and stirs the soul toward earnestness, excellence, and perseverance.

This profound meaning is further affirmed by the divine promise: ***“Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds — they will have the Gardens of Paradise as a lodging.”*** (Al-Kahf, 107)

Here, motivation transcends transient emotion; it is a steadfast spiritual state, yielding fruits in this life and culminating in the ultimate reward in the hereafter.

## **5. A Balanced Vision of Life**

Self-motivation in Islam manifests as a harmonious equilibrium between worldly aspirations and eternal objectives. Rather than drawing a line between the soul and the body, Islam acknowledges the essential need for both to be nurtured in tandem. This balance inspires the believer to strive with excellence and diligence in worldly affairs, while simultaneously ascending spiritually through purification and inner growth. As a result, life becomes infused with purpose, renewal, and profound meaning.

## **6. Conclusion**

Self-motivation in Islam is far more than a psychological technique—it is a holistic philosophy of life. It invites the believer to pursue spiritual elevation, ethical engagement, and persistent endeavor. Rooted in faith in God, this system presents a comprehensive Qur’anic vision of existence, in which the spiritual and the material are not opposing forces, but companions on the same path. It is a journey that leads to deep contentment, inner peace, and an abiding sense of fulfillment.

# **Reliance and Inner Autonomy: Liberation from the Self and the World’s Attachments**

## **1. Inner Liberation: The Essence of True Independence**

In the spiritual framework of Islamic purification (tazkiyah), independence does not begin with the removal of external

constraints, but with the emancipation of the inner self—from the whims of the ego, from the pressure to conform, from the fear of failure, and from attachment to outcomes. True autonomy is not a social posture, but an existential state. It does not imply detachment from others, but rather a deeper connection—with God first and foremost—and from that anchoring arises a soul that carries its trust (amānah) with a sense of freedom and profound responsibility.

## 2. Tawakkul: Trusting in the Unshakable Foundation

In Islam, autonomy is not the opposite of reliance on God (tawakkul); rather, it is its fruit. The more deeply a person anchors themselves in divine trust, the less they become bound by reliance on anything or anyone else. As Allah states:

***“And We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a guide for the Children of Israel: ‘Do not take anyone other than Me as a disposer of your affairs.’”*** (Al-Isra, 2)

This verse articulates with striking clarity the philosophy of tawakkul in the Islamic worldview: that the believer entrusts their affairs to none but God—not in actions, nor in intentions, nor in inner motivations. It is a call to resist placing one’s sense of security or moral compass in the hands of worldly powers or transient assurances. In this divine reliance lies the foundation of true spiritual freedom.

Thus, in this sacred vision, ***tawakkul***—reliance on God—is not a retreat from action, but a profound certainty that God alone is the Guide, the Orchestrator, and the All-Sufficient. The heart finds no true tranquility unless it leans not upon its own strength, but upon the boundless power of the Divine.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) beautifully conveyed this truth when he taught his daughter, Fatimah al-Zahra (peace be upon her),

to say each morning: ***“O Ever-Living, O Sustainer of all, by Your mercy I seek help. Do not leave me to myself even for the blink of an eye, and set all my affairs right.”***

This is the invocation of one who has entrusted all to God with unwavering conviction—one who sees no salvation within themselves, but in the Divine alone; one who places no weight upon their own shoulders, but leans wholly upon the Eternal Support that never falters.

### **3. From the Gaze of People to the Gaze of God**

Within this spiritual framework, faith-rooted independence becomes an inner liberation—from the need for admiration, from the craving for applause, and from the anxiety over how others perceive us. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) captured this essence when he said: ***“True wealth is not abundance in possessions, but richness of the soul.”***

Authentic freedom is not found in external affirmation, but in a heart enriched by God—independent of the fleeting motivations of the world.

Such independence is inseparable from an awakened awareness of one’s ultimate destiny. Each soul will stand before God alone, as the Qur’an declares: ***“And each one of them will come to Him on the Day of Resurrection alone.”*** (Mariam, 95)

This realization reorients our existential compass: it is not the opinions of people that matter most, but the gaze of God. In this light, true autonomy is not separation from society, but alignment with divine purpose—a life lived not to impress the eyes of others, but to meet the eye of the One.

#### 4. Independence within the Embrace of Community

At the same time, self-motivation in Islam is not confined to the individual realm; it is harmonized with a deep sense of belonging to a community of righteousness. Freedom does not equate to isolation, and independence does not imply severance from others. As the Qur'an commands: *"And cooperate in righteousness and piety."* (Al-Ma'idah, 2)

In this light, authentic self-motivation does not place the individual at the center of the universe, but recognizes them as part of a moral ecosystem—one that strives in service of others, in pursuit of God's pleasure.

## Self-Efficacy: Trusting in God and Striving Toward Purpose

### 1. Empowering Humanity through Knowledge: The Foundational Moment

From the very first moment of human creation, knowledge was the first gift God bestowed upon Adam (peace be upon him)—not as a ceremonial honor, but as a purposeful empowerment. The Qur'an states: *"And He taught Adam the names—all of them."* (Al-Baqarah, 31)

God then commanded Adam to present that knowledge to the angels, in a profound Qur'anic scene that weaves together knowledge, distinction, responsibility, and even the act of prostration.

Adam was not honored with the angels' prostration because of physical strength, nor because of more abundant worship, but because he was entrusted with the capacity for learning, discernment, and moral choice. It was this sacred trust—this burden of consciousness—that rendered him worthy of stewardship on Earth.

In the Islamic worldview, self-efficacy is not merely confidence in one's ability to succeed. Rather, it emerges from the believer's awareness of their God-given role as a *khalifah* (steward) on Earth. It is a sacred sense of capacity anchored in trust in God and an acute awareness that the talents and faculties endowed by the Creator are not a source of pride, but a divine blessing—a trust that must be honored through diligent effort, faithful service, and meaningful contribution to the well-being of others.

## 2. Self-Efficacy as an Invisible Inner Struggle

In Islam, self-efficacy is not merely a matter of skill or capability—it is an inner *jihad*, a spiritual striving. It transcends physical ability or intellectual acumen to encompass the struggle against internal adversaries: fear, hesitation, arrogance, and complacency. The believer who is conscious of their divine mission understands that true efficacy is not about ease of performance, but about steadfastness on the path—an ongoing battle to subdue the ego and resist the subtle temptations of weakness.

God has promised divine guidance to those who sincerely strive, saying: ***"As for those who strive in Our cause, We will surely guide them to Our paths. And indeed, God is with the doers of good."*** (Al-'Ankabūt, 69)

Thus, guidance is not the fruit of knowledge alone, but the outcome of sincere effort, inner purification, and the struggle in God's path—both outwardly and within the soul—until one reaches the station of *ihsān* (excellence in faith and character).

## 3. From Achievement to Devotion: Self-Efficacy as a Sacred Trust

In the Islamic worldview, self-efficacy is inseparable from sincere intent, and it finds its true fulfillment not in ambition alone, but in

deep devotion to goals that honor the dignity of the human soul and its role as God's vicegerent on Earth.

The Muslim does not pursue excellence to elevate their name, but sees each goal as a sacred trust before God—a chance to embody truthfulness, mastery, and beneficence. This spirit of **devotion** is not a fleeting enthusiasm, but a steady flame of dedication: unwavering commitment, purity of action, and the resolve to make every effort a meaningful brick in the building of both self and society.

God encapsulated the divine standard for excellence in this verse: ***"[He] who created death and life to test you [as to] which of you is best in deed."*** (Al-Mulk, 2)

Here, "the best in deed" is not defined merely by outward success, but by the purity of intention, the precision of execution, and the sincerity of direction.

True excellence, then, lies not in being ***the most visible***, but in being ***the most faithful***.

***"Indeed, God loves that when one of you performs a deed, he does it with excellence."*** – Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)

This ***ihsān***—this excellence—is the very soul of devotion. It transforms a task into worship, a pursuit into purification, and work into a sacred mission. Thus, self-efficacy in Islam is not merely the possession of tools or skills, but a conscious, accountable practice directed toward God—with the full force of heart, mind, and hand.

#### **4. Stewardship: A Universal Human Responsibility**

The role of stewardship (***khilāfah***) on Earth is not a privilege reserved for the faithful alone, but a shared responsibility carried by the whole of humanity—a trust bestowed upon every soul infused with the

divine breath. As the Qur'an states: ***"And We have certainly honored the children of Adam."*** (Al-Isrā', 70)

This honor encompasses all human beings—by virtue of their capacity for discernment, choice, and moral awareness.

Yet, when a believer embraces this role within the framework of faith, it transforms from a natural entitlement into a profound spiritual responsibility.

What began with Adam—when God taught him the names and honored him before the angels, not for power or piety, but for knowledge and entrusted responsibility—was not a fleeting moment, but the foundation of an enduring mission. Every believer carries within their heart a spark of that divine trust, and is called to stewardship in a manner befitting the nobility of such a charge.

To truly grasp this role is to elevate self-efficacy from a mere feeling of capability to a deep consciousness of mission—a continual readiness to shoulder responsibility with sincerity and integrity. As God declares: ***"It is He who made you successors upon the earth."*** (Fāṭir, 39)

Stewardship, then, is not a badge of superiority, but a test of action and intention.

When a person perceives themselves not merely as a doer of tasks, but as an heir to a divine legacy, an inner clarity begins to stir—fueling purpose, refining direction, and nurturing a balanced pursuit of progress and purification, achievement and intention, effort and remembrance.

## 5. True Competence Is Tested, Not Claimed

Self-efficacy in the Islamic perspective is not measured in times of ease or comfort; rather, it reveals itself amid the heart of challenges. The believer, deeply aware of their sacred mission, is not easily deceived by the glitter of achievements. They understand that the path to true realization is fraught with trials, and that sincerity in striving only emerges when the trials intensify, voices clash, and confidence wavers.

God Almighty declares: ***“Do people think that they will be left to say, ‘We believe,’ and they will not be tested?”***

***And We certainly tested those before them. And Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars.”*** (Al-‘Ankabūt, 2–3)

This is the crucible of truthfulness—a test that does not merely touch the surface, but penetrates the depths of one’s will, measuring the maturity of resolve and the purity of intention.

True spiritual competence is not an inflated ego nor a superficial self-confidence. Rather, it is a humble confidence—imbued with the firm certainty that God supports those who are sincere, steadies those who are truthful, and guides those who strive earnestly. Thus, competence becomes the provision for perseverance, a means to uplift oneself and the community, and a motivation to pursue goals with a sincere and balanced spirit.

Every achievement—no matter how grand it appears—is, at its core, a trust, a blessing, and a testament to God’s grace. The continuous striving for excellence is itself a form of worship, a service to creation that pleases the Creator.

## 6. Conclusion: Competence Does Not Thrive in Isolation

Despite its central importance, self-efficacy does not grow in isolation, nor does it bear fruit at the margins. No matter the depth of a believer's dedication and excellence, they remain part of a community, encompassed by a nation, accountable before God within a network of relationships, responsibilities, and duties.

Herein lies the profound value of belonging—the spiritual and moral cord that connects the individual to the collective of righteousness. It transforms personal achievement into a building block of communal strength, and channels individual striving into a broader service. Such striving grows purer through love, solidarity, and mutual encouragement.

## ■ Spiritual and Moral Belonging:

### 1. Belonging to God: The Origin that Reshapes Everything

In the Islamic vision, belonging is not merely a social connection or a feeling of affiliation to a group. It is an existential bond rooted in the very origin of creation, intrinsically linked to the Creator, and reflected in one's conduct and purpose. It is the believer's profound awareness that they are not an isolated entity drifting through time and space, but a soul bearing God's signature, a member of a community walking the path of truth, and a steward on a land that witnesses their deeds.

This belonging endows life with a noble purpose and provides a moral foundation upon which one can stand firm against challenges. In the Quranic context, belonging ascends to the level of belonging to God above all else. God declares: ***"Indeed we belong to Allah, and indeed to Him we will return."*** (Al-Baqarah, 156)

This brief phrase encapsulates the entire philosophy of belonging: our past is from Him, our destiny is toward Him, and our responsibility lies between these two points.

When this meaning settles deep in the heart, a person no longer acts merely for belonging, but acts in accordance with it—committed to values, striving for good, and careful that their actions bear witness to the sincerity of their affiliation.

## **2. Belonging to the Ummah: From Unity of Faith to a Mission of Witnessing**

From the foundation of belonging to God flows the belonging to the Ummah—not as a mere political or ethnic entity, but as the community of truth united by God through faith, mercy, and divine mission.

This Ummah transcends the boundaries of ethnicity, race, and geography, encompassing all who have acknowledged God's oneness, believed in His message, and embraced the responsibilities of that faith.

God declares: ***“You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah.”*** (Al-Imran, 110)

The excellence of this nation is not measured by its numbers or power, but by its deeds: commanding good, forbidding evil, and maintaining faith in God.

God further clarifies the mission of this Ummah in another verse: ***“Thus We have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you.”*** (Al-Baqarah, 143)

This “witnessing” is far more than mere presence; it is an ethical, intellectual, and prophetic stance—embodying the trust of conveying the message, upholding justice, and manifesting mercy.

When a believer truly senses that they are part of this living body, their sense of belonging ceases to be peripheral or individualistic. Instead, they bear the collective responsibility of inheriting the message, serving humanity, and realizing goodness upon the earth.

### **3. Belonging to Humanity: Mercy as a Universal Mission**

While belonging to the Ummah embodies the ethical bond among believers, Islam does not confine this circle; rather, it opens it wide to encompass all of humanity and the boundless mercy that unites us. The Qur’an teaches that the prophetic mission was never sent for an exclusive group, but for all worlds—a mercy, not a source of conflict; a call to build, not to exclude. As Allah declares: ***“And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds.”*** (Al-Anbiya, 107)

Moreover, the Qur’an paints a profound portrait of human equality that transcends ethnic and social divisions:

***“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you.”*** (Al-Hujurat, 13)

Thus, the believer’s belonging extends beyond their immediate tribe or nation—it embraces all humanity. Their heart carries the responsibility of mercy, their actions bear the message of justice, and in every human being they see a creation worthy of being treated in a manner that pleases their Creator.

#### 4. Belonging in Behavior: From Rituals to Living Cooperation

When the sense of belonging settles deeply in the believer's heart, their actions no longer revolve solely around personal interests. Instead, they see their efforts as a continuous striving to serve God and His creation—a responsibility that transcends the individual and embraces the community. Prayers in congregation, the Friday gathering, and the pilgrimage are not mere formal rituals; they are sacred seasons where the feeling of belonging is renewed, souls merge toward a single purpose, and intentions unite on the path of righteousness and piety.

