



The Power of Motivation: Spiritual Psychology Series

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Author Biography

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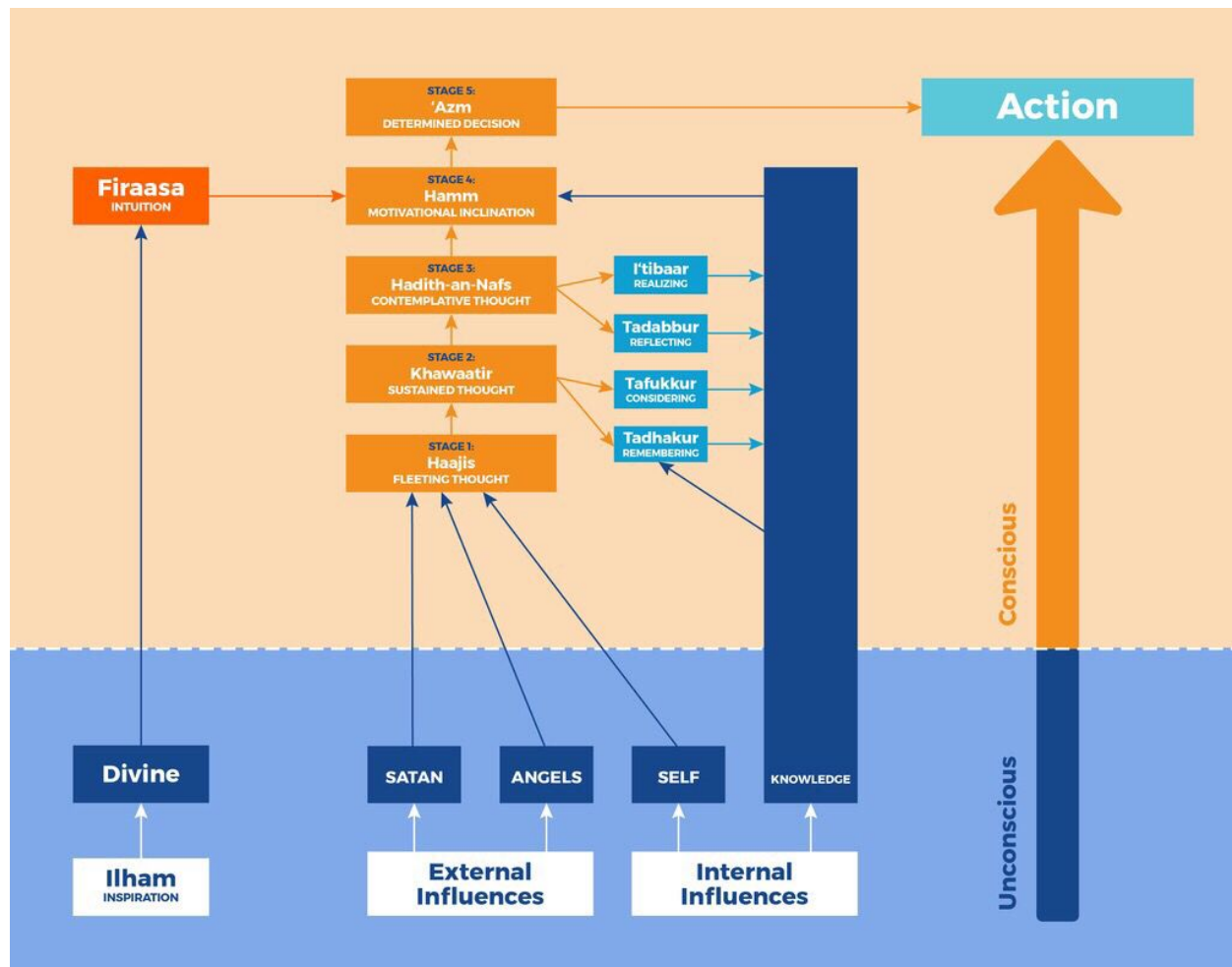
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Abstract

Motivation is at the root of our conscious thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. It provides the basis for experiences of happiness and joy as well as anxiety and sorrow. It strongly affects our judgments and beliefs about the world. The Qur'an describes the internal components of the self that provide the foundation for our motivational states. Continuing with the larger project of formulating an understanding of human psychology from an Islamic perspective, this article aims to shed light on the concept of motivation. The paper is divided into three sections, (1) Fundamentals of Motivation; (2) The Motivational State; and (3) Motivational Fuel. The first section discusses the phenomena of pain and pleasure in the context of motivation. The next section describes the components that determine our motivation including a discussion on the Qur'anic terms: *nafs ammara bis-soo* (self that inclines toward evil) and the *nafs mutma'inn* (self that inclines towards a higher existence). The final section considers the concepts of *sabr* (will-power) and *shahwa* (desires) as the competing driving forces of motivation. It also provides practical guidelines for increasing our *sabr* and decreasing our *shahwa*.

Introduction

The Spiritual Psychology series aims to construct foundational models that integrate Islamic spirituality with theories of the mind and behavior. The goal is to inspire the reader to reconnect with their spirit in a way that is meaningful and augmented with a deeper understanding. In the previous article, we examined the fundamental aspects of thought, the process of thinking itself, and a proposed system of beneficial contemplation (*tafakkur*). The current article focuses on human motivation, which is a determinant of thought and behavior. In utilizing the *Marātib al-Qaṣd* (degrees of intention) system, as outlined in Figure 1, we have already covered *al-hājis* (fleeting thought), *al-khāṭir* (sustained thought) and *ḥadīth an-nafs* (deliberate thought) in the prior article. The current article focuses on *al-hamm* (motivation).



Motivation is at the root of our conscious thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The motivational state is a necessary psychological structure that is projected onto the world by the mind. It orients us toward what our hearts yearn for. It provides the basis for experiences of happiness and joy as well as anxiety and sorrow. It strongly affects our judgments and beliefs about the world. In the previous article, we spoke about the various agents that can introduce thoughts into our minds. Understanding the motivational state at a deeper level will enable us to take better control of our thinking, our emotions, our behavior, and, ultimately, our lives.

This paper is divided into three sections, (1) Fundamentals of Motivation; (2) The Motivational State; and (3) Motivational Fuel. The first section discusses the fundamental concepts that underlie Human motivation—pain and pleasure. The subsequent section discusses the structure and function of motivational states that

are formed in the heart. It describes how our emotions, thoughts, and experiences of pleasure and pain integrate into a motivational state that forms the basis for our aims and aspirations in life. The final section considers the driving forces of motivation and provides practical guidelines for harnessing the power of motivation toward our goals.

Section I: Fundamentals of Motivation

Pleasure and Pain

The most fundamental of experiences to human beings are pain and pleasure. Our minds and bodies orient toward what will bring us pleasure and away from what will bring us pain. The idea that human beings *ought* to live their life in a way that maximizes pleasure and minimizes pain is known as hedonism. There are different schools of hedonism that have postulated various definitions of the ultimate pleasure that is to be sought. There are many philosophies, such as the Epicurean school of hedonism that have a more sober approach to pleasure. The Epicureans recognize that true pleasure lies in living a life of virtue, rather than indulgence of carnal desires.¹ In this way, there is overlap with Islamic notions of pleasure.

