



The Lost Art of Contemplation: Spiritual Psychology Series

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Author Biography

Zohair Abdul-Rahman was born and raised in Toronto, Canada. He has a B.Sc. in Life Sciences with a minor in Psychology, M.Sc. in the Scientific Method, and Ijazah in Islamic theology and Hadith. Currently, he is pursuing medical studies at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia.

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Introduction

Modern psychology involves the study of human cognition, affect, and behavior. These three phenomena represent fundamental components of the human experience. They are also deeply connected to the Islamic message of self-purification (*tazkiyyat an-nafs* or *tasawwuf*). This process is described as the pinnacle of success in the Quran: “Certainly, the one who purifies [one’s soul] has succeeded”;¹ and, “The one who purifies it has certainly succeeded.”²

Islam represents a system meant to transform an individual’s cognitions, emotions, and behaviors that will ultimately lead them to a meaningful and fulfilling life. Thus, classical scholars who dedicated significant portions of their scholarship to the topic of self-purification consequently developed profound theories of human psychology. In a previous article exploring Islamic Spirituality and Mental Well-Being,³ we concluded that there was a need to construct models of human psychology based on the terminology found in the Quran, building from the Islamic tradition. Such an endeavor will be clinically relevant, providing practitioners with appropriate spiritual paradigms for Muslim clients experiencing mental illness. Furthermore, developing an Islamic framework of psychology will showcase the breadth and depth that exists in the Islamic tradition regarding human psychology and spirituality, enabling others to appreciate their profundity and the value they bring to humanity in the 21st century.

This article series attempts to build an Islamic model of spiritual psychology that encompasses human cognition, metacognition, consciousness, motivation, emotion, and behavior with an emphasis on practical implications for psycho-spiritual growth and building conviction. Due to the risk of reading modern psychological discourse into the Islamic tradition, we will use Quranic vocabulary and terminology found in the classical sources as the starting point for our

¹ Quran, 87:14

² Quran, 91:9

³ <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/zohair/islamic-spirituality-and-mental-well-being/>

discussion. Subsequently, we will compare and contrast with modern insights, either integrating or differentiating to produce a clearer understanding for the 21st-century reader.

The articles are organized according to the *Maraatib al-Qasd* (degrees of motivation) model often mentioned in the Islamic tradition.⁴ This model provides a holistic framework for human behavior that starts with thoughts, proceeds to motivation, and ends with action. The 5-step sequence is described below:

- 1) *Al-Haaqjis*: A fleeting thought that is quick to enter into consciousness and quick to exit;
- 2) *Al-Khaatir*: A thought that enters into the mind and an individual chooses to think about;
- 3) *Hadith an-Nafs*: An internal conversation, where a thought is deliberated over in depth;
- 4) *Al-Hamm*: A motivation to act, where a thought process has impacted a person's motivation or emotional state; and
- 5) *Al-'Azm*: A firm resolve to execute an action. While a person may still hesitate over a *hamm*, once they reach the point of *'azm* it has become a firm decision with no going back.⁵

The current article focuses on the first three stages. It examines the emergence of conscious thought and the various types of deliberation referenced in the Quran. Section 1 focuses on the significance of thoughts; Section 2 explores the fundamentals of thought; Section 3 describes the concepts of metacognition and contemplation; and Section 4 showcases a practical contemplative practice for

⁴ The degrees of motivation are typically described with reference to the following line of poetry:

مراتب القصد خمس هاجس ذكروا
فخاطر فحديث النفس فاستمعا
يليه هم فعزم كلها رفعت
سوى الأخير ففيه الأخذ قد وقعا

This line is cited by the famous Qur'anic commentator Al-Alusi (d. 1270 H) in *Ruh al-Ma'ani* (Beirut: Dar Ihya Turath al-Arabi 1985) vol. 3, p. 64 (explanation of 2:284). It is also cited by Siddeeq Hasan Khan (d. 1307 H), in *Fath al-Bayan fi Maqasid al-Qur'an* and Anwar Shah Kashmiri (d. 1353 H) in *Fayd al-Bari*.

⁵ See also Zarabozo J. *Commentary on the 40 hadith of Imam Nawawi* (2 vol. set). Denver: Al-Basheer; 2009. p. 1109

moral and spiritual growth developed by the famous polymath Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751 AH).

Section 1: Significance of Thoughts

Our thoughts are the deepest interface we have with the dimension of the spirit. This is because our thoughts exist beyond the physical world. Although we can observe when a person is engaged in thought, we can never physically observe the actual content of the thought. Other than Allah, no one can know our thoughts as we experience them. Thoughts, in their essence, carry meaning and content. Thus, although electroencephalography (EEG) can measure the neuronal activity associated with thinking, we will never be able to observe its essential content. From this perspective, thinking is a metaphysical process that carries us beyond the confines of the material world. Thoughts themselves are otherworldly in the sense that their content is not made up of particles or atoms.

It is no wonder that the Quran heavily emphasizes the spiritual action of engaging in thought. In over 750 places, the Quran directs the human being to think, ponder, reflect, listen, and observe.⁶ The common element among all these processes is the conscious thought that is produced in the mind. It is a tragedy that most have lost touch with the rich experience that exists in the mind. Despite the progress in knowledge and technology witnessed in the 21st century, the world has reacted to it counterproductively, and the mind has gone from center to backstage.

Age of Distraction

In the modern age of rapidly advancing technology, considerable time is invested in learning how to utilize the latest digital systems to boost productivity in all dimensions of our lives. In our careers, employers place high value on technological proficiency. Those who fail to keep up with the constant onslaught of digital tidal waves become uncompetitive in the ever-shrinking job market that is shifting towards integrating new systems to increase workplace efficiency. Our

⁶ Berisha, E. (2017). The Qur'anic semio-ethics of nature. *Islam and Civilisational Renewal*, 8, 47-65.

social lives have also been transformed with innovations in social media and networking tools that have removed nearly all barriers to communicating with friends and family. Our minds are constantly distracted with all the new devices that we own as we struggle to keep up with the seemingly never-ending series of updates and changes.