Within this spiritual belonging, the believer finds reassurance in cooperation, strength in giving, and a compassion that overcomes individual fatigue. The Prophet ﷺ beautifully summarized this truth when he said: ***“The example of the believers in their mutual love, mercy, and compassion is like one body; when any limb aches, the whole body responds with sleeplessness and fever.”***

Belonging in Islam is not merely a slogan, but a shared life in which pain resonates alongside hope. Individual efforts transform into building blocks of a collective structure that bears witness to God's goodness and contributes to the rectification of the earth.

The Prophet (PBUH) did not stop at speaking of universal mercy; rather, he entrusted every believer with a direct responsibility toward those around them when he said:

***“He is not a believer whose stomach is full while his neighbor lies hungry beside him, knowing this.”***

Here, belonging emerges as a duty, not just an identity—a daily trust, not a seasonal sentiment.

## 5. Belonging to the Journey of Truth: From Adam to the Manifestation

Belonging in the faith-based perspective is not merely an attachment to a lived reality or a present community; rather, it is a belonging to a continuous line stretched through time—a line that began with the angels' prostration to Adam, the rebellion of Iblis, and extended through the journey of the prophets and reformers, passed down through generations until God inherits the earth and all that is upon it.

The believer who understands the dimensions of this belonging sees themselves as a living continuation of the path of truth, goodness, and servitude—from the very first moment of divine commission to God's promise of complete sovereignty and perfect justice in the time of the awaited divine manifestation.

Thus, the believer lives not only for personal goals but contributes through effort, thought, reform, and empowerment of people to prepare the ground for the appearance of the Mahdi (may God hasten his reappearance)—to spread knowledge, establish truth, revive human competence, and ready the earth to receive just divine leadership.

Belonging here is not merely an inner feeling, nor a social stance, but an existential position within God's grand design—a line on which stand Moses, Abraham, Jesus, Muhammad, Ali, Fatimah, and all those who declared "Our Lord is God" and were truthful.

This line does not call for mere spectators, but for pioneers—those who pave the paths of reform by every means: through knowledge, action, mercy, decisiveness, patience, and wise management. So that when God's promise arrives, the one who rises among them does so *from* them, and they are those who preceded Him, not those who lagged behind.

# Balance Between This World and the Hereafter: The Compass of Islamic Motivation

In Western discourse, motivation is often presented as a pursuit of “personal success” or “self-actualization,” yet it frequently falls into one of two extremes: either drowning in material achievement at the expense of meaning, or withdrawing into psychological comfort under the guise of balance, without a spiritual horizon that connects the person to something greater.

However, in the faith-based, purifying Islamic perspective, the balance between this world and the hereafter is not a dull middle ground, but a precise existential stance that enables a person to live with full energy in this world, without losing their guiding compass.

## 1. Balance as a Purposeful Awareness

The Muslim does not see life as merely a fleeting passage, nor does he dissolve in its details. Rather, he understands that God has appointed him as a vicegerent on earth—not to merely survive it, but to cultivate it with the intention of salvation. His daily striving in work, provision, relationships, and bearing responsibilities is a pursuit on the path of God, provided the intention is sincere and the direction is sound.

God Almighty says, ***“And seek, through what Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world.”*** (Al-Qasas, 77)

This verse is not only a guidance toward moderation but a motivational compass that makes every worldly effort a step on the path to the Hereafter, purifying success from the impurities of forgetfulness and selfishness.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) beautifully summarized this profound meaning of the worldly life in his immortal words: *“Indeed, the world is a place of truth for those who are truthful with it, a place of well-being for those who understand it, a place of wealth for those who provision themselves from it, and a place of admonition for those who take heed from it; it is the mosque of God’s beloved, the prayer place of God’s angels, the landing place of God’s revelation, and the marketplace of God’s friends; they earned mercy there and gained Paradise.”*

Thus, the world is not a realm opposed to the Hereafter, but a means for those who understand it, a fertile ground for those who wish to bear fruit for their meeting with God.

## **2. Balance as a Source of Sustainable Self-Motivation**

When the believer lives this balance, their inner drive flourishes, for they do not see their work as meaningless, nor their effort as mere pressure, nor their success as a temptation. Rather, they perceive every moment as an opportunity for deepened worship.

When they strive to earn their livelihood, they regard their sustenance as a trust; when they achieve, they see their accomplishment as gratitude; and when they grow weary, they understand that fatigue is not the opposite of the spirit, but a path to its refinement.

This is what distinguishes self-motivation in Islam: it does not rest solely on external rewards or the thrill of achievement, but on an inner meaning connected to God, which turns every effort into a source of tranquility, not anxiety.

## **3. Balance Protects from Excess and Disconnection**

The modern human is often consumed by conflicting ambitions: achievement or rest? ambition or contentment? gain or serenity?

But in the Qur'anic vision, the question is reconstructed: Does this pursuit draw me closer to God, or does it cut me off from Him?

If it draws me closer, then it is worship—even if it takes place in a marketplace or on a football field.

And if it cuts me off, then it is a trial—even if it occurs inside a mosque.

This awareness rebuilds motivation on clearer foundations, and shields the self from internal burnout that consumes energies in the name of success, or from spiritual surrender that hides behind mere asceticism without effectiveness.

#### **4. Balance Is Not a Goal... but a Means to God**

Balance in Islam is not an independent objective, but rather a means to complete servitude. Hence, balanced self-motivation is surrounded by tranquility, for it does not rely on a fleeting state, but on a cosmic vision.

Balance links action to intention, effort to purification, the worldly life to the Hereafter, making the entire life of the believer a continuous cycle of renewed worship and renewed motivation.

#### **5. Summary:**

The balance between this world and the Hereafter is not merely psychological comfort, but a compass of spiritual and behavioral motivation that directs every action, every energy, and every choice toward God. It transforms this worldly life into a field for building the self, serving creation, and seeking closeness to the Divine.

# Gratitude and Contentment: The Spiritual Energy that Sustains Motivation

In the long journey toward achievement and growth, initial motivation alone is not enough; one needs an inner fuel that keeps them steady and reassured. In the Islamic perspective, gratitude and contentment are among the most vital sources of this fuel.

## 1. Gratitude: Transforming Thankfulness into Driving Energy

Gratitude in Islam is not mere words uttered, nor a fleeting emotional state. It is a constant awareness that everything one possesses is by the grace of God, and that every blessing is a responsibility before it is a pleasure.

This awareness rescues the human from the whirlpool of comparison and complaint, anchoring them firmly in the position of gratitude. Thus, they invest what is in their hands instead of chasing what they do not possess.

God Almighty said: *“If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]”* (Ibrahim, 7) This is a promise not only of increase but of a renewal of blessing, motivation, and tranquility. Gratitude inspires a person to act—not out of deficiency, but out of thankfulness—and to see the blessing as a tool for giving, rather than merely a pleasure for consumption.

## 2. Contentment: The Serenity of Deep Motivation

Contentment is the other face of gratitude, but it emerges especially when things do not go as we wish. It is a conscious surrender to what God has decreed—not a passive submission to circumstances. It is trust in the wisdom of God in what has been written, without extinguishing the flame of striving or weakening the resolve to act.

God Almighty said: Say, ***“Never will we be struck except by what Allah has decreed for us”*** (At-Tawbah, 51) This verse does not sow resignation but builds certainty and liberates the heart from anxiety.

Contentment does not contradict ambition; rather, it protects it from breaking at failure and grants the soul room for reflection without losing its direction or confidence. Thus, contentment becomes a profound power that preserves motivation and shields it from the fragility of expectations, because it builds the drive on trust in God, not merely on results.

### **3. When Gratitude Meets Contentment: The Birth of Balanced Motivation**

Gratitude propels you forward, while contentment prevents you from falling backward. Gratitude reminds you of what you have, and contentment reassures you about what you have lost. Together, they create a person who works with energy, perseveres with steadfastness, and lives with a grateful, balanced spirit.

Therefore, self-motivation in Islam is not built on mere enthusiasm, but on active serenity—knowing what you possess, trusting what has been decreed for you, exerting your best effort, and accepting what comes to pass.

### **4. The Manifestation of Gratitude and Contentment at the Peak of Trial: Two Scenes from Ashura**

The meeting of gratitude and contentment was embodied in one of history’s greatest scenes—on the day of Ashura—when Imam Hussain (peace be upon him) emerged with his infant child, Abdullah, who was suffering intense thirst, unable to cry or even ask for water.

The Imam took the child into his arms and asked the people for a drink of water for him. But Harmila ibn Kahil shot an arrow in a panic, piercing him from vein to vein, while he was still in his father's hands.

In that moment when hearts break, the Imam raised his hands to the sky and said: "Lighten what has befallen me, for it is in the sight of God. O Allah, take [my soul] until You are pleased." He did not ask, "Why?" nor did he become angry. Rather, he surrendered, gave thanks, and was content.

Hours later, when the pure body of Imam Hussain (peace be upon him) fell on the scorching ground, headless, Lady Zainab (peace be upon her) came out of her tent, approached him, lifted his body slightly, looked to the sky, and uttered her immortal words: "O Allah, accept this sacrifice from us."

At the height of her grief, she did not speak out of personal pain, but with surrender, contentment, and trust.

Thus, the family of Muhammad teaches us that gratitude is not only at times of blessing, but also in the trial; that contentment is not only after relief, but within the heart of hardship. And that true motivation does not stem from external incentives, but from the presence of God in the heart.

## **5. Conclusion:**

Gratitude and contentment are not merely spiritual virtues, but internal systems that nourish motivation and protect the self from erosion. The more a person thanks for their blessings, the more their effort increases; and the more they accept their fate with contentment, the more they persist on their path. Thus, motivation endures even in the absence of immediate results.

# Motivation at Work: From Productivity to Worship

In the Islamic perspective, work is not separated from the greater purpose of human existence on earth; rather, it is viewed as a tool for building the self, fulfilling responsibility, activating values, and drawing closer to God.

Self-motivation in Islam is not based merely on the desire for success, but on the awareness that work is part of servitude, and that daily professional life can become a path to spiritual elevation if the intention is pure and the means are sound.

## 1. Intention and Excellence: Transforming Work into Worship

Intention is the starting point. What distinguishes work in the faith-based perspective is not its type or location, but the goal it aims for and the intention that drives it. When a Muslim enters their workplace feeling entrusted and aware that God observes their effort, their action transforms into an act of worship, even if its outward form is not explicitly devotional.

God says: *“He created you from the earth and appointed you its stewards.”* (Hud, 61) — meaning He entrusted you with building and cultivation, not merely through means but through values, intentions, and conduct.

Hence, the Prophet (PBUH) said: “Indeed, Allah loves that when any one of you does a job, he does it with excellence.” Excellence here is not merely a professional standard but a sign of honoring the trust and a means of drawing closer to God.

Moreover, ethical values are not a mere behavioral luxury, but internal components of motivation. Truthfulness, honesty, justice, and respect grant the worker psychological balance and coherence

between inner disposition and outward behavior. This harmony between values and work produces deep self-motivation, not just fleeting enthusiasm.

## **2. The Hereafter Goal: The Deep Motivator for Work**

The fundamental difference between Islamic motivation and materialistic motivation lies in the purpose. A Muslim does not work merely for profit or recognition, but to fulfill their trust before God and to contribute to the cultivation of the earth in a way that pleases its Creator.

When a person realizes that every effort is accounted for in the balance of God, daily work becomes an opportunity for purification, learning, and strengthening faith—not merely production or consumption.

This understanding grants the believer the ability to persevere even in difficult circumstances, because they do not expect only immediate results, but strive for a distant spiritual reward. Thus, the workplace transforms into a field of trial, construction, and closeness to God.

## **3. Conclusion:**

Work in Islam is not separate from worship; rather, it is its extension under its conditions: intention, values, mastery, and purpose. Motivation in the work environment does not stem solely from passion or ambition, but from a deeper vision: that every effort is an opportunity for elevation, and that professional success is measured not only by results, but by sincerity of intention, quality of performance, and the impact of work in the balance of God.

## **Critique of the Western Theory and the Islamic Response**

Despite the widespread acceptance of self-motivation theory in academic and practical circles, and despite its contribution to restoring the importance of internal drives as a fundamental engine of human behavior, it has not been free from criticism—whether regarding its theoretical limitations, its applicability across diverse cultural environments and contexts, or its resilience against the existential and economic pressures faced by contemporary humans.

However, the Islamic perspective reconstructed in this chapter does not aim merely to “patch up” these gaps, nor to Arabize the Western theory. Rather, it offers a foundational, integrated vision rooted in innate nature and purpose, linking self-motivation to the journey toward God, and shifting human focus from self-centeredness to the centrality of one’s divine mission.

In the following paragraphs, we will address these criticisms one by one to demonstrate how Islamic self-motivation (ISP) not only overcomes these concerns but fundamentally redirects the discussion, elevating concepts to a unifying and comprehensive spiritual horizon.

### **► First Criticism: The Difficulty of Applying Autonomy in Highly Regulated Environments**

One of the most prominent criticisms directed at the self-motivation theory is that one of its three pillars—autonomy—is difficult to achieve practically in many real-world settings. In institutions characterized by strict hierarchy and structure, such as military organizations, critical medical environments, or even some traditional educational and commercial settings, individuals are not afforded genuine freedom to choose their methods of execution or modes of

interaction; rather, they are required to adhere to fixed instructions and procedures.

- ♦ **Islamic Response: Autonomy as Inner Liberation, Not Merely External Freedom**

In the Islamic perspective, autonomy does not begin with choosing the method or freedom of execution, but rather with liberating the inner self before the outer circumstances. It is not founded on the principle of “do whatever you want,” but on the principle of “free yourself to sincerely obey God, even in the most restrictive environments.”

### **1. Tawakkul (Trust in God): Liberating the Will from Attachment to Others**

Islamic autonomy starts with breaking free from the chains of expectations, pressures, and the desire to please people. It manifests in true reliance on God, where the heart is freed from anxiety and directed toward fulfilling the trust with confidence and tranquility, regardless of external orders and instructions.

God Almighty says: *“And We gave Moses the Scripture and made it a guide for the Children of Israel that you not take anyone other than Me as a disposer of affairs.”* (Al- Isra, 2)

Here, autonomy means liberation from attachment to intermediaries, not rebellion against the system.

