

Souls Assorted: An Islamic Theory of Spiritual Personality

ZOHAIR ABDUL-RAHMAN
NAZIR KHAN

YAQEEN™
INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC RESEARCH

Author Biography

Zohair Abdul-Rahman was born and raised in Toronto, Canada. He has a B.Sc. in Life Sciences with a minor in Psychology, M.Sc. in the Scientific Method, and Ijazah in Islamic theology and Hadith. Currently, he is pursuing medical studies at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia, where he regularly delivers sermons, lectures, and classes for the Muslim community.

Dr. Nazir Khan is a Director of Research at Yaqeen Institute. He is a medical doctor and clinical neuroscientist, volunteer Imam, and consultant for the Manitoba Islamic Association Fiqh Committee. He has received traditional certification (*ijazah*) in the study of the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic theology (*aqeedah*).

Disclaimer: *The views, opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in these papers and articles are strictly those of the authors. Furthermore, Yaqeen does not endorse any of the personal views of the authors on any platform. Our team is diverse on all fronts, allowing for constant, enriching dialogue that helps us produce high-quality research.*

Copyright © 2018. Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research

Abstract

Having a sense of belonging to a faith community has a strong impact on an individual's conviction and commitment to belief. Among the first signs that a person is distancing themselves from Islam is when they distance themselves from the Muslim community. They may feel alienated or out of place when they find themselves at a mosque or a gathering of Muslims. This article explores the concept of spiritual personality in the hopes of demonstrating that Islam has the breadth necessary for anyone to feel included within its mission. Spiritual personality refers to a person's natural disposition that influences what aspects of Islamic practice, belief, and virtues naturally appeal to them. With a better awareness of this diversity, we hope that the Muslim community begins to create space for people of diverse interests, talents, and strengths to thrive and grow. We explore the concept of personality in the Qur'an and Islamic tradition as well as attempt to construct a model of spiritual personality. A preliminary typology of four spiritual personality orientations is proposed at the end.

What is Personality?

It difficult to imagine an aspect of our lives that is not shaped by personality. It features prominently in all of our interactions, our choices of friends, the careers we choose and our ability to succeed in them, the types of decisions we make, our personal interests and ambitions, and even the way we acquire and process information about the external world.[1] Being alive is a complex and dynamic process that requires continuous effort for self-preservation. The world presents us with opportunity as well as danger. We are constantly confronted with dilemmas in life, requiring us to respond in ways that would achieve benefit or at the very least, avert any harm. In response to such complexity, we develop various strategies to overcome the challenges of living in the world. These strategies ultimately influence our thought processes, emotional experiences, and behaviors. The result

[1] Susan Cain. *Quiet: The power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking*. (Crown Publishing Group 2012), pp. 2-3.

is a set of dispositions and tendencies that characterize our style of interacting with ourselves, the world, and others. In a word, *personality*.

'Personality' is a construct used to account for the variance among people in their behavior, affect, and cognition.[2] Essentially, it is a construct used to understand why people feel, behave, and think about the world differently. The academic field of *personality psychology* has "never been in better health than at the present time," with integration of data from neuroscience and genetics, and a variety of tools to measure major traits like extraversion versus introversion.[3] Perhaps the most famous personality test is the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI), which is based on the conceptual theory of archetypes developed by Carl Jung. The personality theory most commonly used in psychology research is the Big Five model which examines openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (a convenient mnemonic is the acronym OCEAN). Recently, a landmark study found empirical evidence for the type theory by analyzing data from the Big-5 model.[4] They discovered four meaningful patterns of distribution across the 5 personality trait dimensions.

A sound knowledge of one's personality is indispensable. It has been said, "A genius in the wrong position could look like a fool."[5] There is scarcely a job interview that does not require one to know their strengths and weaknesses. One of the fascinating aspects of the Prophet Muhammad's leadership is that he always selected people for opportunities that were most suited to their natural talents and skills. Some personalities have the strength to endure the most grim challenges, some have the creativity to find novel solutions, some have the tenderness to console someone in distress, and so on. These differences we observe are not random variations, but result from our innate personalities.