Alex Pang, the author of *The distraction addiction*, describes our online lives as actual jobs: “If maintaining your online life feels like a job, maybe that’s because it is.”⁷ He explains that the average American spends 60 hours a month online. Those hours add up to 3 months of full-time work per year. In this “online career,” we spend 20 days on social networking websites, 38 days on blogs, YouTube and news websites, and 32 days purely on email. When looking at the usage of devices in just one day, we find that the average American sends and receives 110 messages, checks their phone 34 times, visits Facebook on 5 separate occasions, and spends 30 minutes total liking posts.⁸

Constant engagement with technology, screens, and devices not only paradoxically hinders our productivity in reaching our goals, but also has significant effects on the mind. Clark and Chalmers, philosophers of consciousness, advanced a theory of the extended mind in 1998 that has become better understood in light of recent inventions.⁹ The theory states that human beings often utilize devices in the external environment for cognitive processes that would normally occur intra-mentally. The clearest example of this is memory. In the past, notebooks were used and in our times, it has become applications on our phones, laptops, tablets, and computers that allow us to offload even more of our memory than in the past due to the ease of accessibility and efficiency of storage in new technology. The classic example is the shift in memorizing phone numbers. KasperSky Lab conducted a survey in Europe and found that 60% of adults were able to recall the phone number of the home they lived in when they were 10 years old, but could not recall the current phone numbers of their children or office. One third of the

⁷ Pang, A. (2013). *The distraction addiction*. New York: Brown and Company. p. 5

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Clark, A., & Chalmers, D. (1998). The extended mind. *Analysis*, 58(1), 7-19.

participants were unable to recall the number of their partners.¹⁰ We used to register important phone numbers in the memory system of our mind, but have now outsourced this process extra-mentally.

Mind extension is not limited to memory, but also includes executive functions such as planning. Google automatically sends you a message with suggested times to leave home to catch a flight. There are even applications that cross-reference your pre-selected food preferences with restaurant menus to suggest the most appropriate food selections.

Due to this unprecedented level of outsourcing of the mind, we have lost the hidden treasure that lies within its use. Being preoccupied with gadgets, screens, and devices has distracted us from the powerful creativity, insight, and self-awareness that our minds were designed for. Modern science has recognized the utility and potential that lies in the depths of our minds and souls. In particular, there have been many studies conducted on the meditation practices of far Eastern traditions. These practices have been found to have profound positive effects on emotional, psychological, and physical disorders including depression, substance abuse, alcohol abuse, and cardiovascular disease such as hypertension.¹¹ At a more fundamental level, thoughts have been demonstrated scientifically to have profound effects on our biological functioning. A common phenomenon known as the ‘placebo effect,’ a therapeutic benefit that is achieved solely through a person’s belief that they will heal, is a profound example of thoughts impacting our health.¹² The findings regarding the placebo effect suggest that it is ubiquitous and can be effective against various pathophysiological and psychopathological states. Conversely, it is well established that stress, which is partly based on the cognitive framing of our life circumstances, has significant negative effects on a wide variety of biological systems including hormone regulation, cardiovascular disease, and immune system functioning.

¹⁰ Digital Amnesia in Practice. <http://amnesia.kaspersky.com/>

¹¹ Chiesa, A., & Serretti, A. (2010). A systematic review of neurobiological and clinical features of mindfulness meditations. *Psychological Medicine*, 40(8), 1239-1252.

¹² Moerman, D. E., & Jonas, W. B. (2002). Deconstructing the placebo effect and finding the meaning response. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 136(6), 471-476.

Section 2: Fundamentals of Thought

Khawaatir

The thoughts that flood our minds during our waking moments are collectively termed *khawaatir* by Ibn al-Qayyim (subsuming the categories of *haajis* and *hadith al-nafs* defined earlier).¹³ Dr. Maalik el-Badri, a contemporary Muslim psychologist, defines *khawaatir* as “internal dialogue” or “concealed speech” that may occur fleetingly.¹⁴ These are the thoughts in the constant running dialogue that represents the lens of our lived reality. *Khawaatir* seem to be analogous in this respect to the “automatic thoughts” described by Aaron Beck, the founder of cognitive therapy.¹⁵ Automatic thoughts refer to mental activity that emerges without conscious effort in response to a stimulus. One component that seems to be associated with the content of our *khawaatir* is our innate personality.¹⁶ *Khawaatir* from an Islamic perspective can be conceptualized as the amalgamation of competing forces from our unconscious. These forces exist internally as a part of us or externally as separate agents (Divine, angelic, or satanic).

The Unconscious

The topic of the unconscious is very complex and has been approached through both cognitive and psychodynamic perspectives in the field of psychology. Freud was one of the first Western intellectuals to discuss the influence of the unconscious (or subconscious) on conscious thoughts, motivations, desires, and dreams. It is interesting to note that some of Freud’s ideas regarding defense mechanisms of the unconscious were predated significantly by Muslim theologians. For instance, Ibn Hazm (d. 456 AH) described repression of forbidden

¹³ Al-Badri M. (2000). *Contemplation: An Islamic psychospiritual study*. Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, p. 22.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Lightsey, O.R., Gharghani, G. G., Katz, A. M., McKinney, V. A., & Rarey, E. B. (2013). Positive automatic cognitions mediate the relationship between personality and trait positive affect. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 14(1), 115-134.

sexual impulses towards family members as resulting in a variety of conscious behaviors.¹⁷

Although Freud's understanding of the unconscious focused primarily on aggression and sexuality, his protégé Carl Jung espoused his own theory of the unconscious that incorporated complex religious belief systems into what he termed the "collective unconscious." Both psychologists attempted to discover the common unconscious psychological architecture present in every human being. This dimension of the human mind is not a material entity, rendering its study beyond the empirical limitations of the scientific method. Hence, it has not been given much attention beyond these two figures in the western world. Recently, however, cognitive and social psychologists have explored the role of unconscious bias in determining attitudes, beliefs, and prejudices. The focus has shifted from describing the structural components of the unconscious, to describing its functional implications.

As mentioned, the unconscious is the dimension of the human being that is fundamentally part of the realm of the *ghayb* (unseen). Thus, it behooves any Muslim seeking to achieve a better understanding of the mind to explore the perspective of revelation. At least one prophetic narration affirms the notion that an unconscious part of the mind can influence our conscious thoughts and drives,

*Abu Huraira reports that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Certainly, Allah has overlooked for my ummah what arises (haddathat) in his mind (nafs) as long as he does not act it out or vocalize it."*¹⁸

Accountability exclusively applies to phenomena that are within the boundary of our conscious choices. The Quran informs us,

*God does not place a burden on a person that he is not capable of fulfilling.*¹⁹

¹⁷ Abu Layla M. (1990). *In pursuit of virtue: The moral theology and psychology of Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi*. London: TaHa Publishers, p. 158.