### **2. Pure Intention: The Ever-Present Space of Freedom**

In Islam, intention (niyyah) is the greatest realm of freedom. Even in the harshest conditions where a person has no choice, they can liberate their intention and transform their action into an act of worship. The Prophet (PBUH) said:

***“Actions are but by intentions, and every man shall have only what he intended.”***

Thus, a worker in a strict institution, or a doctor bound by precise medical protocols, can experience inner autonomy through a sincere intention for God, turning their work into a field of spiritual purification rather than mere task performance.

### **3. The Concept of Trust (Amanah): Owning the Work Without Submitting to It**

Islam places responsibility on a person for their work, not because they chose it freely, but because they accepted to bear the trust. This creates a sense of moral ownership over the action, even if one does not have freedom in its design or selection. Allah says: ***“Indeed, We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it.”***(Al – Ahzab, 72)

Thus, Islamic autonomy transcends the problem of the “external” and centers on the internal decision-making, where the believer asks: “What did I intend? Whom did I aim to please? For whom do I dedicate my effort?”

#### **♦ Summary of the Response:**

While the theory of self-determination faces difficulties in implementing autonomy within highly regulated environments, the Islamic perspective addresses this challenge at its root. It shifts the concept of autonomy from external freedom of choice to an inner orientation of the heart, a focus on God, and the transformation of action into a trust (amanah).

Thus, a person is not truly free only when granted options, but when they direct their intention rightly, work with sincerity, and draw their

strength from the certainty that God is fully aware of their efforts—no matter how simple or imposed those efforts may be.

## ► **Second Critique: The Limited Applicability of the Self-Determination Theory Across Non-Western Cultural Contexts**

Self-Determination Theory emerged from a Western, secular, and individualistic cultural framework, where personal autonomy is highly esteemed, and individual competence and achievement lie at the heart of psychological and social values.

However, numerous comparative studies have shown that this model does not seamlessly fit societies grounded in collective traditions, such as many Asian, Islamic, and African cultures, where social values, familial bonds, and communal belonging take precedence over the individualism that underpins the Western theory.

In these contexts, motivation and meaning often flow through relationships, shared duties, and a sense of belonging — dimensions that the original theory tends to overlook or underemphasize.

In these cultures, the self is understood through the lens of belonging, where decisions are shaped by collective responsibilities, and identity is deeply intertwined with family, community, and faith—not merely with the individual alone.

Thus, the activation of the principle of “autonomy” as proposed by Self-Determination Theory, or the notion of “separate self-efficacy,” may not align harmoniously with these cultural frameworks. On the contrary, it can provoke a fundamental clash with their core values, stirring resistance rather than acceptance.

## ♦ **Islamic Response: Motivation Emerging from Within the Culture, Not Imposed from Outside**

In the Islamic worldview, motivation is not something imposed externally upon a value system; rather, it is cultivated from within the very cultural, ethical, and spiritual fabric of the community. Islam does not see “belonging” as contrary to motivation, but as its very foundation. Nor does it regard the “self” as isolated from the community; instead, the self is a living thread woven into the collective tapestry.

### **1. Belonging to God: The Existential Starting Point**

In Islam, a person's identity begins with the profound acknowledgment of servitude to God: ***“Indeed, to Allah we belong and to Him we shall return”*** (Al-Baqarah, 156) This sense of belonging is not an abstract concept but a central axis that reshapes every behavior and drive. It grants the individual a deep sense of dignity and responsibility, free from the need for constant self-justification or the endless search for external incentives.

### **2. Balance Between the Individual and the Community:**

Islam nurtures within the believer a consciousness of self as a responsible individual, without severing ties from the collective. Every person is accountable for righteous deeds, yet their fruits ultimately serve the community and are rewarded by God's justice, not by popular opinion.

God Almighty says: ***“Every soul is held in pledge for what it has earned.”*** (Al-Muddathir, 38)

Yet He also commands: ***“And cooperate in righteousness and piety.”*** (Al-Ma'idah, 2)

Thus, the Muslim is called to personal excellence and collective cooperation, feeling that their inner motivation serves a higher communal purpose, not merely personal gain.

### **3. Motivation Rooted in the Divine Mission, Not in the Pressure of Achievement:**

In Western culture, much motivation is built on competition, distinction, and independence. But in the Islamic worldview, motivation springs from the individual's mission in existence itself—not from comparison with others.

The Prophet (PBUH) said: *“Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock.”*

This means every person, in their unique position, bears responsibility. They are not compelled to imitate or surpass others, but to fulfill their duty with sincere devotion.

#### **♦ Summary of the Response:**

While the Self-Determination Theory struggles to adapt effectively to non-Western cultural contexts, the Islamic perspective addresses this challenge at its root. It does not isolate the individual from their community, nor does it demand a stereotypical form of autonomy. Instead, motivation is built upon a profound belonging to God, a moral mission, and a collective identity that spans history.

In Islam, one does not need to be “different” to be motivated; rather, one needs to be sincere, present, responsible, balanced between self and community, and conscious that God is watching— and that is enough.

## ► **Third Critique: The Limits of Intrinsic Motivation Amid Economic and Social Crises**

Some studies suggest that intrinsic motivation—despite its effectiveness under normal circumstances—does not always hold strong in harsh environments burdened by economic or social pressures. In situations of poverty, job insecurity, or overwhelming work stress, passion or internal desire alone may not be enough to keep a person going. Instead, tangible incentives such as wages, promotions, and stability become necessary.

This perspective highlights that intrinsic motivation, rooted in one's inner drive, can lose its momentum when confronted with harsh realities. People do not act solely out of competence or the desire to learn; they are also driven by fear, necessity, and the fundamental need to survive.

### ♦ **Islamic Response: Rooting Intrinsic Motivation in Deep Spiritual Meaning**

In the Islamic worldview, motivation is not left to be sustained solely by fleeting emotions or psychological incentives; rather, it is anchored in a comprehensive teleological framework that imparts to human striving a meaning that transcends immediate pressures and grants a steady, enduring energy in the face of crises.

#### **1. Peace of Heart Amid Hardship:**

Islam does not deny the impact of adversity, but it guides awareness so that a person is not reduced to their circumstances. Even in the darkest moments, God links work with hope, effort with tranquility, nourishing the soul with a meaning broader than immediate reward: ***“Indeed, with hardship comes ease. Indeed, with hardship comes ease.”*** (Al-Inshirah, 5–6)

## 2. Motivation Rooted in Faith, Not in Circumstance:

The believer does not wait for “favorable conditions” to act. He works not because the environment is ideal, but because he is entrusted with responsibility—and because every effort is seen, recorded, and weighed by God.

*“And say, ‘Do [as you will], for Allah will see your deeds, and [so will] His Messenger and the believers. And you will be returned to the Knower of the unseen and the witnessed, and He will inform you of what you used to do.’”* (At-Tawbah, 105)

This consciousness generates a form of purpose-driven motivation that anchors the believer amid constriction and drives perseverance even when the external rewards are scarce.

## 3. Patience and Certainty: Deep Wells of Inner Energy

In pressured environments, many succumb to frustration. But for the believer, hardship is not meaningless—it is a terrain for patience and a stage for spiritual ascent. The Prophet (PBUH) said:

*“How wondrous is the affair of the believer! For his affairs are all good. If something pleasing befalls him, he is grateful, and that is good for him; and if something harmful befalls him, he is patient, and that is good for him.”*

Thus, the believer is animated by a form of purifying motivation—one that relies not solely on outcomes, but on intention, struggle, trust in God, and unwavering belief in His promise.

### ♦ Summary of the Response:

While Western motivational theory reveals clear limitations when internal drive is tested under pressure, the Islamic paradigm

addresses this challenge by transforming motivation into a spiritual posture—not a matter of mood or emotion, but of divine responsibility. It is rooted in conviction, not convenience; in hope, not immediate reward.

Thus, the Muslim does not act only when conditions are ideal. He moves forward because striving, in and of itself, is an act of closeness to God; giving in hardship is a form of worship; and remaining steadfast in adversity is a path to spiritual elevation.

### ► **Critique Four: The Sustainability of Intrinsic Motivation—Between Theory and Practice**

Some studies have raised important questions about the long-term sustainability of intrinsic motivation as outlined in Self-Determination Theory. Specifically, they ask: Can this kind of motivation endure in the absence of consistent external reinforcement?

When positive feedback is lacking, when social recognition is absent, or when disappointment becomes a recurring theme, individuals may begin to lose their sense of competence and belonging. Over time, even strong initial motivation can erode under the weight of isolation and unacknowledged effort.

Some scholars argue that unless intrinsic motivation is regularly nourished by tangible successes or external affirmation, it remains vulnerable to gradual decay—particularly in environments where hard work goes unrewarded, and achievements pass unnoticed.

### ♦ **Islamic Response: A Motivation Renewed through the Bond with God**

In the Islamic worldview, motivation is not left at the mercy of external recognition or shifting circumstances. Rather, it is anchored in an inner system of intention, devotion, and certainty—turning

every moment of effort into an opportunity for renewal and spiritual growth.

## **1. Renewal through Intention: An Inexhaustible Source of Energy**

In Islam, the human being is not burdened with maintaining a constant sense of enthusiasm. Instead, he is called to continually renew his intention (*niyyah*)—for intention is the origin, the compass that redirects effort and revives its soul.

The Prophet (PBUH) said: *“Actions are but by intentions, and each person shall have only what he intended.”* Here, intention is not merely a justification for action—it is a deep, vital force that sustains work when zeal fades, purifies it when ego seeps in, and brings it back to life when it begins to die out.

## **2. Daily Acts of Worship: Instruments of Motivational Renewal**

The five daily prayers, remembrance (*adhkar*), supplication (*du‘ā*), fasting—these are not isolated rituals, but spiritual checkpoints that reconnect the heart with its Source. In the wear and tear of routine or the suffocation of worldly pressures, these practices come as divine intervals to reignite motivation at its truest origin: nearness to God.

They restore clarity where confusion spreads, and meaning where mechanical repetition dulls the spirit—reminding the believer that his work is part of a sacred covenant, not merely a worldly pursuit.

## **3. Endurance as the Foundation of Sustainable Effort**

In Islam, motivation is not measured by intensity or momentum, but by steadfastness and sincerity. One who works slowly but consistently

is, in the sight of God, more firmly grounded than one who surges forward only to collapse.

Allah says: *“And those who strive in Our cause—We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good.”* (al-‘Ankabūt, 69)

The one who labors, even in silence and without applause, is granted unseen assistance and an enduring guidance—both of which are more lasting than fleeting praise or temporal rewards.

#### **4. Summary of the Response:**

While self-determination theory struggles to guarantee the sustainability of internal motivation without ongoing external affirmation, the Islamic paradigm offers a self-renewing system rooted in divine connection.

It draws upon the intentionality of the heart, the rhythm of worship, the discipline of trust (*tawakkul*), and the serenity of certainty (*yaqīn*). The believer does not rely on outer validation to persevere; he draws endurance from his relationship with God, his faith that every effort is counted, every deed observed, and that his Lord forgets not the striving of the faithful.

#### **► Critique Five: Is Self-Motivation Sufficient Without External Support? And How Deeply Is It Linked to Genuine Well-being?**

Some scholars argue that self-motivation—as envisioned by Self-Determination Theory—may not be sufficient on its own to sustain long-term performance or ensure deep psychological well-being.

Even if a person begins a task with strong internal drive, that motivation may falter in the absence of appreciation, tangible results,

or emotional connection. A sense of loneliness or lack of communal support may gradually erode their resolve, especially when positive feedback is absent.

Moreover, the link between self-motivation and true well-being is neither direct nor guaranteed. One may feel driven, yet remain unsettled—restless, lacking inner peace or genuine satisfaction.

This is because motivation, by itself, does not necessarily yield meaning or tranquility—particularly when it is cut off from a higher purpose or a coherent spiritual framework.

In such cases, motivation becomes an engine without direction: capable of movement, yet aimless in its journey.

#### ♦ **The Islamic Response: Motivation as a Path to God, Not an End in Itself**

In the Islamic worldview, self-motivation is not viewed as a psychological goal to be pursued for its own sake. Rather, it is seen as a devotional tool—a means to activate human potential in the journey toward closeness with God. What gives motivation its true value is not merely its intensity or duration, but the direction it takes and the purpose it serves.

### **1. Motivation Anchored in Mission, Not in Outcome**

In Islam, effort is not measured by its material success but by sincerity and intention. A person may toil in silence, may strive without applause, and still be fully motivated—because their work is offered to God, and each moment is accounted for in His sight.

As the Qur'an reminds: ***"Indeed, Allah does not let the reward of the doers of good go to waste."*** (At-Tawbah, 120)

This awareness grants the soul a serenity that precedes any recognition, and a satisfaction that is not dependent on applause or compensation.

## **2. Well-Being in Islam: Not a Fleeting Feeling, but Enduring Tranquility**

While Western theories often equate well-being with fleeting happiness or subjective satisfaction, Islam anchors it in *sakinah*—a deep, enduring tranquility that flows from connection with God, acceptance of His decree, and trust in His wisdom.

As the Qur'an states: *"Those who believe and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah—verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest."* (Ar-Ra'd, 28)

True well-being, then, is not found in the absence of hardship, delay, or uncertainty. It is the stillness of a soul anchored in faith, even when circumstances are stormy—because it draws its calm not from outcomes, but from the divine presence.

## **3. True Support: The Divine Companionship**

The Islamic vision does not deny the value of social support—but it does not make it a prerequisite for motivation. The most powerful moments of inner drive may emerge in silence, in pain, in solitude—when a person feels that God is with them, even if no one else is.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught Ibn 'Abbas: *"Be mindful of Allah, and He will protect you. Be mindful of Allah, and you will find Him before you... If you ask, ask of Allah; and if you seek help, seek help from Allah."*

## ► **Summary of the Response:**

While some studies argue that intrinsic motivation may erode in the absence of external support or recognition, the Islamic perspective offers a deeper and more resilient framework—one that sees motivation not as an end in itself, but as a vehicle on the path toward God.

Rather than tying well-being to pleasure or success, Islam anchors it in *ridā* (contentment), *sakinah* (serene tranquility), *yaqīn* (certainty), and an unbroken connection with the Divine. This grounding empowers the believer to continue striving with a steadfast spirit—even in the face of silence, delay, or invisibility—knowing that what matters most is not being seen by people, but being known by God.

## ► **Concluding Reflections: From the Theory of Motivation to the Path of *Tazkiyah***

After examining the critiques of Self-Determination Theory as framed within Western thought—and offering a detailed response rooted in the spiritual framework of *tazkiyah* (inner purification)—it becomes clear that the challenge lies not in the core concepts themselves, such as autonomy, competence, and belonging, but rather in the existential foundation upon which these concepts rest, and the ultimate purpose they serve.

