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## PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALING THROUGH ISLAMIC PRACTICES: A STUDY OF SALAH, FASTING, AND ZAKAT

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### Abstract

*In the contemporary world, rising levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional instability have increased the need for holistic approaches to psychological healing. Islam offers a comprehensive framework for mental and emotional well-being through its core spiritual practices. This article explores the psychological healing potential of three fundamental Islamic acts of worship: Salah (prayer), Fasting (Ṣawm), and Charity (Zakat/Ṣadaqah). Using a descriptive and analytical approach, the study examines how these practices contribute to emotional regulation, stress reduction, self-discipline, and inner peace. Salah provides structured daily intervals of mindfulness, spiritual connection, and self-reflection, which help reduce anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. Through remembrance of Allah, prayer cultivates emotional resilience, gratitude, and a sense of purpose. Fasting strengthens self-control, patience, and emotional discipline by restraining physical desires and purifying the soul, thereby enhancing mental clarity and psychological stability. Charity, particularly Infaq fi Sabilillah, promotes psychological healing by reducing material attachment, fostering empathy, strengthening social bonds, and increasing self-worth and life meaning. Both Islamic teachings and contemporary psychological research support the positive impact of altruism on mental health. The article argues that while these practices do not replace professional psychological treatment, they serve as powerful complementary tools for mental well-being. Rooted in Qur'anic guidance and Prophetic traditions, Islamic worship offers an integrated model of spiritual and psychological healing that remains highly relevant in addressing modern mental health challenges.*

**Key Words:** Islamic Psychology, Salah, Mental Health, Fasting, Charity, Spiritual Healing,

### Introduction

Mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, stress, and emotional instability have become increasingly prevalent in modern societies. While contemporary psychology offers various therapeutic models, there is a growing recognition of the importance of spiritual and religious resources in psychological healing. Islam presents a holistic worldview in which mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being are deeply interconnected. Rather than separating religion from psychology, Islamic teachings integrate worship (*ʿibādāt*) as a means of inner purification, emotional balance, and psychological stability. Among the core Islamic practices, Salah (prayer), Fasting (Ṣawm), and Charity (Zakat and Ṣadaqah) occupy a central position. These acts are not only ritual obligations but also structured disciplines that regulate human behavior, emotions, and thought patterns. The Qur'an and Sunnah repeatedly emphasize tranquility of the heart (*ṭuma'nīnah*), patience (*ṣabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), and compassion (*raḥmah*) as foundations of a healthy inner life. This study explores how these three practices function as psychological tools that promote mental well-being and emotional healing. The article aims to present an Islamic psychological model that complements modern therapeutic



approaches, highlighting how faith-based practices can address inner distress and contribute to holistic mental health.

### **Literature Review**

Existing literature in psychology increasingly acknowledges the positive role of spirituality and religious practices in mental health. Studies in the psychology of religion show that prayer is associated with lower stress levels, improved emotional regulation, and increased resilience. Mindfulness-based therapies, widely used in modern psychology, share similarities with the focused attention and bodily awareness found in Salah. Research on fasting, particularly intermittent fasting, indicates benefits such as improved cognitive function, emotional regulation, and reduced stress-related hormones. Although many studies focus on physiological outcomes, emerging research suggests a link between fasting, self-discipline, and psychological well-being. Islamic scholarship, however, emphasizes fasting as a spiritual and moral training that purifies the soul and disciplines desires, which indirectly supports mental stability. Charity and altruism have been widely studied in positive psychology. Empirical research confirms that giving behavior increases happiness, reduces depression, and strengthens social bonds. Islamic literature goes further by framing charity as a means of purifying the heart from greed, arrogance, and envy—traits closely associated with psychological distress. Despite these findings, much of the existing research treats religious practices in isolation or from a purely secular perspective. There remains a lack of integrated Islamic psychological analysis that systematically examines Salah, Fasting, and Charity together as a unified healing framework.

### **Research Question**

How do Salah, Fasting, and Charity contribute to psychological healing from an Islamic perspective?

