

# An Islamic Conceptual Framework of a Well-balanced Personality

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to highlight a conceptual framework of a well-balanced personality in the light of an Islamic point of view. The article begins with an explanation on the nature of human beings as the underlying concept on which the entire assumption of human personality is based. Further discussion will focus on the types of personality – that is, *nafs al-ammārah*, *nafs al-muṭmainnah*, and *nafs al-lawwāmah*. In this regard, the spiritual development process is about the continuous effort of the animal soul to subordinate itself to the power of the rational soul.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the educational process – in particular, its methods and the curriculum content – is discussed as an element of intervention in developing good personality traits. The exposition of this article’s writing is derived from scholarly and original sources of knowledge – that is, the Holy Qur’ān and the tradition of the Prophet (ṢAAS), as well as the writings of Muslim scholars to verify and elucidate some of the relevant matters.

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## Introduction

Personality is an aspect that is born within every human. It is an overall picture of the individual, both internally and externally, in terms of its physical, emotional and psychological characteristics. Self-personality recognition is very important information for individuals in their process of managing intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences. Personality recognition can also help individuals manage and adjust themselves in a different life situations. The understanding of the personality from the Western point of view and from the Muslim perspective will provide individuals different understandings. Compared with the West, Muslims maintain that the formation of the personality and its development is based on the internal aspects that directly affect the individual's spiritual nature. In other words, the debate about the personality from the Islamic perspective not only focuses on aspects of genetics, anatomy and biology; it also discusses how these three aspects are developed in parallel with the unfoldment of the spiritual. Spiritual aspects of a person's quality in terms of weaknesses and strengths – as well as the elements which affect their strength and weaknesses – will be the main focus in the Islamic worldview. These aspects of genetics, anatomy and biology will make the human unique and allow for different potentials and for healthy personalities. This spiritual aspect has been forgotten or denied by the West. Therefore, I seek to explore the healthy personality from the Islamic perspective.

The nature of personality and how it develops has been a main concern in the study of psychology for more than a hundred years.<sup>2</sup> From the point of view of modern psychology, personality is a unique collection of attitudes, emotions, habits, thoughts, impulses, and behaviors that define how a person typically behaves in various situations.<sup>3</sup> For a wider standpoint, the discussion on personality also deals on individual differences, the connection between mind and body, and the physiology of perception.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the concept of personality from the point of view of Western psychologists is based on their interest in research. Multiple schools of thought flourished in the early nineteenth century – schools such as behaviorism, psychoanalytic, trait theory, and social learning – whereby ideas, theories, and patterns of human personalities were formulated and studied by means of a material and mechanistic approaches.

Behaviorist theory, founded by B. F Skinner, maintained that human character and personality is the product of stimulus and response, which can be measured and analyzed empirically. Stimulus is referred to the changes that have some impact or effect on that organism such that be-

havior is modified in some detectable way. Whereas response is the movement that results from the stimulus.<sup>5</sup> This theory focuses more on external changes in human behavior. In contrast, Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalytic theory, viewed personality as a result of internal changes in human beings. A psychoanalytic view of the human personality focuses on the conscious and unconscious mind, whereby a more general view is that human actions are to fulfill the biological needs of individual.<sup>6</sup> Another approach, the development of human personality from cognitive and structural psychology, deals largely with the human mind and thought, and how the mind and the body interact with each other.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, type and trait theories are concerned with common characteristics among individuals and characteristics that differentiate individuals from each other. Traits are defined as relatively enduring patterns of behavior, which are relatively consistent in many situations.<sup>8</sup> In this case, Gordon Allport and Raymond B. Cattell, who were among the pioneers of this theory, believed that the most important traits were: those motivational traits related to values (dynamic traits); ability traits related to effectiveness such as intelligence and social skills; and finally, temperament traits that were largely inherited aspects of behavior. Cattell has devised the five-factor model of personality traits, which has been used extensively by psychologists and educators. The five-factor model of personality traits are: neuroticism, extroversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. These five traits are the basic units of personality and considered to be relatively stable across a person's life span.<sup>9</sup> From a different point of view, the social point of view, personality is learned behavior. According to Albert Bandura, the most important parts of human behavior are learned from other persons in society – family, friends, and the broader culture. Bandura places particular emphasis on cognitions about the individual's ability to handle the demands of life—that is, the individual's self-efficacy, the capability of doing what is necessary to reach the goal.<sup>10</sup> In this case, compared to a person with a poor sense of self-efficacy, an individual with a positive and functional self-efficacy may accept greater challenges, expend more effort, and may be more successful in reaching his or her goal.

