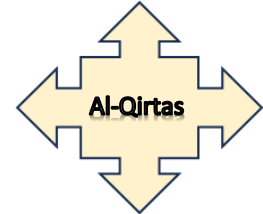


Examining The Psychological Impact of Islamic Practices on Ethical  
Behavior



Abdul Samad Danish  
Jafar Nazir\*  
Saqib Ullah Khan

Lecturer, HITEC University Taxila Cantt.  
Lecturer, NUML Rawalpindi at Corresponding Author-  
[jafar.nazir@numl.edu.pk](mailto:jafar.nazir@numl.edu.pk)  
Lecturer, HITEC University Taxila Cantt.

Abstract

The present study is aimed at the examination of the intriguing links between Islamic traditions and norms of conduct that are noticeable in an individual's life, by identifying and analyzing the ethical impact of beliefs, rituals and teachings of Islam. The essay put forward a holistic framework backed up by psychological theories and empirical studies aimed at demystifying the tangible mechanism that propel Muslim to adopt right moral behavior. Through observing the role of Islamic principles on the minds of their followers, conducting this study allows us to see how commitment to religious teachings is expressed in moral conduct in multiple life areas. Comprehending these connections does not just present scholars with interesting case studies about ethical behavior from an Islamic perspective as well as in terms of religion and psychology, but also provides manners to individuals, communities and organizations that would increase the ethical behavior of their members within Islamic contexts. Through this study, we discover a closer connection between religious faiths and moral activity than their distinct state might suggest. It also highlights the impact of religious practices on the ethical code of the peoples of Islamic societies as well as in the proceedings of the community in general.

**Keywords:** Ethical Behavior, Islamic Practices, Psychology, Morality

## **Introduction**

Islam holds the record as the most widely professed religious confession in the world (Pew Research Center, 2017: 30). Islamic faith is incomplete without its practices which is the main tool in Muslims' lives and this lets people become better persons morally. They contain multifaceted facets of the daily life, such as devotion, abstinence, charity, and travel for worship, which are indissolubly linked to the Islamic doctrine (Quran; Hadith). Although the generally accepted fact that religion and morality relate to each other has been recognized, however, the exact neurological mechanisms through which Islamic practices contribute to moral decision-making are being studied which is less-known (Rezvani, Khosravi, & Sohrabi, 2018). Knowing the psychological factors involved cannot be underestimated as it is necessary in the process of ascertaining religious beliefs and moral up-doing. Islamic rites and rituals like Salah (prayer) involve the entire self being integrated. The performance of prayer creates rigid routine for a daily life and also instill self-discipline and mindfulness. (Tariq, 2013) Frequent worshiping in accordance with the Islamic principles enables Muslims to cultivate their moral standard as well as their responsibility to themselves and others (Mirzaei & Movahedi, 2014).

Dzakar is the religious obligation of paying charity to the poor and the needy. It focuses on the feelings of generosity and empathy with the less fortunate, so that Muslim communities find this social responsibility important and develop compassion towards others. The Salah prayer makes Muslims frequently reflect on themselves as they align their daily lives with God and consequently becoming better people in terms of ethical principles and moral virtues (Tariq, 2013). Prayer becomes the essential part of this ritual and like a reminder of one's responsibility towards almighty, also towards fellow beings, and finally a value like integrity is gained in behavior (Movahedi & Mirzaei, 2014). The like manner, the duty of Zakat helps Muslims collectively to contribute towards the welfare of society and strengthen the relationships among people to foster peace and prosperity (Nasir & Khalid, 2014). Here we can clearly see that, without these practices people might not be able to live with each other in a socially just manner and do not possess the virtues which help in creating moral communities.

This paper intends to bridge this gap by analyzing the psychologically driven ways in which the Islamic practices have an impact on ethical decision making. Through the examination of the roles of belief systems, practices and community norms we can acquire a deeper