---

[2] Funder, D. C. (2015). *The personality puzzle: Seventh international student edition*. W. W. Norton & Company, p. 5.
[3] Philip J. Corr, Gerald Matthews. *The Cambridge handbook of personality psychology*. (Cambridge University Press 2009), p. xxii.
[4] Gerlach, M., Farb, B., Revelle, W., & Nunes Amaral, L. A. (2018). A robust data-driven approach identifies four personality types across four large data sets. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *2*, 735-742.
[5] Idowu Koyenikan, *Wealth for all: Living a life of success at the edge of your ability.* (NC: Grandeur Touch, L.L.C., 2016).

Our personality represents our preferred method in dealing with the world. Frustration and anxiety often manifest when a person acts contrary to their preferred methods. This is commonly seen, for instance, when a person's job does not align with their personality strengths, resulting in job dissatisfaction.[6] People who are high in creativity, for example, often feel shackled in jobs that are highly structured, repetitive, and resistant to change. Conversely, someone who is high in conscientiousness may thrive in such an environment.

Personality in the Qur'an and Sunnah

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ described personality differences as being rooted in the creation process of Adam:

> *Indeed Allah Most High created Adam from a handful that He took from all of the earth. So the children of Adam come in according with the earth, some of them come red, and white and black, and between that, and the lenient, the hard-headed, the filthy, and the pure.*[7]

This *hadith* is profoundly comprehensive, referencing the fundamental components of the human being. It informs us of the interesting connection between the qualities of the earth and the qualities of the human being. The first category of attributes mentioned deals with the physical body, specifically skin color. The second category of attributes deals with personality, particularly on the dimension of agreeableness. The final category, according to the *hadith* commentator Mulla Ali al-Qari (d. 1014 AH), speaks to the *akhlāq* (character) of the human being in reference to spiritual purity and impurity.[8] Altogether, the *hadith* references body, mind, and spirit.

The Qur'an also alludes to personality in a few places. For instance, the Qur'an states, *"Everyone behaves according to their nature (shākil), and your Lord knows who is the most guided"* (17:84). Imam Al-Qurtubi (d. 671 AH) mentions in his

---

[6] Nicodemus, K. M. (2012). Personality type and job satisfaction. In R. D. Urman & J. M. Ehrenfeld (Eds.), *Physicians' pathways to non-traditional careers and leadership opportunities* (pp. 11-17). New York: Springer.
[7] *Jami' al-Tirmidhi*, 3213.
[8] Mulla Ali al-Qari'. *Mirqat al-Mafatih Sharh Mishkat al-Masabih*. (Dar al-Fikr 2002). Vol. 1, p.176.

commentary that the early scholar Mujahid said *shākil* means a person's nature (*ṭabee'ah*). He also quotes Al-Farā' who said it refers to a person's way of being that he has been born upon.[9]

In a very intriguing narration about the human soul, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "The souls are like troops collected together, those that are familiar incline to each other, and those that are dissimilar are repelled."[10] Badr ad-Deen al-'Ayni (d. 855 AH) mentions that the analogy means that human beings are one creation but are of different categories based on their traits (*sifāt*), just like an army is made up of different divisions, battalions, and squads that have their own distinguishing features.[11] Thus, there seems to be a subtle reference here to the diversity of human personality.

Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (d. 852 AH) describes a variety of views in the Islamic tradition regarding the meaning of souls inclining towards each other.[12] For instance, Al-Qurtubi (d. 671 AH) explains that souls differ by various features and those that share similar features are naturally drawn towards other members of the same category. Abu Suleyman Al-Khattabi (d. 388 AH) notes that this could be due to the souls having met prior to life in this world, or it could be that their similar natures draw them together.

Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH) derives very valuable social advice from this narration, "One of the benefits of this narration is that if an individual finds something in his heart against a good and righteous person, he should search for the cause of it,[13] seeking to cease the ill-feeling."[14] On the other hand, it is also possible that we harbor ill-feelings not due to any fault of the other person, but just because of personality differences. Recognizing and being aware of these differences can help purify our hearts from ill feelings toward others.

---

[9] Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jaami' li-Ahkaam al-Quran*, verse 17:84. Accessed Online.
[10] *Sahih Bukhari*: Accessed Online.
[11] Al-Ayni, *Umdat ul-Qari Sharh Sahih Bukhari*. Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya. Beirut: 2001. vol. 15, p. 297.
[12] Al-Asqalani, *Fath ul Bari*. Al-Maktabah As-Salafiyya. vol. 6, pp. 369-370. The subsequent statements by Al-Qurtubi and Al-Khattabi are cited by Ibn Hajar.
[13] This statement also points to the value of identifying and altering harmful core beliefs, which is the basis of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).
[14] Al-Asqalani, *Fath ul Bari*. Al-Maktabah As-Salafiyya. vol. 6, pp. 369-370.

The Prophet Muhammad's companions paid attention to personality similarities and differences in their observations. One of the most explicit narrations comes from the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, Aisha, who made the following comments about the similarity between the Prophet ﷺ and his daughter Fatimah:

> *I have not seen anyone resemble the Messenger of Allah in disposition (samtan), characteristics (dallan) and mode of conduct (hadyan), in their standing and sitting, than Fātimah, daughter of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ . When Fātimah would enter upon the Prophet ﷺ he used to stand up for her, kiss her and seat her in his place; and when the Prophet ﷺ used to visit her, she would stand up for him, kiss him, and seat him in her place.*[15]

Similarly, when describing whom he thought most closely resembled the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, Hudhayfah used the same descriptors regarding personality. Hudhayfah said, "I have never seen anyone more similar to the Messenger of Allah in characteristics (*dallan*), disposition (*samtan*), and mode of conduct (*hadyan*) than Ibn Ummi 'Abd (i.e., Abdullah ibn Mas'ud)."[16] These three terms are all considered to be similar in meaning and emphasize personality traits in interacting with people as well as some moral and spiritual traits (such as reverence/*khushu'* and humility/*tawadu'*).[17] The distinction between such categories of traits are examined in the subsequent section.

Personality versus Moral Character

As described earlier, personality refers to our preferred behaviors and attitudes for interacting with the world. The key word to highlight is preference rather than responsibility. In other words, our personality tendencies are generally value-neutral or amoral, just like our preferences for food, scenery, art, and recreation. Furthermore, personalities are generally fixed, difficult to change and,

---

[15] *Sunan Abi Dawud* (Online). For an interesting derivation of 33 lessons from this *hadith* see Al-Jubury, Kehlan. The Prophet and his daughter. Prophetic Guidance blog (June 15, 2013). http://propheticguidance.co.uk/the-prophet-and-his-daughter/

[16] *Sahih Bukhari* (Online).

[17] See al-Sha'rawi's comments as cited in Umar Ahmad Zakariyah. *Hayat al-Nabi fi baytihi*. (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah 1971), p. 237.

as mentioned earlier, attempting to act contrary to one's personality results in negative mental health outcomes.

Contrary to personality, which is generally stable and value-neutral, character (*akhlāq*) is value-laden and can be changed. Our character refers to moral traits, qualities such as humility, sincerity, patience, gratitude or arrogance, hypocrisy, impulsivity, and ingratitude. Developing positive character traits is a task that we have been given by Allah and one for which we will be compensated according to our effort. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said, "I was sent to perfect good character (*akhlāq*)."[18]

It is known that Allah does not give an individual a responsibility that they cannot fulfill as explained in the Qur'an, "*Allah does not place a burden on anyone more than they can bear*" (2:285). Thus, our character, unlike our fundamental personality traits, can be changed according to whether we actively seek to develop it or choose to neglect it. Having said that, a person's personality can render certain *akhlāq* qualities easier or harder to obtain. For instance a person who is low in neuroticism (a personality trait) may find it easier to be optimistic (an *akhlāq* trait) compared to someone higher in neuroticism, who may be prone to pessimism.[19] Furthermore, someone who is more introverted may find introspection (*murāqaba*) easier while an extroverted person may find it easier to strengthen relationships with family (*silat ar-rahim)* or host guests with grace (*takreem ad-dhuyoof*).

