

SUFFERINGS AND THE RESPONSES OF RELIGIOUS SPIRITUALITY

(A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MUSLIMS)

**Dr. Farhat Nisar¹ , Ms. SobiaYaqoob²
Ms. Ume Farwa³ , Dr. Samia Wasif⁴**

Abstract

Spirituality and religion has become tool of medication in different areas of life especially in treatment of mental health. Spirituality has defined as divine and unseen reality or an inner motivational force that enables a person to discover the reality of the being and doing or can be invisible interior stimulus through which people subsist. Definition of religion can be understood as a connection between the human and the sacred. Unlike other spiritual beliefs Islamic spirituality is a part of Islamic teachings articulated in the Qur'an rather than human speculation. Therefore, the maturity of the Muslims' spiritual life must be designed according to the teachings of Quran. The Quran gives dualistic existence of human kind, the body which is temporary and perishable and the soul which is everlasting. In Muslim culture the health and illness, hardship and comfort is in the hand of Allah and grief, problem, crises, sufferings and diseases are the test of believer from Allah.

This particular research has been designed to assess the religious spirituality as healing response to the sufferings. The data was collected through Qualitative method of interview from the different people facing the sufferings in terms of the loss of any valuable relation, financial crisis, workplace pressure, family problems, social isolation, and dread disease of their own and

¹ **Dr. Farhat Nisar**, Assistant Professor Comsats, Islamabad.

² **Ms. Sobia Yaqoob**, Lecturer Comsats, Islamabad.

³ **Ms. Ume Farwa**, Lecturer Comsats, Islamabad.

⁴ **Dr. Samia Wasif**, Assistant Professor, Comsats, Islamabad

their loved ones. The population of study consisted of 10 selected through sampling. A qualitative analysis approach was used for data scrutiny. Findings of the research have demonstrated that, all participants emphasize on the religious aspects of spirituality. It is hoped that such type of responses and their analyses will inspire more informed practical research in Muslim nations. Alongside the findings of research provides the scope of Islamic spirituality as tool of medication to address the psychological issues as well.

Key words: *Sufferings, Religion, Spirituality, Muslims, Responses*

Introduction

Spirituality and religion have been taken as tool of application in most of the applied areas of life specially related to mental health like psychiatry (Blass, D.M. A 2001 p. 79–85). Religious values in form of teachings are widespread to employ as tool in the treatment and recovery from different disease and psychological disorders especially in alcohol and drug abuse. Recent qualitative and quantitative studies have supported spiritual religiosity as tool in abuse healing process (Brown, E. 2006 19-39). Spirituality as belief more or less found in every society even if the people are not religious and most often has been defined in stipulations of individual beliefs. Although in some cases these beliefs may also be entirely material (Byfield, T., & Byfield, V. 1998 33). The religious prayers or practices are typically defined as a gauge of spirituality or religiosity (Blass, D.M. A . 2001). Even in the context of western philosophies it is practical to suppose that people may be religious and spiritual or that they may be only spiritual or religious or that they may be neither (Miller, W. 1998). It is not probable that people will be religious but not spiritual, in view of the fact that spirituality is integrated into religions and is manifested in practices

Literature Review

What is Spirituality?

As far as the meaning of spirituality is concerned, “spirituality” has been defined in diverse and sometimes conflicting meanings and definitions. According to some researcher religion and spirituality can be interchangeable terms (Dowling, E., Gestsdottir, S., Anderson, P., von Eye, A., & Lerner, R. M. 2003). If Religion can be understood with the system of faiths and rules (Tisdale, T.C. 2003.), then the one who seeks self-awareness or self-actualization through spirituality can be

religious (Abu-Raiya, H., & Pargament, K. I. 2011). These definitions describe spirituality a divine and unseen reality for the people; or it can be an inner motivational force that enables a person to discover the reality of the being and doing or can be invisible interior stimulus through which people subsist. Spiritual practices are utensils of inner life. Spiritual experiences can comprise association to a larger reality with a more inclusive self through amalgamation with other people or community (Takahashi, M., & Ide, S. 2003. 15–38). Definition of religion can be understood as a connection between the human and the sacred, mystical, and decisive reality and scaffold in which follower can find answers to the great questions of being (Woll M. L, Daniel B. Hinshaw, MD, FACS, and Timothy M. P, MD, MPH, MTS, FACS. (2008. 3048–3057). Spiritual practices include correlation to a larger realism with a more inclusive self through unification with other human beings (Takahashi, M., & Ide, S. 2003.15-38).