The models of personality proposed by the Western psychologists are still vague and incomprehensive because their assumptions of human personality are still segmented into different waves of ideas and theories. The following is Hans Eysenck's comment on the personality:

The concept of personality is widely recognized as being quite central in psychology, yet its definition is a very nebulous affair indeed. There

is some agreement that it refers to certain enduring dispositions in the constitution of the individual and that it is a basic reality underlying important individual differences in behavior, but precisely what its nature is, how it originated, and how it can be measured, are questions on which psychologists are in desperate disagreement.<sup>11</sup>

In Islam, the human is a beauty and unique creation in nature who is made up of the body, the soul, and the spirit. Thus, the whole understanding of human personality should integrate these three components altogether; otherwise, a comprehensive conception of human personality might not be achieved.<sup>12</sup> Up to this point, the Western secular psychologists disregard the soul or the spirit as one of the entities in human nature. This is because the soul or the spirit is immaterial, and a discussion of it enters into the realm of spirituality and metaphysics, areas that are not approached by the Western understanding of the concept of the human. Edward Titchener, the pioneer of structural psychology stressed that the concept of metaphysics from scientific point of view is rather a metaphysics in which both matter and spirit disappear, in order to make way for the unitary conception of experience.<sup>13</sup> Auguste Comte, a French philosopher in the nineteenth century, who was also the founder of positivism, emphasized that the scientific study of the human should be free from theological, philosophical, or political assumptions and implications.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of a materialistic approach that is concerned on the physical aspect of the human being (as devised by former scientists such as B. F Skinner, Edward Thorndike, and J. B Watson), modern psychologists however believed that spirituality is vital in developing human character. As a result, new ideas and theories such as transcendental, existential, and humanistic approaches were developed.<sup>15</sup> The existential approach was devised by a number of European philosophers such as Soren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Friedrich Nietzsche as an effort to help people resolve the dilemmas of contemporary life – quandries such as isolation, alienation, and meaninglessness.<sup>16</sup> Viktor Frankl, one of the pioneers of the existential approach, has developed a new approach entitled “logotherapy,” which means “therapy through meaning.” The central themes are: the will to meaning; the freedom to find meaning in all that we think; and the integration of the mind, body, and spirit.<sup>17</sup> The humanistic approach is similar because it emphasizes the individual, personal choice, and free will in shaping personality. Abraham Maslow, a pioneer of the humanistic approach assumes that every individual have a built-in drive toward fulfilling his own natural potentials. The attainment of this potential is referred to as self-actualization. In order to achieve this higher level

of human needs, the individual also needs to fulfill other needs – for example, biological needs, psychological needs, and social needs.<sup>18</sup> Yet, this inclusion of the spiritual aspect in psychological theories is not enough for the Muslims expectations and needs. This is because the concept of spirituality from the Westerner’s point of view is based on human experience or on phenomena that can be described and assessed empirically.<sup>19</sup>

The Muslims believe that spirituality is an element of religion, and religion is based upon knowledge contained in the Qur’ān, which is the general guide for the human existence. As such, it is the only divine guidance on the spiritual that is superior to all others and total; and because of its totality, it embraces the psychic and even the corporeal aspects of the individual.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the excellence of humans and their well-being, either as individuals or collectively, are realized by means of divine knowledge and ethical values.

## The Nature of the Human

The human is constituted of two elements; the body and the soul.<sup>21</sup> Al-Ghazālī describes human nature as an integration of spiritual and bodily forces. The body and the soul are very closely interrelated – which means that without the soul, the body alone cannot be a human. Likewise, without the body, one cannot be a human. Nevertheless, the real essence that causes the physical body to function is the soul and not the body. In this case, the body is not more than just a container that provides a very appropriate space for the soul to dwell while it is in its worldly form.<sup>22</sup> In *Alchemy of Happiness*, Al-Ghazālī elaborates on the relationship between the body and the soul:

The body may be compared to a steed and the soul is a rider, the body was created for the soul, the soul for the body. If a man knows not his own soul, which is the nearest thing to him, what is the use of his claiming to know others? It is as a beggar who has not the wherewithal for a meal should claim to be able to feed a town.<sup>23</sup>

As the soul is the main entity in forming one’s personality, it is important to understanding the nature of the soul. The real essence of the soul and how it exists in the human body is mysterious and cannot be grasped by means of human intelligence alone. In the case of life after death, although the body has perished, the soul still survives and returns to its creator.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the discussion on the soul should be illuminated by religion (*dīn*) and directed by the knowledge of God.