The distinction and connection between personality and character is described in the story of Ashajj, of the tribe of 'Abd Qays. When a delegation from his tribe traveled to Madinah, they raced to greet the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as soon as they arrived. However, Ashajj stayed behind, knelt his camel, and changed into a fresh pair of garments before going to meet the Prophet. The Prophet Muhammad said to Ashajj, "You have two characteristics which Allah loves: forbearance (*ḥilm*) and deliberation (*anāh*)." Ashajj asked, "Have I acquired them or was I born with them?" The Prophet replied, "Rather it is something you were born with."

[18] *Muwatta Maalik*: Accessed Online.
[19] The precise personality traits associated with optimism are explored more fully in Sharpe, J. P., Martin, N. R., & Roth, K. A. (2011). Optimism and the Big Five factors of personality: Beyond neuroticism and extraversion. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *51*(8), 946-951.

Ashajj then said, “Praise be to Allah who created me with those very qualities which He loves.”[20]

The narration describes forbearance and deliberation, roughly correlating to the ‘Big Five’ traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness, as being created as part of his innate personality. These personality traits facilitated the virtue he was able to demonstrate that was described as being loved by Allah. These included not causing any harm or inconvenience to the others or the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by not participating in the initial race towards him. It also included taking the time to show extra care and respect to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ by changing his garments and meeting him in a calm manner.

Personality Psychology in the Islamic Tradition

The Qur’anic terminology for the components of the psyche of the human being includes *nafs* (self), *hawa* (desires), *aql* (intellect), *ruh* (soul), *qalb* (heart), *lubb* (mind), *baseera* (insight), and *shakal* (predisposition). In a previous article, we constructed a model of the human psyche from an Islamic perspective, utilizing many of these terms.[21] Although there is no specific term used in the Qur’an to describe the psychological construct of ‘personality,’ the concept as demonstrated in the previous section exists in both the Qur'an and Sunnah.

The first appearance of personality discussions in early Islam comes from the Muslim philosophers who were greatly influenced by Hellenistic philosophy.[22] Therefore, the terms that were used to discuss personality were mere translations of the terms used by the Greeks. Ishaq bin Hunayn translated Aristotle’s treatise ‘On the soul’ into Arabic (known as *Kitāb an-Nafs)*. Al-Farabi (d. 339 AH) wrote a commentary on this work and Ibn Rushd (d. 595 AH) later summarized it. *Nafs* (self), *dimāgh* (mindset), *shakhṣiyya* (personality), *tabee’atu nafs al-insanee*

[20] *Sunan Ibn Majah* (online), *Sunan Abi Dawud* (online).
[21] https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/zohair/powerofmotivation/
[22] Al-Ani, Nizar Muhammad Sa’id. *Ash-shakhsiya al-Insaniyya fee al-Fikr al-Islamee*. International Institute of Islamic Thought, Beirut: 2005, 2nd edition.

