



# **ALAFIA MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT**

**TAKING AN ISLAMIC  
APPROACH TO MENTAL  
HEALTH**

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## **INTRO**

**As a Muslim, going through mental health difficulties can be difficult and confusing. Dealing with the stigma within our communities, sometimes being made to feel as though we are deficient in our faith while already living in a society that freely misunderstands what it means to be Muslim.**

**Let's discuss some of the common myths that we hear in our communities.**

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## **“MUSLIMS DON’T EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION, IF YOU FEEL DEPRESSED IT IS BECAUSE YOU HAVE BEEN DEFICIENT IN ACTS OF WORSHIP.”**

We Know that Allah (SWT) will test us through various trials that may include going through difficulties with our mental health. We can acknowledge that becoming distant from Allah (SWT) will lead to difficulties, but this is just one possible contributing factor. There are biological and environmental factors that play their role. There are many examples of how the environment can influence our mental health both in the Quran and hadith of these texts. For example we can take the story of our Prophet Yaqub (AS) who was deeply saddened by the loss of his son Yusuf (AS). He was overcome by grief to such an extent that he lost his sight.

In this story he was patient and relied on Allah SWT for help. This shows that experiencing mental health difficulties is more than the result of a loss in faith. Another example is the the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) experienced the year of sorrow following the death of his wife Khadija (RA) and his uncle Abu Talib.

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## **“IF YOU JUST PRAYED MORE YOUR PROBLEMS WOULD GO AWAY”**

Of course, it is only Allah SWT that will bring relief to our suffering. We are reliant on his judgment and mercy, but this does not mean that medicine and therapy don't have their role. Taking the means that Allah (SWT) has made available to us can include seeking advice from doctors and therapists.

The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) said “There is no disease that Allah has sent down except that he has also sent down its treatment.”







## **HOW OUR MUSLIM AND BLACK IDENTITIES INFLUENCE OUR APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH**

Very often when dealing with mental health professionals, the spiritual aspect of care is lacking or entirely absent. Given how central our faith is in shaping our perception and understanding of the world, treatment/ therapy may feel incomplete/ foreign and distant to what's important to us. Another aspect that is often neglected in a healthcare setting is the cultural and language barriers.

As black Muslims we get hit from all angles in our society, from Islamophobia to racism, cultural isolation and intra community stigmas. Rarely do these aspects get addressed. Most seem to be aware of the inequalities we face when dealing with the health care system (more likely to get sectioned, more likely to be restrained/ seen as violent, more to be placed in seclusion, more likely to have been administered rapid tranquillisation). Yet not enough seems to be done to address these inequalities or make any changes. The first thing we can do to address this is arm ourselves with knowledge of our rights and the realities of what the system represents.

Understandably, there are some of us who are sceptical or mistrustful of the medical community when it comes to understanding our problems and providing solutions. Fortunately, Islam has a rich history within the field of psychology and there are there are therapeutic models that incorporate our faith as part of treatment. These are Islamically integrated forms of therapy.

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# ISLAMIC CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF THE HUMAN PSYCHE

- **Nafs:** The Nafs when translated means soul. It is used to describe the lower part of the self/soul which is our behavioral inclinations. In its untrained state which can be compared to the concept of ID as described by neurologist Sigmund Freud. It is the part within us that has an insatiable hedonistic appetite. It can be refined and trained to go beyond these animalistic instincts to strive towards the Divine through a process called Mukhalafat- al Nafs or going against the lower self.

- **Ruh:** The ruh is both the human being's spirit or life force, and the sacred longing for connection and remembrance of the Divine. It is that part within that seeks to be closer to our creator and drives our Nafs to be in alignment with our purpose and the will of Allah (SWT).

- **Qalb:** The Qalb or spiritual heart is the interface between the between the Ruh and the Nafs and therefore input from either can lead to illumination or darkening of the Qalb.

- **Aql:** The rational faculty that we use to attain knowledge and reasoning. It is often referred to as our intellect. It is what controls our perception of the world. It allows us to contemplate the consequences of our actions and mediates and subjugates the harmful whims of our Nafs.

- **Ihsas:** Our basic emotions.

As humans we all are born with the inclination towards good, this is our Fitrah. Despite this we must battle daily with our animalistic drive, the hedonistic pleasure seeking part of our self or ruh-hayawani-bashari, and try to connect with our angelic drive or ruh-ulwi-samawi.

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## **HOW DOES THIS PLAY INTO OUR MENTAL HEALTH?**

All of these components are interconnected and work together. A change in one area will have an effect on the whole system. Islam has provided us a framework with which we can develop self-awareness or inkishaf which allows us to find any imbalances in our spiritual well-being. The goal is to develop I'tidal or equilibrium.

Experiencing mental health difficulties can be a means of improving our relationship with our Creator. It can be an opportunity for repentance and returning to Allah (SWT). It is through Allah (SWT) that we will find peace and contentment.

Prayer and other spiritual resources can be a source of comfort.

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