### **Research Gap**

While modern psychology has extensively studied spirituality and mental health, there is a significant gap in research that presents an indigenous Islamic model of psychological healing grounded in Qur'anic teachings and Prophetic traditions. Most available studies either secularize religious practices or examine them individually without recognizing their interconnected nature in Islam. Additionally, limited scholarly work addresses *Infaq fi Sabilillah* as a therapeutic psychological mechanism beyond social welfare. There is also a lack of holistic frameworks that combine Salah, Fasting, and Charity as coordinated tools for emotional regulation, self-discipline, and inner peace. This study seeks to fill this gap by offering a comprehensive Islamic psychological perspective rooted in classical sources and supported by contemporary insights.

### **Discussion**

The analysis demonstrates that Islamic practices operate on multiple psychological levels. Salah cultivates mindfulness, emotional release, gratitude, and surrender, all of which are central to anxiety reduction and emotional healing. Fasting strengthens impulse control, patience, and emotional discipline, enabling individuals to manage stress and negative emotions more effectively. Charity redirects focus from self-centered distress to compassion and social connection, fostering meaning and psychological fulfillment. Together, these practices form a balanced system that addresses the mind, heart, and behavior simultaneously. Unlike purely cognitive approaches, Islamic worship integrates belief, action, and emotion, offering a



sustainable model for inner healing. This integrated approach explains why Islamic spirituality has historically produced emotionally resilient individuals and cohesive communities.

### **Psychological Cure Through Salah (Prayer in Islam):**

Salah (prayer) is more than a religious obligation in Islam<sup>1</sup> — it is also a powerful psychological tool that offers emotional and mental healing<sup>2</sup>. Below is a discussion of how Salah can act as a psychological cure:

#### **1. Stress Reduction and Relaxation:**

When a person prays, he feels connection and communication with a higher power. This connection offers a sense of security, reducing anxiety.

The repeated motions (standing, bowing, prostrating) regulate and increase focus and promote physical and mental relaxation, Salah offers five organized spiritual breaks from the chaos of daily life, helping reset mental and emotional states.

#### **2. Relief from Depression and Loneliness**

Regular prayer reinforces a meaningful life narrative and reminds the individual of their higher purpose, which counters feelings of worthlessness and anxiety. Depression often disrupts routine<sup>3</sup>. Salah imposes a structured rhythm on the day, promoting mental discipline thus pushes back depression. Talking to Allah gives a person big chance to overcome fluctuation in emotions, even if they cannot talk to others about their inner feelings.

#### **3. Anxiety Management**

Through prayer, one learns to surrender what they can't control. This reduces worry and calms the mind. Surah Al-Fatiha and other verses: Repeating verses with themes of mercy, hope, and divine help fosters a more optimistic mindset. Allah has highlighted this fact in Quran as follows:

“Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest.”<sup>4</sup>

#### **4. Self-Reflection and Insight**

Praying regularly provides an opportunity of self-examination and spiritual elevation, which can reduce guilt, shame, or regret. These are quiet moments to listen to one's heart, cultivate mindfulness, and even identify harmful thoughts or patterns.

#### **5. Improved Emotional Resilience**

Salah reminds believers that they are not alone and are constantly given chances to improve, which enhances self-worth and emotional strength. It contains a lot of Gratitude-based supplications which shift focus from lack to abundance, a proven technique in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Ijaz, Shahid, Muhammad Tahir Khalily, and Irshad Ahmad. "Mindfulness in salah prayer and its association with mental health." *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 6 (2017): 2297-2307.

<sup>2</sup> Suseno, Bayu. "Muslim prayer (Salah), and its restorative effect: Psychophysiological explanation." *Asian Journal of Islamic Psychology* (2024): 1-7.

<sup>3</sup> Lai, Francisco Tsz Tsun, Vivien Kin Yi Chan, Tsz Wai Li, Xue Li, Stevan E. Hobfoll, Tatia Mei-Chun Lee, and Wai Kai Hou. "Disrupted daily routines mediate the socioeconomic gradient of depression amid public health crises: a repeated cross-sectional study." *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 56, no. 10 (2022): 1320-1331.

<sup>4</sup> Qur'an 13:26

<sup>5</sup> Gudan, Eric Matthew. *Gratitude-based interventions for treating ruminative depression*. The Institute for the Psychological Sciences, 2010.



## 6. Spiritual Connection as Healing

Salah allows a person to:

- Release emotional pain to Allah especially when one weeps or cries in his salah<sup>6</sup>
- Feel spiritually cleansed
- Renew hope

This connection can be deeply therapeutic for those feeling emotionally overwhelmed or broken.