¹⁸ al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. (Bayrūt: Dār Ṭawq al-Najjāh, 2002), v. 7 p. 46 # 5269.

¹⁹ Quran, 2:286

Thus, we are not held accountable for any mental phenomena that are outside the reach of our will. This *hadith* implies that there is an underlying unconscious structure that determines certain conscious thoughts outside of our will. We will explore the unconscious structure implied in the *hadith* and shed light on its various components.

Components of the Unconscious

Waswaas

One of the most significant influences on our consciousness is termed *waswaas* (whispering).²⁰ The Islamic tradition speaks about this phenomenon in context of (1) satanic whispering, (2) self-whispering, and (3) angelic whispering.

Satanic Whispering

Satanic whispering is further divided into evil suggestions from the unseen and the seen realm. Both of these categories of satanic whispering are referenced in the last chapter of the Quran,

*Say: I seek refuge in the Master of Humanity, the King of Humanity, the God of Humanity from the evil whispering of the one who retreats. He who whispers into the chests of Humanity from among the Jinn (hidden creatures) and Humanity.*²¹

It is clear that Jinni *waswaas* would be considered in the domain of the unconscious, but what is human *waswaas* and how is it considered unconscious? Human *waswaas* encompasses any communication from human beings that can be extended beyond direct conversations to include books, media, and images. Although the initial suggestion by other human beings is in the domain of consciousness, it later becomes unconscious when it is incorporated into our memory systems. These suggestions can stir emotions and desires within us at any moment in which we encounter anything relevant in our life. Ibn al-Qayyim writes,

²⁰ Al-Badri, M., p. 23

²¹ Quran, 114:1-6

“Next, thinking will be transferred to or stored in the memory and the memory will transform it into a volition and a motive which will be acted out in real life as an action.”²²

Thus, external agents can determine the makeup of our unconscious that will inevitably affect our conscious thoughts. Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH) provides a vivid conceptualization of how these external agents gain access to our unconscious,

*Iblis enters into the human being according to the space that is available for him. The space is increased based on the level of heedlessness, ignorance, or lack of knowledge. Realize that the heart is like a fortress with walls. In these walls are gates. Through these gates is the potential for the fortress to be breached. The intellect dwells inside this fortress and the angels encircle it. To the side of this fortress is the place for the desires. The devils gain access to this area without any difficulty. Thus begins the war between the fortress and those outside. Shaytaan constantly searches for an opening into the fortress where a person's guard is let down so he can breach the wall.*²³

The domain of *waswaas* in the unconscious can be tempered through conscious interventions. It is possible that through breaking free of distractions and attaining knowledge and consciousness of God a person can transform the entire dynamic of the unconscious. This struggle between the individual and Satan is a key dimension of the unconscious and the conscious that Ibn al-Qayyim also speaks about. He explains that every day the self enters the battlefield,

*He puts on his army gear and takes his weapons as he enters into the battlefield. His desires and passions against his intellect ('aql) and guidance (huda). The only way to victory is through the help of Allah.*²⁴

Shaytaan uses the individual's own passions and desires as weapons against the person. If he is overcome, then

²² Al-Badri M, 23 p. translation of Ibn al-Qayyim. *Al-Fawa'id*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Nafā'is; 1981. p. 173

²³ Ibn al-Jawzi. *Talbis Iblis*. Bayrūt: Dār al-Qalam; 1982. p. 38

²⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim. *'Iddat as-Sabireen*. Damām: Dār Ibn al-Jawzi; 2012. p. 48

*his intellect is with shaytaan like a prisoner in the hand of the enemy...the very thing that Allah has honored and elevated his status with comes in the possession of his enemy and is used to destroy him.*²⁵

Whispers of the Nafs (Self)

The *waswaas* that emerges from the *nafs* is referenced in the Quran,

*And We have certainly created man and know what his nafs whispers to him...*²⁶

The content of the whispers of the *nafs* is determined by interactions between a person's desires, guidance, and character. The unrestricted human desire seeks that which brings it pleasure. Ibn al-Qayyim categorized pleasure into three types corresponding to three general desires. The first type of pleasure includes those rooted in attaining necessities for survival and propagation such as eating, drinking, and procreation. The second type of pleasure concerns climbing the dominance hierarchy to attain authority and leadership. The final category of pleasure is experienced through awareness of God and developing virtue.²⁷ None of the categories represent purely sinful desires. Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) describes the basis of pleasure, "Experiencing what is compatible with one's self is the means of pleasure."²⁸ Thus, our desire for pleasure is positive from this perspective. However, the Quran describes following desires as a negative quality that hinders growth of the individual:

*They are the ones who Allah has placed a seal over their hearts and they follow their desires.*²⁹

*They only follow conjecture and what the self desires even though guidance has come to them from their Lord.*³⁰

²⁵ Ibid, p. 51

²⁶ Quran, 50:16

²⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim. *Rawdat ul Muhibbeen*. Jeddah: Dār Alam al-Fawa'id; 2010, pp. 245-246

²⁸ Ibid, p. 233

²⁹ Quran, 47:16

³⁰ Quran, 53:23

Ibn al-Qayyim distinguishes blameworthy pleasures from praiseworthy pleasures by focusing on their ultimate outcomes. He explains that pleasure that eventually leads to pain is blameworthy.³¹ Thus, overindulging in desires or oppressing others to achieve pleasure will eventually lead to pain in this life and in the next. The true pursuit of eternal pleasure can only be found in a meaningful and fulfilling relationship with the Divine.

The *nafs* can motivate towards good or evil depending on its integration with the positive elements of human nature such as *aql* (intellect) and *huda* (guidance) or negative elements such as *hawaa* (desires) and *waswaas* (evil whispers). The Quran categorizes the levels of *nufuos* into three:

Level 1: *Nafs Ammara bis-Soo'*

“Certainly the *nafs* commands towards evil except for those whom Allah has shown Mercy.”³²

Level 2: *Nafs Lawwama*

“I swear by the *nafs* that feels guilty.”³³

Level 3: *Nafs Mutma'inna*

“O tranquil *nafs*, return to your Lord well-pleased and pleasing to Him.”³⁴

The thoughts that emerge from the *nafs* are in accordance with where it falls in the spectrum. Those *nufuos* that are underdeveloped are susceptible to influences from evil *waswaas* and more likely to overindulge in natural desires. The *nufuos* that are developed will use revelation and their intellect to curb their desires and overcome satanic whispers.