While the Western paradigm envisions the human being as an autonomous agent in pursuit of self-fulfillment, the Islamic worldview presents the human as an honored servant, entrusted with a sacred mission, journeying toward God by cultivating the divine gifts and capacities entrusted to them.

Thus, the perspective on self-motivation is fundamentally transformed: from a tool to magnify the ego, it becomes a means to deepen servitude; from a quest for recognition, it shifts into a pursuit

of contentment; from a desire for achievement, it turns into a faithful fulfillment of trust and duty.

The responses have clarified that what may appear as shortcomings in the Western theory—such as the difficulty of autonomy in restrictive environments, the weakening of motivation amid crises, or the need for external support—are not deficiencies within the human being per se, but rather limitations in the lens through which the human is viewed.

When motivation is reframed within the context of purpose, intention, responsibility, stewardship, reliance on God, contentment, and divine mission, these apparent gaps are not merely filled; the entire experience is elevated to a deeper, calmer, and more steadfast and balanced level.

We do not call to dismantle what modern psychology has offered, but rather to transcend its natural limits by linking it to the supreme source of meaning and energy: God, Glorified and Exalted be He.

Thus, motivation does not remain a mere technique or a self-improvement recipe; rather, it becomes a guiding compass that reorients intentions, transforming a person from reactive impulse to conscious awareness, from scattered distraction to purposeful progress, and from fluctuating incentives to steadfast goals.

As God Almighty says: ***“And those who believe and do righteous deeds – We will surely assign to them lofty chambers within Paradise beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever. Excellent is the reward of the [righteous] workers.”*** (Al-Ankabut, 58)

# Conclusion of the Chapter: Journeying Toward Light Under the Guardianship of God

In light of the foregoing analysis, critique, and reconstruction, it becomes clear that the difference between Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Islamic Spiritual Motivation Paradigm (ISP) transcends mere differences in tools or terminology. Rather, it reaches to the very core of worldview: How do we perceive the human being? What moves them? And toward what ultimate destination do they proceed?

To encapsulate these distinctions succinctly, the following table illustrates the transformation from the modern psychological perspective to the faith-rooted, soul-purifying vision across the key dimensions of motivation and self-change.

**Comparative Table: From Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to the Islamic Spiritual Motivation Perspective (ISP)**

Comparative Dimension	Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Islamic Spiritual Motivation Perspective (ISP)
Theoretical Foundation	Rooted in humanistic psychology, emphasizing three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.	Grounded in the Qur’anic worldview, centered on servitude (‘ubūdiyyah), spiritual purification (tazkiyah), and stewardship (istikhlāaf).
Primary Goal	To cultivate intrinsic motivation for enhanced performance, personal satisfaction, and psychological well-being.	To embark on a journey toward God through sincere intention (niyyah), excellence in conduct (ihsan), and truthful action.

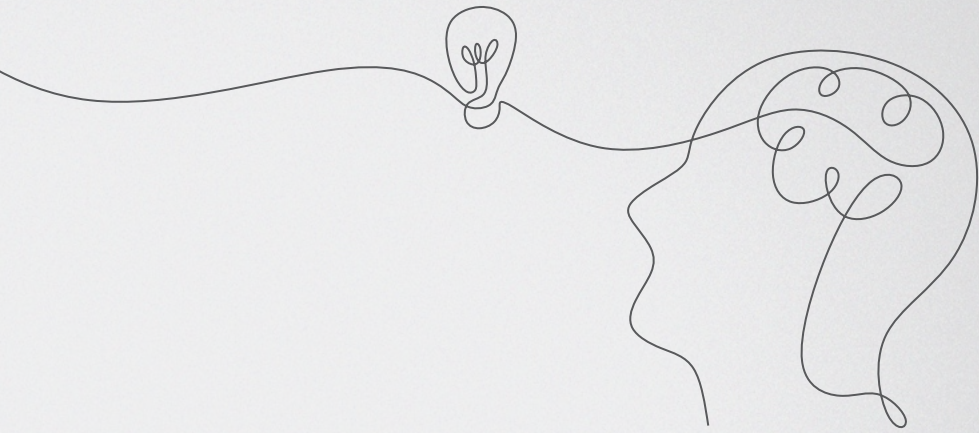
Comparative Dimension	Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Islamic Spiritual Motivation Perspective (ISP)
Autonomy	Defined as the individual's sense of control over their choices and behaviors.	Understood as liberation from the self's desires, human opinions, and worldly attachments through reliance on God (tawakkul).
Competence	The feeling of efficacy and mastery over tasks and challenges.	A profound awareness of being accountable to God, where striving for mastery is itself an act of worship.
Relatedness (Belongingness)	The psychological need for social bonds, acceptance, and support from others.	A spiritual belonging that connects the soul to God, the community of truth, and the universal mercy toward humanity.
Source of Motivation	Intrinsic drive originating from internal feelings of capability and desire.	Faith-driven motivation that springs from pure intention, conscious presence of God, and hope for divine acceptance.
Sustainability of Motivation	Maintained through the fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs.	Sustained through continuous trust in God (tawakkul), prayer (du'ā'), spiritual striving (mujāhada), and ongoing purification of the soul (tazkiyah).
Concept of Success and Achievement	Success is measured by the attainment of personal goals and external accomplishments.	Success (falāḥ) is defined by closeness to God, with value placed on sincerity and effort beyond mere worldly results.

Comparative Dimension	Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Islamic Spiritual Motivation Perspective (ISP)
Approach to Obstacles and Challenges	Viewed as barriers to be overcome with resilience, flexibility, and external support.	Perceived as divine tests (ibtīlā'), opportunities for spiritual growth, soul refinement, and deepening sincerity and devotion.
Relation to Time and Outcomes	Emphasizes motivation in the present moment, aiming for balance and immediate results.	Focuses on long-term commitment to the Hereafter, where efforts are accounted by God regardless of immediate visible fruits.

This table reveals a profound distinction: while motivation in the Western framework begins with desire and culminates in feeling, in the Islamic spiritual perspective it starts with intention (niyyah) and culminates in spiritual purification (tazkiyah).

Whereas Self-Determination Theory (SDT) aims to cultivate a stable drive for self-actualization, the Islamic Spiritual Perspective (ISP) seeks to liberate the soul from its own ego, anchor the striving toward closeness with God, and transform daily effort into an act of worship.

Thus, motivation in Islam becomes a continuously renewing devotional journey, not driven merely by psychological impulses, but guided by a higher purpose, sustained by sincere intention, and refined through wholehearted devotion. As God Almighty declares: ***“And my success is not but through Allah. Upon Him I have relied, and to Him I return.”*** (Hud, 88)



Chapter Seventeen

# **The Theory of Flow**

## Chapter Seventeen

# The Theory of Flow

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### Part One: The Theory of Flow – A Western Psychological Perspective

#### **An Introduction to the Flow Theory and Its Psychological Development**

##### ► **Prelude: From the Stream of Will to the Overflow of Presence**

Having explored in the previous chapter how intrinsic motivation may be transformed into a devotional path—nourished by intention,

anchored in sincerity, and oriented toward an eternal purpose—we now turn to a deeper dimension of the spiritual journey: the moment of full presence. It is in this moment that heart, mind, and action converge in serene harmony—a quiet fusion of focus and fulfillment, where stillness becomes a form of motion and accomplishment flows not from effort, but from alignment.

Here, the concept of **“Flow”** emerges as one of the central pillars of modern positive psychology—a term coined to capture those rare psychological moments when a person is wholly immersed in a task they love and have mastered. In such moments, the mind enters a state of total absorption, the self seems to dissolve, time fades into the background, and one becomes fully present, wholly engaged.

But does this psychological state stand as an end in itself?

Can it, on its own, account for the profound tranquility, existential steadiness, and enduring sense of meaning the human soul seeks?

Is it merely a framework for understanding the relationship between a person and their work—or can it ascend to explain the deeper bonds between the human being and their Creator, their ultimate destiny, and their innate drive toward spiritual perfection?

In this chapter, we begin by exploring the origins, components, and psychological applications of Flow Theory. We then journey beyond its secular framework to present a holistic Islamic perspective—one rooted in the spiritual science of *tazkiyah* (purification of the soul).

Within this sacred paradigm, flow is redefined not merely as a state of optimal performance, but as a spiritual station (*maqām*) along the path to God: a state that bears the fruit of self-effacement in divine pleasure, and conscious presence in every moment of life.

## ► Defining the Flow Theory

*Flow Theory* refers to a distinctive psychological state in which an individual becomes wholly absorbed in an activity that demands both focus and effort, while simultaneously engaging their inner capabilities. In this heightened state, a person experiences deep concentration, a sense of timelessness, and a fading of self-awareness—where the task itself becomes its own reward.

This concept was articulated by psychologist **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**, who observed that individuals entering such states—artists, athletes, and creators alike—tended to perform at their peak and described these experiences as among the most fulfilling and joyful moments of their lives.

Not every act of concentration qualifies as *flow*, however. For true flow to occur, the activity must strike a delicate balance: it must be sufficiently challenging to demand effort, yet intrinsically enjoyable. Crucially, it must be pursued not for external rewards, but for the inward satisfaction it yields.

## ► Historical Background and Theoretical Development

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi began his exploration of *Flow* in the 1970s, driven by a central question: Why do some individuals experience profound happiness while engaged in demanding, focused activities—such as painting, athletic performance, musical composition, meditation, or scientific inquiry?

Through interviews and empirical studies, he observed that such individuals consistently described moments of complete immersion and inner harmony—states he would later define as *flow*.

Over time, Flow Theory expanded beyond its initial psychological roots to influence diverse fields including education, sports, management, coaching, and the arts. It became one of the foundational pillars of **positive psychology**—a discipline co-founded by Csikszentmihalyi and Martin Seligman—dedicated to enhancing human well-being and flourishing, not merely addressing dysfunction or psychological disorders. At its core, positive psychology seeks to understand the conditions that foster happiness, resilience, and meaning.

Importantly, Flow Theory emerged from within a secular intellectual framework—an attempt to explore happiness and fulfillment outside of religious paradigms. This historical context makes it a compelling subject for comparison with the Islamic spiritual tradition, which offers a theocentric and purpose-driven vision of inner harmony and transcendence.

## ► **The Significance of Flow Theory in Psychology**

Flow Theory marks a paradigmatic shift in the field of psychology, as it moves the focus beyond the treatment of psychological disorders toward the cultivation of positive human experiences. Rather than merely alleviating anxiety or depression, the theory aspires to empower individuals to reach peak mental and emotional performance by achieving a harmonious balance between the challenges they face and their latent abilities.

This equilibrium fosters a profound sense of inner meaning, while nurturing contentment, happiness, and psychological stability. Individuals who frequently enter flow states tend to be more positively engaged with their surroundings, more productive, and more capable of contributing meaningfully to their workplaces and communities. In this light, flow becomes a powerful tool for realizing holistic psychological well-being and for nurturing both personal flourishing and social vitality.

# Foundations for Achieving Flow: Between Theory and Practice

Flow Theory offers a comprehensive psychological framework for understanding how individuals can enter a state of deep focus and mental absorption while engaged in a meaningful activity. This state arises from a set of psychological principles that define the characteristics of flow, as well as practical strategies that prepare the mind and behavior to access this unique experience.

These foundations may be broadly categorized into two interwoven dimensions:

- ♦ **Theoretical Principles:** These outline the core attributes that distinguish the flow state from ordinary states of attention or engagement.
- ♦ **Practical Factors:** These emphasize the conditions and behavioral practices that facilitate the emergence of flow in daily life.

## ► First: Theoretical Principles of Flow

### 1. The Balance Between Challenge and Skill

At the heart of the flow experience lies a delicate equilibrium: the task at hand must offer a level of challenge that is well-matched to the individual's existing skills. When the challenge exceeds one's ability, the result is often frustration and anxiety. When it falls below one's competence, the outcome is boredom and disengagement. But within the *golden zone of balance*—where challenge and skill are in harmony—a natural motivation arises, focus intensifies, and the mind becomes wholly immersed.

**Example:** A seasoned chess player is likely to enter a flow state when matched against an equally skilled opponent. The game feels neither overwhelming nor trivial; instead, it becomes a space of dynamic engagement, excitement, and effortless presence.

## **2. Clarity of Goals**

Flow cannot emerge in the midst of ambiguity. The individual must have a clear and precise understanding of what they are striving to achieve. This clarity provides the activity with a defined direction, allowing the mind to channel its energy fully and without distraction.

## **3. Immediate Feedback**

A flow state depends on real-time feedback regarding one's progress. This feedback can be external—such as results or guidance—or internal, like the intrinsic sense of accomplishment. The more an individual feels they are moving toward something meaningful, the more their focus sharpens and their immersion deepens.

## **4. Deep Concentration and Loss of Self-Awareness**

One of the most distinctive qualities of flow is the individual's complete absorption in the experience—so profound that self-consciousness fades, time dissolves, and the external world recedes. In moments of true flow, worries and distractions vanish, and the person enters a state of pure presence within the activity itself.

## **5. A Sense of Control and Mastery**

Emerging from the balance between challenge and skill is a growing sense of control over the task at hand. This feeling is not one of arrogance or dominance, but rather an inner tranquility—a quiet confidence that one is capable of continuing and of achieving something meaningful.

## **6. Intrinsic Motivation and the Value of the Task**

Activities that truly generate flow are rewarding in and of themselves—not because of external recognition or rewards. In a state of flow, the activity becomes an end in itself, pursued for its own sake. It offers a unique and self-renewing sense of joy, fulfillment, and inner alignment.

### **► Second: Practical Factors for Cultivating Flow**

#### **1. Continuous Skill Development**

To maintain the delicate balance required for flow, one must engage in the ongoing refinement of their abilities. Learning, deliberate practice, and the accumulation of experience serve as the foundation upon which higher challenges can be met without tipping into overwhelm or monotony.

#### **2. Goal Setting and Task Breakdown**

Clarity in intention anchors the mind. When large tasks are broken down into smaller, measurable milestones, the path ahead becomes navigable. Each completed step offers a sense of achievement that fuels momentum, drawing the individual deeper into a state of focused immersion.

#### **3. Creating the Right Mental and Temporal Conditions**

Flow requires an environment as free as possible from distractions. Effective time management, silencing notifications, and dedicating focused periods for work are all essential to fostering deep immersion. Practices such as meditation or breathing exercises help clear the mind beforehand, preparing the individual to fully engage in the task.