The term *rūh* (literally “spirit,” “soul,” or “breath of life”) is used in the Qur’ān to refer to numerous metaphysical phenomena such as angels,

revelation, or divine inspiration.<sup>25</sup> The *rūh* has been discussed by many Muslim scholars such as al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā as divine in its nature. Al-Ghazālī's description of the soul is based on the Qur'ān and Hadith. The soul according to al-Ghazālī is a substance (*jawhar*), not an accident (*'ard*), and it exists by itself. It is immortal, conscious of itself; it is not measured in terms of extent in space and time; and is the locus of the intelligible. There are four terms used in relation to the soul, depending on its states (*ahwāl* – that is, the heart (*qalb*), the soul or self (*nafs*), the spirit (*rūh*), and the intellect (*'aql*).<sup>26</sup> When it is involved with intellection and apprehension, it is called “intellect”; when it governs the body, it is called “a soul”; when it is engaged in receiving illumination, it is called “a heart”; and when it reverts to its own world, it is called “spirit.”<sup>27</sup> Ibn Sīnā designates soul and spirit as two levels of an entity, which he defines as soul. The soul is pure at the transcendental level. However, at the phenomenal level, it enters the body and animates it. In this case, the first level of the soul belongs to metaphysics, whereas the other level is known in the realm of natural sciences.<sup>28</sup> Like al-Ghazālī, Ibn Sīnā also believes the soul is nonmaterial, a spiritual substance capable of existing independently of the body.<sup>29</sup> Ahmad bin Muhammad Miskawayh describes the essence of the soul as a motion.<sup>30</sup> The motion is of two kinds: one toward intellect, and another toward matter. The first motion brings the individual nearer to the source of the intellect, and hence, it illuminates and in turn illuminates the matter. This implies a transcendental aspect of the human self, which is *rūh*, and a sensible self, which is the *nafs*. It is clear that the *rūh* is the universal spirit, which is present in all manifestation, and one of its manifestations is the individual soul of a human.

According to Muslim scholars, when the soul or the spirit (*rūh*) was first created in the spiritual world, it had already acknowledged God as the creator. The conversation between spirit and God is revealed in Qur'ān (7:172), God asked the spirit, “*Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?*” The spirits answer, “*Yes! We do testify.*” This conversation has significant implications on the nature of the human. Firstly, from the very beginning, the human is endowed with the knowledge of God, and the human has consciously and wholeheartedly acknowledged God as his or her creator. Secondly, man has consciously and willingly sealed a covenant with God before he entered this earth and promised to obey, submit, and follow all of God's commands. Fourthly, the human has agreed to submit and accept Islam or *al-din* as his or her way of life. Finally, as a result of his or her royalty, the human will experience peacefulness, tranquility, and happiness in this world and in the hereafter.

When the human disobeyed God, transgressed the divine rules, and digressed from Islam, the human had indeed violated the covenant, and this will affect his or her soul and body. Believing in God means to submit oneself wholeheartedly and willingly to Islam because Islam is the only religion acceptable to God. The religion of Islam encompasses all dimensions of human life – including faith, worship, ethics and morality, education, social interaction, cultural, political and economic interaction, crimes and punishment, family matters, and the inner realm of sincerity and purity of intention.<sup>31</sup> This is a real submission. Other religions have evolved their own forms of submission, which are based upon their cultural traditions or a mixture of traditions based upon revelation.<sup>32</sup> For example, in Hinduism, the philosophical aspect, which is the important aspect of the Hindu metaphysics, has been transformed into art at the expense of the rational and intellectual elements. It can be seen in the Hindu's religious literature, for example, the Mahabharata and Bharatayuddha. In these two epics, romantic and mythological aspects of Hindu literature are emphasized rather than the philosophy and the metaphysical aspect of the religion. The emphasis on the aesthetic aspect in Hinduism is because the religion is imposed on the community by the authority of the ruling group.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the concept of submission is corrupted by these material elements.

The human's constitution consists of several basic elements, which will determine the individual's nature and from which precedes all bodily acts and mental qualities. Every element has an effect on the constitution. There are four elements which exist in the human soul—namely, desire (*shahwah*), bestiality (anger), diabolicalness, and lordliness (*rahbāniyyah*).<sup>34</sup> These four elements also exist in every human. This nature is not the same as the original nature. This is because the original nature refers to the condition of the soul at the time of its creation, while the person's nature is its condition after birth. All the four elements in man's constitution are not developed simultaneously. They develop one by one at different stages of growth.<sup>35</sup>

The first element that exists is animality, which is desire (*shahwah*). The desire is purposely developed to seek the means by which the body as the vehicle of the soul will remain in healthy condition and the human species will be preserved. This element is responsible for animal qualities such as eating, sleeping, and copulating.<sup>36</sup> The second element is bestiality, which develops anger. The main aim of anger is to ward off all that is harmful to the body. With this element, the human possesses the qualities and acts of the ferocious animals – qualities such as envy, violence, and having disagreements. If a human is unable to control his or her desire and anger properly, it will cause moral destruction. For some people,