Part 2 of this article will, God Willing, provide a more detailed exposition on the *nafs* and its role in constructing our motivations, emotions, and thoughts.

³¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Rawdat ul Muhibeen*, p. 235

³² Quran, 12:53

³³ Quran, 75:2

³⁴ Quran, 89:27-28

Whispers from Angels

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud reports that the Prophet ﷺ said, “There is none among you except that he has one partner from the jinn and another from the angels.”³⁵

The angelic whispers are inclinations toward goodness that are inspired into the hearts of mankind as described in another narration,

*Abdullah reports that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Satan has a portion over the son of Adam and the angel has a share over him. The devil directs man to commit evil actions and deny the truth and the angel encourages man to do good actions and believe in the truth.”*³⁶

Ilhaam (Inspiration) and Firaasa (Intuition)

Ilham refers to direct inspiration from God. A famous example of this phenomenon is found in the story of Moses and his mother,

*And we inspired to the mother of Moses, ‘Suckle him; but when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear and do not grieve. Indeed, We will return him to you and will make him one of the messengers.’*³⁷

Inspiration is often experienced as intuition and is referred to as *firaasa*. The Prophet ﷺ described *firaasa* as a light from God,

“Beware the *firaasa* (spiritual intuition) of the believer, for he sees with the light of Allah.”³⁸

The concept of *firaasa* is also alluded to in the Quran,

“Certainly in that (story of Lot) are signs for the *mutawassimeen* (those who discern).”³⁹

³⁵ Muslim, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. ([Bayrūt]: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabīyah, 1955), v. 4 p. 2168 #2814

³⁶ al-Tirmidhī, Muḥammad ibn ‘Īsā. *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*. (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ġarb al-Islāmī, 1998), v. 5 p. 69 #2988

³⁷ Quran, 28: 7

³⁸ al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, v. 5 p. 194 #3127

³⁹ Quran, 15:75

Ibn Abbas and other commentators of the Quran noted that *mutawassimeen* here refers to the *mutafarriseen*, those who possess *firaasa*.⁴⁰

Ibn al-Qayyim illuminates the link between *firaasa* and the story of Lot by explaining, "...When a person observes the outcomes of previous transgressing nations, then he is granted *firaasa*..."⁴¹

Ibn al-Qayyim defines *firaasa* as "light that Allah throws into the heart of a believer that allows him to distinguish between truth and falsehood."⁴² He also quotes other scholars that describe the dimension of *firaasa* that relates to attaining knowledge of unseen realities.⁴³ He further explains that phenomenologically *firaasa* is experienced as a belief, thought, or idea that emerges into one's consciousness that obliterates anything that opposes it. One way to distinguish *firaasa* from other thoughts is that "*firaasa* is the first thought that emerges without any oppositional thoughts that co-occur alongside. If oppositional thoughts co-occur then this is regarded as a normal thought."⁴⁴

Firaasa can include predictions of the future as well as judgments regarding people that aren't empirically verifiable or readily observable. The latter concept is elucidated in a story regarding Junayd al-Baghdadi:

*Once Junayd was delivering a public lecture and a young Christian boy disguised as a Muslim came to ask a question. He said, "O Shaykh, what is the meaning of the saying of the prophet, 'Beware of the intuition of the believer, for he sees with the light of Allah.'"*⁴⁵ *Junayd was silent and then raised his head to him and said, 'Become Muslim, the time of your Islam has come.'* *The young boy immediately became Muslim.*⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Qayyim. *Kitab ar-Ruh*. 5th edition. Cairo: Al-Maktabatu at-Tawfeeqiyya; 2012.

⁴¹ Ibn al-Qayyim. *Madarij as-Salikeen*. Al-Mansoorah: Maktabatu Fayyadh; 2013.

⁴² Ibid, p. 826

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 827

⁴⁵ Many scholars of *hadith* have pointed out weakness in this narration chain of transmission, such as at-Tabarani (*Al-Mu'jam al-Awsat*, vol. 8, p. 23), Al-Aqeeli (*Ad-Du'afaa al-Kabeer*, vol. 4, p. 129) and Ibn al-Jawzi (*Mawdu'aat ibn al-Jawzi*, vol. 3, p. 389).

⁴⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madarij as-Salikeen*, p. 827

Ibn al-Qayyim also describes types of *firaasa* that are not related to faith and are accessible to all human beings based on other important characteristics. For example, he explains that doctors of medicine possess a type of *firaasa* based on their knowledge and experience.⁴⁷ There are also people who are not Muslims who are able to interpret dreams based on their capacity for interpreting symbols.⁴⁸ He also explains that scientific theory can be useful in deriving accurate predictions. He explains this as “natural intuition” (*al-firaasa al-khalqiyyah*) based on the connection between natural events.⁴⁹ Ibn al-Qayyim notes that these types of intuitions do not aid a person in understanding deeper truths that will bring them benefit in both worlds.⁵⁰ This knowledge of deeper truths requires the special *firaasa* that is a gift from Allah, stemming from His light.

Imam al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) conceptualized *firaasa* as stemming from a “window” in the heart that opens to the world of the unseen. The other windows represent our normal physical senses. When a person focuses on his soul rather than the physical world, different impressions from the unseen world are perceived. He explains that this is the reason most visions that are truthful occur in the dream state, when the body is cut off from the sensory world,

*In the state of sleep, when the avenues of the senses are closed, this window is opened and man receives impressions from the unseen world and sometimes foreshadowings of the future. His heart is then like a mirror which reflects what is pictured in the Tablet of Fate. But, even in sleep, thoughts of worldly things dull this mirror so that the impressions it receives are not clear.*⁵¹

We see similar imagery discussed by Ibn al-Qayyim regarding the heart being like glass and a mirror. Imam al-Ghazali explains that in the conscious state, a person can still perceive through the unseen window in accordance with the purity of their heart, “The more a man purifies himself from fleshly lusts and concentrates his

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 828

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 829

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 828

⁵¹ Al-Ghazali. *The alchemy of happiness* [internet]: Orange Sky Publishing; p. 26. Available from <http://mehmetgok.com/orangesky>

mind on Allah, the more conscious will he be of such intuitions. Those who are not conscious of them have no right to deny their reality.”⁵²

Thus, we can understand *firaasa* as light coming from Allah that encapsulates meanings of hidden realities. This light interacts with the pure heart of a believer and projects an accurate image to its consciousness. The quality of this light is much greater than any other thought, idea, or knowledge that the individual possesses since it comes straight from Allah. Thus, it outshines any other thought related to it and remains fixed in the heart.