#### **4. Choosing Activities with Intrinsic Motivation**

Internal drives—the alignment of the activity with personal values and interests—are the most powerful catalysts for achieving flow. The more an activity resonates with one's inner inclinations, the greater the likelihood of entering that focused, immersive state.

#### **5. Building a Supportive and Enabling Environment**

One's surroundings have a direct impact on how easily flow is attained. Social support, access to the right tools, and an atmosphere that values effort and creativity are all vital in nurturing a calm confidence that allows the individual to enter the experience fully and peacefully.

#### **6. Receiving Regular Feedback**

It benefits the individual to receive continuous feedback on their performance, whether from themselves or from others. This ongoing reflection fuels progress, keeps the experience dynamic, and deepens immersion and engagement with the task at hand.

## **The Impact of Flow on Mental Well-being and Performance**

Research has demonstrated that entering a state of flow significantly enhances both psychological and professional quality of life. This state bestows upon the individual a profound sense of satisfaction, boosts efficiency in accomplishment, and strengthens self-confidence. The impact of flow can be summarized across three interconnected dimensions:

## **1. Enhancing Mental Well-being**

### **♦ Reducing Stress and Cultivating Happiness:**

Flow helps alleviate psychological pressure by channeling the mind's full focus onto a single activity, thereby shrinking the space for anxiety and negative thoughts. This state has been described as a profoundly positive experience that nurtures vitality and inner contentment.

### **♦ Increasing Satisfaction and Sense of Purpose:**

Individuals who regularly experience flow express a high degree of life satisfaction. This stems from moments of deep harmony with themselves, where their efforts feel meaningful and genuinely appreciated.

## **2. Boosting Performance and Creativity**

### **♦ Elevating Productivity and Work Quality:**

In professional settings, flow is regarded as a key to high performance. Deep concentration leads to accomplishing tasks more efficiently and swiftly, with superior quality. Consequently, many organizations strive to create environments that facilitate seamless entry into flow.

### **♦ Igniting Creativity and Problem-Solving**

In the flow state, the mind breaks free from conventional patterns and habitual thinking, opening the door to innovation and original insight. Research shows that individuals immersed in flow demonstrate greater mental flexibility and a clearer ability to think beyond familiar boundaries.

### 3. Cultivating Self-Capabilities and Strengthening Confidence

#### ♦ Skill Development and Personal Mastery:

Since flow arises when a task is challenging yet achievable, it naturally motivates continuous skill enhancement, fostering genuine professional and personal growth.

#### ♦ Fostering Autonomy and Self-Confidence:

Rooted in intrinsic motivation, flow nurtures psychological independence, empowering the individual with stronger self-belief and less reliance on external validation or social praise.

#### ► Summary

Flow is far more than a fleeting moment of intense focus or immersion; it is a profound psychological experience that awakens the deepest reserves of human potential. By harmonizing intrinsic motivation, unwavering mental concentration, and a challenge that inspires growth, flow becomes a powerful catalyst for inner development and creative excellence. It stands as one of the most vital keys to achieving psychological balance, professional mastery, and enduring well-being in one's life journey.

## ■ Empirical Foundations Supporting Flow Theory

Numerous rigorous Western studies have demonstrated the profound and positive impact that the experience of flow exerts on mental health, creativity, professional performance, and overall well-being. In the following section, we explore the most significant of these studies, categorized by their core fields, to illuminate how flow fosters a richer, more fulfilling human experience.

## ► Highlighting Key Studies by Core Domains

### 1. Flow and Work: Enhancing Performance and Professional Fulfillment

One of the pioneering experimental investigations into flow experiences at work versus leisure was conducted by Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre. Their research revealed that individuals encounter higher levels of challenge and skill engagement during work activities compared to recreational ones. These work-related flow experiences were closely tied to a profound sense of meaning and productivity, positioning work as a potent<sup>80</sup> source of deep satisfaction whenever flow is achieved within it.

### 2. Flow and General Psychological Well-being

In a comprehensive review featured in the *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi offered an insightful analysis of flow's effects on mental health. They affirmed that flow correlates with enhanced quality of life, increased self-satisfaction, and reduced anxiety—especially when activities resonate harmoniously with an individual's values and skills.<sup>81</sup>

### 3. Measuring Flow in the Workplace Environment

Bakker developed a specialized psychological instrument to assess flow in professional settings. His findings demonstrated that frequent flow experiences at work are positively associated with intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, and reduced burnout. Moreover,

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80 Csikszentmihalyi, M., & LeFevre, J. (1989). Optimal experience in work and leisure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56(5), 815–822. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.56.5.815>

81 Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2002). The concept of flow. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (pp. 89–105). Oxford University Press.

employees who regularly enter flow states tend to achieve higher long-term performance.<sup>82</sup>

#### 4. Flow, Creativity, and Problem-Solving

Using the Experience Sampling Method, Fullagar and Kelloway demonstrated that employees who enter flow states during their work exhibit heightened creativity and greater adaptability in problem-solving. These individuals also report significantly higher levels of self-efficacy, reflecting a deep-seated confidence in their ability to meet challenges and innovate with grace.<sup>83</sup>

#### 5. Flow in Daily Life and Levels of Achievement

The *Handbook of Positive Psychology* highlights that individuals with an “autotelic personality”—those who seek challenges and derive intrinsic pleasure from accomplishment—are more likely to experience flow frequently. This propensity is closely linked to elevated intrinsic motivation and a resilient optimism that fuels continual growth and fulfillment.<sup>84</sup>

### ► Conclusion:

These studies collectively affirm that the state of flow is far more than a fleeting psychological moment; it is a rigorously examined phenomenon with profound implications. Flow has the power to elevate the quality of both mental well-being and professional life, to ignite creativity, and to foster deep psychological stability. Hence, embracing the concept of flow and integrating it thoughtfully into

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82 Bakker, A. B. (2008). The work-related flow inventory: Construction and initial validation of a measure of flow in the workplace. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72(3), 400–414. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2007.11.007>

83 Fullagar, C. J., & Kelloway, E. K. (2009). Flow at work: An experience sampling approach. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 82(3), 595–615. <https://doi.org/10.1348/096317908X357903>

84 Nakamura, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2002). The concept of flow. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (pp. 89–105). Oxford University Press.

educational, developmental, and workplace frameworks is not merely beneficial—it is essential for holistic human flourishing.

## ■ Scientific Critique of Flow Theory:

Despite its significant influence within positive psychology and its broad applications in education, work, and creativity, flow theory has not escaped scholarly critique. Researchers have highlighted various methodological, cultural, and practical challenges confronting the theory. In the following section, we examine some of the most prominent criticisms, supported by rigorous examples from Western academic research.

### 1. Measurement Challenges and Methodological Limitations

#### ♦ The Subjective Nature of the Experience:

Flow is inherently an internal, deeply personal experience, which renders its measurement more reliant on subjective interpretation than on objective scientific metrics. Most researchers depend on self-reported accounts from participants, whose immediate impressions and personal definitions of flow inevitably influence their responses.<sup>85</sup>

#### ♦ Lack of Standardized Quantitative Tools:

Schüler highlights that the questionnaires commonly used to assess flow often lack high consistency and reproducibility, thereby limiting their reliability in comparative or longitudinal studies. This variability weakens the strength of conclusions drawn from such research.<sup>86</sup>

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85 Jackson, S. A., & Marsh, H. W. (1996). Development and validation of a scale to measure optimal experience: The Flow State Scale. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 18(1), 17–35.

86 Schüler, J. (2010). Flow experience and achievement motivation. In *Advances in Flow Research* (pp. 215–231). Springer.

## 2. Cultural Challenges and Individual Differences

### ♦ A Western-Centric Concept:

The theory of flow was developed within a Western cultural framework that highly values individual achievement and competitive performance. This emphasis may not align with cultures that prioritize collectivism and communal harmony. Comparative studies have revealed clear differences in how flow is understood and experienced between Western and Eastern societies.<sup>87</sup>

### ♦ Personality Variability and Dispositions:

Researchers have noted that some individuals, due to inherent personality traits, are less inclined to seek challenges or engage deeply in activities, making the universal application of the flow concept somewhat unrealistic.<sup>88</sup>

## 3. Limitations of Sustainability and Effectiveness Under Pressure

### ♦ The Transient Nature of Flow:

Flow is often criticized as a fleeting state dependent on ideal conditions, which can be difficult to maintain consistently in everyday life.<sup>89</sup>

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87 Delle Fave, A., & Massimini, F. (2005). The relevance of subjective well-being to social policies: Optimal experience and tailored intervention. *Social Indicators Research*, 65(1), 1–36.

88 Swann, W. B., Rentfrow, P. J., & Guinn, J. S. (2012). Self-verification: The search for coherence. In *Handbook of Self and Identity* (pp. 362–385). Guilford Press.

89 Keller, J., & Bless, H. (2008). Flow and regulatory compatibility: An experimental approach to the flow model of intrinsic motivation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(2), 196–209.

#### ♦ **Vulnerability Under Stress:**

High stress levels or multitasking significantly reduce the likelihood of entering a flow state, particularly in demanding work environments.<sup>90</sup>

### **4. Practical Criticisms in Workplace Environments**

#### ♦ **Mismatch Between Job Nature and Flow:**

Not all tasks or professional settings are conducive to activating the flow experience. Routine or highly administrative roles often lack the sufficient challenge or autonomy necessary for flow to occur.<sup>91</sup>

#### ♦ **Excessive Immersion and Loss of Balance:**

Some studies have highlighted that despite its benefits, flow can sometimes propel individuals toward overwork, which negatively impacts their social and family lives.<sup>92</sup>

### **5. Effectiveness of Flow in Enhancing Psychological Well-being**

#### ♦ **The Complex Relationship Between Flow and Happiness:**

Not all research shows a straightforward or strong correlation between flow and overall happiness, suggesting that flow may not always serve as a reliable indicator of well-being.<sup>93</sup>

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90 Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*. Basic Books.

91 Fullagar, C. J., & Kelloway, E. K. (2009). Flow at work: An experience sampling approach. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 82(3), 595–615.

92 Eisenberger, R., Jones, J. R., Stinglhamber, F., Shanock, L., & Randall, A. T. (2005). Flow experiences at work: For high need achievers alone? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(7), 755–775.

93 Keller, J., & Bless, H. (2008). *Flow and regulatory compatibility: An experimental approach to the flow model of intrinsic motivation*. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(2), 196–209.

### ♦ Using Flow as an Escape Mechanism:

Some studies suggest that flow may at times be employed as a means of escaping reality, rather than confronting psychological or social challenges head-on.<sup>94</sup>

## ► Conclusion

These critiques illuminate aspects of flow theory that require reconsideration and refinement—whether in terms of measurement, practical application, or cultural framing. They also reveal the theory's limitations in offering a fully comprehensive and enduring explanation of psychological well-being. From this perspective arises the need for a broader vision, one that reinterprets flow not merely as a mental state, but as a spiritual journey transcending individualism toward purification of the soul and connection with the Divine.

In the following section, we will explore this expanded understanding by presenting the Islamic alternative conception of flow, framing it as a holistic, faith-infused experience.

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94 Schüler, J. (2010). *Flow experience and achievement motivation*. In *Advances in flow research* (pp. 215–231). Springer.

## Part Two: The Purifying Flow — Annihilation in God and Presence in Life

### **An Introduction to the Purifying Flow: Journeying Toward God in a Moment of Complete Presence**

In the earlier chapters of this book, our journey began with the question of identity: *Who are you?* We paused to reflect on the truth of the human being as a creation infused with the divine breath of God's spirit—innately inclined toward perfection and entrusted with the sacred responsibility of stewarding the earth in the spirit of servitude.

We then delved deeper into the nature of the self, exploring its gradual formation through programming, behavior, and spiritual striving. Our reflection led us to the moment of inner harmony—where the soul, mind, body, and heart align in unison.

In the chapter ***“Journeying Toward God,”*** we examined how this self-awareness unfolds into a lifelong path, along which the believer advances toward their Lord through pillars of intention, excellence (Ihsan), balance, and generous giving.

But what transpires when this journey reaches a state of maturity and wholeness?

What unfolds when the heart, mind, and deed converge in a single moment—when a person lives their entire existence in a profound **presence with God**?

Here begins the experience of the **“Purifying Flow”** — a spiritual state in which the meanings of the journey manifest vividly, and life unfolds with an unceasing energy of sincerity and tranquility.

In Islam, the state of flow is understood as more than a fleeting psychological condition or a feeling of immersion in a particular activity. It is part of the believer’s ongoing journey toward closeness to God, requiring deep engagement and a continual striving to embody servitude.

This closeness is not an abstract or illusory concept; rather, it is a real and formative nearness that springs from the depth of faith in God. It culminates in a level of servitude where the Muslim experiences a state of **“annihilation in God”** (fanā’ fi Allāh), liberating them from all earthly constraints—whether desires, psychological pressures, or social burdens.

From this perspective, the state of flow in Islam is not a final goal in itself, but a means through which the individual expresses their connection to God and detachment from all others. Every moment and every action, no matter how small, becomes a gateway through which the believer senses divine proximity and manifests absolute servitude.

As Imam Ali (peace be upon him) said: ***"I have never seen anything except that I saw God before it, after it, with it, and within it."***

Thus, the believer perceives nothing in this universe in isolation from God and constantly holds in awareness that their deeds are, in essence, a form of worship.

## **Understanding Flow as Immersion in Servitude:**

In Islam, the concept of "Purifying Flow" closely aligns with the station of *Ihsan* (excellence in worship), as expressed in the Prophet's (peace be upon him) hadith:

***"Ihsan is to worship God as if you see Him; for if you do not see Him, indeed He sees you."***

At this elevated station, the believer is not merely a performer of worship but is deeply immersed in divine presence, fully absorbed in the moment, unified in feeling, action, and purpose—so much so that the self disappears, and the whole being is present with God.

This state of **Ihsan** represents the highest manifestation of the Purifying Flow, where every moment and every deed is seen as an opportunity for closeness, and every activity becomes a field for spiritual purification.

Thus, spiritual flow becomes a means of **turning to God while fully engaged in life**, not withdrawing from it; a way to experience tranquility **amidst motion**, not in its absence.

Imam Ali (peace be upon him) embodied this state in its most beautiful form when he gave away his ring while bowing in prayer—a moment of pure servitude that did not distract him from awareness of others but rather deepened it. With generosity extended at the peak of humility, God revealed about him the verse:

***“Your ally is none but Allah and [therefore] His Messenger and those who have believed — those who establish prayer and give zakah, and they bow [in worship].”*** (Al-Ma’idah, 55)

It is as if God is telling us: this is how fanaa (annihilation in Him) truly is — complete presence with Him, accompanied by compassionate awareness of His creation, all in the same moment.