who have been chosen by God, these elements are moderate.<sup>37</sup> The third element is the diabolic. It appears when the child reaches the age of discrimination (*tamyīz*) or seven years old. This element consists in making use of discrimination to search out the ways of wickedness and to satisfy anger and desire through guile and deception. As a result, certain acts and qualities manifest in the individual such as enmity, guiding people to evil, and ostentation. It is repressed in those who were created with only a moderate degree of desire and anger. Due to this, the Prophet said that the devil in him submitted to him.<sup>38</sup> Besides the diabolic elements in the human's constitution, there is also the existence of a devil who is outside the human, but who leads him or her to evil by exciting desire and anger and by giving the human evil suggestions. The last element is the lordly (*rabbāniyyah*) element. This element is the source of the qualities of love, of praise, of sovereignty, and of the knowledge of various sciences. It is present in the soul from the time of its creation. Then, by virtue of its being a divine entity, this element now becomes manifested. In tandem with reason ('*ʿaql*'), the element of *rabbāniyyah* also appears when a child is at the age of discrimination. Reason is identical with the lordly element.<sup>39</sup>

There are four faculties in the human soul – namely, the faculty of desire, the faculty of anger, the faculty of knowledge or reason, and the faculty of justice – and these faculties correspond to the elements mentioned above.<sup>40</sup> The faculties of desire and anger are referred to as passion (*hawāʾ*) and inclined to the evil. Apparently, these two faculties are naturally rebellious, purely irrational, and always exceed the proper limits. It is reason that knows the proper limits and the consequences of evil when it exceeds the limits. Therefore, the function of reason is to order passion to remain within the limit of reason, and finally will help the soul to be in peace and tranquillity. However, the reason has no power prevent passion from exceeding its limits, because reason develops later than passion. Hence, it needs another faculty, which is the faculty of justice to control the desire and anger from exceeding their limits.<sup>41</sup> The faculty of justice is powerful and capable in controlling the passion and enforcing it to submit to reason. The faculty of justice and reason only appears in man, not in animals. Therefore, the lower animals are always guided by their passion. The faculty of justice is the source of virtues and the cornerstone of moral development. Since the faculty of justice and reason appeared when human beings are at the age of maturity, children are not morally responsible to God.<sup>42</sup>

It is clear that the soul is not emotions or merely experience – indeed, its existence surpasses the human mind and is originally pure and divine. Thus, the nature of human beings is indeed free from any impurities as



stated in the famous hadith: “Every new born is born in a state of *fiṭrah* (natural disposition) then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian or a Magian.”<sup>43</sup> This means, the result of a bad character occurs when the soul is connected with physical body and involved in this material world. Indeed, the nature of the human is not only to study the heredity and biology of human beings as understood by the Western psychologist,<sup>44</sup> but encompasses on how human anatomy develops in tandem with the spiritual soul.

## Personality Development

### *Personality Types*

I shall now focus on the personality types and how it develops in the human soul. There are two peculiar powers in human body that struggles with each other to control and dominate the human soul. The first power is naturally evil that produces blameworthy qualities and vices such as anger, gluttony, envy, rancor, excess in sexual desire, love of wealth, miserliness, desire for excessiveness in speech, love of influence, ostentation, pride, and conceit. The second power is naturally good and always inclined to goodness.<sup>45</sup> With this power, good character and virtues exist – namely, wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, there are three types of personality that exist in the human soul – namely, *nafs al-ammārah*, *nafs al-muṭmainnah*, and *nafs al-lawwāmah*.

The personality of *al-ammārah* (instigating soul) is developed when the evil has successfully conquered the human soul. This state is the negative psychic source in the human – the seat of egoistic, selfish desires, and always incited by evil.<sup>47</sup> If these forces are instigated by evil, rebelling against reason, and gaining complete ascendancy over it, the divine element will become weaker until it is almost completely smothered. The main effect of *nafs al-ammārah* is to paralyze the cognitive process.<sup>48</sup> All the faculties in human soul will then be subservient to evil, and even reason becomes a slave of passion, lust, and anger. This negative motive can only be weakened by the training of the self.<sup>49</sup>

The second personality is *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* (the admonishing soul); this means that the soul censures itself.<sup>50</sup> This personality exists in the human when the divine element is constantly struggling with the human evil to subdue it. If the human soul is illuminated by proper knowledge, moral excellence, and strong will, it is possible for the human to suppress the evil and enforce it to submit to the angelic power. In this

case, the individual occupies the position midway between the levels of the angel and the animal, and his distinguishing quality is knowledge. He can attain to the level of angel with the help of knowledge or fall down to the level of animals by letting his anger and lust dominate him.<sup>51</sup> Sigmund Freud, the author of psychoanalytic theory, discussed a similar pattern of conflict in the human mind. He maintained that the human personality resulted from the constant conflict between id, ego, and superego. The id is prone to achieve satisfaction, and in the unconscious state, the ego is responsible for controlling the desire of the id and for adjusting it to the world of reality; and finally, the superego is the moral agency of personality, which strives for perfection.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, the personality as described by Freud, is basically derived from the unconscious situation in human soul and also the influence of the individual's evil tendencies.