Summary

We have discussed the structural components of the unconscious that influence the conscious outpouring of thoughts that occur at every moment in our minds. Our conscious thoughts are continuously being altered and formulated based on complex interactions between components of the unconscious. It is important to note that we are not advocating an entirely deterministic view of the thoughts that emerge involuntarily from the unconscious. A person can intentionally counteract unconscious influences. For instance, personality transformation can help change our *khawaatir* by elevating our *nafs* closer to the *nafs mutma'inn*. Seeking refuge in Allah and strengthening the fortresses of our heart can aid us in our battle against satanic whispers. Having friends that inspire us with their words and behavior fill our memory with positive ideas that become readily available for extraction when confronted with a difficult situation. Developing our character and intellect can aid us in appropriately integrating the desires of the self. Personal hygiene⁵³ and being in angelic environments can increase the positive forces that come from the angels. Lastly, the processes involved in purification of the soul will bring about greater *firaasa*.

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ This refers to the well-known prophetic narration regarding angels being annoyed by similar odors as human beings are annoyed by.

Section 3: Process of Thinking

In terms of the process of thinking, the Quran utilizes a diverse set of terms that share the general meaning of contemplation but individually contain subtle differences regarding the intricacies of thinking. Some exegetes of the Quran have described 30 different terms that are used such as thinking (*tafakkur*), reflecting (*tadabbur*), and remembering (*tadhakkur*) that are essential processes required to effectively extract meaning from the signs of Allah in the Quran and the natural world.⁵⁴

This section of the article touches upon a concept known as metacognition—or “thinking about thinking”—that has become popular in recent years.⁵⁵ The process of thinking about thoughts is a higher-order form of thinking that determines how we interpret the world around us. The cognitive strategy we choose to undertake in a given situation involves a metacognitive choice that will dictate the quality and quantity of knowledge we can abstract from it.⁵⁶ These units of knowledge can then proceed to form conceptual frameworks through which future information is understood. Thus, the Quran provides us with the metacognitive guidance necessary to abstract meaning and truth from the world, providing us with conceptual frameworks that enable us to see the world as it really is.

Components of Contemplation

Ibn al-Qayyim includes a fascinating discussion on the different types of thinking in his book *Miftaah Dar as-Sa'adah*. He provides an explanation of the terms used in the Quran to denote contemplation. This section will focus on his discussion of *tafakkur* (thinking), *tadhakkur* (remembering), *i'tibaar* (realizing), and *tadabbur* (deliberating). The first two processes describe ways in which initial thoughts can emerge through deliberate choice (rather than automatically through the

⁵⁴ Kamali, M. H. (2006). Reading the signs: A Quranic perspective on thinking. *Islam & Science*, 4(2), 141-164.

⁵⁵ Veenman M. V. J., van Hout-Wolters, B., & Afflerbach, P. (2006). Metacognition and learning: Conceptual and methodological considerations. *Metacognition and Learning*, 1, 3-14.

⁵⁶ Ibid

unconscious); the latter two describe how initial thoughts (whether automatic or deliberate) can lead to new insights and knowledge.

Tafakkur

“*Tafakkur*: To bring something to one’s cognitive space.”⁵⁷

This is the main form of thinking the Quran references. *Fikr* is the most general of these terms and encompasses the process of bringing a thought to conscious awareness. *Tafakkur* is distinct from *khawaatir* in that it is a more deliberate process by which an individual chooses to direct and focus their thoughts. In this circumstance, the initial thought brought to consciousness is derived either from the environment or through an innate creative process that is independent of our environments. Hence, *khawaatir* involves a predominantly passive process while *tafakkur* is an active process.

Tadhakkur

“*Tadhakkur*: Bringing awareness of knowledge that requires attention after a person has been distracted from it or it is unseen to him: ‘Certainly those who are righteous, when a party of shaytaan touches them, they immediately remember (*tadkhakkar*), then they gain insight’ (Surah A’raaf: 201).”⁵⁸

When a person has been affected by the whispers of Satan or by their carnal passions, they are in dire need of this method of thinking. *Tadhakkar* involves the ability to draw on knowledge that a person has previously acquired as a means of defending against the delusions of Satan and curbing their desires. When a person is overcome with jealousy stemming from ingratitude, materialism, and contempt for others, he must bring to mind knowledge of *al-Qadar* (Divine Decree). By remembering that Allah distributes His bounties to whom He wills, one understands that being jealous of others involves challenging the validity of Allah’s Decree. Through reflection of this sort one gains insight into the diseases plaguing one’s heart as well as appreciation for one’s own blessings. When a

⁵⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim. *Miftaah Dar as-Sa’dah*. Jeddah: Dār Alam al-Fawa’id; 2011.

⁵⁸ Ibid

person has been overcome by addictive urges stemming from a mind incapable of postponing gratification and a heart that craves pleasure, he must remember the One who he is disobeying, His power, His Might, His grandeur. In *‘Iddat as-Sabireen*, Ibn al-Qayyim advises the one overcome with passion to bring 20 different thoughts to conscious awareness. For the sake of brevity, we will mention just three of them.⁵⁹

1. Remember Allah’s countless blessings upon you and that your disobedience will erect a barrier between you and them.
2. Remember that through your fulfilling of desires and attainment of temporary pleasure you will lose out on goodness both in this world and in the next. Faith, providence, and wealth all decrease as a consequence.
3. Remember that Allah has promised to replace what you leave for His sake with something much better. It is worth the struggle.

When a person draws these forgotten treasures from beneath the sands of his heart, he can repurchase his soul after almost selling it for a miserable price. Remembering these pearls of wisdom allows a person to break free from the delusions of Satan and see the world as it is, a journey towards Allah. He sees whatever hinders this path as challenges, and whatever facilitates the path as gifts.