Spirituality in Islam

Islam as religion claims to be complete code of life (Al-Qur'an, 3:19), influences upon Muslims' life-style and thinking (Abu-Raiya, H., & Pargament, K. I, 2011.93-115). Unlike other spiritual beliefs Islamic spirituality is a part of Islamic teachings articulated in the Qur'an rather than human speculation. Therefore, the maturity of the Muslims' spiritual life must be designed according to the teachings of Quran (Ahmad. F, Muhammad. M.B, Abdullah. A. A. 2011.36-45). In Islam the fear of Allah leads toward the complete submission and self-purification in this world and success in life hereafter as mentioned in Quran: "But as for him who feared to stand before his lord and restrained him from lust, Lo! The paradise will be his home (Al-Quran, 79:40–41). In addition, according to Islam we have two lives, one in this world and one in the hereafter. Our life in the present world is far less important than our eternal life in the hereafter (Al-Quran, 6:24.). Those who submit their will before the will of Allah attain the true satisfaction even in the time of trouble as mentioned in Quran: "Those who submit their wills –they have sought out the right conduct (Al-Quran.72:14). In Islam, Allah is the only Ultimate reality possessing everlasting existence, The realization of self-Sufism is completely absorbed by presence of Allah that no longer has any individuality (Elkaisy-Friemuth.M. (2006).). The Quran gives dualistic existence of human kind, the body which is temporary and perishable and the soul which is everlasting (Haque, A. 2004). In Muslim culture the health and illness, hardship and comfort

is in the hand of Allah and grief, problem, crises, sufferings and diseases are the test of believer from Allah. In Islam the religion is considered as road map for spirituality towards Allah. Without religion there is no acceptance of spirituality in Islam (Nasr, S. H. 2003). All the resources in Islamic spirituality must be based on Quran. But on the other side spiritual influences of beliefs and worships must produce an absolute Muslim who would be a sincere servant of Allah and a supportive member of community (Abu-Raiya, H., & Pargament, K. I. 2011).

Methodology

This particular research has been designed to assess the religious spirituality as healing response to the sufferings. The data was collected through Qualitative method of interview from the different people facing the sufferings in terms of the loss of any valuable relation, financial crisis, workplace pressure, family problems, social isolation, and dread disease of their own and their loved ones. The sample population consists of people from Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Starting with, some general sort of questions as part of interviews such as: "What is spirituality in your view?" or "How do you perceive the spiritual activities?" The duration of interviews were taken on the participant's nature, interest and age. Then few more questions about the experiences of the level of motivation and faith during their crises were asked. The time and place of the interviews were set by conformity with the participant's will. The span of each interview was designed according to the interest, nature and age of each participant.

The population of study consisted of 10 selected through sampling. A qualitative analysis approach was used for data scrutiny. At first level the interviews were taken from the participants and then important statements along with their initial meanings that exist in the interview text about the participants' perception of spirituality has been underlined. The participants of this study were 10. The age varied between 25 and 60, consisted of 6 females and 4 males. The study's main objective was to find out the participants' insight of spirituality. The findings of this research assisted through the following four main responses: Beliefs in Allah, angels, death and predestination as spiritual strength, Worships for internal satisfaction (Salat and Zakat for self-satisfaction.), Morality for self-satisfaction (religious, personal and social resources), and Seeking for spiritual appeal in sufferings.

Response 1: Beliefs as the Spiritual Strength

In order to find out the perception of the meaning of spirituality, the participants were question asked to define spirituality in their own meaning and the type of spiritual activities they follow. Subsequently, all of them consider the religious aspect of spirituality and they use this term as "relationship with Allah" and "belief in Allah". Majority of the participants mentioned "relationship with Allah" trouble as trail from Allah, suffering as part of predestination and rewarded in life hereafter. For instance, One of the participant lost her parents in early age faced much hard time in life responded that these sufferings are trail from Allah and gave her strength to live a productive life as mentioned in Quran that Allah is with Patient people. Another male participant who had financial crises in life mentioned that he took the crises as trail from Allah because Allah has promised to reward for suffering in this world. All of them faced sufferings with the hope of reward, joining to the Allah as creator, owner and sustainer of their lives, stands as sign of love, care, beauty and all elegant things. Some participants mentioned "belief in Allah" and "Obeying His orders" as their definition of spirituality: 'Spirituality means having belief in Allah. 'Spirituality means obeying the orders of Allah. In the opinion of some participants, having being trust in Allah, having no Confusion for death as reality, having an appropriate way of living according to the path given by Allah at both in Internal and external feelings. 'In my idea, a religious person should accept death as reality. He neither fears of death nor violates the other's rights .He should feel sense of belonging with Allah, and listens to Allah's orders. Of course being religious is not just being cautious concerning the exterior for know-it-all. A spiritual man may not have a spiritual exterior unless his attitude are religious too'(a young man's reply who was suffering with dread disease).