The point of departure between the Islamic viewpoint and all schools of hedonism is in the marking of pleasure as an end versus pleasure as a means. Islamically, experiencing pleasure and averting pain are signs that we are headed in the right direction in life, but do not constitute the direction itself. The utility of a sign on a journey is to guide the traveller to continue his or her pursuit of the ultimate destination, rather than signal its end. Hedonism, on the contrary, posits that pleasure is the ultimate *telos* (purpose) of human life.

One way to understand the distinction is in reference to psychological hedonism and ethical hedonism. Psychological hedonism is the notion that pleasure and pain are the fundamental drivers of human behavior.² Ethical hedonism is the idea that

¹ Rosenbaum, S. E. (1990). Epicurus on pleasure and the complete life. *Hellenistic Ethics*, 73(1), 21-41.

² Woolf, R. (2004). What kind of hedonist was Epicurus? *A Journal for Ancient Philosophy*, 49(4), 303-322.

the ultimate *telos* is to act in a way that maximizes pleasure and minimizes harm.³ The former is a description and the latter is a prescription. The Islamic tradition seems to take a middle approach, recognizing ethical dimensions of pain and pleasure as means toward Truth and virtue, rather than being Truth and virtue themselves.

Experiential Dimensions of Pleasure and Pain

Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751 AH) provides a categorization scheme of pleasure in its relation to human experience. We will broadly refer to this as experiential pleasure. He describes three different types of experiential pleasure, 1) Sensory pleasures (*ladhha juthmāniya*), 2) Imaginative Fanciful pleasures (*ladhha khayāliyyah wahmiyya*); and 3) Intellectual and Spiritual pleasures (*ladhha ‘aqliyya rūḥāniyya*).^{4,5} Ibn al-Qayyim doesn’t explicitly mention pain, but each category necessarily includes pain as an experience at the other end of the spectrum. He mentions in another work, “Out of the wisdom of Allah, He has made pleasure give rise to pain, and pain give rise to pleasure.”⁶

Sensory pleasures and pain are those associated with eating, drinking and procreating. These are pleasures and pains that humans share with animals. Imaginative pleasures are described as emerging when a person achieves power, authority, or leadership.⁷ Conversely, imaginative pain is associated with being dominated, controlled, and oppressed. This can be understood based on the modern conception of social dominance hierarchies.⁸ Dominance hierarchies are arranged according to what human beings or societies value. For instance, monetary value

³ Ibid

⁴ *Rawdat al-Muḥibbīn*, p. 245

⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim also comments on an ontological discussion surrounding the existence of pleasure. Is pleasure merely the absence of pain or an independent existent? Some have argued that the pleasure associated with eating and drinking is due to the dissipation of hunger and thirst. This is the famous position held by Epicurus, although his name is not invoked in Ibn al-Qayyim’s discussion. Ibn al-Qayyim’s position is that pleasure is an independent existent that necessarily protects against pain. Thus, it is associated with pain in its opposing nature, but is not ontologically independent from it.

⁶ Ibn Qayyim. *Shifā’ al-‘Alīl*. Cairo: Dar at-Turaat; p. 526.

⁷ *Rawdat al-Muḥibbīn*, p. 245

⁸ Hirsh, J.B., Walberg, M. D., & Peterson, J. B. (2013). Spiritual Liberals and Religious Conservatives. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4(1), 14-20.

produces its own dominance hierarchy in each society that results in pleasure as a person climbs to a higher position by amassing wealth. Influence, leadership, power, awards, fame, and beauty all represent different dominance hierarchies that people often seek to climb to experience their associated pleasures. Intellectual and spiritual pleasures are associated with knowledge (*ilm*), spiritual awareness (*ma'rifa*) and developing virtues such as nobility, generosity, chastity, bravery, and forbearance.⁹ Ibn al-Qayyim explains that when pleasure is associated with knowledge of Allah and love for Him, then a person has entered a garden of paradise in this world.

*There is nothing more pleasurable, pure and blessed to the heart and soul than love for Allah, turning to Him, connecting to Him, experiencing tranquility in His presence and longing to gaze upon Him.*¹⁰

Allah describes this pleasure in the Qur'an,

*Those who have believed and whose hearts become serene through the remembrance of Allah. Certainly, through the remembrance of Allah, hearts become tranquil.*¹¹

Conversely, those who live a spiritually destructive or nihilistic life are described as experiencing immense existential pain,

*Whoever turns away from My remembrance will have a miserable life.*¹²

And,

⁹ *Rawḍat al-Muhibbīn*, p. 246

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 246-247

¹¹ Qur'an, 13:28

¹² Qur'an, 20:124

*And whoever betrays their relationship with Allah, it is as though he has fallen from the sky and was either snatched by birds or thrown to a distant place by a strong wind.*¹³

Eschatological Functions of Pleasure and Pain

Pleasure and pain have a very complex relationship with regard to Islamic Eschatology. In this world, good deeds bring about pleasure but can also result in pain. Similarly, sin brings about pain but can also lead to pleasure. However, in the next life, there is only pleasure for goodness and only pain for evil.

Pleasure in the Next Life

1) Eternal Pleasure

Pleasure is seen as the fundamental reward associated with virtuous living in the next life. The greatest reward promised for faithful believers in the next world is the opportunity to gaze upon Allah Himself. This reward is described as a pleasure in a famous Prophetic supplication, “O Allah, I ask you for the pleasure of gazing upon Your face.”¹⁴

Pain in the Next Life

1) Deserved Pain

Pain in the next life is seen as the fundamental punishment associated with an evil lifestyle in this life. The punishment and pain in the hellfire is a recompense for the pain people caused to others and their own selves in this world.

Indeed, those who disbelieve in Our verses, We will drive them into a Fire. Every time their skins are roasted through We will replace them with other skins so they may taste the punishment. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted in Might and Wise.

¹³ Qur'an, 22:31

¹⁴ *Sunan an-Nasā'i*, Accessed on <https://sunnah.com/nasai/13/127> [August 28, 2017]

2) Therapeutic Pain

Another function of pain in the next life is healing. According to Islamic Eschatology, some people will be purified through the experiences in the hellfire and thereafter placed into paradise.¹⁵

Pleasure in this World

1) Rewarding Pleasure

Pleasure is also seen as a reward for doing good in this world. Therefore, the worthy pleasures a person experiences in this world should be seen as Mercy from Allah due to the commitment shown by the individual to His cause.

Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer, We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do.

