

Special Article

Management of Anxiety and Depression: An Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

Under the title of “Sudd-ul-Hamm” or repelling worries Ibn -al -Quayim (IQM) made his contribution in managing what we now diagnose as anxiety and depression.

IQM defined Hamm as worries in the heart about possible future threats and /or distress because of past afflictions

Ibn al-Qayyim’s psychotherapeutic theory may be compiled as follows:

- 1- Human nature is characterized by a will to satisfy needs and desires
- 2- Human behavior is characterized by successive endeavors to satisfy these desires. Prophet Mohammed peace be upon him is reported to have said that the truest of names are al-Harith and al-Humam.
- 3- Humans are amenable to suffering distress because of loss and / or worry about possible future afflictions
- 4- Emotional well-being depends on (daf’ul-ham) which may roughly translate as repelling frustration.
- 5- Al-hamm corresponds to both anxiety and depression as Ibn al-Qayyim refers repeatedly to worries of past losses and future worries.
- 6- The best defense is always to have recourse to Allah.

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- 7- Having recourse to Allah is emphasized primarily in the internalization of the articles of faith and the conceptualization of the five pillars of Islam including Salat (Prayers)
- 8- Thus, Salah as an exemplary session of mindfulness carried out at least five times a day is a perfect exercise with all the requirements of distraction-free order where calm and serenity is the norm, lowering the gaze and confining all the senses to the prayer tasks at hand: A typical manifestation of mindfulness. The prophetic Hadith goes “come to salah with tranquility and dignity”
- 9- But of course, there is more to salat and to components of other acts of worship than sheer mindfulness. Their benefits go way beyond sheer ridding oneself of despair or psychopathology. Acts of worship are ladders of ascension to higher levels of spiritual experience and communion with the Almighty. Acts of worship and observance of religious injunctions have always been associated with the consummation of character. It can be said that IQA’s theory of motivation has bridged the gap between psychology and ethics

Keywords: Islamic Perspective, Anxiety, Depression, Ibn -al -Quayim, Psychotherapeutic theory.

Introduction

Ibn Qayyim Al -Jawziyya (ابن قيم الجوزية) (IQA), also known as Ibn al-Qayyim (1292-1350 CE) (691-751 AH), was an outstanding Islamic scholar during the Mamluk era (1250-1517 CE). The Mamluk era inherited the knowledge treasures of the five hundred years long golden age of the Abbasid renaissance (750- 1258 CE). He played a prominent role in the intellectual debates that were hotly disputed among schools of Sufism, Rationalists (Al Mutakalimin), Jurists and Philosophers. He is generally considered a reformer who emphasized religiosity as an individual experience which leads to sincere moral purification, propriety of conduct and ever-abiding divine observance. This article is about the concepts of IQA in the management of anxiety and depression which he called *Hamm* (worries) and *Hazan* (Sadness/ Sorrow)

The era of Ibn Qayyim Al -Jawziyya (IQA)

In the golden age of the Abbasid renaissance, five hundred years before IQA was born, an all-encompassing movement started sweeping across all fields of intellectual inquiry not only in the areas of Quran and Hadith studies but also life sciences, medicine, chemistry, math, astronomy literature as well as social sciences. Famous compositions of philosophers of antiquity from Greek, Indian and Chinese cultures were translated and examined. Muslim scholars learned liberally from other civilizations but were always able to maintain their originality. A widely circulated Hadith in Islamic literature goes (wisdom is the lost property of the believer) was narrated by ibn Maja and al Tirmithi, though not decisively accepted as authentic Hadith yet it was extensively considered as a major motivation for Islamic scholarship. By maintaining their originality Early Muslim scholars seem to be confident that they lend wealth of wisdom more than they borrow. One glaring example of their areas of intellectual excellence is spiritual, moral and psychological well-being.

IQA came at a time when the science of hadith was well established. The library of his time was proliferating with manuscripts of Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawood, al-Tirmithi, al- Nassi. He was preceded by published exegesis of the Holy Quran including al-Tabari (839-923, al-Qurtubi (1214-1273) and was roughly contemporaneous with the famous Qur'anic exegetist Imam Ibn Kathir (1302-1373).

Not only the authoritative Islamic sources were facilitated to IQA but also precursor works on ethics, education and emotional health. These precursor works included the memorial

compositions of Ibn al-Muquaffa, al-Jahiz, al-Razi, al-Farabi, Ibn Miskawaihi, Ibn Hazm, Al-Gazali, Ibn Taymiyah and Ibn Al Jozi. All that made IQA the commemorative learner of celebratory mentors.