understanding of the interplay with the human cognition and the underlying complexity of moral conduct. Such research engenders a wide-scale consideration of the way moral dimensions could originate from religious beliefs and may facilitate identifying culturally empathetic approaches in psychology and moral philosophy (Saeed, 2018). On the other hand, investigating these processes can point out the ways that promote the ethical behavior and well-being of the Muslim communities and eventually can result in the more integrated living between different groups of people.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The empirical investigation of the psychological dimensions of the Islamic practices on ethical behavior is based on a footing of various theoretical approaches. The social identity theory (SIT) defines the moral decision a Muslim makes, by being related to them by their congruence to the Muslim norms and practices, thus making them a member of the Muslim community (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Through an identification with a religious group, individuals are encouraged to ensure the compliance of group values, including those principles of Islamic ethics also (Vann Vugt, Sanda Hart, 2004). This identity creates a form of social identity through which the people give meaning and a framework of interpretation of moral dilemmas to guide their behavior toward choices that are acceptable in their faith community. Especially so, Muslims may take notions of ethical behavior as a way to positively reinforce the members who have already got a sense of ownership or belongingness in the Muslim community (Van Vugt & Hart, 2004).

Cognitive dissonance theory provides another viewpoint to tackle the issue of Islamic practice; ethical behavior relationship. This theory posits that people experience disillusionment as a result of having faith and behaviour which do not really match up. This creates conditions conducive to the happening of cognitive dissonance alleviation. (Festinger, 1957). In Islamic context, followers might look after doing things according to the Islamic moral principles to have cognitive consistency with the religion him or her practiced (Johnson & Greenberg, 2015). Hence, praying and donating money to charity in accordance with Islamic regulations is not only an expressing of one's identity, but also a remedy to cognitive dissonance because such actions once again are consistent with one's religious values. On top of that, observing an ethical Islamic code can be a significant driver for psychological peace and stability that enriches the moral willpower to do well (Johnson & Greenberg, 2015).

### **Islamic Practices and Ethical Behavior**

Islamic habits, whose origin goes back to the Quran and the Hadith, are an aggregation of the rituals and traditions that daily define the lives of Muslims worldwide. This adoration includes daily prayers (Salah), the fasting during the month of Ramadan (Sawm), alms giving (Zakat), and the pilgrimage to the Masjid al-Haram (Hajj). These pillars of Islam serve as a means of religiously identifying the faithful Muslims (Quran; Hadith). With society social practices, these routines provide a guiding principle of character as a mean of ethic expression in the Muslim community (Ali, 2018). Based on the studies published, obedience to the traditions or rituals corresponds to more moral understanding and the practice of being prosocial (Tariq, 2013). For example, numerous researches have established that Salah attendance enhances integrity and cultivate honesty (Movahedi & Mirzaei, 2014). The act enables individuals become conscious and aware of their own actions. Similarly, fasting during Ramadan helps to be more disciplined, and sympathetic to people who are less fortunate in society; a trait that elicits noble generosity and compassion.

Alongside that, the Islamic religious instructions allege that almsgiving (Zakat) is a very important issue as a part of the social selflessness (Nasir & Khalid, 2014). Through that, people struggle to achieve a spiritual responsibility and to cultivate a sense of empathy and respect for others prosperity (Tariq, 2013). The Hajj pilgrimage also upholds these transformational processes through the coming together of different Muslims from different backgrounds thus imparting a sense of humility, equality, and unity (Brockopp 2005). With fasting, hajj, charity, etc., they are given a reminder of their human duties and they become compelled to translate their spiritual beliefs into tangible actions beneficial not only for themselves, but for the whole society of Moslems (Ali, 2018). In general, the ethical behavior would be guided by moral framework that is Islamic and thus, it would be the main focus of the actions of an individual. A sense of being accountable and compassionate would also be at the core of the Islamic practices (Tariq, 2013). They are no less than a prayer in the form of actions. They are a medium to gain virtues and thus lead to the salvation of the society.

### **Psychological Mechanisms**

The psychology of the relations which exist between the Islamic practices and the ethics of human behavior can be seen through some cognitive mechanisms. Firstly, the sense of accountability to

Allah (God) and the belief in divine reward and punishment as the consequences of violation from these ethical principles make the faith of Muslims to the norms defined in Islam the highest (Ali, 2018). Arabians declared that the divine entity Allah was always observing their actions permanently and they would be answerable for all their deeds in the afterlife (Quran). The conviction that they will be subject to divine control on Judgment Day will make people try to live rightfully and avoid evil and the desire to tantric arts being rewarded with divine approval (Johnson & Greenberg, 2015). Hence, the social bond within the Muslim society which creates a medium where the good behavior is appreciated is one of determinant of an individual's moral conduct. Joint practices and mass prayers and services, among others, Salah (prayer) and mutual charitable deeds, hence create situations where those who exercise such a religiously driven conduct get the reinforcement they need or the respect of their peers (Van Vugt & Hart, 2004).