¹⁶

The Prophet ﷺ also said when asked, “What is your opinion of the one who does a good deed and he is praised for it?” “It is early glad-tidings.”¹⁷

2) Deceptive pleasure

Shameful pleasures are seen as punishments that delude a person to continue in their sinful lifestyle. The Qur'an mentions,

*So leave them in their confusion for a time. Or do they think that we extend for them wealth and children seeking goodness for them? On the contrary, they don't have the right perception.*¹⁸

¹⁵ The interested reader can refer to this Yaqeen article for a more detailed discussion:

<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/mohammad-elshinawy/the-infinitely-merciful-and-the-question-of-hellfire/>

¹⁶ Qur'an, 16:97

¹⁷ Sahih Muslim, Accessed on <https://sunnah.com/muslim/45/216> [August 28, 2017]

¹⁸ Qur'an, 23:54-56

Pain in this World

1) Punitive Pain

Pain can be a punishment in this world for sin and oppression. As quoted earlier, the Qur'an mentions,

*Whoever turns away from My remembrance will have a miserable life.*¹⁹

*And We had gripped them with suffering [as a warning], but they did not yield to their Lord, nor did they humbly supplicate, [and will continue thus]. Until when We have opened before them a door of severe punishment, immediately they will be therein in despair.*²⁰

2) Merciful Pain

Pain can also function as a reminder to change a person's lifestyle. Often, a person continues living a sinful life until they are struck by a calamity. It is through this experience that they orient their life towards Allah as a means of coping with the pain.

*And We sent to no city a prophet [who was denied] except that We seized its people with poverty and hardship that they might humble themselves [to Allah].*²¹

3) Forbearing Pain

Pain is also experienced as a test,

*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.*²²

4) Redemptive Pain

¹⁹ Qur'an, 20:124

²⁰ Qur'an, 23:76-77

²¹ Qur'an, 7:94

²² Qur'an, 2:155

Pain can also result in the forgiveness of sins,

The Prophet ﷺ said, “There is nothing (in the form of trouble) that comes to a believer even if it is the pricking of a thorn that there is decreed for him by Allah good or his sins are obliterated.”²³

5) Growth Pains

Lastly, pain can be a necessary consequence of doing the right thing and is subsequently rewarded with pleasure in this world and the next.

That is because they are not afflicted by thirst or fatigue or hunger in the cause of Allah, nor do they tread on any ground that enrages the rejectors of truth, nor do they inflict upon an enemy any infliction but that is registered for them as a righteous deed. Indeed, Allah does not allow to be lost the reward of the doers of good.²⁴

Epistemic Functions of Pleasure and Pain

Seeking out pleasure and minimizing pain is not necessarily hedonistic and can be a useful epistemic tool to search for worthwhile pursuits in life. Ibn al-Qayyim describes the intuitive epistemological potential of pain and pleasure in relation to knowing what is beneficial and harmful for an individual, “Benefit is associated with pleasure and harm is associated with pain.”²⁵ Thus, pleasure, from this perspective, is conceptualized as an indication of benefit being obtained. Conversely, pain is conceptualized as harm being incurred.

Ibn al-Qayyim quotes Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) in explaining the theological significance of the epistemic functions of pleasure and pain, “Experiencing what is compatible (*mulā'im*) with one’s self produces pleasure and experiencing what is

²³ *Sahih Muslim*, Accessed on <https://www.sunnah.com/muslim/45/65> [September 4, 2017]

²⁴ Qur'an, 9:120

²⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim. *Ighāthat ul-Lahfān*. Jeddah: Dār Alam al-Fawā'id; p. 39.

incompatible (*munāfi*) with one's self produces pain.”²⁶ Taken together, we can understand epistemic pleasure as experiencing something externally (in the environment) or internally (in the mind and body) that we are *meant* to experience. What is *meant* to happen is what *should* happen. This is a value judgment that can only be made in Truth by Allah. Things are only meant to happen if Allah is the One who intends its occurrence.

*Allah intends to make clear to you and guide you to the ways of those before you (i.e. the Truth) and to grant you redemption (for your sins). And Allah is Knowing and Wise.*²⁷

Anything that Allah wants for you to experience is, by definition, the Truth. Therefore, the pleasurable experience of ‘compatibility’ can be conceptualized as a phenomenological²⁸ experience of Truth. Whatever we are “meant” to experience or whatever is compatible for us is an indication that it what was intended by Allah for us to experience.²⁹ Conversely, the experience of epistemic pain is an indication of harm, which is incompatible with us and thus a phenomenological experience of Falsehood.

To summarize, the epistemic functions of pleasure and pain refer to their potential to inform us of Truth. This is because Allah made a reliable association between pleasure and benefit and pain and harm. Benefit and harm can be understood as what is compatible and incompatible for the human being to have experienced. Compatibility and incompatibility can be understood as Truth and Falsehood from a phenomenological perspective.

²⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim. *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn*. Jeddah: Dar Alam al-Fawa'id; 2010. p. 233.

²⁷ Qur'an, 4:26

²⁸ Phenomenology refers to the study of the conscious experience of a phenomenon rather than its specific nature of being. In this context, Truth can be studied as a separate concept, but phenomenology here refers to how a person subjectively experiences Truth in their lives in terms of thoughts, emotions, feelings, and behaviors.

²⁹ Generally, the Will of Allah is categorized into Executive and Legislative. Executive Will encompasses everything that actually occurs and Legislative Will consists of things that Allah Wants to come into being (such as beauty, goodness, repentance etc.), but gives the human being the choice to follow. The intention of Allah in this paragraph refers to the Legislative Will. For a more detailed discussion please refer to <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/justin-parrott/reconciling-the-divine-decree-and-free-will-in-islam/#ftnt8>

Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyyah explains how benefit and Truth relate to each other on an ontological level. He describes *naḥ* (benefit) and *ḥaqq* (Truth) as *asmā' mutakāfi'ah*.³⁰ This is a term used by Ibn Taymiyyah to describe the relationship of words to a meaning. For him, *asmā' mutakāfi'ah* are not *asmā' mutarādifa* (pure synonyms that indicate the same meaning) or *asmā' mutabāyinah* (words that describe distinct qualities) but rather are words that indicate complementary qualities of one essence.³¹ He explains that *al-mashrū'* (Divine legislation), *al-nāfi'* (source of benefit), *al-sālih* (that which is virtuous), *al-'adl* (justice), *al-ḥaqq* (Truth) and *al-ḥasan* (goodness) are *asmā' mutakāfi'ah*.³² Thus to Ibn Taymiyyah these meanings all represent different qualities of one inseparable essence—Allah's Will that we are meant to accept and actualize in this world. When we act in accordance with this, we experience pleasure.

Although it is not mentioned explicitly, we can infer through *mafhūm al-mukhālafah* (inverse inference) that the opposite applies. That which opposes Allah's Will is *ḍarr* (harm), *fisq* (vice), *ẓulm* (oppression), *bāṭil* (falsehood) and *qabīḥ* (evil). When we act in accordance with these concepts, we experience pain.

The Moral Dimension of Pleasure and Pain

It is important to note that the risk of falling into hedonism is great if pleasure-seeking is conceived as a sufficient tool in signifying truth, value or benefit. Ibn al-Qayyim explains that any pleasure that leads to human flourishing (*kamāl*) can be conceptualized as worthy pleasures (*ladhha maḥmūda*).³³ He acknowledges that many are misguided with their feelings and follow pleasures that result in damage and ruin one's life. He labels this as shameful pleasure (*ladhha madhmūma*).³⁴

³⁰ Ibn Taymiyya. *Qā'idatun Fī al-Maḥabba*. Cairo: Dar at-Turāth; p. 17.