As we explained in the chapter “Journey to God,” purification (tazkiyah) is not a silent devotional journey but a living path practiced through one’s work, relationships, reform, giving, and conscious engagement with life’s details. In this context, Purifying Flow is the moment when all these details merge into a unified spiritual feeling, transforming the world around you into a field of worship—not a distraction, but a means of drawing closer.

From the Islamic perspective, life is not a burden on the soul; it is the arena of integrated servitude. Immersion in work, relationships, or worldly tasks does not come between the believer and their Lord, as long as the intention is pure, awareness is present, and the heart is connected.

God says: ***“Men whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allah.”*** (An-Nur, 37)

## Flow as Spiritual Liberation and Annihilation in the Pleasure of Allah

One of the defining characteristics of Purifying Flow in Islam is that it is not merely a psychological immersion but a profound liberation from the servitude of the self, desires, and attachments that weigh down the heart and hinder its presence with God. The lighter the burden of desires becomes and the more the veils over the self are lifted, the more the heart is revealed to the divine light and begins to dwell in a state of serenity that springs from annihilation in the pleasure of Allah.

This liberation does not mean withdrawal from life; rather, it is the exact opposite — a conscious immersion in life with a spirit purified for Allah, unrestrained by hope or disturbed by expectation. The story of the People of the House of Prophethood (Ahl al-Bayt) exemplifies this meaning most eloquently. Imam Ali, Fatimah al-Zahra, Hasan, and Husayn (peace be upon them) vowed to fast, and when the time for breaking the fast came, for three consecutive nights, they preferred a needy person, then an orphan, then a captive over themselves, despite being at the peak of hunger and fatigue. In their giving, they said only:

***“We feed you only for the sake of Allah; we desire from you neither reward nor thanks.”*** (Al-Insan, 9)

This Qur’anic verse is not merely a statement of intention but a declaration of a spiritual state of complete liberation from the self and total dissolution in the will of Allah. They gave not because they owned, but because Allah loved, and they loved to love as He loves.

Here, flow becomes a moment of **voluntary annihilation in God**—not negating the self, but purifying it; not excluding the world, but illuminating it with the light of servitude. This is the essence of

**“purifying liberation”**: to live in this world freed from its chains, to give without expectation, to act without attachment, to be present in everything—but solely for the sake of Allah.

As Allah says: “Allah is the Protector of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into the light.” (Al-Baqarah, 257)

In this flow, a person no longer oscillates between desires and life’s fluctuations but transforms into a luminous being, moving from Allah and toward Allah, with absolute inner freedom and a heart filled solely with His light.

## **Activating Purifying Flow in Daily Life and Achieving Spiritual Balance**

After exploring how purifying flow represents a state of deep immersion in servitude and liberation from attachments, we now turn to its practical realm: daily life in all its details.

In Islam, true devotion is not seen as withdrawal from the world, but rather as a refined art of living **in** this world, **for** Allah, and with Allah.

Here manifests the skill of spiritual balance, which is not measured by how much a person possesses or renounces, but by how consciously they engage with what they have, their perspective on what they use, and their direction in what they seek.

As Allah says: ***“And seek, through what Allah has given you, the Hereafter; but do not forget your share of the world.”*** (Al-Qasas, 77)

This balance does not mean dividing life into “religious” and “worldly” compartments, but rather integrating the two into a single current of conscious presence, where every action becomes an opportunity for spiritual elevation.

A person works, masters their craft, enjoys, creates, invests, and interacts—not merely because these are life's demands, but because they see in them means of broader worship, fields for purification, and ways to enact divine stewardship on earth.

And here the *Tad flow* (spiritual flow) of purification reaches its peak:

When the heart does not detach from God despite the busyness of activity, and the intention does not get lost amid tasks, nor do desires overpower the spiritual direction, but the person continues through life's details with a steadfast spiritual compass, knowing that all they hold is a trust. If they manage this trust with a sincere intention, they enter a state of silent yet profound servitude.

Thus, wealth does not contradict asceticism, enjoyment does not conflict with piety, and possession does not oppose detachment. The secret of purification lies in possessing what you wish without letting anything possess you. It lies in immersing oneself in the cultivation of this world without dissolving within it.

This is the secret to which the noble verse refers, describing those who unite monotheism with uprightness, intention with action, becoming in the presence of the angels—secure and tranquil—in this life and the Hereafter:

Indeed, those who say, ***“Our Lord is Allah” and then remain steadfast—the angels will descend upon them, [saying], “Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised.***

***We [angels] are your allies in this life and in the Hereafter.”***  
(Fussilat, 30–31)

## Critique of the Western Theory and the Islamic Response

When reviewing the Western theory of flow, we notice that it has made an important contribution to understanding moments of deep focus and psychological satisfaction. It sought to describe states of immersion in activities that give a person a sense of meaning and fulfillment. However, despite this appreciation, the theory has not been free from a number of scientific and philosophical criticisms, both from within the field of psychology and beyond.

In the first part of this chapter, we addressed the most prominent of these criticisms, which centered on difficulties of measurement, cultural variations, and the temporary nature of the experience, the limited applicability in practical life, and its unclear relationship to true well-being.

Because the Islamic approach we present here does not merely imitate the Western concept or “Islamize” it superficially, but rather re-grounds the idea from its roots within a comprehensive monotheistic vision, it is important to examine how this approach responds to each criticism—not by mere defense, but through constructive internal development.

In the following sections, we will discuss each of these issues and demonstrate how the concept of **tazkiyah flow**—when built upon the principles of servitude, sincere intention, and continuous connection with God—not only overcomes those critiques but also opens a deeper horizon for understanding the human being, the meaning of presence, and the purposes of striving.

## ► **First Criticism: The Difficulty of Accurately Measuring Flow**

One of the most prominent criticisms directed at the Western theory of flow is that it describes a subjective internal state that cannot be precisely captured by objective methods. It is based on feelings such as “immersion,” “engagement,” and “loss of sense of time,” all of which are experiences difficult to measure with rigorous experimental tools. This weakens the theory’s validity for applied and comparative research, making it vulnerable to mood-based or projective interpretations.

Some researchers have attempted to develop quantitative tools—such as the Flow State Scale—but these tools fundamentally rely on self-reports, which are susceptible to mood influences or cultural expectations. For example, one person may exaggerate their sense of satisfaction, while another may lack the language or awareness to describe a flow moment, even though they actually experience it.

### ♦ **Islamic Response: Measuring Flow through Tazkiya (Spiritual Purification) Criteria**

In the Islamic perspective, “Tazkawi Flow” is not measured by fleeting emotions but by the fulfillment of clear spiritual and behavioral standards connected to the essence of the experience: pure intention (niyyah), presence with God, harmony between speech and action, and the achievement of positive internal and external effects.

#### **1. Criterion of Intention and Sincerity:**

Sincerity (ikhlas) in Islam is a precise scale that distinguishes between righteous and unrighteous deeds, tied to the purpose behind the action rather than its outward form. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

***“Actions are judged by intentions, and every person will have what they intended.”***

Thus, the Tazkawi Flow can be considered present when an action is performed with a clear intention solely for God, not for self, others, or any worldly gain.

## **2. Criterion of Internal Consistency and Behavioral Reflection:**

Flow is also measured by its effects: Is there an inner tranquility? Is satisfaction felt with God rather than with the outcome? Has this influenced ethical behavior, tone of voice, or the quality of performance?

Thus, the *Tazkawi Flow* becomes a tangible experience, even if it is not verbally expressed.

## **3. Acts of Worship as an Applied Model for Measuring Flow:**

In prayer, for example, flow can be recognized not by fleeting emotions but by the degree of heart’s presence, the lasting impact of the prayer after it ends, and whether it brings about inner transformation.

God says: ***“And it is [truly] difficult except for those who humble themselves [in worship].”*** (Al-Baqarah, 45)

This opens the door to understanding that Islamic flow can be evaluated through its fruits, not mere verbal declarations.

## **♦ Summary of the Response:**

Whereas Western theories grapple with the challenge of precisely defining and measuring the moment of flow—often limited to fleeting feelings and subjective accounts—the Islamic perspective

shifts the focus from ephemeral emotions to profound meaning, from transient states to sincere intention, and from personal reporting to tangible, transformative impact.

In this view, the concept of *Tazkiyah Flow* transcends mere mood or momentary experience; it embodies a spiritual state manifested through the purity of intention, the tranquility of the soul, the refinement of character, and the harmony between one's actions and their divine purpose.

Thus, this experience attains a deeper reality and a more rigorous measure, surpassing the psychological constructs of the Western framework, as it is anchored in the eternal and measurable fruits of inner purification and outward righteousness.

## ► **Second Critique: Cultural and Individual Variations in Interpreting Flow**

A fundamental critique directed at the Western theory of flow is its emergence within a specific cultural milieu—one that is individualistic, secular, and performance-driven—where success is measured by achievement, and happiness is understood as a private mental state disconnected from community or existential purpose.

Consequently, numerous studies have shown that the interpretation of the flow experience varies significantly across cultures and spiritual worldviews. For instance, many Asian or traditional societies may not regard individual accomplishment or momentary pleasure as valid measures of fulfillment; instead, they often elevate discipline, spiritual proximity to the Divine, or familial harmony as higher expressions of true contentment.

This cultural disparity challenges the universality of the flow concept and exposes it to criticism as a Western-centric perspective cloaked in the guise of a universal human experience.

## ♦ **Islamic Response: The Tazkiyah Flow as a Universal, Transcultural Framework**

From the Islamic perspective, the concept of flow is not rooted in the customs of a particular people or the philosophy of a single civilization. Rather, it springs from the innate human nature (*fitrah*) and the divine objectives of revelation, making it applicable across all times and places—regardless of one’s social, ethnic, or economic background.

### **1. Islamic Values Transcend the Local to Embrace the Universal:**

The core values underpinning the tazkiyah flow experience are sincere intention, excellence in action (*ihsan*), contentment with God’s decree, and responsibility toward oneself and others. These are innate values shared by all humanity, requiring no specific civilizational allegiance. As God Almighty declares: “[*He has*] **created mankind in the best stature, (*fitrah*) that which Allah has ordained for them.**” (Qur’an, Ar-Rum: 30)

### **2. Balancing the Individual and the Community:**

While Western flow theory tends to emphasize personal pleasure or individual achievement, Islam offers a model where presence before God harmonizes with benevolence toward creation. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “***The best of people are those most beneficial to others.***”

Thus, the tazkiyah flow is fulfilled only when its impact on the self aligns with a positive effect on one’s community.

### **3. Individual Diversity Within a Unified Framework:**

In Islam, people are not required to follow a single, uniform path; rather, all are called to turn toward God through their unique talents,

roles, and circumstances. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: *“Every person is facilitated according to what they were created for.”*

This opens the door for the tazkiyah flow to manifest uniquely in each individual's natural domain, without coercion or a rigid template.

### ♦ **Summary of the Response:**

While Western flow theory struggles with the challenge of cultural variability and the difficulty of generalizing a psychological experience, the Islamic perspective transcends these issues by grounding itself in the shared human fitrah, relying on divine values universally applicable to all communities, and embracing individual diversity within the encompassing framework of servitude to God.

Thus, the tazkiyah flow becomes not only compatible with culture but illuminates it from within, bestowing upon it a unifying, monotheistic dimension.

### ▶ **Critique Three: The Challenge of Sustaining the Flow State**

One of the fundamental criticisms directed at the Western theory of flow is the inherently fleeting nature of this state—despite its beauty and effectiveness. Flow tends to emerge in exceptional moments when skill and challenge align perfectly, or during favored activities where specific conditions are met. Yet, the moment this delicate balance is disturbed—whether by routine, psychological pressure, or distraction—the experience evaporates, replaced by fragmentation or boredom.

Thus, sustaining flow is regarded as a significant challenge within the Western model. It is often seen as a rare phenomenon difficult to maintain consistently in daily life, especially in work or study environments characterized by repetition and stress.

## ♦ **Islamic Response: From Fleeting Flow to Continuous “Servitude”**

In the Islamic perspective, flow is not merely an emotional state dependent on specific conditions, but rather an integral part of a renewed way of life rooted in sincere intention, remembrance of God, spiritual orientation, and self-transcendence.

### **1. The Concept of Servitude as a Permanent Framework for Flow:**

Islam does not separate worldly activity from spirituality; instead, it sanctifies every moment of life as an opportunity for worship, provided it is coupled with a pure intention. As God declares in the Quran:

*“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.”*  
(Adh-Dhariyat, 56)

This verse situates flow within a realm of continuous possibility, where every movement—from labor to interpersonal interaction—can become a path to divine proximity.

### **2. Renewal of Intention Revives the Flow:**

In Islam, one is not required to feel a constant spiritual ecstasy; rather, what is demanded is sincerity in intention and its continual renewal. Thus, the continuity of flow is not measured by what one *feels* moment to moment, but by what one *directs oneself toward* and *perseveres in*. This makes the spiritual flow (tazkiyah flow) a state that is renewed with every action, every day, rather than lost with the passing moment.

### **3. Daily Acts of Worship as Scheduled Flow Stations:**

One of the profound wisdoms behind the obligatory acts of worship—prayer, fasting, and remembrance—is that they repeatedly return a

person to their spiritual center, enabling them to experience “miniature moments of spiritual flow” daily, preventing estrangement from true meaning.

For example, prayer is renewed five times each day, remembrance (dhikr) is accessible at all times, and fasting restores balance between desires and willpower. Through these, the tazkiyah flow becomes a continuously regenerating state rather than a fleeting experience at risk of fading away.

### ♦ **Summary of the Response:**

While Western theory views flow as a rare and fragile state, Islam reconstructs the experience from its roots by making servitude to God the context that generates flow, renews its energy, and sustains it through intention and worship.

With each new moment, each new prayer, each new act, and each renewed intention—the flow is revitalized, not as a mere feeling, but as an enduring existential stance on the path of drawing closer to God.

### ► **Critique Four: The Limited Applicability of Flow in Work Environments and Real-World Constraints**

In Western flow theory, flow is often idealized as a state linked primarily to creative pursuits, leisure activities, or intrinsically motivating tasks. Routine daily work, repetitive job functions, or high-pressure professional environments are frequently seen as ill-suited for flow experiences because they lack the fundamental condition: a balance between challenge and skill, or the presence of intrinsic motivation.

Consequently, many practical applications of flow theory in workplace settings are viewed as limited or elitist. They may not align with

economic or social contexts where workers have little freedom to choose their tasks or modify their work conditions with ease.