Also, the community's joint effort to reinforce what is morally right in the Muslim community, works in shaping individuals' decisions and attitudes towards ethical conducts. Various rituals and congregational worship showcasing focal points like Salah (prayer) and mutual acts of charity aid Muslims in affirming their ethical principles and get approval from their peers (Van Vugt & Hart, 2004). This social reinforcement therefore helps to create a supporting atmosphere where such behavior that is ethical is praised and accepted and in turn, one is encouraged to follow moral standards that are appreciated by a society. (Nasir & Khalid, 2014). Still, such communal activities are generators of feelings of belonging and solidarity among believers, also through the establishment of control over the ethical behavior of the group (Ali, 2018). Furthermore, the religious dynamics that are in place have the potential to provide people with a more perceptive moral consciousness, which helps them to spot ethical concerns. Pondering, praying and engaging with holy verses inspire persons to pay attention to their behaviors and values so as to get wisdom and principles of ethics (S. Tariq, 2013).

By using these cognitive functions, moral consciousness is being developed, which directs people's behavior and decision-making process, intensifying their moral standards so it gets easier for them to obey ethical conduct (Movahedi & Mirzaei, 2014). Alongside religious and moral practices, individuals are capable to grasp and implement ethical values, which is useful in moral dilemmas as they enable clarity and integrity. Therefore, constant coherence of the beliefs and words is made possible. The act of Islamic doctrines and moral behavior is in many ways determine

through some psychological mechanism. First of all, an individual is always awake to the accountability of Allah, as a result, faith becomes the driving force that orients one in a moral and norms stipulated in the Islamic tradition. Muslims regard sin as a betrayal of the Creator that leaves the sinful person eternally condemned. Hence, committing sins is unacceptable because they would be accountable for their actions in the afterlife. As a result, they would do their best to be righteous and avoid evilness.

Consequently, the second biggest influencer in the Muslim community is called social reinforcement, which also has a strong effect on a person's tendency to act morally. Through joint practices and community prayer Muslims receive the possibility to refresh their beliefs in the ethical principles and establish the place for themselves at the community where ethics is appreciated and ideally becomes a behavior pattern. The final but not least, the cognitive reappraisal in the framework of religious practices imparts moral sensitivity and awareness that enable to resolve ethical quandaries. The process of mindful action, the plea and engagement with religions texts makes people ponder about themselves and finally understand the founding principles of ethical conduct making them to have commitment in ethical conduct. Overall they explain how these mechanisms behave together and shape individuals' moral consciousness which leads their actions to be in harmony with Islamic ethics.

### **Empirical Evidences**

The experimental study into the various psychological influences of Islamic practices on ethical conduct is still rare but auguring well. Multicultural researches across Muslim immigrants and non-Muslims has demonstrated that those who adopts Islam often shows a higher behavior of pro-social and trustworthy characteristic (Norenzayan et al., 2016). This is shared responsibility, perhaps to an extent, because of their religious doctrines and rituals e.g. alms-giving (Zakat) and integrity in relations with others (Ali, 2018). Among the other, Saroglou and Cohen (2014) proved through their research that Muslims are more concerned about helping both unknown people and other people in general compared to non-Muslims in any experiments they used. However, some studies have found that faithfulness to the Islamic practices including the Salah (prayer) is associated with reduced levels of cheating and dishonesty (Preston et al., 2019). This study reveals the possibility that the Islamic doctrine, and practices significantly contribute to the desirable

ethical involvement of the Muslims. Furthermore, a few experimental studies have found out that the mental process involved with Islamic rituals is associated with ethics.

Reference to the Julian and Greenberg demonstration of laboratory setting ethical perception alteration in the prime of Islamic morals has already been enacted. Another example of the work done by the authors is the study by Shariff and Norenzayan (2007) that proved putting people in God's presence and in front of religious concepts makes them behave more kindly. Likewise, Ginges and Atran (2011) study emphasizes the fact that Muslim group, which was exposed to 'sacrifices of the God Is done for the noble purpose of living, significantly extended the amount, which they would pay for charity'. The results of such experiments present the execrative proof showing that religious behaviors and beliefs should be considered as triggers for peoples' moral actions by engaging their cognitive processes related to religious self-identifications and moral values (Saroglou & Cohen, 2014). But while more study is required in order to fully comprehend the dynamic relationship between faith, ritual, and cultures, the role it plays remains insufficient even in cultural diversification.