Ibn al Qayyim on “Sadd-al-Hamm” or “Repelling Worries”

To start with, IQA assertions on *Hamm* (worries), seem to emanate from his theory of motivation. Here he claims that humans are normally motivated by *Hamm* whether to do good or bad. It is, as he puts it, the process of intention (al Iradah). *Hamm*, according to him, is originally the energy that drives behaviour. This is consistent with the widely circulated prophetic Hadith which goes “The truest of names are Harith and Hammam”.

(قال رسول الله -صلى الله عليه وسلم-: أَحَبُّ الْأَسْمَاءِ إِلَى اللَّهِ: عَبْدُ اللَّهِ وَعَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ ، وَأَصْدَقُهَا: حَارِثٌ وَهَمَّامٌ)

Hammam is the adjective form of the noun *Hamm*. So, it is the truest description of human nature, that is, always possessing the will to act (*al Harth*) according to human needs and desires. (*al Harth* being the verbal noun of the adjective Harith). Etymologically, *Harth* means ploughing, or cultivation. IQA said: “*Hamm* is the beginning of intention,” meaning it is the initial spark that occupies one’s mind, whether for good or bad.

However, In the context of health, IQA defines *Hamm* as “*worry is the pain in the heart caused by the anticipation of something unpleasant in the future*” while “*Hazan is sadness due to pain in the heart caused by past unpleasant incidents*”.

الهم هو الألم الوارد على القلب بسبب توقع مكروه في المستقبل.

والحزن هو الألم الوارد على القلب بسبب وقوع مكروه في الماضي

The spiritual healing value of IQA’s writings for Muslims is widely celebrated. His healing regimens are almost entirely founded on the basic doctrine of acknowledging the true meaning of believing in Allah and therefore putting trust on Him. In his book *Zad al-Ma’ad*, he mentioned that when the heart loses its completeness in knowing and loving Allah, it becomes afflicted with worries, distress, and sorrow. These are the basic principles of spiritual health. That is mainly his reference recipe to what we call the management of anxiety and depression.

IAQ had written profusely on “Dafu’ Al Hamm” (removing or guarding against *Hamm*). However, this study shall deal with his scheme as provided in five of his books namely:

- 1- Madarij al-Salikin (مدارج السالكين بين منازل إياك نعبد وإياك نستعين)
- 2- Zad al-Ma’ad (زاد المعاد في هدي خير العباد)
- 3- Al-Fawa'id (الفوائد)
- 4- Al-Wabil al-Ṣayyib min al-Kalim al-Tayyib (الوابل الصيب من الكلم الطيب)
- 5- Ighathat al-Lahfan min Maṣayid al-Shayṭan (إغاثة اللهفان من مصايد الشيطان)

1. Madarij al-salikin (مدارج السالكين بين منازل إياك نعبد وإياك نستعين)

In this book, IQA argues that to combat *Hamm* one is best encouraged to inculcate *Tawakul* (trust and reliance on Allah). Allah is the creator and provider. His bounties on all are uncountable including the blessing of life and faith. He is the *Rahman* whose mercy engulfs anyone (even those who do not believe in Him) and everything even without being asked, and He is the *Rahim* whose mercy has covered all who believe in Him. With such inspirations *tawakul* can be imbued in oneself with a sense of calm and serenity that helps fend off against despair and helplessness.

2. Zad al- Ma’ad (زاد المعاد في هدي خير العباد)

In this book, IQA recommends invoking Allah using the prophetic *Du’aas* (supplications) like (*I seek refuge in Allah from worry and sadness*).

He contends that many Quranic verses mention peace of mind and relieving worry, such as:

“*Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest.*” (Qur’an 13:28).

“*And give glad tidings to the patient.*” (Qur’an 2:155).

“*And whoever fears Allah, He will make a way out for him.*” (Qur’an 65:2).

3. Al-fuwa'id (الفوائد)

In this book, IQA stresses mindfulness by insistently avoiding exaggerated worry about the past and/or future settling down to spiritual flourishing.

4. Al Wabil Al syayib min Al Kalim al Tayib (الوابل الصيب من الكلم الطيب)

In this book, IQA emphasize the effectiveness of *Istigfar* (seeking forgiveness from Allah). Bukhari has narrated the Prophet saying that “he (the Prophet makes *Istigfar* and *Towbah* (repentance) more than seventy times a day”. Interpreters of Hadith mentioned that the hadith signifies the numerosity of *Istgfar* not necessarily the exact number seventy.