- ♦ **Islamic Perspective: Transforming Work into Worship, Regardless of Its Nature**

In the Islamic worldview, the measure of spiritual flow (tazkiyah flow) is not found in the level of excitement or stimulation a task provides, but rather in the sincerity of intention, the devotion, the mastery, and the conscious orientation toward God in every act—no matter how simple or repetitive it may appear.

### **1. Work as Worship in Its Own Right:**

Islam does not tie the value of work to market worth or personal enjoyment. Instead, it anchors it in purpose and establishes it as a means of spiritual purification and fulfilling one's duty. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: ***"Indeed, Allah loves that when anyone of you does a job, he perfects it."***

This profound teaching opens the door to flow for every individual, in every profession and every task, on the condition that they perform their work with excellence and pure intention—not waiting for extraordinary challenges or ideal conditions.

### **2. Gradation in Servitude Fits the Diversity of Life's Contexts**

Islam does not demand that every environment be stimulating or inspiring. Rather, it acknowledges that life inevitably carries its burdens and challenges. In such circumstances, what matters most is a pure intention, patience, and ihsan (excellence and kindness)—these become the true measures of closeness to God, even in the simplest of tasks.

The prophets themselves engaged in humble professions: our Prophet Dawud (David, peace be upon him) was a blacksmith; Musa (Moses, peace be upon him) tended sheep; and our beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was a shepherd before becoming a merchant. Yet, through their sincere devotion, they transformed their daily work into a sanctuary—achieving profound presence and connection with God within every act.

### **3. Balancing Productivity and Inner Well-being**

Islam neither encourages excessive immersion in work to the point of self-destruction, nor does it advocate abandoning work under the guise of asceticism. Rather, it calls for a delicate balance:

*“And seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world.”*  
(Al-Qasas, 77)

This equilibrium transforms work into a means of servitude rather than separation from it, making the experience of spiritual flow possible even amid the constraints of reality.

#### **♦ Summary of the Response:**

While Western theory views ordinary work environments as impediments to the flow experience, the Islamic perspective reconstructs this experience fundamentally: any work—no matter its nature—becomes an opportunity for worship, purification, and spiritual flow, provided that the intention is sincere, the performance is excellent, and the connection with God remains constant.

Thus, one does not require a creative job or an ideal environment to enter a state of flow; rather, all that is needed is a heart connected to the Divine, a pure intention, and skilled hands.

## ► Critique Five: The Effectiveness of Flow in Enhancing Psychological Well-Being

Although flow theory is regarded as a cornerstone of positive psychology, many researchers have raised questions about the extent to which flow genuinely promotes true well-being.

Flow—as conceptualized in Western theory—is often tied to pleasurable activities, personal achievements, or heightened states of concentration. However, experiencing these moments does not necessarily equate to living a more balanced or truly happy life.

In fact, some studies have shown that momentary satisfaction does not always lead to inner tranquility, and that deep immersion in a task—despite its benefits—can sometimes serve as an escape mechanism from confronting reality or profound pain, rather than a means to overcome it.

Moreover, the very notion of “well-being” in Western culture often remains relative—either material or psychological—without connection to an existential purpose or spiritual dimension.

### ♦ Islamic Response: Well-Being as Tranquility Rooted in Servitude

In Islam, psychological well-being is not perceived as a fleeting feeling of contentment or pleasure but is understood as a profound inner peace arising from connection to God, satisfaction with Him, and certainty in His presence.

#### 1. Al-Tazkawi Flow Does Not Aim for Pleasure but for Tranquility:

While the Western approach emphasizes psychological pleasure or momentary harmony, Islam focuses on achieving heart’s tranquility, which is deeper and more enduring.

***“Those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of Allah. Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find comfort”***  
(Ar-Ra’d, 28)

This tranquility is not tied to the nature of the work or challenge but to the reality of God’s presence in the heart, making al-tazkawi flow a stable internal state, unaffected by fluctuating circumstances.

## **2. Not Escaping Reality but Facing It by the Light of God:**

When a person immerses themselves in a hobby or activity to escape pain or anxiety, this is not al-tazkawi flow but a disguised distraction. In contrast, al-tazkawi flow is immersion in confrontation, not escape; it is walking the path of servitude, not neglecting it.

Allah says: ***“O mankind, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet it”*** (Al-Insan, 6)

The luminous flow is sincere striving in the way of God, transforming pain into closeness, weakness into supplication, and suffering into a blessed passage toward the Divine Encounter.

### **♦ Practical Example:**

A man suffers from severe psychological pressure due to losing his job. He resorts to playing video games or binge-watching series for hours as an escape from feelings of failure and fear of the future. This immersion is not a healthy flow but a disguised distraction that stalls his spiritual journey and deepens his internal sense of loss.

In contrast, another person facing the same experience chooses to sit with himself in sincere solitude, reviewing his condition, increasing his prayers, and reflecting on the verse: ***“Indeed, you are laboring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet it”*** (Al-Insan, 6)

He understands that this pain is a path, not an obstacle.

He moves toward action, even if just a small step: rewriting his resume, improving a skill, seeking advice, and sincerely beseeching God to make this hardship a means of growth rather than decline.

This is al-tazkawi flow: confronting reality with the light of reliance and effort, not drowning in consumption and escape.

### **3. The Criterion of Well-Being in Islam:**

In Islam, the measure of well-being is not achievement, but contentment; not fleeting excitement, but enduring inner peace. It is the state of living every moment of life with a heart that softly prays: *“O Allah, grant me satisfaction with Your decree, and bless me in what You have destined, so that I neither hasten what You have delayed nor delay what You have hastened.”*

#### **♦ Summary of the Response:**

The Islamic perspective goes beyond merely addressing the limitations of the Western notion linking flow and well-being. It offers a broader, deeper understanding of well-being rooted in faith, contentment, and certainty. Flow becomes not an end in itself, but a sacred means toward attaining a tranquil unity with the Divine—a peace that is steadfast and profound, far surpassing transient moments of pleasure.

Thus, flow is transformed from a mere experience of elation into a continuous journey toward meaning, clarity, and spiritual serenity.

# Chapter Conclusion: Flow as Holistic Servitude and a Way of Life

Thus, after tracing the concept of flow in its modern psychological framing, observing its impact on achievement and satisfaction, and then re-rooting it within the spiritual path of purification (tazkiyah), we arrive at the essence of the difference between the two models:

It is not merely in the conditions of focus or the triggers of accomplishment, but in the orientation of the heart, the reference of presence, and the meaning of striving.

To summarize this profound transformation—from “mental immersion” to “faithful self-annihilation,” from a fleeting moment of performance to the enduring station of *ihsan* (excellence in worship)—the following table highlights the key distinctions between the psychological theory of flow and the spiritually integrated concept of flow in the Islamic worldview.

**Comparative Table: From Flow Theory to the Purifying Flow (Tazkiyah Flow)**

Comparison Aspect	Flow Theory (Psychological Perspective)	Islamic Purifying Flow (Tazkiyah Perspective)
Theoretical Foundation	Positive Psychology – Optimal state of focus and immersion	Spiritual Purification Framework – The station of <i>Ihsan</i> and presence with God
Primary Objective	Happiness, satisfaction, and peak performance in activity	Annihilation in God, embodying servitude in every moment

Comparison Aspect	Flow Theory (Psychological Perspective)	Islamic Purifying Flow (Tazkiyah Perspective)
Nature of Flow	Mental immersion in a beloved task – loss of time and self-awareness	Deep spiritual presence with God – integration of intention, action, and purpose
Source of Meaning	Enjoyment of the activity itself ( <i>autotelic experience</i> )	God’s pleasure, awareness of Divine proximity, fulfilling the purpose of servitude
Flow Triggers	Clear goals, balanced challenge and skill, feedback	Pure intention, remembrance ( <i>dhikr</i> ), reliance ( <i>tawakkul</i> ), excellence ( <i>ihsan</i> ), and Divine companionship
Continuity	Exceptional moments arising when conditions are met	A continuous state renewed by intention, worship, and remembrance at all times and places
Attitude Toward Work and Tasks	Tasks as means for enjoyment and focused engagement	Every worldly act (when sincere) is worship and a realm for spiritual flow
Relationship with Others	Individual or collective – enhancing cooperative performance	Flow encompasses giving, altruism, and serving creation for the sake of God
Expected Outcomes	High performance, happiness, creativity	Tranquility, inner peace, steadfastness, spiritual purification, and a good end

This comparison reveals that flow, within the purifying (tazkiyah) vision, is far more than a mere mental state or psychological experience. It is the fruit of a mature inner journey, the outcome of a

sincerity that is renewed continually, and a direction firmly rooted in the pleasure of God.

While the psychological perspective pursues focus and enjoyment, the believer in the purifying vision seeks presence and contentment—an annihilation in God where the self dissolves into meaning, where work becomes prayer, prayer becomes action, and life itself is an unceasing act of worship.

Thus, this chapter does not conclude with a full stop, but rather opens onto a new line in the human journey with the Divine. Here converge all the meanings of this book—from innate nature to purification, from intention to striving—in a moment of inner clarity. It is a moment when the soul realizes, with heartfelt conviction, that what it has learned and pursued were not isolated stages but integral steps guiding it toward a new awareness: a moment of tranquility, a vivid remembrance of divine nearness, in which the heart is calmed and its direction straightened. ***“And that to your Lord is the finality.”***(An-Najm: 42)

Conclusion of Part Two:

# **From the Self to God — When Insight Blossoms**

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## **A Reflective Prelude — What Does It Truly Mean to Develop Your Self?**

Amidst the countless paths of self-development presented to us, the idea seems almost settled: to “develop” is to advance, to achieve, to master, to realize one’s potential. Yet, deep within, something in the human soul continues to ask: To where? And why? By what measure is this self being developed?

Is self-development about enhancing outward performance? Or is it about reshaping the self according to its true essence and ultimate purpose? Is it merely an accumulation of skills, or a sincere journey back to the origin of our innate nature?

For too long, we have been led to believe that the self is an entity to be trained, tamed, engineered, and managed... yet we have forgotten that it is a trust, not a project. That it is a means, not an end.

We have forgotten that the self was created to soar toward God, not to swell around itself.

In the second part of this book, we were not seeking ways to achieve higher emotional intelligence, deeper focus, or faster productivity. Rather, we were searching for how to be more truthful in our journey toward God—not how to perform better, but how to live with deeper meaning.

In this sense, the question of “self-development” ceases to be about skills or techniques, and instead becomes a matter of intention, purpose, and direction—the profound moment when the soul whispers, “O God, take my hand and lead me to You... make of me a self that knows You... and walks toward You.”

## **The Path We Have Taken — From Deconstruction to Reconstruction**

In this section, we did more than simply compare Western models with Islamic alternatives; we revisited the very framework upon which our self-awareness is built. We traced the thread that leads a person from understanding their needs, to uncovering their motives, to being fully present in the moment, and finally to holistic growth toward God.

We began with the pyramid that crowns many self-development theories: Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We discovered that its structure reflects an inverted view of humanity. In response, we proposed an integrative pyramid of needs founded on the law of authentic selfhood—where the self is realized in proportion to its harmony across four dimensions: the body, the mind, the heart, and the spirit.

Next, we examined the notion of the Law of Attraction—the idea that reality forms simply through desire. We challenged this, emphasizing that desire alone is insufficient; it must be accompanied by sincere effort and trust in God. Thus, consciousness shifts from self-centeredness to alignment with divine laws and submission to the Divine Will.

Next, we ventured into the realm of presence in time through the philosophy of **"The Power of Now."** We observed how this philosophy often severs a person from both their past and their destiny, offering instead a profound alternative: **The Power of Purposeful Presence.** Here, one inhabits the moment not to dissolve into it, but to fulfill their trust and responsibility before God.

We then reflected on meditation and mindfulness, discerning the subtle distinctions between mere focus and true attention, and between superficial awareness and genuine contemplation. The alternative we proposed is **"Conscious Reflection"**—a state that does not simply observe the moment, but dwells within it with insight, meaning, and constant remembrance of God.

In Chapter 13, we confronted the influence of **Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)**, which promises rapid self-transformation in mere minutes. We asserted that true transformation is not a commodity to be sold, but a sacred struggle to be earned through spiritual purification. Thus, we introduced Integrated Faith Programming (IFP), where every form of "programming" springs

from the servant's awareness of their Lord and their sincerity toward their innate nature.

Next, we addressed the concept of the **"growth mindset,"** which frames failure as an opportunity for learning. We expanded this horizon into what we call the **"tazkiyah growth mindset,"** where every test is not merely a lesson but a genuine chance to progress on the spiritual path.

In the final three chapters, we reached the pinnacle of depth. In Chapter 15, we questioned the nature of happiness, discovering it not within the realms of **"positive psychology,"** but rather in the science of **faith-based psychology.** Chapter 16 redefined intrinsic motivation through the lens of spiritual self-drive, and in Chapter 17, we reconstructed the state of **"complete immersion"** to become **tazkiyah flow** — a moment of total annihilation in the pleasure of God, transcending mere work or performance.

Thus, each chapter served as a bridge, guiding us from a materialistic, spiritless model to a spiritually rich paradigm full of meaning and direction...

From the self as a tool, to the self as a sacred trust.

## **The Overarching Messages of This Section**

What we have gained from this section is not merely a critique of existing models, nor a simple substitution of one technique for another. Rather, it is a gradual unveiling of the true nature of the journey for which we were created, and a realignment of the compass by which we navigate the quest for self-development.

While the titles and paths may vary, the core, profound messages that emerged are singular in essence—rooted in our innate nature and directed toward purification (tazkiyah):

**1. The self is not something to be developed, but a trust to be purified.**

All the talents and capacities we possess are not crafted solely to elevate ourselves, but to serve as means through which we come to know God and walk toward Him. Purification does not begin with techniques, but with honesty to the self, sincere intention, and acknowledgment of one's weaknesses.

**2. Happiness is not invented; it is granted to those who walk the path of truthfulness and balance.**

All the “positive psychology,” “mindfulness,” or “successful programming” offered to us sought serenity—but serenity in Islam is not merely the absence of anxiety, it is the heart's presence with God.

**3. The present moment is not a refuge to flee into—it is a trust we are entrusted with.**

*Now* is not everything, but it is the point at which your sincerity is tested: your truthfulness with your past, your hope for your future, and your striving toward your ultimate purpose.

**4. No model of development holds true value unless it is rooted in purpose.**

Even the most refined Western frameworks often stop at the thresholds of performance, adaptation, or emotional well-being. But we were searching for something deeper—for *meaning*. And we found it only when we returned to God... and returned to ourselves, guided by the light of our original nature.