### **Conclusion**

In brief, Islamic practices have a very strong impact on people's moral conduct through many psychological means. The accountability to Allah and the social reinforcement of Muslim tribes as well as the mental reconstruction gestalt during the Islamic consecration of religious presents are the components ones that work in concert to develop moral consciousness and establish Islamic moral principles. The empirical research concludes that Muslims practicing our religion tend to demonstrate more prosocial behavior and honesty in their routine tasks than their counterparts who do not practice Islam that can be traced to the religious platforms at least in part. Also, there are experimental research that give further indication to saying that an Islamic ethics' prime materials can also prime individuals to influence the way they make ethical decision. Getting into the essentialities of such phenomenon have both implication for Muslims themselves and for their moral conduct. The acknowledgment of the importance of religious mentalities and behavior in the shaping of moral orientation of the people creates a platform for the development of interventions meant for the promotion of moral values and pro-social behavior across varied cultural activities. Besides that, a rigorous investigation is needed to examine the intricate network between religion, psychology, and morality and explore the actual goals of social ethics. Through

going on in the exposure of this phenomenon, there is a chance that we can learn even more about the ethical behavior that is inseparable from religious traditions.

### **References**

- Ali, K. (2018). *Islam: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Başkale, H. (2017). The effects of fasting during Ramadan on self-control and empathy. *Religions*, 8(1), 8.
- Brockopp, J. E. (2005). *The pilgrimage to Mecca: The rites of the Hajj*. Cambridge University Press.
- Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford University Press.
- Ginges, J., & Atran, S. (2011). War as a moral imperative (not just practical politics by other means). *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 278(1710), 2930–2938.
- Johnson, S. A., & Greenberg, J. (2015). The psychological motives underlying religious prosociality: The case of ritual behavior. In D. A. Rand, M. Nowak, & K. Sigmund (Eds.), *Understanding cultural traits: A multidisciplinary perspective on cultural diversity* (pp. 215-234). Princeton University Press.
- Keshavarzi, S., Besharat, M. A., & Karami, M. (2016). The role of religious beliefs in predicting moral sensitivity: The mediating role of existential intelligence. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 55(2), 676-684.
- Movahedi, S., & Mirzaei, M. (2014). Effect of prayer on the degree of awareness of the moral values in the students. *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*, 3(3), 454-462.
- Nasir, M. F., & Khalid, S. A. (2014). Impact of Zakat on poverty alleviation and human welfare: A case study of Pakistan. *Journal of Islamic Economics, Banking and Finance*, 10(4), 70-88.
- Nasr, S. H. (2007). *Islamic philosophy from its origin to the present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*. State University of New York Press.
- Norenzayan, A., Gervais, W. M., & Trzesniewski, K. H. (2016). Mentalizing deficits constrain belief in a personal God. *PLoS ONE*, 11(3), e0152439.
- Pew Research Center. (2017). *The changing global religious landscape*. Retrieved from <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/>



- Preston, J. L., Ritter, R. S., & Hernandez, J. I. (2019). Islam promotes honesty: Evidence from a sample of adults from the United States and Egypt. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 50(1), 86–94.
- Rezvani, M., Khosravi, M., & Sohrabi, F. (2018). The effect of religious beliefs and practices on ethical decision-making in the workplace: A study on managers of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). *Journal of Management and Development Process*, 7(3), 57-74.
- Saeed, A. (2018). *Islamophobia: Lived experiences of online and offline victimization*. Springer.
- Saroglou, V., & Cohen, A. B. (2014). Psychological approaches to the study of religion: What can we learn from a terror management theory perspective? In V. Saroglou (Ed.), *Religion, personality, and social behavior* (pp. 169–194). Psychology Press.
- Shariff, A. F., & Norenzayan, A. (2007). God is watching you: Priming God concepts increases prosocial behavior in an anonymous economic game. *Psychological Science*, 18(9), 803–809.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.
- Tariq, A. R. (2013). *Islamic ethics: Divine command theory in Arabo-Islamic thought*. Routledge.
- Van Vugt, M., & Hart, C. M. (2004). Social identity as social glue: The origins of group loyalty. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86(4), 585–598.