³¹ Ibid

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid, p. 235

³⁴ Ibid

We can intuitively recognize that some experiences of pleasure seem to be shameful or at least non-virtuous based on the latter categorization scheme. For instance, Ibn al-Qayyim points out that sensory pleasures on their own do not bring about true human flourishing (*kamāl*).³⁵ If that were the case, he argues, the people living the most fulfilled and truthful lives would be the ones who ate, drank, and engaged in intercourse the most.³⁶ Naturally, people would tend to see this lifestyle as devoid of purpose and shallow. Furthermore, the cognitive pleasures associated with dominance are readily seen as destructive. It should be pointed out, that both pleasures are meant to be experienced in a way that does not result in damage to one's soul or body. Sensory pleasures have been directly commanded to be fulfilled by Allah, but not in excess so as to result in damage, "Eat and drink but not in excess, Certainly Allah does not love the extravagant".³⁷ Similarly, competition regarding social dominance hierarchies breeds jealousy and results in vice rather than virtue. However, we are meant to compete with one another in spirituality and virtue, in a manner that is mutually encouraging and uplifting, "And for that (paradise) let the competitors compete."³⁸

Ibn al-Qayyim differentiates between the worthiness and the shamefulness of a pleasure in consequentialist terms. Immediate pleasure that eventually leads to greater pain in this life or the next is shameful.³⁹ Furthermore, Ibn al-Qayyim asserts,

*Any pleasure that leads to pain or averts a pleasure worthier than it cannot really be called pleasure, even if the nafs (self) mistakes it for pleasure. Can you really say there was pleasure in a poisoned meal that may have initially felt good, but led to immense pain shortly thereafter?*⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid, p. 245

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ Qur'an, 7:31

³⁸ Qur'an, 83:26

³⁹ *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn*, p. 235

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 240

Thus, forbidden pleasures or engaging in permissible pleasures in excess will eventually lead to pain and therefore cannot be termed pleasure.

Regulating Pleasure and Pain

In differentiating worthy and shameful pleasures, Ibn al-Qayyim explains the indispensable use of the intellect, “The intellect (*‘aql*) is uniquely able to project multiple pathways into the future based on the actionable options at hand.”⁴¹ The intellect is the faculty that allows us to project future consequences of actions and inform us whether a given action is worth pursuing or whether it will end in pain. The other important aid consist of the forbidden boundaries set by Allah in Divine revelation. This is why the Qur'an is described as being the *furqaan* (distinguisher between good and evil).⁴² The last ingredient is *ṣabr* (self-control; self-regulation), which refers to the energy required to change a behavior despite immediate pleasure gains based on knowledge from the intellect, revelation, or both. Conversely, a person's *hawā* (desires), *shahwa* (passions) and *shayṭān* (satanic whispers) encourage immediate pleasure despite its pathway to pain, rendering the pursuit shameful.⁴³ To summarize, pleasure, intelligence, revealed knowledge, and self-regulation all work together to orient the human being in the direction of obtaining benefit that is virtuous (generally known through revelation) and enduring (generally known through the intellect). The Qur'an pairs these two attributes in multiple places. For instance,

*Wealth and children are from the allurements of this world, but the enduring (bāqiyāt) and virtuous (salihāt) are better according to your Lord and the better (path) to aspire toward.*⁴⁴

Pleasure is not evil, but rather a mercy from Allah and a means by which we have the motivation to seek out the Divine in this world. Ibn al-Qayyim argues that

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 164

⁴² Qur'an, 3:4

⁴³ These concepts will be dealt with in greater depth in Section III (Motivational Fuel).

⁴⁴ Qur'an, 18:46

human beings are naturally predisposed to seek out what brings them pleasure and that *tawḥīd* is necessary to experience the true and ultimate pleasure of a meaningful life.⁴⁵

The association between benefit, truth, and pleasure described earlier is realized as long-term sustained pleasure. Ibn al-Qayyim explains that this only occurs when a person engages in pleasurable activities that are meaningful, resulting in closeness to Allah.⁴⁶ Meaning as a prerequisite to experiencing pleasure is an intriguing concept that is increasingly being recognized in the field of mental health. There is a correlation between suicide rates and experiencing a lack of meaning.⁴⁷ Suicide is very strongly correlated with a phenomenon known as anhedonia, an inability to experience pleasure.⁴⁸ Thus, a person who sees their life as meaningless is unable to experience the pleasures of this world and is left with just the pain. This drives them to want to end their suffering by ending their life.

Section II: The Motivational State

The concept of meaning being necessary for pleasure can be understood more clearly by exploring the neuroscience and psychology of human motivation. The brain's experience of pleasure involves the release of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that is associated with reward and motivational states.^{49,50} For dopamine to be released, it is necessary for a person to have a motivational state in their mind directed toward a specific goal. As we will learn in this section, without a goal or

⁴⁵ *Igāthat al-Lahfān*, p. 39

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 236

⁴⁷ Oishi, S., & Diener, E. (2013). Residents of poor nations have a greater sense of meaning in life than residents of wealthy nations. *Psychological Science*, 25, 422-430.

⁴⁸ Addington, D. E., & Addington, J. M. (1992). Attempted suicide and depression in schizophrenia. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 85(4), 288-291.

⁴⁹ Hilton Jr, D. L. (2013). Pornography addiction – a supranormal stimulus considered in the context of neuroplasticity. *Socioaffective Neuroscience & Psychology*. 3:1, 207s7, DOI: 10.3402/snp.v3i0.20767

⁵⁰ Kleitz-Nelson, H. K., Dominguez, J. M., & Ball, G. F. (2010). Dopamine release in the medial preoptic area is related to hormonal action and sexual motivation. *Behavioral Neuroscience*, 124(6), 773-779.

purpose, there is no dopaminergic response and thus no pleasure associated with any pursuit in life. This is what is meant by meaning being necessary for pleasure.

Cognitive Components of Motivation

Modern psychology has conceptualized the motivational state as being comprised of many components that drive human behavior along its trajectory to eventually meet its goal. The cognitive components of motivation are “conceptualizations relevant to the movement from point a, the undesired beginning-state, to point b, the desired end state.”⁵¹ The end-state can be understood as a person’s meaning or purpose. Ibn al-Qayyim describes a similar conceptualization of the motivational state as he describes the fundamental cognitive structures that underlie behavior, “There are 4 factors: (1) Matters that are loved (intrinsically valued), (2) Matters that are (intrinsically) despised, (3) Taking a path towards what is loved (intrinsically valued), (4) Taking a path that will prevent what is (intrinsically) despised.”⁵²

Ibn al-Qayyim also elucidates the former quote regarding cognitive components of motivation by explaining what the necessary conceptualizations are to construct this map. “It is known that every living thing other than Allah, including angels, human beings, demons and animals are in a constitutive state of dependency and need for achieving benefit and repelling harm. This cannot be accomplished unless a person is able to conceptualize the source of benefit and harm. Benefit is associated with pleasure and harm is associated with pain.”⁵³ Thus, a person requires a clear conceptualization of what will bring benefit and harm for them to construct an end goal while simultaneously building pathways that will bring them towards it.