Tafakkur and Tadhakkur

Tafakkur and *tadhakkur* together create a system that works to enrich the human mind with knowledge. *Tadhakkur* is the process by which the heart constantly re-evaluates knowledge it has learned in light of new experiences, in order to gain deeper insight and firm grounding (*fahm*). A person who knows that “Allah reigns Supreme over his matter” (Surah Yusuf: 21), realizes—no matter how alone he feels in this crowded world, or how conquered he feels by the negativity and pessimism of those surrounding him—that Allah’s Decree prevails over all. A person who brings this thought to conscious awareness as he goes through struggle or difficulty, and when he achieves relief and success, will gain a deeper insight

⁵⁹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Iddat as-Sabireen*, p. 93

into Allah's role in his life. Thus, successive trials become easier, as his heart finds rest in remembering Allah. If a person does not engage in *tadhakkur* of what he has learned about Allah whenever he encounters a new situation, he will eventually lose this knowledge and it will no longer impact his heart. The knowledge will "rust" in the heart, making it inaccessible at the times it is needed the most: "Rather their hearts have rusted because of what they earned."⁶⁰

Through sincere advice, motivational reminders, and inspirational encounters with the signs of Allah, this rust is shaved off allowing the previously acquired knowledge to float freely in our consciousness. Ibn Qayyim mentions, "(*Tadhakkur* is done) so the heart does not lose the effect of its knowledge, and so it does not disappear."⁶¹

The function of *tafakkur* is described as "increasing one's knowledge and allowing the heart to attain what it previously did not have."⁶² Together, Ibn al-Qayyim explains, "*Tafakkur* builds the heart and *tadhakkur* preserves it. *Tafakkur* and *tadhakkur* are the seeds of knowledge. The rains come and nourish them (*tafakkur*) and remembering (*tadhakkur*) is its vaccination."⁶³

I'tibaar

"*I'tibaar*: It is linguistically derived from '*uboor*, which means crossing. This is because a person goes from an original thought to a new realization (*ma'rifah*) through this type of thinking. This is the goal of *i'tibaar*. It is a constructive process whereby existing thoughts are synthesized to produce more profound and sophisticated realizations.

'Certainly in their stories is a profound realization (*'ibrah*) for the people of sound intellect.' (Surah Yusuf: 111)

⁶⁰ Quran, 83:14

⁶¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Miftaah Daar as-Sa'adah*, p. 525

⁶² Ibid, p. 525

⁶³ Ibid

‘Certainly in that is a profound realization (*‘ibrah*) for the one who is in Awe.’
(Surah Nazi’aat: 26)

‘Certainly in that is a profound realization (*‘ibrah*) for the people of insight.’
(Surah Ali-Imran: 13; Surah Noor: 44).”⁶⁴

This is a secondary process that is enacted upon pre-existing thoughts in the mind. In the Quran, this process is linked with pondering over stories. The process by which the mind extracts profound lessons from a story is known as *i’tibaar*. Moving from a raw story to a profound realization through the bridge of *i’tibaar* involves the process of abstraction. This allows one to achieve a meta-lesson from the narrative that can be applied to one’s own life, despite obvious differences with the original story. For example, when we read about the story of Maryam and Zakariyya being able to bear children despite them believing it was not possible, we learn to conquer our own self-limiting beliefs and realize our full potential through the power of Allah. When we read about the dark story of the fall of Shaytaan, we gain insight into the satanic thoughts or diseases that may plague our own hearts and minds. When we read about the story of redemption of our father Adam, we are given hope for a better future and inspiration to change for the better.

Tadabbur

“*Tadabbur*: It is called this because it is focused on the *adbaar* (the end) of a matter. It is the logical consequence of a starting thought. This is used in reference to speech:

‘Do they not consider the consequences of the speech (the Quran)?’ (Surah Mu’minoos: 68)

‘Do they not ponder (*yatadabaroos*) the Quran?’ (Surah Nisaa: 82).”⁶⁵

Tadabbur is to follow a thought to either its logical end or starting foundation. On a practical level, *tadabbur* of the Quran is the process by which a reader looks at a

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp. 524-525

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 525

verse and determines the implications of its meanings for their life. When we truly consider the statement “My Mercy encompasses everything” (Surah A’raaf: 156) with *tadabbur* while going through a difficulty, then we necessarily come to the conclusion that the pain, suffering, and difficulty I am going through is enveloped in Allah’s Divine Mercy. As Ibn al-Qayyim explains elsewhere, “Out of the wisdom of Allah, He has made pleasure give rise to pain, and pain give rise to pleasure.”⁶⁶ Thus, the pain one is experiencing due to the loss of a loved one, a broken heart, financial restraints, social isolation or depression is all enveloped in the Divine Plan of Mercy and Wisdom. This is a firm belief of the believer as he sails through the strong winds of life, never losing hope. He has pondered over the verses of the Quran that speak of the bounties, blessings, and love of Allah for His slaves and has come to no other conclusion than, “So verily with hardship, comes ease. Verily with hardship, comes ease”⁶⁷ (Surah Inshirah: 5-6).

Thoughts to Behavior

Human beings are capable of impeding or acting contrary to impulses or thoughts that arise in their minds. Furthermore, they are able to engage in metacognition to change or incorporate thoughts into networks of knowledge. The process by which a conscious thought becomes knowledge and then behavior is outlined by Ibn al-Qayyim who states that there are five cognitive-behavioral stations that are causally linked, “And so there are five states: *fikr* (thought), which gives rise to *‘ilm* (knowledge), which gives rise to a *haal* (paradigm or conceptual architecture) that stimulates the heart, which gives rise to an *iraada* (motivational drive), which gives rise to an *‘aml* (action).”⁶⁸

Expanding Ibn al-Qayyim’s Model

Fikr, Ilm, and Haal

The first step is (1) *fikr*, which involves bringing awareness of new information or thoughts to one’s mind. As a person recalls the new information to guide his or her

⁶⁶ Ibn Qayyim, *Shifaa ul-‘ileel*. Cairo: Dar at-Turaat; p. 526.