The third personality is *al-nafs al muṭmainnah* (the tranquil soul).<sup>53</sup> *Muṭmainnah* or *tuma'ninah* describes the calm, restful condition of the heart – that is, peacefulness, satisfaction, joy, happiness, and freedom from any worry resulting from doubt.<sup>54</sup> The soul is tranquil when it has successfully suppressed evil to submit to the faculty of reason, which is good, and finally acknowledged the divineness of God. The individual with this personality is always yearning for goodness and seeks the true knowledge.<sup>55</sup> Al-Ghazālī emphasized that the yearning for it is not a superimposed task on the self, but it originates in the human from the divine element (*rabbāniyyah*), which enables the human soul to partake in things divine. When the human achieves the life of reason, the individual begins to see his or her ideal self vividly; consequently the human gives him- or herself over to God.<sup>56</sup> The three personalities discussed above are shown in Figure 1.

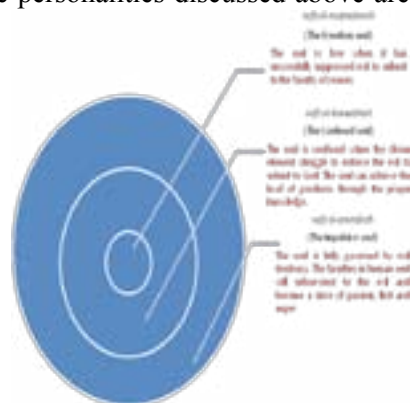


Figure 1:

Three types of human personalities, when the soul is integrated with a physical body.<sup>57</sup>

Figure 1 shows the state of human personality in the situation in which the evil power is dominating the soul. As an impulsive soul is controlling the human body, the faculty of reason becomes weaker and enslaved to passion and lust. Similarly, the Western conception of human personality, espoused by psychoanalytic theory, has resulted from the constant conflict between id, ego, and superego. However, the conclusion to the conflict between these three entities is due to the evil agitation in which the individual's sexual desires are evil or that the individual is necessarily fraught with the evil consequences. In contrast, the Islamic approach is aimed at regulating human sexuality in a most humane manner and finally achieves tranquility and closeness to God.<sup>58</sup> As the sexual instinct is the strongest of all the passions, it should be controlled in the most humane manner. The humane manner is referred to the concept of the mean (*wasaf*) – the equilibrium or the midway between the two opposite character traits, each of which is extreme.<sup>59</sup> The concept of the mean in reflexes is expressed in the Qur'ānic verse:

Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes).<sup>60</sup>

Human sexual desire should be controlled under the faculty of reason, which is the seat of goodness, and this will direct and stabilize the passion to attain a proper condition. This is because an excess in sexual desire will lead to various kinds of vices. On the other hand, lack of sexual desire will also lead to unsatisfactoriness. Al-Ghazālī emphasized:

Sexual desire is a praiseworthy thing when it stands in a state of equilibrium, obedient to the law of intellect and the Law in all its movements. Whenever it becomes excessive, it should be broken with hunger and marriage.<sup>61</sup>

### *Educational Process*

Though the human is born with the state of *fiṭrah*, which is a natural inclination in the human to agree to the existence of God; however, as the nature of the human is created to be receptive to both good and bad, the individual in some instances is gifted with a perfect innate disposition, possessing sound intellect and good character traits such as those of the prophets, the saints and the pious.<sup>62</sup> Those who are born with the opposite characteristic can achieve goodness through education, habituation, and association with noble persons.<sup>63</sup> Al-Miskawayh held that every human character is subject to change.<sup>64</sup> However, the admonitions and education

produces different results in different people; some are responsive to discipline and acquire virtue rapidly, while others are also responsive but slowly gets accustomed to discipline and the acquisition of virtue. In relation to attaining a well-balanced personality, individuals should work hard to harmonize the entities in the soul and perform all the requirements ordered by God. According to Al-Ghazālī, closeness to God is equivalent to normality, whereas distance from God is equivalent to an abnormal personality.<sup>65</sup>

Since the nature of human beings is dual – comprised of the soul and the physical entities – the way to achieve a well-balanced personality is through educational processes. In this sense, education is regarded as an intervention process. This is because education, or *ta'dīb*, from the Islamic terminology is to bring out the inner faculty and latent character traits by actualizing the good natural disposition (*fitrah*), which is inherently divine.<sup>66</sup> Education also means to instill the quality of goodness that the human seeks through righteous practice and self-discipline. There are three elements, which are inherent in this concept of education – that is, the recipient (the human), the content, and the method.<sup>67</sup> The human is defined as a rational animal. Rationality refers to the reason by which the activity of clarification, discrimination, and judgment occurs. The innate faculty that is responsible for articulating the linguistic symbols into meaningful patterns is reason or *al-'aql*. *'Aql* is a spiritual substance by which the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) recognizes and distinguishes the truth from the false and the good from the bad.<sup>68</sup>