To summarize, pleasure can only be achieved in relation to a motivational state. The motivational state is comprised of an end objective that is loved, implying that

⁵¹ Peterson, J. B. (2008). *The meaning of meaning*. 2nd ed. Vancouver: Routledge. pp. 11-32.

⁵² *Ighāthat al-Lahfān*, p. 39

⁵³ Ibid

it brings benefit. Ibn al-Qayyim explains this as a natural disposition, “Things that are loved and sought after are that which bring benefit and the experience of pleasure.”⁵⁴ Thus a person must have a belief system that informs them about the sources of benefit and harm. From this conceptualization, a person can construct motivational states toward attaining benefit and avoiding harm. This is the source of meaning and purpose in a person’s life. Ibn al-Qayyim explains that the ability to independently cause benefit and harm is a defining feature of divinity as is mentioned many times in the Qur'an,

*Say: Do you worship besides Allah that which has no capacity to harm or benefit you? And Allah is the All-Hearing and the All-Knowing.*⁵⁵

*And they worship other than Allah that which neither harms them nor brings them benefit.*⁵⁶

*He calls upon other than Allah, what will not bring him harm or benefit, that is extreme misguidance.*⁵⁷

So a person orients themselves toward the ultimate source of benefit and harm, and that is their god, an ultimate source of meaning. This process of constructing the motivational state with end-goals that require a belief system which informs sources of benefit is as necessary to the human mind as being conscious when in a state of wakefulness. Thus it applies to everyone, including atheists. Without a conception of what will bring benefit, and a value for it, a person would not be able to act at all in the world. Every action involves an implicit belief that this behavior is worth pursuing.

Ibn al-Qayyim explains the concept of value hierarchy regarding motivational states to provide deeper clarity. In a person’s life, every action they take is

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 439

⁵⁵ Qur'an, 5:76

⁵⁶ Qur'an, 10:18

⁵⁷ Qur'an, 22:12

necessarily directed toward some objective.⁵⁸ Nobody can move without a purpose or aim. Ibn al-Qayyim categorizes these goals into *murād li-nafsih* (intrinsic) or *murād li-ghayrih* (extrinsic).⁵⁹ Extrinsic goals are those that are sought after because they will bring about another desired goal.⁶⁰ For instance, an extrinsic goal for most people is consuming food. It is done for goals of preserving life, increasing energy, or averting hunger. Intrinsic goals are sought after for themselves. An intrinsic goal is the ultimate Truth that organizes all extrinsic goals. It represents the purpose of your life. It unifies all a person's aims to provide clarity, meaning, and purpose to all a person's pursuits. This unification of life's pursuits under one ultimate purpose is the essence of *tawhīd* (Unification of the Divine).

*Say: My prayers, my sacrifice, my life and my death are all for Allah, the Master of all the realms.*⁶¹

The intrinsic goal reigns supreme in an individual's value hierarchy. It is sought after for no reason other than itself. In other words, functionally it is a person's primary motivation for all their deeds, the centerpiece of their psychological universe, the very god that a person worships in this world, even if they do not affirm a transcendent God. As Allah mentions in the Qur'an, "Have you not seen the one who takes his desires as his God?"⁶²

Extrinsic goals necessitate an intrinsic goal by virtue of the problem of infinite regress (I am doing action A because of X, which is done because of Y, which is done because of Z etc.) and circularity (I do action X because of Y, which I do because of X). Furthermore, if there is no intrinsic goal then extrinsic goals are rendered meaningless, since there is nothing intrinsically valued. It is necessary that there is a foundation to everyone's value hierarchy, and that foundation functionally operates as their deity. It is what is loved, valued and perceived as the

⁵⁸ *Ighāthat al-Lahfān*, p. 67

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 68

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Qur'an, 6:162

⁶² Qur'an, 25:43

source of ultimate benefit. A person without a clear conception of God is doomed to wander the world pursuing meaningless extrinsic pursuits, being pulled in every direction. The Qur'an captures this reality, “Verily your pursuits are dispersed.”⁶³

Based on this model, we can understand the psychological implausibility of *shirk* (associating partners with God). *Shirk* is conceptualized as having multiple intrinsic goals according to this framework. Having multiple intrinsic goals that sit at the top of the value hierarchy renders the entire value system as structurally unsound. The utility of an organized value system is based on its ability to enable an individual to prioritize their actions in the world. There is no way for a person to discriminate between intrinsic goals, since they have equal value. In other words, there is a psychological necessity for *tawhīd* (unification) of the intrinsic goal. The Qur'an explains this complex perspective of *tawhīd* and *shirk* through a profound parable,

*Allah presents an example: a slave owned by quarreling partners and another belonging exclusively to one man—are they equal in comparison? Praise be to Allah! But most of them do not know.*⁶⁴

Thus, pleasure can only be achieved if a person has meaning in their life. Meaning has to do with relating one's existence with a higher purpose or goal. Pleasure is achieved as a person progresses toward this goal. Without a purpose, a person will be unable to experience pleasure, since there is necessarily no progress toward anything.

Furthermore, temporary pleasure can be experienced by simple extrinsic goals or false intrinsic goals. The extrinsic goals will eventually lose meaning and a person will feel a deep existential void in their life, characterized by anhedonia, all due to the absence of an intrinsic goal. If a person has false gods that they have propped up as intrinsic goals, either in the form of idols, or social dominance, they will soon reveal their falsehood. This is because intrinsic goals are conceptualized based on

⁶³ Qur'an, 92:4

⁶⁴ Qur'an, 39:29

their ability to bring benefit to a person. For example, as a person works towards serving his own desires and acquiring dominance, they will recognize how empty and meaningless that goal really was when it no longer brings them pleasure.

The Emotional Component of Motivation

Another important component of the motivational state in addition to cognitions consists of emotions. Emotions possess an evaluative function that is based on an internal conscious or unconscious assessment of our current progress in our journey towards an end-goal.⁶⁵ Negative emotions are experienced when we encounter obstacles in our journey that hinder our progress towards the end-state. When this occurs, a person feels pain related to anxiety, frustration, and anger.⁶⁶ This is intuitively felt by most people when they experience failure in striving toward an objective. Ibn al-Qayyim explains the emotional component of motivation by describing the pain associated with not being able to achieve what the heart desires,

*Whoever is constantly engaged in lustful gazes will be persistently affected by frustration and regret. The most harmful thing for the heart are the images it is exposed to by the eyes. The heart craves what the eye sees and develops a strong desire to (sexually) interact with it (through perception of touch, voice and fragrance). This desire to move beyond mere visual stimulus perturbs the heart deeply until it loses all senses of self-restraint, determined to reach it. This gap between what the heart craves and what it possesses is what results in pain.*⁶⁷

Spiritual Foundations of Motivation

From a neuropsychological perspective, there is constantly an interchange between our cognitive systems (*'aql*) and the (shameful) pleasure system of our brain

⁶⁵Peterson, J. B. (2008). *The meaning of meaning*. 2nd ed. Vancouver: Routledge. pp. 11-32.