### Final Thoughts:

While Salah is not a professional therapy, it complements psychological healing and strengthens emotional well-being. Numerous studies show that personal spirituality developed through prayer positively influences mental health<sup>7</sup>. It's a form of spiritual psychological practice deeply embedded in the Muslim lifestyle. Allah has guided Muslims to seek help through this practice:

And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is difficult except for the humbly submissive (to Allah)<sup>8</sup>.”

### Psychological Cure Through Fasting (الصوم):

Fasting (صوم) is far more than abstaining from food, drink and permissible sexual relationship. It's a powerful tool for emotional stability, mental clarity, and spiritual cleanliness. Across religions and cultures, fasting has been used not only for physical purification but also for psychological excellence. Some important benefits of fasting are as follows:

**1. Emotional Detox:** During fasting, the mind becomes still. Without eating and stimulation, raised emotions often get weak. The desire to please Allah enables a person to overcome anger stress frustration lust and anxiety. Fasting substitutes negative emotions with positive one<sup>9</sup>.

**2. Discipline and Self-Control:**

Fasting restrains the nafs (ego)<sup>10</sup>. It teaches patience, self-control, and delay gratification — key traits for psychological resilience<sup>11</sup>. Over time, this builds inner strength, reduces impulsiveness, and increases self-realization.

**3. Mental Clarity and Focus:**

With digestion paused and effort to please Allah, the brain shifts into a sharper state. Many people report:

- Increased clarity
- Better concentration
- Creative insights

In both animals and humans, fasting prevents and treats the metabolic syndrome, a major risk factor for many neurological diseases<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Bylsma, Lauren M., Ad JJM Vingerhoets, and Jonathan Rottenberg. "When is crying cathartic? An international study." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 27, no. 10 (2008): 1165-1187.

<sup>7</sup> Larrivee, Denis, and Luis Echarte. "Contemplative meditation and neuroscience: Prospects for mental health." *Journal of religion and health* 57, no. 3 (2018): 960-978.

<sup>8</sup> Qur'an 2:45

<sup>9</sup> Wang, Yiren, and Ruilin Wu. "The effect of fasting on human metabolism and psychological health." *Disease markers* 2022, no. 1 (2022): 5653739.

<sup>10</sup> Haque, Amber. "Psychological Effects of Fasting." *Academia. Erişim* 4 (2019).

<sup>11</sup> Hauser, Marc D. "Patience! How to assess and strengthen self-control." In *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 4, p. 25. Frontiers Media SA, 2019.



#### 4. Peace and Stillness:

Through fasting, we detach from constant desire — food, screens, noise — and return to the present moment. This calmness helps relieve:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Emotional restlessness

In Islam, this is called “سكينة” — divine tranquility<sup>13</sup>.

#### 5. Spiritual and Psychological Healing:

True healing begins when the soul feels connected with its Creator. Fasting is a doorway to:

1. Inner peace
2. Forgiveness (of self and others)
3. A sense of meaning and higher purpose

During fasting a person gets closer to Allah and get time to remember him and in this way his heart gets satisfaction

Allah says in the Holy Quran:

“In the remembrance of God do hearts find rest<sup>14</sup>”.

#### Important Note:

Fasting can be used to overcome mental illness besides therapy<sup>15</sup>, it can enhance healing. However one should consult a doctor to know that whether he is physically capable of fasting or not

#### Final thought :

Fasting is not about starving the body. It’s about training the soul to resist its desire<sup>16</sup> through abstaining from halal feed drink and permissible sex— and through strengthening the soul mind begins to heal.

#### Psychological Cure Through Charity (الله سبيل في انفاق) An Islamic and Psychological Perspective:

##### 1. Understanding “الله سبيل في انفاق” (Spending in the Way of Allah)

“الله سبيل في انفاق” refers to spending one’s wealth, time, or resources purely for the sake of Allah— seeking no worldly gain or recognition, but rather spiritual fulfillment and reward from Allah.

Allah says in the Holy Quran:

“The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains.<sup>17</sup>”

<sup>12</sup> Phillips, Matthew CL. "Fasting as a therapy in neurological disease." *Nutrients* 11, no. 10 (2019): 2501.