The second element inherent in the concept of education is the content, and this refers to knowledge. Because of knowledge, teaching and learning becomes meaningful and reasonable. In a modern society, the concept of knowledge has been influenced by the idea of secularism. Secularism is referred to the deliverance of the human from religions and from metaphysical control over his reason and his language.<sup>69</sup> This secular idea is reflected in every facet of the human life – education, politic, economic, philosophy, and social. The modern conception of knowledge is something that can be proven by human reason and known through scientific and empirical investigation.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, knowledge is something that can be experienced by the human and can be grasped by human reason. If this is the case, according to the modern point of view, the invisible things like soul, God, values, and religion are not considered as knowledge. This is in contrast to the Islamic perspective, in which the visible and invisible aspect of human life, refers to this world and the world after life and both are considered sources of knowledge. The meaning of knowledge from Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's point of view is "*the arrival in the soul of the meaning of a thing.*"<sup>71</sup>

In this context, the “meaning of a thing” is the right meaning of it obtained from the Holy Qur’ān. The knowledge of everything, tangible or intangible, is explained in the Qur’ān and also in the traditions of the Prophet (pbuh). Hence, the concept of knowledge from the point of view of Al-Attas is:

recognition of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence.<sup>72</sup>

Recognition of the proper places of things and of God does not necessarily imply concomitant actions on the part of the human to behave in accordance with what has been recognized.<sup>73</sup> Thus, recognition must be followed by acknowledgement. If not, recognition is in vain. Another key concept, which is related closely to the concept of knowledge, is the term *adāb*. *Adāb* is the knowledge that preserves the human from errors of judgment. The meaning of *adāb* as pointed out by al-Attas is:

Recognition and acknowledgement of the reality that knowledge and being are ordered hierarchically according to their various grades and degrees of rank and of one’s proper place in relation to that reality and to one’s physical, intellectual and spiritual capacities and potentials.<sup>74</sup>

This concept of *adāb* inculcates a sense of order and discipline in our mind. The inculcation of *adāb* should be the primary concern among the Muslims in this world because it is about the growth of spiritual and external aspects of the human. Al-Attas further explained that *adāb* is originally a means of being invited to a banquet.<sup>75</sup> The idea of a banquet implies that the host is a man of honor and prestige, and the people who are present are those who deserve the honor of the invitation. The people are expected to behave in a very appropriate manner in regard to their conduct, speech, and etiquette as they mingle with various noble and gracious people. In virtue of this, *adāb* also means to discipline the mind and the soul; to acquire good qualities and attributes of the mind and soul; to perform the correct against the wrong; and to a person’s acting in order to preserve oneself from disgrace. This inculcation will be naturally reflected in every aspect of our life, personal as well as social.<sup>76</sup>

The knowledge is of two kinds; *fard ‘ayn* and *fard kifāyah*. The former is referred to the knowledge of the oneness of God (*tawhīd*), which also encompasses the fundamental principles in religion. This knowledge is obligatory to every individual. The latter is the knowledge that is obligatory to some Muslims only. It can be divided into religious (*shar’iyyah*) and nonreligious (*ghayr shar’iyyah*). The reli-

gious sciences are derived from the prophets (pbuh), while the non-religious are acquired through reasoning and experimentation.<sup>77</sup>

With regard to the process of acquiring knowledge, Alparslan Açıkgenç categorized it into two aspects – one is external; the other is internal.<sup>78</sup> The internal is the operations of our faculties that we employ while acquiring knowledge. As such, the analysis of this process is the theory of knowledge investigated in the branch of philosophy known as epistemology. The external process of acquiring knowledge is on the other hand what we call “learning.” In this external process, there are many external factors—such as instructor, teaching methods, and other didactic means utilized in teaching and learning. As an external process, learning can be in two ways. One is natural learning; this is attaining knowledge mainly by the use of our faculties for learning, including our senses.<sup>79</sup> The most effective method in this kind of learning is trial and error; and as such, it is self-learning. The other kind of learning is the systematic acquisition of knowledge. It is this second kind of learning that we should consider as actual education.<sup>80</sup>

The educational process is related to disciplining the physical and spiritual aspects of an individual, and this involves the acquisition of knowledge and the transformation of the person’s personality in order to possess a good character trait. When knowledge is transferred to a human, not only does the mindset change, but also the behavior and character is affected. The thinking ability will respond to an affective domain and the way of doing things.<sup>81</sup> This process entails spiritual struggle (*mujāhadah*) and discipline (*riyādah*), leading toward purification of the soul and refinement of character (*tahdhīb al-akhlāq*).<sup>82</sup> Self-discipline means training to inculcate good traits in the soul through simple and continuous practice and, finally, with intense struggle until good action is manifested.<sup>83</sup> Both autocratic and democratic methods can be applied in educational training. The autocratic method is usually applied when the child is of a tender age and does not show his rebellious character. On the other hand, the democratic way is appropriate when the child has reached the age of maturity and is aware that he or she frequently disobeys or humiliates other people.<sup>84</sup>