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ *Rawdat al-Muhibbīn*, p. 153

(*hawā*) that combine to determine the motivational states we experience in life. Ibn al-Qayyim captured this tension by describing the struggle between the *naḥs ammāra bis-sū'* (nature within our soul that inclines to evil) and the *naḥs muṭma'inn* (the nature within our soul that inclines towards a higher existence) in vivid detail.⁶⁸ We mentioned this struggle in the previous article when explaining the battle between *shayṭān* and the individual. This conflict is actualized in the heart as the *naḥs muṭma'inn* against the *naḥs ammāra bis-sū'*.

When we integrate this struggle with the previous discussion on motivation, we can understand this phenomenon as the *naḥs ammāra bis-sū'* attempting to construct motivational frames towards immoral and destructive ends that are immediately pleasurable. Conversely, the *naḥs muṭma'inn* works to reorient the individual toward a virtuous end and constructs the appropriate motivational map. The process by which the *naḥs muṭma'inn* deconstructs and reorients motivational states augmented by the *naḥs ammāra bis-sū'* requires a sound '*aql* (intellect) and a special type of energy referred to as *ṣabr* (self-control or patience)⁶⁹. Modern psychology refers to this construct as self-regulation, the mind's ability to regulate one's behavior by offsetting immediate pleasure for long-term benefit and acting in accordance with one's values. When a motivational state is activated towards an end that our intellect deems to be harmful, hopeless, or idle, then the *naḥs muṭma'inn* utilizes its self-regulatory capacity (*ṣabr*) to restrain from the compulsion elicited by the motivational state.

The *naḥs ammāra bis-sū'* also works to deconstruct and divert motivational states formed by the *naḥs muṭma'inn* toward its own ends. This process is subtle and often occurs unbeknownst to the individual. A person can think they are on a path toward being charitable, but they are actually on a path towards ostentation. The actions in both situations appear the same outwardly, but the motivational state is different. Ibn al-Qayyim describes more than 35 dual-pairs where the *naḥs ammāra bis-sū'* subtly diverts the aims of the *naḥs muṭma'inn* to an aim that is different internally, but almost identical outwardly. For instance, the *naḥs ammāra bis-sū'*

⁶⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim. *Kitāb ar-Rūh*. 5th edition. Cairo: Al-Maktabah at-Tawfiqiyyah; 2012, p. 328.

⁶⁹ The concepts of *ṣabr* and self-regulation are discussed in more detail later in this article.

obscures the distinctions between nobility and arrogance, generosity and extravagance, discipline and rigidity, and optimism and wishful thinking.⁷⁰

Motivation and Doubt

The control of the *nafs ammāra bis-sū'* over the heart is not exclusive to misbehavior, but is also relevant to the phenomenon of doubt. The human being has been created with an in-built motivational trajectory toward a meaningful understanding of the world. Learning knowledge carries the responsibility of acting in accordance with it. It can be said that knowledge and action are two sides of the same coin. Thus, it follows that the two overarching problems that affect the heart of a person stem from problems of knowledge (doubts/*shubhuhāt*) and problems of action (desires/*shahawāt*). These both represent the two primary ways that a motivational state formulated by the *nafs muṭma'inn* is distorted toward the aims set by the *nafs ammāra bis-sū'*.

The acquisition of knowledge is an action that is necessarily nested in a motivational state with ignorance as the starting point and knowing as the end-point. This motivational state is constructed by the *nafs muṭma'inn* to achieve enlightenment through acquiring knowledge and protecting one's self from the ignorance that results in false beliefs and misbehavior. The *nafs ammāra bis-sū'* diverts the motivational state from *'ilm* (knowledge) to *ẓann* (conjecture). This is because knowledge of *ḥaqq* (truth) and the spiritual and moral responsibility that accompanies it require a person to act contrary to their dark urges. *Ẓann* (conjecture) is not accompanied by any responsibility and allows a person to indulge without feeling remorse. Furthermore, *ẓann* pathologically interacts with existing *'ilm* in the heart resulting in *shakk* (doubt). Thus, *ẓann*, which is achieved when the *nafs ammāra bis-sū'* uses the *'aql*, deconstructs existing knowledge, rendering it doubtful.

⁷⁰ *Kitāb ar-Rūh*, p. 369

This concept is captured in the following passage of the Qur'an,

*And when it was said, "Indeed, the promise of Allah is **Truth** (Ḥaqq) and the Hour [is coming]—no doubt about it," you said, "We **know** ('ilm) not what is the Hour. We assume only **conjecture** (ẓann), and we are not convinced (yaqeen)."*⁷¹

In this example, knowledge of the accountability of mankind is being highlighted as ḥaqq. Recognizing it as such is paramount in achieving felicity in the next stage of our being. However, having knowledge of this truth comes with the immense responsibility of ensuring every choice, micro or macro, is morally, intellectually and spiritually optimal.

*And the record [of deeds] will be placed [open], and you will see the criminals fearful of what is within it, and they will say, "Oh, woe to us! What is this book that leaves nothing **small** or **great** except that it has enumerated it?" And they will find what they did present [before them]. And your Lord does injustice to no one.*⁷²

This knowledge disrupts the plans constructed by the *nafs ammāra bis-sū'*, delivering a lethal blow. The response from the *nafs ammāra bis-sū'* is to counteract this knowledge with *ẓann* that downgrades knowledge of the hereafter to something that is uncertain and doubtful. For instance, a person may conveniently assume that reality is exclusively derived through the physical senses. This results in the conclusion that reality is limited to this world.

*And they say, "There is not but our worldly life; we die and live, and nothing destroys us except time." And they have of that no **knowledge** ('ilm); they are only **assuming** (ẓann).*⁷³

⁷¹ Qur'an, 45:32

⁷² Qur'an, 18:49

⁷³ Qur'an, 45:32

This *ẓann* cannot be proven rationally, empirically or intuitively. It is merely an unproven assumption that is held with greater conviction than a system of beliefs that render entire reality as meaningful.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, this *ẓann* is used to escape the responsibility associated with Truth, enabling a shamefully hedonistic pursuit of life. Interestingly, when Allah quotes the skeptics in saying “we are not convinced,” the Arabic word used is *mustayqineen*. This implies the process of searching or seeking certainty. This is a crucial epistemic aim for those who are searching for the Truth of this world. Those who do not make certainty a priority may escape the responsibility that accompanies conviction, but they will sustain the excruciating existential pain of nihilism.

And whoever turns away from My remembrance—indeed, he will have a depressed life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind.”⁷⁵

Section III: Motivational Fuel

We have discussed the fundamentals, structure, and function of the motivational state. The final piece to the motivational puzzle regards the energy associated with the motivational state. This energy can be positive (*ṣabr*) or negative (*shahwa*) depending on the aim of the motivational state. The *nafs ammāra bis-sū’* is fueled by *shahwa* and the *nafs muṭma’inn* is fueled by *ṣabr*. Thus, it follows that strengthening *ṣabr* and weakening *shahwa* is an essential approach to achieving one’s true goals and aspirations.