<sup>13</sup> Ray, Amit. "Spiritual Fasting: A Scientific Exploration." *Yoga and Ayurveda Research* 4, no. 10 (2024): 75-77.

<sup>14</sup> Qur’an 13:28

<sup>15</sup> Almosavi, Maryam Hosseini. "A Brief Look at the Role of Fasting in Mental Health and its Correspondence with Advances in Psychology." *Journal of Fasting & Health* 3, no. 3 (2015).

<sup>16</sup> Hoffman, Valerie J. "Eating and fasting for God in Sufi tradition." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 3 (1995): 465-484.

<sup>17</sup> Qur’an 2:261



## 2. Charity as a Psychological Healer

Modern psychology and Islamic teachings both support the idea that acts of charity can heal emotional and mental distress. Here's how it works:

### a. Reduces Depression and Anxiety

1. Giving to others boosts dopamine and serotonin (neurotransmitters associated with happiness)<sup>18</sup>.
2. Social support and helping others reduces loneliness<sup>19</sup> and depression
  - 3. Islam promotes compassion and community support is one of the core needs of the human psyche<sup>20</sup>.

### b. Increases Self-Worth and Purpose:

- Acts of انفاق remind individuals that they can contribute to make a difference.
- It redirects attention from personal suffering to collective healing.
- It heals people facing existential crisis or low self-esteem, by providing purpose<sup>21</sup>.

### c. Heals Trauma and Grief:

- Listening and helping others in pain becomes a cathartic process<sup>22</sup> as we attend who are depressed due to poverty and illness.
- It creates a sense of emotional connection and shared humanity, softening the heart hardened by materialism and selfishness. It overcomes ego and superiority complex<sup>23</sup>

### d. Reduces Material Attachment and Greed:

- Excessive attachment to wealth can cause anxiety<sup>24</sup>. Spending in Allah's path re-aligns priorities.
- Islam cures material obsession and greed by encouraging charity<sup>25</sup>.

A well-known hadith of Rasool salal laho aliehi wasalam also makes it clear that real wealth cannot be measured by material possessions:

Abu Hurairah radi Allahu anhu reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Wealth is not in having many possessions. Rather, true wealth is the richness of the soul."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, Laura. "What are the key brain chemicals? How can you hack them to get happier?."

<sup>19</sup> Rook, Karen S. "Social support versus companionship: effects on life stress, loneliness, and evaluations by others." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 52, no. 6 (1987): 1132.

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert, Paul. "Compassion as a social mentality: An evolutionary approach." In *Compassion*, pp. 31-68. Routledge, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Kleiman, Evan M., and Jenna K. Beaver. "A meaningful life is worth living: Meaning in life as a suicide resiliency factor." *Psychiatry research* 210, no. 3 (2013): 934-939.

<sup>22</sup> Klopsteh, Angela. "Catharsis and self-regulation revisited: Scientific and clinical considerations." *Bioenergetic Analysis* 15, no. 1 (2005): 101-131.

<sup>23</sup> Pramod, J. P., Vanita Malewar, and K. Bhuvaneshwari. "Superiority Complex Towards Subordinates in the Working Environment." *International Journal of Indian Psychology* 12, no. 2 (2024).

<sup>24</sup> Norris, J. Ian, Nathaniel M. Lambert, C. Nathan DeWall, and Frank D. Fincham. "Can't buy me love?: Anxious attachment and materialistic values." *Personality and Individual Differences* 53, no. 5 (2012): 666-669.

<sup>25</sup> Barwi, Muhammad Ramadan Najam, Ammara Rehman, Muhammad Yaseen, Ghazala Bashir, Yasmin Nazir, and Asia Shabbir. "Solutions For Moral Issues Evolving From Poverty And Unemployment In Developing Islamic Countries (In The Light Of Islamic Charity System)." *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 7, no. 1 (2023).

<sup>26</sup> Şahih al-Bukhari.no.6446, , Şahih Muslim,no.1051.



### 3. Charity and Spiritual-Mental Balance:

- In Islam, the heart (قلب) is the seat of both spiritual and emotional states. Charity purifies the heart from:
  - a. Kibr(arrogance).      b. Bukhl (miserliness) .      c. Hasad (envy).<sup>27</sup>

Spiritual and purified hearts are more resilient to depression, stress, and interpersonal conflicts<sup>28</sup>.