## 5. The path to God is not reserved for a spiritual elite—it is a life’s calling, open to all who are sincere.

You need not be an ascetic, a mystic, or a scholar... it is enough to be honest in your intention, balanced in your journey, and genuinely seeking the Face of God.

This is the great message of this section: that self-development, when undertaken for the sake of God, becomes *tazkiyah*—sacred growth. And *tazkiyah*, when grounded in knowledge and insight, becomes a true journey toward the light.

## Returning to the First Chapter with New Eyes

When we began this book, we began from within.

We asked about our identity, our purpose, the laws of *fitrah*, the nature of the self, the journey of stewardship, the meaning of sincerity, the pursuit of balance, and the path that leads to God.

In that first section, we were rediscovering the human being as God intended: a soul animated by devotion, not merely a body striving for dominance.

Then came the second part—a quiet intellectual encounter with some of the most influential Western concepts shaping modern human consciousness.

We deconstructed them, examined them from within, understood what they offer... and what they take away.

But we did not remain there.

We returned—so we could purify our vision, reorient our awareness, and offer models rooted in *fitrah*, connected to God.

And now, as we draw this second section to a close, we do not close it on mere answers, but on a new insight. An insight that takes us back—not to the first section as a mere hurried introduction, but as a deep, authentic root whose fruits have matured throughout this part.

Look again. Reflect once more... You will discover that everything you have read here has been a repeated return to the origin—to your true essence, to the questions: “Who are you?” and “Why were you created?”—but seen through a different lens: a lens that has learned to compare, to deconstruct, to rebuild, and then to choose the path ahead.

## ■ When the Heart Returns to God

It is as if, in this final section, we were lighting the lanterns—one by one...

The lantern of *fitrah*, the lantern of purpose, the lantern of presence, the lantern of reflection.

And each lantern whispered the same truth:

Return to God... through yourself, not outside of it. Through your striving, not your wishing. Through your sincerity, not your pretense.

And here you are now—at the threshold of this contemplative journey’s end. You may not have found all the answers. But perhaps... you have drawn nearer to the *right question*—The question that begins within, And does not rest... until it returns to God.

The Book Conclusion

# From Knowledge to Divine Presence

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When the clamor of concepts quiets down, and the pursuit of achievement gently recedes... the old question remains, bare and unadorned as when it was first born: Who am I? And why am I here?

It is with this question that our journey began—not to chase quick answers, but to return inward, to that forgotten depth where meanings are forged and souls are built. And when we stood at the threshold of Zaynab (peace be upon her), we were not merely contemplating a heroic scene, but gazing upon a profound example

of a soul shaped by patience, faith, and sincere devotion to God. As if in her radiant silence, she whispered to us: If you wish to stand firm when life trembles... return to your true self, to your Lord, to the light that dwells within you.

Across the Pages of *No Limits*, We Walked Two Intertwined Paths

- ♦ **One path led inward**—to your fitrah, your identity, your purpose, and your spiritual and psychological composition.
- ♦ **The other led outward**—into a thoughtful confrontation with modern concepts: testing them, comparing them, and ultimately rebuilding them through the lens of revelation and the truth of the human being.

Through this dual journey, we came to realize that Islam does not offer superficial tools for self-development. Rather, it redefines the self itself: *Who am I? Why was I created? For whom do I strive?*

We witnessed how Islam presents a holistic and integrated vision of self-development—one that does not separate life from purpose, nor action from intention.

Instead, it turns every moment into a field of worship, and every sincere effort into a path that leads to God.

## ■ Balancing the Material and the Spiritual

In the Qur'an, you find no call to flee from the world—nor to dissolve entirely within it. Instead, you encounter a delicate balance: *“Seek, through what God has granted you, the Hereafter; and do not forget your share of this world.”* (Al-Qasas, 77)

Islam acknowledges the body—and honors it—yet never places it above the soul.

It teaches you how to seek provision, build the earth, and achieve... without losing your heart, your spirit, or your direction along the way.

This balance is precisely what distinguishes the Islamic vision from most Western theories.

For while many modern frameworks focus on one dimension and neglect the other—either indulging in materialism, or dissolving the human being into fleeting emotions without purpose, submission, or accountability—Islam invites you to a harmony that integrates both body and soul, effort and meaning, dunya and akhirah.

## **The Ultimate Purpose: Conscious Servanthood**

*“I did not create jinn and humankind except to worship Me.”*  
(Adh-Dhariyat, 56)

In this verse lies every key:

You are not merely a being made to produce—you are a servant made to love, to revere, and to journey.

True self-development does not lie solely in achievement, but in knowing your destination—and reshaping your life in light of nearness to God.

## **Tazkiyah: From Performance to Purification**

In the Islamic paradigm, self-development is not a trick, a skillset, or a training course.

It is a journey of purification—of removing what distorts your *fitrah*, and nurturing what you were innately created with: sincerity, modesty, resolve, and mercy.

*"He purifies them, and teaches them the Book and wisdom."*  
(Al-Baqarah, 151)

*Tazkiyah* is the essence—while knowledge and wisdom are the instruments that serve that essence.

This is why every act of worship in Islam—from prayer to fasting—is, at its heart, a path of purification that returns you to yourself... and then raises you toward God.

## ■ Inner Truth and Self-Harmony

In an age where masks multiply, being honest with oneself has become one of the rarest virtues. That is why *inner truthfulness* stands as a central concept in this book.

It is not merely the act of confessing—but the art of living in harmony with what you truly believe. It means achieving a balance between your mind, your heart, your body, and your soul... and allowing your *fitrah* to guide you when the world grows noisy with conflicting voices.

God described the Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him) with these words: *"Indeed, he was a man of truth and a prophet."* (Maryam, 41)

Such a title—*siddeeq*, a deeply truthful one—is only given to those whose inner and outer lives are in tune: In their striving and stillness, in their thoughts and emotions—they are one.

## ■ A Comprehensive and Practical Pathway

Islam does not merely theorize—it equips you with living, transformative tools. Prayer, zakat, fasting, supplication, remembrance, reflection, and striving... These are not empty rituals, but instruments for refining the self, aligning your path, and anchoring your presence with God.

As God says: ***“Then We put you on a path of command—so follow it.”*** (Al-Jathiyah, 18) The path is already there. What is required is not to reinvent yourself from scratch, but to walk the way that leads you home.

## ■ Stewardship and Responsibility

In Islam, you are not merely one who seeks salvation—You are entrusted with cultivating the earth. The self does not reach wholeness until it contributes to the restoration of its surroundings: in relationships, in behavior, in community.

As God declares: ***“It is He who made you successors upon the earth.”*** (Al-An’am, 165). Stewardship is not just an honor—it is a responsibility. It calls you to be a light for others, not a burden upon them.

## ■ Character as the Core of the Self

In the end, none of this can bear fruit—unless your character blossoms. Truthfulness, humility, patience, forgiveness, excellence... These are not outer displays; they are the very heart of self-development and the essence of true humanity. ***“I was only sent to perfect noble character.”*** With these words, the Prophet (PBUH) summarized the message, the principle, and the ultimate goal.

## ■ In Conclusion...

Through the pages of this book, we have seen that Islam does not merely offer alternatives to modern theories of self-development. It surpasses them—with a structure that is holistic, rooted in *fitrah*, saturated with meaning, and guided by purpose.

Self-development in Islam is neither luxury nor self-glorification. It is a path to God—and a journey into the very meaning of life.

## ■ A Final Invitation to the Reader

Now that you've journeyed through these pages, don't let the book close before you open a new chapter with yourself. Learn. Reflect. Try. Revisit. Practice. But before all else—**be honest with yourself**. And then... walk.

I pray that this book becomes a key to a new light within you—that it draws you nearer to your own soul, and to your Lord, and that your next steps be firm, conscious, and serene... on the path of *La Hudood*—the journey without limits.



## About The Author

# Abbas Al-Humaid

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An Arab writer and thinker whose journey bridges contemplation and action, uniting the search for meaning with a lifelong commitment to human development.

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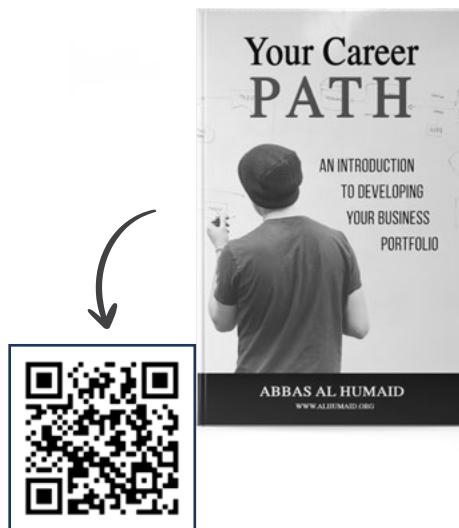
His book, “No Limits – Self-Development from an Islamic Perspective,” represents the essence of a journey spanning more than four decades—a quest to bridge the realms of knowledge and faith, method and meaning, redefining self-development through the lenses of human nature, divine purpose, and stewardship.

“What I write is not the fruit of a completed answer, but the outcome of a journey still ongoing — in pursuit of light and sincerity.”

Other Books by The Author

# Available for Free Download

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# Appendix

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1. **Stewardship:** It refers to the human role as a khalīfah (vicegerent) of Allah on Earth, entrusted with caring for creation responsibly.
2. **Vicegerency (Khilafah):** The belief that humans are Allah's representatives on Earth, entrusted to uphold justice and stewardship.
3. **Altruism (Al Ithar):** Selfless concern for others' welfare; prioritizing others' needs without seeking personal gain.
4. **The Realm of Barzakh:** The intermediate state between death and resurrection, where souls await final judgment.

5. **Reliance upon God (Tawakkul):** Trusting in Allah's plan and support while taking appropriate action.
6. **Self-Awareness:** Conscious recognition of one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, enabling personal insight.
7. **SWOT analysis:** Strategic tool evaluating Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats in individuals or organizations.
8. **Maslow's hierarchy of needs:** Pyramid model of human needs from basic (physiological) to self-actualization at the top.
9. **ERG Theory (by Clayton Alderfer):** Simplifies Maslow into Existence, Relatedness, and Growth needs that can be pursued simultaneously.
10. **The law of attraction:** The idea that positive or negative thoughts bring corresponding experiences into one's life.
11. **Positive psychology:** Study of strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive.
12. **Evolutionary psychology:** Field examining how evolved mental adaptations influence behavior and cognition.
13. **Faith-Based Psychology:** An integrative approach combining psychological principles with religious beliefs and spirituality.
14. **Innate nature — the fitrah:** The intrinsic, pure disposition with which humans are born, inclined toward faith and morality.
15. **The law of authenticity:** Principle encouraging alignment of one's actions and expressions with true inner self.

- 16. Growth Mindset theory:** Belief that abilities and intelligence can develop through effort, strategy, and learning.
- 17. The Broaden-and-Build Theory:** Positive emotions expand thinking and build lasting personal resources (by Fredrickson).
- 18. Divine causality (sunan):** The natural, consistent laws by which Allah governs the universe, predictable and purposeful.
- 19. The Law of Striving and Reliance:** Balancing personal effort (jihad) with reliance on Allah for results.
- 20. Du'ā (Supplication):** Personal prayer or invocation seeking Allah's help, guidance, or forgiveness.
- 21. Dhikr—the remembrance of God:** Repetitive phrases or reflections to keep one's heart mindful of Allah.
- 22. Glorifying God (tasbīḥ):** Declaring Allah's perfection, often through phrases like "Subḥānallāh".
- 23. Seeking His forgiveness (istighfār):** Asking Allah to pardon one's sins and shortcomings.
- 24. Mission-Driven Presence:** Living intentionally with purpose, aligning actions daily with a higher mission.
- 25. Conscious Reflection (tafakkur):** Deep thought and contemplation to derive insights and spiritual realization.
- 26. Meditation:** Focused mental practice aimed at cultivating calmness, clarity, or spiritual awareness.
- 27. Mindfulness:** Attentive awareness of the present moment, noticing thoughts and sensations without judgment.

- 28. Tawḥīd – monotheism:** Core Islamic belief in the oneness and absolute unity of Allah.
- 29. Tadabbur:** Deep reflection on Quranic verses to understand their wisdom, context, and application.
- 30. God-consciousness (taqwā):** Awareness and reverence of Allah guiding ethical behavior and inner vigilance.
- 31. Tawḥīdī creativity:** Innovation rooted in the concept of divine unity, reflecting spiritual insight in work.
- 32. NeuroLinguistic Programming (NLP):** Method exploring the relationship between language, thoughts, and behavior patterns to influence outcomes.
- 33. Integrated Faith Programming (IFP):** Holistic approach that embeds faith values into personal development and organizational culture.
- 34. Sensory representation systems:** It is an NLP concept categorizing how people internally process information via visual, auditory, kinesthetic modes.
- 35. Emotional anchoring:** Another NLP technique associating a specific stimulus with a desired emotional state for recall.
- 36. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** Psychotherapy that identifies and changes negative thought patterns influencing emotions and behaviors.
- 37. Striving against the self (mujāhada):** Inner struggle to overcome ego, desires, and moral weaknesses in pursuit of spiritual growth.

- 38. Tazkiyah (purification):** Cleansing the soul from impurities like ego, greed, envy, turning toward moral excellence.
- 39. “Purifying Growth Mindset” (PGM):** Fusion of mindset growth principles with spiritual purification and moral refinement.
- 40. Fixed Mindset:** Belief that traits and intelligence are innate and unchangeable, limiting learning and resilience.
- 41. Neuroscience:** Scientific study of the nervous system, especially the brain’s structure and function.
- 42. Neuroplasticity:** Brain’s capacity to form new neural connections and adapt through experience and learning.
- 43. Muhāsaba — self-accountability:** Regular self-assessment and reflection to align actions with values and correct one’s course.
- 44. PERMA model:** Framework (Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment) outlining wellbeing pillars.
- 45. VIA Character Strengths/StrengthsFinder:** Tools assessing individual character strengths to guide personal and professional growth.
- 46. SelfDetermination Theory:** Motivation theory emphasizing autonomy, competence, and relatedness as psychological needs.
- 47. Islamic Spiritual Motivation Perspective (ISP):** Framework integrating Islamic values to inspire and sustain spiritual motivation.
- 48. The Theory of Flow:** State of deep absorption and performance when challenge and skill are balanced (by Csikszentmihalyi).



## About The Author

# Abbas Al-Humaid

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