Ṣabr & Self-Regulation

The concept of self-regulation in modern psychology is roughly equivalent to the concept of *ṣabr* in Islam.⁷⁶ Self-regulation is defined as the energy that enables a

⁷⁴ The interested reader should refer to: <http://spiritualperception.org/the-real-battle-meaningful-vs-meaningless/>

⁷⁵ Qur'an, 45:32

⁷⁶ We will be using the terms *sabr* and self-regulation interchangeably. Generally, we will use self-regulation when speaking about the psychological perspective and *sabr* when speaking about Ibn al-Qayyim’s or the Islamic perspective.

person to act in harmony with their values and projected long-term benefits despite the energy required and forgoing of short term pleasure.⁷⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim defines *ṣabr* as the strength and energy required to act in ways to bring benefit and to restrain from that which brings harm.⁷⁸ He goes deeper than modern research regarding the nature of this energy. He describes an initiatory and inhibitory strength as two fundamental components of *ṣabr*.⁷⁹ The initiatory strength is the element of *ṣabr* that enables the initiation of action to achieve a long-term benefit or to act in accordance with one's values. This dimension of *ṣabr* is utilized when a person acts to fulfill responsibilities and obligations, despite obvious costs of energy, pain, and difficulty. The inhibitory strength focuses on the energy that is required for restraint or abstinence. This dimension of *ṣabr* is most relevant to this article, as it has to do with refraining or abstaining from a particular action, despite the appeal of short-term pleasure or the short-term pain associated with abstinence. The advantage of this conceptualization is that it is more precise and can explain the variability of *ṣabr* between individuals more accurately.

Ibn al-Qayyim notes that the differences between people regarding *ṣabr* are based on variability in these two dimensions.⁸⁰ He explains that a person may be high in initiatory strength, but low in inhibitory control compared to someone who is low in initiatory strength but high in inhibitory control.⁸¹ The variation regards the quality of *ṣabr*, rather than purely quantity. Ibn al-Qayyim explains that this is why you may find a person who struggles with staying away from the forbidden, but does not find any difficulty fulfilling their obligations such as prayers, fasting, or even charitable deeds such as reading scripture or praying the long night prayers.⁸² Such a person has a strong initiatory component of their *ṣabr*, but a weak inhibitory component. This describes the common archetype of a practicing Muslim who fulfills his obligations but struggles with lust-related addiction. In fact, Ibn al-Qayyim himself uses the example of a person who finds it difficult to

⁷⁷ Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2007). Self-regulation, ego depletion and motivation. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 1, 115-128.

⁷⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim. *Uddat aṣ-Ṣābirīn*. Damam: Dar Ibn al-Jawzi; 2012. p. 41.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 40

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 41

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Ibid

refrain from lustful gazes but has no difficulty praying the night prayer in the heat of summer and the cold of winter.⁸³ Conversely, he describes the person who has the ability to resist the temptation of lustful gazes but cannot fulfill his obligations.⁸⁴ This may be why you find Muslims who do not meet obligations of prayer or fasting, but strictly avoid unlawful meat, illicit relationships, and intoxicants.

Strengthening *Ṣabr* & Self-Regulation

There is a lot of modern research that has studied how to develop skills of self-regulation, which can be useful in this regard. Self-regulation is described as a limited resource that diminishes each time it is used. Thus, it is possible for a person to become completely depleted of his or her self-regulatory energy. When this happens, a person often succumbs to temptations and experiences a rebound effect.⁸⁵ This refers to when a person uses up their entire self-regulatory capacity to avoid a certain behavior or to do a certain action. Subsequently, they ‘rebound’ once their energy is depleted and end up engaging in the behavior they were trying to avoid or they become unable to engage in the action they were intending. The rebound effect is often seen in unreasonable diets. A person uses up all their self-regulatory resources to abstain from consuming all sorts of foods. After the resource is depleted, they engage in binge-eating.

In the context of lust-related behaviors, a person may deplete their resources in trying to refrain from engaging in forbidden gazing and subsequently ‘rebound’ and engage in those activities. It is also possible that a person engages in other actions that require self-regulatory strength, and the depletion of the resource crosses over to the domain of lust and a person does not find the ability to disengage. For instance, a person may have spent the entire day engaged in long and intense studying or working, followed by a large quantity of worship in the form of recitation or prayer. Close to the end of the day, the person then goes to the

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ Muraven, M., Tice, D. M., & Baumeister, R. F. (1998). Self-control as a limited resource: Regulatory depletion patterns. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(3), 774-789.

gym for a workout. This person has engaged in activities that required large resources of self-regulatory energy. Thus, when he or she returns home and the temptation of lustful images crosses his or her mind, they are left without any energy to resist. Although we mentioned that Ibn al-Qayyim saw initiatory and inhibitory strengths as separate domains of *ṣabr*, it seems that depletion of energy in one may at times transfer over to the other.

The first practical suggestion from the idea of self-regulatory depletion is to ensure that an adequate amount persists throughout the day. This can be done by ensuring a person does not engage in sudden and extreme bursts of activity that require willpower. This idea is captured in a statement of the Prophet ﷺ, “This way of life is easy, no one overburdens himself in it except that it will overcome him...”⁸⁶ It can also be maintained by engaging in activities that replenish this resource. Generally, rest and positive emotion replenish self-regulatory resources.⁸⁷ Thus, sleeping or positive emotion-inducing activities such as socializing, art, sports, and hobbies may aid in the refueling of will power.

The literature also describes certain personalities or characteristics that are more prone to self-regulatory depletion than others. For example, people who had high self-esteem and were defensive (high in self-presentation bias) experienced greater depletion of self-regulation.⁸⁸ Self-presentation bias refers to a person altering their behaviors to ensure they look better in front of other people. This is interesting because the construct of defensive high self-esteem can be understood as a type of arrogance, since it describes people who think too highly of themselves. Thus, developing humility may help slow down the depletion of self-regulation.

It should also be noted that when a person is depleted of self-regulatory energy, it is still possible to engage in, or refrain from, activities that require energy through using extrinsic incentives to drive motivation. Studies have found that participants

⁸⁶ *Sahih Bukhari*, #39

⁸⁷ Tice, D. M., Baumeister, R. F., Shmueli, D., & Muraven, M. (2007). Restoring the self: Positive affect helps improve self-regulation following ego depletion. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 43(3), 379-384.

⁸⁸ Lambird, K. F., & Mann, T. (2006). When do ego threats lead to self-regulation failure? Negative consequences of defensive high self-esteem. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32, 1177-1187.

who depleted their self-regulation but were given incentives such as cash, were able to still engage in activities requiring self-regulation.⁸⁹

An important element of self-regulation or *ṣabr* that we have not touched on, is its ability to grow in strength in accordance with the frequency with which it is used. From this perspective, it is analogous to a muscle that weakens initially through prolonged use, but after recovery becomes stronger.⁹⁰ From this notion, another practical suggestion for those interested in increasing their self-regulation is to use it more often. However, just like excessive exercise can be a hindrance to muscle growth, so can excessive self-regulation. As mentioned earlier, it is important that significant use occurs while not being completely depleted.