5. Igathat -al -Lahfan (إغاثة اللفان من مصايد الشيطان)

In this book, IQA describes the different types of insinuations of *Shaytan* (the devil) that cause despair. Here, IQA suggests ways to ward off against such satanic insinuations, most importantly by acts of righteous actions and consistent good deeds.

The effects of IQA on contemporary scholars

The ideas of IQA in relieving despair have expectedly influenced many modern researchers and practitioners including Qurni (2001), Said (2011) and Wahaf (2009).

Al-Qurni shows how the Muslim set of mind helps ameliorate despair, sadness and worry in more ways than one, reminiscent of IQA. He emphasizes the power of faith in:

- a) **Ameliorating sadness** due to *Tawakul*, *Sabr* (patience), recitation of Quran, *Duaa*, *Dzikr* (calling Allah by his holy names) and expression of gratitude to Allah. Allah says "*If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in blessings].*" (Qur'an 14:7).
- b) **Living in the moment.** the Prophet said "*When you wake up in the morning, do not expect to live until the evening.*"
- c) **Positive thinking.** In the Hadith Qudsi, Allah says "*I am as My servant thinks of Me.*" ;
- d) **Avoiding over reaction** about people's possibly disquieting opinions about oneself. In the Hadith "*Whoever seeks the pleasure of Allah even if people dislike it, Allah will be pleased with him*" , thus cultivating positive thinking, dealing with hardship as an opportunity to cleanse one's sins;
- e) **Engaging in volunteering and charity.** The Prophetic hadith goes "*good deeds erase bad deeds*";

f) **Recitation of Quran** brings tranquility to the heart and keeps you away from bad company and gossip.

Al-Qahtani (2009) was even more directly reliant on IQA in delineating anti-anxiety spiritual regimens, offering guidance such as understanding nature of trials and enduring them with Patience; engaging in *Salat* (Islamic prayer), *Dzikrand Duaa*; trusting in Allah's decree; seeking forgiveness by *Istighfar*; cultivating a mindset of gratitude thus shifting attention away from negative thoughts.

Al 'Udaidan (2005) aimed at providing a plethora of items that could help develop detailed protocols of relieving distress, based on Islamic sources relying mainly on IQA's ideas.

Are IQA's ideas relevent to modern psychotherapy?

Anxiety and depression are the most prevalent mental disorders in the Muslim world and indeed more so in other parts of the world. Statistics of prevalence rate vary considerably worldwide as well as within the Muslim and Arab world. (Al-Zahrani et al 2022; Karam et al 2019)

A much higher prevalence rate is seen in Europe and US (Steel et al 2014, Santomouro 2021). The difference in prevalence rates of such emotional disorders has been partly ascribed to the levels of religiosity. This may underscore the need to conduct more research on the nature of Islamic religiosity and its efficacy in relieving depression and anxiety.

IQA writings are now about 800 years old, yet they still provide an infinite source of inspirations to contemporary researchers and practitioners in the field of Islamic oriented psychotherapy. Attempts to adapt IQA psychology to different Muslim communities would perhaps require sensitivity to the tiny variations within the various cultures in the Muslim world itself. This is easier said than done. Psychologists, particularly young ones have a chance to address issues of relevance to develop anti-anxiety therapeutic protocols derived from Islamic values, apply them in their clinics and compare their efficacy and efficiency to existing modalities of modern psychotherapy.

In fact, IQA psychology can be reformulated in a way that makes it relevant even for patients from other Faiths.

IQA psychology can be viewed from another perspectives. It is not simply a recipe for treating patients in despair so much as it is a plan to exalt all people of faith from normality to supernormality. It can be viewed as a theory to sanitize psychospiritual health. This should be compared to the newly emerging concept of well-being developed by positive psychologists and adopted by WHO where well-being is not just freedom from mental disease but also having a sense of meaning and purpose. (Madeline Holcombe, 2025) The only difference is that well-being as a positive state is thought to be determined by socioeconomic and environmental conditions, while within al -Qayum's context it is determined by the depth of religiosity.