Instruction (*ta’līm*) is another method in the educational process. The word *ta’līm* is derived from the Arabic word *‘allama*, which means to teach, to instruct someone with knowledge, and to make the person possess that knowledge. *Ta’līm* is particularly applied to that which is repeated often so that an impression is produced thereby upon the minds of the learners (*muta’allīm* or *murīd*).<sup>85</sup> With this definition, at least three

elements form the process of *ta'lim*: knowledge (*'ilm*), learners (*murīd*), and teachers (*murshid*).<sup>86</sup> The method of instruction is philosophically reflected from the confrontation between reason (*'aql*) and passion (*nafs ammārah*). In this situation, reason will be instructed by the heart (*qalb*) to become close to goodness. Reason might be blamed if it ignores such advice and will be praised if it follows the instruction of the heart (*qalb*). Significantly, reward, motivation, praise, and also punishment are among the main approaches in the learning process. A child who manifests good traits or actions should be admired and rewarded with something that gives him or her joy and should be praised in front of others. On the other hand, if once a while he does something bad, it is best to pretend not to notice and not to bring it to the attention of others, particularly if the child diligently endeavors to hide his or her action – for the exposure of such deeds may cause the child to become emboldened, until the child no longer cares when the deeds are made public.<sup>87</sup> In the second stage, if the child repeats his or her wrongdoing or bad behavior, the child should be privately approached and made to feel that it was a very serious thing and to advise the child not to repeat such a mistake. In this case, the father as well as the mother should use the method of threatening to tell others about the child's misdeed or disgrace him or her in front of other people.<sup>88</sup>

Physical punishment will be imposed as soon as the child reaches seven years of age, for example in a child leaving his or her daily prayers. In this case, the child will be beaten mildly in order to accustom him to his or her religious duty.<sup>89</sup> Al-Ghazālī also mentioned that nobody should intercede in the disciplinary process. The child was advised not to cry out or sob as a mark of courage and maturity because crying is the practice of slaves and women.<sup>90</sup> However, severe punishment in an instructional process will harm children because it is categorized among the bad habits. Ibn Khaldūn, in his book *Muqaddimah*, gives an example of slaves and servants who are brought up with injustice; they will feel oppressed, lack energy, be prone to tell lies, and become insincere and lazy, which finally becomes part of their character. Therefore, he insists that teachers must not be too severe toward their pupils, nor a father toward his son.<sup>91</sup>

Another method in educating children is through habituation (*al-i'tiyād*). The process of habituation takes place through self-discipline (*riyādah*), by which the actions are initially enforced until they ultimately become part of the child's nature.<sup>92</sup> In the modern day, the role of teacher and parent is crucially important in the educational process, particularly at the early and elementary stage of education. As these two stages are dealt

with, life structures and the worldview of the individual are possible by means of the method of habituation.<sup>93</sup> Teachers can incorporate habituation in the learning process by preparing varieties of teaching aides to assist the student remember and get accustomed to the knowledge taught. As a facilitator, a teacher should also encourage and stimulate the student to practice exercises regularly so that he or she can achieve the goal of the lesson.<sup>94</sup>

According to Al-Ghazālī, every bodily act produces an effect that forms a direct bearing on the quality of the soul. When the act is repeated and performed deliberately, its effect on the soul becomes established. The body and the soul interact with each other. In other words, as the bodily action influences the soul, similarly the soul will influence the physical performance. As a result, when the quality of the soul is established, relevant bodily action necessarily proceeds from it. Furthermore, the level of willingness in the execution of act depends on the strength or weakness of the soul.<sup>95</sup> In this sense, the child's pure heart is compared to a precious uncut jewel devoid of any carving; this jewel can be cut into any shape, and likewise, the child will incline to anything that is imposed upon him or her. Thus, if the child is habituated to and instructed in goodness, then this will be the child's practice when the child grows up; the child will attain felicity in this world and in the hereafter. Similarly, should the child be habituated to evil, and neglected as though it were animal, the child will face misery.<sup>96</sup>