Response 2: Worships for internal Satisfaction and Peace

Some participants considered worship as source of internal satisfaction and peace. In their opinion, worship considerations in personal and social dealings can be added as positive motivation to face the problems of life. 'In my idea, a religious man does not miss any chance to contact to Allah. He does not neglect his prayers, or hesitate to spend in the way of Allah 'and he is conscious of Allah's

orders' (Participant who is 50 years old male suffering from blood cancer). A spiritual person must be religious too and he should be anxious about worships. (Participant had financial crises in life). He added that spirituality means that you should be a good person for will of Allah and do worship just to have an association with Him'. He was of the view that spiritual individuals must have special signs particularly appeared on their faces but they are more concerned about their beliefs as well as practices. Actually, such people are devoted and ambitious about their worships for the sake of Allah not for their personal needs (female participant lost her parents in early age). She also added that If soul is clean and you're not neglecting your prayers than you will take your problem as trial from Allah which will be rewarded either in this life or hereafter. But if you don't have the feeling of relationship with Allah through prayer, you cannot realize your affiliation with Him (Allah) then the problem feels you more difficult than it can be. She connected herself to Allah through prayers (Salat) and visiting the holy shrines of saints through even if she was a patient of a dread disease, She still felt blessed by Allah (young participant having dread disease).

Response 3: Morality for Self-satisfaction

Most of the participants replied to the question of morality as expression of internal spirituality. A young female divorced by her husband for the reason of her complexion answered to the question of morality as source of self-satisfaction which ultimately results in having positive image of society as well. She said, being trustworthy, having love and respect towards others, good etiquette and honesty in speech and practice, no hypocrisy must be only for the will of Allah only and not to show off. 'In my opinion, a religious person avoids telling lie or deceiving others, does not get jealous of what others have, does not violate others' rights. Of course being religious is not just being cautious about the manifestation and impression before the people rather, that person is concerned about internal satisfaction and impression before Allah. The person may not have an influential appearance of his or her spiritual strength unless his or her beliefs are religious too. She said that her ex-husband is a well-known scholar and apparently a socially well-mannered person of the community but practically he is doing all this for social image not for the will of Allah. A young widow replied to this question that morality means that first you prove yourself as a good person and do fair in dealings with others, then you expect good things from others even

in some cases the spiritual people do not expect good from others in performing their good deeds. She added that spiritual requirements include such practices that can be performed to help and support other people without any intentions of return and reward. For example, if you find someone in problem, you can help him or her through your financial, verbal, physical, or emotional support for relieving the pain and grief. She shared her own life experience that after the death of her husband she opened an orphanage to seek happiness in providing comfort and pleasure to needy and deserving people in the society. She further added that a woman like her this can be a valuable practice to offer time without any intentions of reward or return and the blessings can be beyond definitions. She opinioned that spirituality is not only the name of performing religious worships but to be good with the human beings for the sake of Allah is the real meaning of spirituality. The male participant who financial crises had replied to the question of morality that being fair is the real success of life and only when one is fair with others, then only one can expect fairness from others.

Response 4: Seeking for spiritual appeal in sufferings

Lastly, the participants were asked about the spiritual resources that how they use these tools for the sake of help, support and hope for them. Their answers exposed that the spiritual resources mostly used by them were beliefs, worships, and morality. The worships include prayer, fasting, and Zakat. Morality includes fair dealings, truthfulness and being kind to others. And in the time of difficulty the strong faith in Allah, life after death rewards and punishment work like spiritual source of hope. The female participant who lost her parents in early age was of the view, that once people start performing their religious obligations of Namaz, fasting, Zakat, Pilgrimage. Their position will gradually evolve and they will feel relaxed and hopeful to face the obstacles in life. For a young man suffering from dread disease considered following religious spirituality as a source of hope and satisfaction in troubles and problems. One of the participants ,a female in late fifty, could not get marry because of her family responsibilities, replied to this question that everyone must be concerned about what has been told by teachings of spirituality regardless of their religion, cast and creed. I think everyone must experience what he/she is required to do by the orders of his/her spirituality source and do everything that pleases him/her internally. Fortunately, we are

blessed to have the Holy Quran as source of spiritual and material guide. We must think about Allah and see what He requires from us as Muslim.