⁶⁷ Quran, 94:5-6

⁶⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Miftaah Daar as-Sa’adah*, p. 525

decisions, he engages in *tadhakkur* and it becomes (2) *ilm*. If the information does not aid a person on their spiritual, intellectual, and moral journey, it has not reached the level of knowledge and stays at (1) *fikr*. Thus, knowledge is defined by its ability to bring benefit to a person's life. As bits of knowledge develop from the things we think about, they become arrangements of knowledge. The patterns of these arrangements of knowledge are determined by our logic and reasoning along with our character. For example, words in a sentence are strung together based on the rules of grammar to produce a meaningful statement. However, the choice of content stems from our character and values. If a person values truth, the content of his speech will always be truthful. If a person is selfish, then the sentences he constructs will be used to manipulate others. In this analogy, the words represent knowledge, grammar represents rationality, and the sentence itself represents the specific arrangement of knowledge. Thus, pieces of knowledge are connected in arrangements based on rationality, just as words are connected in arrangements based on grammar. The end-products are knowledge structures. These represent anchors, axioms, starting points, and foundations through which we interpret subsequent information about ourselves and our environment. This information is transformed into knowledge and added to existing knowledge structures to build new foundations or to build and enrich existing ones. Following our analogy with language, the sentences that represent our knowledge structures are further combined to produce paragraphs. These paragraphs are combined to produce passages, which are subsequently combined to produce a complete book. The entire arrangement that emerges from our set of knowledge structures is the (3) *haal* (conceptual architecture).

The Heart as a Lens

The conceptual architecture of the mind is the lens of the heart through which the environment is processed. This lens is referenced in the Quran,

“Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass is as if it were a pearly star and it is lit from the oil of a blessed olive tree...”⁶⁹

As Ibn al-Qayyim explains, the glass represents the heart, and the lamp represents the light of faith that illuminates the soul.⁷⁰ One of the reasons why glass is used as a symbol of the heart is because of its clarity. Ibn al-Qayyim says, “By its clarity, (the believer) sees truth and direction.”⁷¹

When the physical light of this world reflects off the *ayaat* (signs) in creation and is perceived by the heart, the light refracts and produces an image. The clarity and depth of the image is based on the complexity of the conceptual architecture. More complex architectures are derived from richer and wider knowledge structures combined with intelligence and good character. The image represents meaning that is abstracted from the signs of Allah.

Three Orders of Meaning

This meaning can be classified into three levels. The first order of meaning emerges from the empirical features of the signs. It requires the sensory system of the mind to be able to perceive. The meanings associated with it are in the domain of *khavar* (description). For instance, a particular rock formation can be explained scientifically by merely describing its appearance, shape, color, and composition. This is meaning that has emerged from the sign in the form of *khavar*. This can be regarded as (1) *fikr*.

The second order of meaning arises from rational deliberation upon the sign and is known as (2) *ilm*. Cognitive processes are required to abstract meaning in relation to the etiology or purpose (*hikmah*) of a particular natural phenomenon embedded in a wider context. Continuing from the previous example, explaining the geological processes that led to the rock formation along with its current role in the ecosystem of a particular geographical area would all qualify as second-order

⁶⁹ Quran, 24:35

⁷⁰ Ibn al-Qayyim. *Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyya on the Invocation of God = Al- Wābil Al-Ṣayyib Min Al-Kalim Al-Ṭayyib*. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Soc, 2007), p. 64.

⁷¹ Ibid

meanings. Second-order meanings have resulted in great technological advancement throughout history, especially in recent centuries.

The third and final order of meaning arises from a myriad of cognitive processes along with psycho-spiritual states described in the Quran. Distraction and vice hinder a person's ability to recognize this level of meaning. The Quran consistently explains the signs of Allah as being perceptible only by people with faith, conviction, knowledge, and intellect through the actions of contemplation, remembrance, deliberation, listening, and seeing. The fundamental cognitive process that occurs at this level is known as *Qiyaas bil-Awlaa* (High-order Analogy). This is referenced in the Quran, "And to Allah belongs the highest analogy."⁷² Thus, relying on purely literal and syllogistic thinking will blind a person from this order of meaning. *Qiyaas bil-Awlaa* involves abstracting values (moral, intellectual, and spiritual) from the natural world and appropriately recognizing their ontological and epistemological dependence on the Divine (*ma'rifah*). The values that are abstracted are Divine Names and Attributes manifested in a limited form in this reality. The beauty, majesty, and awe that arise from gazing upon the rock formation, along with the recognition of the metaphysical basis for these values in the Divine constitute the essence of this highest order of meaning.

Processing Third-Order Meanings

The processing of all meanings primarily occurs through the (3) *haal* of heart as described earlier. Specifically, third-order meanings require a more complex conceptual architecture that remains untarnished. Some lenses have become tarnished, rendering them blind to this layer of meaning. Ibn al-Qayyim says, "And if tarnish builds up, blackens, and envelops the heart completely, the heart's reflective quality and perception will be totally lost, so that it will neither accept what is true nor reject what is false."⁷³

⁷² Quran, 16:60

⁷³ Ibid, p. 47

The Quran often describes the psycho-spiritual state of people who are unable to perceive the light that emerges from the signs of Allah. In fact, this reality is first expressed as early as the third page of the Quran,

“Certainly, those who reject faith, they are indifferent to your warnings and will never believe. Allah has sealed their hearts and ears and veiled their sight. For them is a painful punishment.”⁷⁴

The Haal inspires Iraadah

When the conceptual architecture is formed from our knowledge, reasoning, and good character, it stimulates the heart, resulting in the phenomenological experience of spiritual stations. The meanings perceived in the signs of Allah stir the heart toward *tawakkul* (reliance on Allah), *sabr* (perseverance and patience,) *shukr* (gratitude), *khawf* (fear), *mahabba* (love) and *rajaa'* (hope). These spiritual stations are experienced as a person sees the Names and Attributes of Allah through His signs. From this stage, our (4) *iraada* (ambitions, will, choices, and decisions) emerge. From one's will and ambitions come (5) behavior and action.