### 4. Scientific Support:

Modern studies confirm that helping other and charitable acts:

- Lower blood pressure
- Decrease cortisol (stress hormone)
- Improve sleep and longevity
- Enhance mood and social bonds<sup>29</sup>

### 5. Practical Tips for Using Charity as Healing:

Many psychological problems can be cured through charity. if someone is facing depression he should Feed the poor anonymously. This will add meanings to his life. If a person is afflicted by anxiety he can sponsor an orphan his anxiety will be reduced due to emotional grounding. If someone is hit with grief due to a death of loved one he should build a water well in memory of loved one. He will feel satisfied due to lasting reward & peace. If someone is disturbed due to anger. He should help someone silently and in this way he will get spiritual control over ego. If someone feels loneliness he should act as volunteer at a masjid or shelter this will generate a feeling of belonging & connection.

### Recommendations

1. Mental health professionals working with Muslim clients should consider incorporating Islamic spiritual practices as supportive tools alongside clinical therapy.
2. Islamic institutions and mosques should promote awareness of the psychological benefits of Salah, Fasting, and Charity.
3. Future empirical research should examine the measurable psychological outcomes of regular worship practices among Muslim populations.
4. Educational curricula in Islamic Studies should include Islamic psychology as a distinct and applied discipline.
5. Community-based charity initiatives should be recognized not only as social welfare but also as mental health interventions.

<sup>27</sup> Yusuf, Hamza. "Signs, symptoms and cures of the spiritual diseases of the heart." *Translation and Commentary of Imām Mawlūd's Maḥarat al-Qulūb*. Cited in [https://www.fussilatbd.com/islamic/english/Hamza-Yusuf/Hamza-Yusuf\\_Purification-of-the-Heart.pdf](https://www.fussilatbd.com/islamic/english/Hamza-Yusuf/Hamza-Yusuf_Purification-of-the-Heart.pdf) (accessed 31 July 2023) (2022).

<sup>28</sup> Ajawani, J. C. "Spiritual intelligence: A core ability behind psychosocial resilience." In *The Routledge international handbook of psychosocial resilience*, pp. 173-186. Routledge, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Post, Stephen G. "It's good to be good: 2014 biennial scientific report on health, happiness, longevity, and helping others." *Int J Pers Cent Med* 2 (2014): 1-53.



## **Conclusion**

This study has examined the psychological healing potential of three foundational Islamic practices—Salah (prayer), Fasting (Şawm), and Charity (*Infaq fi Sabilillah*)—within the broader framework of Islamic psychology. The analysis demonstrates that these acts of worship are not confined to ritual performance; rather, they function as integrated psychological mechanisms that promote emotional stability, mental resilience, and spiritual well-being. Rooted in Qur’anic guidance and Prophetic teachings, these practices address the human psyche at multiple levels by harmonizing belief, behavior, and emotional experience. Salah provides structured moments of mindfulness, self-reflection, and emotional release throughout the day. By fostering remembrance of Allah, surrender, and gratitude, prayer helps reduce anxiety, alleviate depressive symptoms, and restore inner balance. Fasting, on the other hand, trains the individual in self-discipline, patience, and emotional regulation by restraining physical desires and cultivating spiritual awareness. This process strengthens psychological endurance and enhances clarity of thought, allowing individuals to manage stress and impulses more effectively. Charity serves as a powerful therapeutic practice by redirecting attention from personal suffering to compassion, social responsibility, and meaningful contribution. Through generosity, individuals experience increased self-worth, emotional fulfillment, and relief from material anxiety, grief, and loneliness. Collectively, these practices form a holistic Islamic model of psychological healing that differs from purely secular approaches by integrating spiritual meaning with mental health. Rather than treating psychological distress as an isolated condition, Islam views it as interconnected with spiritual imbalance and social disconnection. While these practices do not replace professional psychological treatment, they significantly complement clinical interventions and offer culturally relevant tools for emotional healing among Muslim populations. In the context of growing global mental health challenges, this study highlights the relevance and applicability of Islamic worship as a sustainable and spiritually grounded approach to psychological well-being. By reconnecting the individual with Allah, nurturing inner discipline, and strengthening social bonds, Islamic practices provide enduring pathways toward mental peace, emotional resilience, and a balanced human life.