Through interviewing the participants, it was found that they seek sheltered in problem under the forces of religious spirituality such as trust in Allah, recitation of Quran, fasting, visiting the shrines and holy places for dua, sacrifices, charity, being kind to others, remain concerned about the social dealings, and taking trouble as trial with reward from Allah. A female participant whose only child was suffering from a dread disease answered to this question that the day I came to know about my child's disease was in its most critical phase. I was wondering and worrying what would happen then and it would be recovered. Everything was unstable. I abruptly called my brother and told him to take me to the Shrine of Bari Imam (The holy Shrine in Islamabad). There we distributed meal of rice to poor's and needy. I think making such practices (distribution of meals to poor and needy) for charity for the sake of Allah is very good in these situations. The answer of the participant suffering from blood cancer is, 'In my Opinion, sick persons like us have a great deal of patience to fight against the disease we face. At least I myself was very consistent. Whenever someone asked me about my condition, I used to respond with positive response instead of saying I am dying! I used to say: 'Today I am feeling better than yesterday. I had no choice except having faith in Allah and His will. But I am hope full to get reward on the Day of Judgment for facing this trouble with patience and courage. The female participant who is widow replied that she basically believed that everything happens to us is written in our fate.

During interviews with the participants in the context of satisfaction level of beliefs the reply was positive in majority of the cases. They are of the opinion that their inner forces and beliefs helped them a lot in fighting against the sufferings and troubles in life and motivated them to face with courage.

Findings

The results of all the interviews show that, all participants emphasize on the religious aspects of spirituality. Such as firm belief in Allah as creator and sustainer through thick and thin, offering prayer(Salat), fasting, recitation of Quran as spiritual activities. Some of them considered moral aspects in concert with religious perspective. The same opinion has been described by Elkaisy-

Friemuth.in 2006 in discussion of Islamic spirituality (Elkaisy-Friemuth.M.2006.101-102). The participants are of the opinion that individual belief and social morality is a part of religious spirituality. By the result of the study, relationship and faith in Allah, obeying Allah's orders and asking for help in time of trouble were defined as spirituality in the view point of the participants. The same results found in a study conducted by Okasha, in 2009 (Okasha, A. (2009).The participants defined spirituality as a deep relationship with a superior power, faith, in the religious beliefs, and something beyond the vision and senses similar with the ideas of Noguchi presented in 2006 (Noguchi W, Morita S, Ohno T, Aihara O, Tsujii H, Shimozuma K, et al.2006.65-70). In another study, conducted by Penman in 2009 the results support the point of spirituality as believe in Gods (Penman J, Oliver M, Harrington A. 2009.29-35), while relationship with others on moral grounds are part of spirituality has been focused by Rahemi in 2006 which has related the relationship of religion with other aspects of life(Rahemi SH. 2006.48-67). However, those findings did not focus the aspects targeted in this research, such as "Allah as spiritual reality", "Seeking refuge in Allah in time of trouble", "offering prayer", "recitation of Quran", "worships as spiritual strength", "charity" and "being fair",that have been mentioned only in this study. Though some of the concepts introduced by previous studies do not match with the concepts of spirituality highlighted in this research yet the idea of religious spirituality are same with difference of themes which includes; religious beliefs, worships, love, fairness, humility, and vision. The surveys and studies of different researches have some differences with findings of this research.

Conclusion

The current research is obviously not the last or enough work in Islamic spirituality and its impact on the people when they are facing problems or sufferings. But it can be an attempt to focus the inclination of Muslims towards firm faith and trust in Allah during sufferings. Muslims believe that they have secured happiness in the afterlife which gives them courage and strength to face obstacles in this life which is temporary. It is hoped that such type of responses and their analyses will inspire more informed practical research in Muslim nations. Alongside the findings of research provides the scope of Islamic spirituality as tool of medication to address the psychological issues as well.

Islamic beliefs and worships can be a mental support in sufferings and problems and effect like a medicine for those who truly believe in Allah and His divine pre destination and decay. People who face sufferings in this life will be rewarded if they truly believe in Allah and life after death. Islam as religion is truly a complete code of life which provides guidance and way out in all situations and circumstances.

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