IQA's psychological health theory may be seen to be founded on twelve main propositions, namely

- 1- Human nature is characterized by a will to satisfy needs and desires
- 2- Human behavior is characterized by successive endeavors to satisfy these desires. Prophet Mohammed peace be upon him is reported to have said that the truest of names are Harith and Hammam.
- 3- Humans are amenable to suffering distress because of loss and / or worry about possible future afflictions
- 4- Emotional well-being depends on (*daf'ul-Hamm*) which may roughly translate as repelling frustration.
- 5- *Al-Hamm* corresponds to both anxiety and depression as IQA refers repeatedly to worries of past losses and future worries.
- 6- The best defense is always to have recourse to Allah.
- 7- Having recourse to Allah is emphasized primarily in the internalization of the articles of faith and the conceptualization of the five pillars of Islam. Starting with *Shahada* (I bear witness that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah and that Mohamed is his servant and messenger.) The rest of the five pillars are four acts of worship -*Ibaadat*- whose validity hallmark is the *Neeyah* (the sincere intention to worship Allah). The truest and most sincere form of *Zakat* (charity) -*Sadaga*- is to give charity with the right hand so discretely that the left hand would not notice, so it is done only for Allah to notice. in

Fasting where Allah says fasting is for me and I am the the One who rewards it. In *Hajj* no supplication is more frequently repeated than “*Lubaik Allahuma Lubaik*” which roughly translates as “here I am coming to you O Allah”. As for *Salat*, Allah says, in Hadith Al Qudsi, “*I have divided al- Salat between me and my servant into two halves*”. The verses in *al Fatiha* the opening of *Salat* is believed to be an all-engaging affectionate dialogue between God almighty and the supplicant.

- 8- Thus, *Salat* as an exemplary session of mindfulness carried out at least five times a day is a perfect exercise with all the requirements of distraction-free order where calm and serenity is the norm, lowering the gaze and confining all the senses to the prayer tasks at hand: A typical manifestation of mindfulness. The prophetic Hadith goes “*come to Salat with tranquility and dignity*”
- 9- Mindfulness which has been shown abundantly to reduce blood pressure, heart rate and cortisol levels. (Grossman et al.,2004). and effectively to reduce anxiety. Regular mindfulness practice was shown to help in dealing with stressful emotions more effectively. (Hofmann et al.,2010; Zeidan et al.,2010)
- 10- But of course, there is more to *Salat* and to components of other acts of worship than sheer mindfulness. Their benefits go way beyond sheer ridding oneself of despair or psychopathology. Acts of worship are ladders of ascension to higher levels of spiritual experience and communion with the Almighty. Acts of worship and observance of religious injunctions have always been associated with the consummation of character. It can be said that IQA’s theory of motivation has bridged the gap between psychology and ethics. In his book “*Madarij-al- Salikin*” IQA reiterates Al-Mawardi’s emphasis on such ethical virtues like justice, patience, loyalty and kindness. Al Mawardi (d. 450 AH) held in high regard Islamic virtues such as truthfulness, justice, forbearance and self-control, patience, humility, benevolence, fulfilling promises, modesty, chastity, chivalry and charity, all of which are associated with self-esteem. No wonder Al- Mawardi in his book “*Adab al- Dunya wa al-Din*” (The Ethics of Worldly Life and Religion). has been an inspiration to great Muslim scholars such as Al Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Quyyim and Ibn Khaldoon, though al-Mawardi himself was partially influenced by al-Jahiz (d.255), al-Kindi (d.256) , Farabi (d. 339), Ibn Miskwaih (d.421).

- 11- The acquisition of virtues according to IQA is a function of religiosity. The prophetic tradition goes “*I was only sent to perfect noble characters*” (Narrated by Malik; and Ahmed). The prophet is the exemplary model to be followed. Quran says “*Indeed in the messenger of Allah you have an excellent example*” (al- Ahzab 33-21). The acts of worship serve the purpose of training the faithful to resist temptations. Fasting, for instance is to train oneself to resist ingestive drive, *zakat* as a charity to resist the impulse to guard one’s material possession. *Hajj* is a tough journey to Makkah. As for prayer the prophet (SAWS) used to stand in prayer until his feet became swollen. He was asked why do you do this knowing that Allah has forgiven your past and future sins whereupon he retorted “*should I not be a thankful servant?*”. So, if you control certain desires for the sake of Allah you shall feel happier even more. (Hadith: *indeed, whenever you give up something for the sake of Allah, Allah will replace it with something better for you*) Narrated by Ahmed.
- 12- *Duaa* is another act of worship that is constantly recommended. Mu’ath ibn Jabal reported that the prophet PBUH intimated to him (*O Mu’ath, I love you, so I advise you O Mu’ath never to forget to say after each prayer: ‘O Allah, help me to remember You, to be grateful to You, and to worship You in the best manner’*) narrated by Ahmed.

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