Summary

Ibn al-Qayyim concludes from his theory of the connection between thought and behavior,

Fikr is the beginning and the key to all that is good. And this (framework) should make clear the significance and value of tafakkur and that it is the most virtuous and beneficial action the heart can engage in until it was even said, 'Engaging in tafakkur for one hour is better than one year's worth of worship.' Fikr is what takes a person from the death and slumber of distraction to being awake and alive. From what he hates to what he loves, from worldly dependency to worldly independence, from the prison of this world to the freedom of the next, from the constraints of ignorance to the expansion of knowledge, from the disease of desire to the cure of turning to Allah, from blindness, deafness, and dumbness to the blessings of sight,

⁷⁴ Quran, 2:6-7

*hearing, and the profound understanding of Allah, from the disease of doubts to the relief of certainty.*⁷⁵

Then what is the state of a person who does not engage in *tafakkur*? Ibn al-Qayyim makes a beautiful analogy of the heart as a piece of land. It can either grow from the seeds of your thoughts, or your greatest enemy can seize the land and sow whatever he wishes:

*Shaytaan encounters the land of the heart as empty and barren, so he plants seeds that will lead to satanic thoughts giving rise to passions, forbidden urges and desires. This will then lead to (forbidden and destructive) actions. But if the land of the heart is busy with good and beneficial thoughts regarding one's purpose in life, thinking about accountability and the next life, its eternal delights and painful punishments, then there will be no room for one's desires.*⁷⁶

Section 4: A System of Islamic Contemplation

The preceding sections focused on the desired process of thinking. This concluding section will focus on the desired content of thinking. Ibn al-Qayyim mentions the four general categories of thoughts that should be actively cultivated:⁷⁷

1. Our most beloved purpose;
2. The path that leads to fulfilling this purpose;
3. Harm that leads to punishment; and
4. The paths that lead to this harm

There is no such thing as a neutral thought. Life is conceptualized as a path towards a particular destination. If at any point in time a person does not move towards their destination during the journey, they are considered having “lost

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 526-527

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 527

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 528

time.” Thus, mankind is always in a state of loss unless they are actively pursuing their end-goal. This is illustrated beautifully in the Quran,

“By time. Verily mankind is in a state of loss, unless they believe, do good deeds, call each other to truth, and call each other to patience.” (Surah Asr: 1-3)

Therefore, if one’s thoughts do not fit into any of the four categories described above, they are considered vain thoughts.⁷⁸ These thoughts feed the evil that exists within the human being. They drive a person towards failure. The key to success in this world and the next is to ensure one’s consciousness is filled with positive thoughts that will ultimately result in positive behaviors.

Ibn al-Qayyim explains that any time a person is in a motivational state toward a particular destination, person, or objective it necessarily implies they love what they are oriented towards.⁷⁹ Motivation is sustained in accordance with the strength of love for the end-goal.

This love is strengthened through the four categories of thought. The first category of positive thoughts is thinking about a person’s most important or most beloved objective. Ibn Qayyim divides these thoughts into two categories: (1) pondering its intrinsic beauty; and (2) pondering the benefit received from it.⁸⁰

The ultimate Beloved of a human being is Allah, The Transcendent, The Source of Peace, The Truth. Thinking about His beautiful qualities engenders love that sustains and strengthens the motivational state. Pondering His Beauty, Perfection, Tranquility, Peace, Love, Compassion and Goodness through the *ayaat* he has spread throughout earth will build the foundation of love. Then, you should remember that Allah is the One Who created you, your body, your soul, your very essence and granted you the gift of life itself. His Love and Care has been sent down through the love and care of your parents. Allah is the One Who pulled you out of the hardships in your life, and helped you accomplish your goals. And most

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 529

⁸⁰ Ibid

importantly, Allah is the One Who pulled you out of the darkness of this world into His light.

The human being then transitions from thoughts about their ultimate purpose to thoughts of how to fulfill that purpose. If a person is constantly thinking about Allah, they will yearn to seek a relationship with Him. The thoughts will then focus on what factors facilitate or hinder one's spiritual ascent towards Allah. Since human behavior is fundamentally determined by motivational states, contemplating the consequences of the enablers and hinderers of this purpose is paramount. This is where Ibn al-Qayyim derived the other three categories of thoughts. He also adds subcategories to be more specific. The system is as follows:⁸¹

1. Thinking about our most beloved purpose
 - a. Thinking about His Beauty and Attributes
 - b. Thinking about His Actions, Kindness, and Providence that indicate His Beneficence
2. The path that leads to fulfilling this purpose
 - a. Thinking about qualities that are loved by The Beloved. A person performs a character review and ponders,
 - i. Is this quality loved by Allah or not?
 - ii. Do I have this quality?
 - iii. If I don't, how do I obtain it? If I do, how do I preserve it?
3. Thinking about our most despised ends⁸²
 - a. Thinking about their ugliness

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 530

⁸² We have slightly modified this category from the original to produce a more coherent system. The original is "Thinking about harm and punishment" without any sub-categories.

- b. Thinking about the pain and harm that would result from the despised ends
- 4. The paths that lead to our most despised ends and result in punishment
 - a. Thinking about qualities that are despised by The Beloved. A person performs a character review and ponders,
 - i. Is this quality hated by Allah or not?
 - ii. If this quality is hated, do I have it or not?
 - iii. If I don't, how do I preserve that and make sure I am free from it? If I do, how do I remove this quality?

When putting them all together, Ibn al-Qayyim explains that the first category increases a person's love for Allah, and the remaining categories make the individual more beloved to Allah. He also reduces them to the following three points:⁸³

1. Knowledge of Allah's *Tawheed* (Divine Unity) and Attributes
2. Path towards Allah
3. Paths away from Allah

This thought process is embodied in Surah Fatiha itself. The first four verses speak to Allah's Names and Attributes and worshipping Him alone. The fifth and sixth verses speak about the pathway to Allah and the seventh verse speaks about the pathways away from Allah.

Conclusion

It is paramount in this age of distraction that we turn our focus inwards to discover the secrets of the mind. The experiences of thinking and consciousness are deeply

⁸³ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Miftaah Daar Sa'aadah*, p. 531

spiritual and can unlock many hidden treasures inside of us. They represent one of the greatest miracles of this universe. They are the basis for our aims and ambitions in life. They are the building blocks of the emotions we experience. Through contemplation, remembrance, and reflection we can build vast and magnificent structures in our hearts from the material of knowledge and understanding. In this way, our conceptual architecture is similar to architectural landscapes constructed in the physical world. The buildings and paths enable the inhabitants of a city to traverse the physical world of matter. Similarly our conceptual architecture enables us to traverse the metaphysical world of meaning. Knowledge structures are the buildings and the processes of thinking (*tafakkur*, *tadhakkur*, *i'tibaar* and *tadhakkur*) are the pathways that connect them together. Collectively, they can produce a shining civilization within our hearts that enriches our experience in this world.

The Islamic tradition has much to offer the field of human psychology. This article has focused on cognitions and metacognitions, exploring their building blocks, processes, and aims. The second article in this series will focus on motivation, behavior and personality transformation, completing our introductory study of Islamic Spiritual Psychology.