Since the faculty of desire first appears during the childhood period, habituation at this stage is aimed at preserving the balance and moderating between the excess and deficiency of the particular faculty. Thus, the child especially at this age should be supervised carefully. The first trait to be controlled is the greed for food.<sup>97</sup> In this case, habituation should begin with the cultivation of good manners in eating. The child should be trained to pick up food with the right hand and to begin with the name of Allah; to eat the food which is nearest to him, and to not start eating before others. The child should neither stare at the food, nor at another person eating. He should be trained not to bolt the food, but to chew it properly and should not eat one mouthful after another without pause. He should eat plain and dry bread sometimes, so that he does not think that the presence of other kinds of food is inevitable.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, the child should be trained by means of rough bedding, clothing, and food to endure difficulties and to be tough.. He should neither be accustomed to luxury and comfort, nor to make friends with those who are accustomed to such a life. In his social conduct, the child should be habituated to the virtue of humility, hospitality, and politeness. Therefore, the parents should prevent the child from boasting to his friends about his parent's possessions.<sup>99</sup>



When a child approaches seven years old, when his faculty of discernment is emerging, he should start with his formal education in school. The teacher is given full authority to supervise the child in terms of child's action and conduct, as well as to teach the child knowledge. In this regard, the teacher will be more concerned with the child's cognitive development through instruction and the transmission of knowledge, while the parents will get involved in the practical application of education. The parents will take a responsibility to ensure their child will consistently perform prayer and fasting in the month of Ramadan.<sup>100</sup> According to al-Ghazālī, learning is a process of recollecting one's own identity. He refers to the soul in the situation when it was struggling to get rid of an evil domination, which is deviant from the truth. When the faculty of reason is successful in subjugating the soul and bringing it back to the truth, it is actually the process of recollecting the soul's identity, which is innately pure and sacred.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, the acquisition of knowledge indeed begins with inner purification, whereby the child needs to be taught to purify the soul from vices and blameworthy qualities, which are doomed to create evil tendencies. Today's educational system, especially the determination of the curriculum, focuses more on the cognitive aspects of the learner and to the preparation of the capable human as a resource for industries. The purpose of the acquisition of knowledge is for the student to perform well in examinations and to have a good job in the future.<sup>102</sup> This situation has caused a deficiency in inner purification and emotional stability, which is the main aim in education.<sup>103</sup>

Socialization is the foundation for the acquisition of good character during childhood. This process should take place through the child's observation and companionship with the righteous. It is due to the fact that a child's nature can take from another nature both its good and evil qualities, meaning that both traits could be acquired from people with whom the child associates. At this stage, parental authority is important in determining the peer group for their child to mingle with. A child should be prevented from playmates or peers who could influence the child in ways contrary to what has been taught by his parents; from those who talk nonsense, and who curse and insult others; and from mixing with children who are accustomed to a luxurious and comfortable life.<sup>104</sup> As the process of learning during the childhood period is developed through perception and imagination, a child inclines to imitate what the child perceives.<sup>105</sup> In this case, it is important for an elementary school teacher to attempt to better him- or herself since children learn attentively from what they see and hear. Furthermore, the child should be kept away from writers or poets who have claimed that poetry is part of an elegant and sophisticated

culture.<sup>106</sup> Similarly, the child should not listen to any amusements that could stimulate the child's desires – that is, poems dealing with lovers and passion – because it would implant the seeds of corruption in the child's heart.<sup>107</sup> On the contrary, the melodious recital of the Qur'ān, which contains beautiful words and wisdom is a sure way to strengthen the soul, in particular for those who have suffered from psychological illnesses.<sup>108</sup>

## Conclusion

The above discussion shows that healthy and balanced individuals are individuals who have knowledge and understand the spiritual condition that underlies their personality. The ability to recognize themselves, to distinguish internal and external requirements, and to identify the elements to enhance their spiritual aspects allows individuals to achieve higher levels of spiritual achievement, which are closer to Allah (SWT). Thus, the way to the quest for knowledge should start from early childhood right up to the old age (lifelong learning). An aspect of lifelong learning has been propagated by Islam since its birth when the first verses of the revelation urged all people to seek knowledge. As the educational focus in this article is mainly for the children and adolescents, it is not a discussion of lifelong learning. However, each individual, young or old, has the same personality development as discussed, including the internal self-conflicts and spiritual strengths and weaknesses.

The First World Conference on Islamic Education in Mecca in 1977, implied that the purpose of education is to produce an individual with a total and well-balanced personality through the training of his or her spirit, intellect, rational self, feelings, and bodily senses.<sup>109</sup> The foregoing discussion has been offered as a humble attempt to clarify the concept of well-balanced personality from an Islamic perspective. No doubt, education at every level should be strengthening. Despite focusing on content and method, the correct understanding on the concept of knowledge should be emphasized among young children. Seyyed Hossien Nasr suggested that the young Muslims learn more about their own intellectual traditions – embracing all the different Islamic disciplines from jurisprudence and its principles to theology, philosophy, and the spiritual sciences of Sufism, as well as the basic disciplines of Qur'ānic commentary and Hadith.<sup>110</sup> In the light of this knowledge, the human can attain perfection in his or her individual self and manifest a well-balanced growth.

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