Ibn al-Qayyim has a chapter dedicated to the issue of enhancing a person's *ṣabr*. He explains that all interventions for matters of the heart or the body can be reduced to cognitive (‘*ilm*) or behavioral (‘*amal*).⁹¹

In terms of the cognitive interventions for *ṣabr*, he explains this has to do with having a better understanding of one's obligations, responsibilities, and values. A person should learn what leads to benefit and fulfillment, and what leads to pain and suffering.⁹² In other words, *ṣabr* is not useful unless a person is utilizing it for the appropriate objectives. The second step in this cognitive intervention is to assign high value and significance to those objectives, ultimately fueling strong determination and motivation.⁹³ He explains that when a person has attached such high significance and aspires towards the values he has learned, then acting in accordance with them will result in tremendous pleasure that overshadows any pain incurred.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. (2007). Self-regulation, ego depletion and motivation. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 1, 115-128.

⁹⁰ Muraven, M., & Baumeister, R. F. (2000). Self-regulation and depletion of limited resources: Does self-control resemble a muscle? *Psychological Bulletin*, 126(2), 247-259.

⁹¹ ‘*Uddat aṣ-Ṣābirīn*, p. 89

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ Ibid

In terms of behavioral interventions, he conceptualizes *ṣabr* as a tag-team wrestling match with the *‘aql* and *dīn* (conscience) against the desires and the *naḥs* (*ammāra bis-sū’*).⁹⁵ From this conceptual framework, he deduces that strengthening one’s *ṣabr* results from either strengthening oneself, or weakening one’s opponent.⁹⁶ He gives 5 interventions that can significantly weaken one’s desires, resulting in relatively stronger *ṣabr*.

The first intervention involves an evaluation of one’s desires and pleasures, both lawful and unlawful. Following this evaluation, the individual should strive to decrease fulfillment of these wants and needs, even if they are permissible. This is the rationale behind fasting, and was a specific prescription of the Prophet ﷺ for youth struggling with sexual desire without a permissible outlet:

*O young men, whoever among you can afford to get married, let him do so, and whoever cannot afford it, let him fast, for that will be a shield for him.*⁹⁷

The second intervention is to lower one’s gaze and the third intervention is to entertain the soul with permissible pleasures.⁹⁸ When a person fulfills a desire through permissible means, then it weakens the strength of the craving. Ibn al-Qayyim mentions that every desire has a permissible means of fulfillment as described earlier. The fourth intervention is to consider the negative consequences of fulfilling these passions and the fifth intervention is to think of the disgust associated with the action.⁹⁹ As Ibn al-Qayyim explains, “It will be hard for a person to drink from a pond full of flies and dogs.”¹⁰⁰

Ibn al-Qayyim says that the first three interventions can be seen as cutting off provisions from a dangerous beast, hiding provisions from the beast, and giving food according to its natural need, respectively.¹⁰¹ Thus a person’s desires can be

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Ibid, p. 90

⁹⁷ *Sahih Bukhari*, #5066

⁹⁸ *‘Uddat aṣ-Ṣābirīn*, p. 90

⁹⁹ Ibid, pp. 91-92

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 92

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 91

symbolized as a beast living inside of them. If it receives too much provision, in the form of forbidden behaviors, it is strengthened and can destroy the body. Limiting its intake and only giving it enough to co-exist with you, results in taming of the beast.

Regarding strengthening a person's motivation for goodness, Ibn al-Qayyim gives 20 suggestions,¹⁰²

1. Beholding the glory of Allah in the heart and His greatness. The thought of disobeying Him should result in shame and embarrassment.
2. Beholding the love of Allah in the heart, so you avoid disobeying Him out of love for Him.
3. Witnessing the blessings of Allah and His favors toward you.
4. Recognizing the Anger and Avenging of Allah.
5. Recognizing the loss incurred by engaging in disobedience. Your sustenance and worldly possessions are decreased, as are your faith and certainty.
6. Experiencing the pleasure that comes with conquering the *nafs ammāra bis-sū'* and pelting Shaytān.
7. Understanding that Allah has promised to replace what has been given up for His sake for something better.
8. Experiencing the special Divine presence that is accompanied by His Mercy and Love.
9. Recognizing that time waits for no one and that it passes swiftly.

¹⁰² Ibid, pp. 93-101

10. The inevitable outcome of disobedience is hardship and pain.
11. Struggle against one's desires, when they emerge.
12. Reject the first thought that will eventually lead to a temptation for evil.
13. Strive to cut off the means to fulfilling your desire. This principle is found in the story of Yusuf where he rushed to leave the room where the sin could only take place.
14. Contemplate the signs of Allah in nature and in His book.
15. Contemplate the temporality of this life and its essence. This life is merely a test and its forbidden pleasures are a delusion.
16. Recognize that your heart is between the fingers of the Most Merciful, so rely on Him and ask Him for help.
17. Appreciate that there are only two trajectories you can be on in life. The first is to the highest companionship (*rafīq al-a'lā*), Allah, and the second is to the lowest of the low (*asfala sāfilīn*).
18. Avoid environments where Allah's Mercy does not descend. How can one thrive in such an environment? Plants and trees don't grow except in places where rain descend.
19. Recognize that Allah created you for life, not death, for honor, not humiliation, for security, not fear, and for wealth, not poverty.
20. Do not be deluded by your knowledge of good and evil. Knowledge comes with responsibility to strive and struggle for its actualization into reality.

These suggestions given by Ibn al-Qayyim are meant to increase motivational fuel through cognitive shifts and behavioral changes. To conclude, we have attempted to condense and express these points in a format that we hope will inspire the hearts and result in stronger motivation. It is written as a letter from your *nafs muṭma'inn*,

Dear beloved slave of the King of kings,

What ails you that you contemplate transgression against the One Who Created you?

Has your heart forgotten its Master? His Greatness and His Glory? That He Knows of your innermost secrets. Sees your every action and Hears your every word?

Surely, wealth and faith are victims of your transgression. Do you desire to erect barriers between yourself and His blessings?

O impoverished supplicant, would you use His countless blessings against yourself in disobedience to Him, or would you use them for yourself in gratefulness to Him?

Think of the blessed bargain, O meandering traveller! That you leave sin and He, the Most Generous, has guaranteed to replace it with that which is better!

Reflect! What compels your Master to offer you such? Nothing in existence can compel The Compeller. Yet, He loves you, and He wants happiness for you.

O despondent soul, you must believe that He loves you! He created you for wealth, not poverty, for life, not death, for honor, not humiliation, and for peace, not fear. What will make you realize that it is sin that brings you nearer to the latter in every respect?

O slave, will you not respond to the Most Loving with your love? For if you love, you would diligently evade all which would distance you from the object of your love. And surely to Allah, the Everlasting, alone belongs the highest example.

So be cautious, and let not linger any corrupt thoughts or wayward feelings lest they turn into destructive fantasies and elaborate plans.

And remember, dear slave, that the strength to overcome your desires, your determination and your will, are between the Fingers of the Most Merciful. Will you not ask Him for relief? O slave, ask and persevere, and know that the One who responds will surely respond.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ The author wishes to acknowledge C. Zarak Aslam's significant contribution in producing this abridged letter.