(nature of the Human Self) are all terms that have been used by Muslim scholars to talk about human personality.[23]

One example of a classical scholar who discussed concepts in psychology utilizing Greek terms is Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) who described disease as manifesting spiritually, psychologically, and physically:

> *Lust is a spiritual illness (nafsāni). But when the disease increases in strength it starts to manifest in the body. It can become a mental illness (dimāghi) such as Melancholia. And it is said regarding this that the disease of obsessions (waswāsi) is similar to Melancholia. Lastly, it can be a physical illness of the body manifesting as fatigue, weakness, and symptoms like that.*[24]

This quotation shows that Ibn Taymiyyah saw parallels between Islamic conceptions of psychology with Greek views as demonstrated by the connection between Melancholia and the disease of *waswās*.[25] Muslim scholars routinely engaged with contemporary sciences of psychology, medicine, and natural philosophy, critically analyzing the opinions in the Hellenistic traditions. Similarly, in our times, Muslim scholars must engage with the modern body of empirical research in the field of psychology to advance the study of spiritual psychology upon the edifices constructed by our predecessors.

Modern psychology and personality theories are generally focused more on description rather than prescription. This means that they are focused on attempting to construct an objective view of how the mind works without subsequently explaining how it is relevant to the flourishing and growth of the human being. Some thinkers attempt to take these models and derive psychotherapeutic methods and approaches to attain meaning and/or happiness.

In contrast, the Islamic paradigm is considerably more focused on prescription rather than description. The Qur'an presents a system of guidance that is meant to

---

[23] Ibid.
[24] Umar Ahmad Ar-Rawi. *Tibb al-Quloob*. Daar kutub Ilmiyya, 2003, p. 83.
[25] The interested reader can refer to a prior article published by Yaqeen on the topic of *waswās*, https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/najwa-awad/clinicians-imams-and-the-whisperings-of-satan/

transform an individual through their relationship with Allah. "*This is the book, in which there is no doubt, guidance for those conscious of God*" (Qur'an 2:2).

Thus, the Islamic tradition is concerned with how our personalities can be utilized to strengthen this relationship and ultimately grow as individuals. If it does describe the structure of the human psyche, it is more interested in describing spiritual elements and functions of our personality. The purpose of knowledge is to act, and the purpose of knowing the self is to act in its best interests.

Spiritual Tendencies

In a fascinating passage, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) answers the question of whether one should focus on strengthening one's faith (*imān*) by first starting with abstinence (*zuhd*), knowledge (*'ilm*), or acts of worship (*ibādah*). He replies:

> *People differ in this regard. From amongst people, some find knowledge easier than zuhd, some find zuhd easier than 'ilm, and some find ibādah easier than both of them. What is prescribed (mashroo') is that everyone acts according to what they are capable of goodness based on the verse "Have taqwa of Allah as much as you are able" (64:16). So when the branches of faith become crowded, a person proceeds with what is most pleasing to God by acting according to what he is most capable.*[26]

Ibn Taymiyyah goes on to explain that what becomes the most virtuous action for a person is whatever comes more readily to him and provides the greatest benefit to his faith, even if that action might not be intrinsically better than other actions. For instance, a person who finds voluntary prayers at night onerous might benefit far more from engaging in more recitation and contemplation of the Qur'an, or more *dhikr* (remembrance), and these actions may be considered more virtuous for this individual. As a corollary, no one can belittle the good deeds of others, since only Allah knows which of them are most valuable and most virtuous for which person. Moreover, Ibn al-Qayyim discussed the concept of spiritual stations (*maqamat*) in his work *Madarij al-Salikeen* and notes that while these are frequently presented in

[26] Ibn Taymiyyah. *Majmoo' al-Fatawa*, vol. 6, pp. 651-652.

a chronological sequence by many authors, one person may pursue the stations of love, contentment, and tranquility at the beginning of one's spiritual journey while for someone else those stations may only be fully actualized at the end of the spiritual journey.[27]

Indeed, even the structure of the cosmos bears witness to the plurality of spiritual personalities. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ informed us, "Paradise has eight gates, and one of them is called Ar-Rayyan through which none will enter but those who observe fasting."[28] Each gate relates to a different virtue, and whoever increases in the deeds of a certain gate becomes from the people called to enter it.[29] Thus, different people may have propensities for different types of virtue, and will therefore enter Paradise from different routes.

Every human being is different. We see this all around us in the diverse pursuits individuals find spiritually rewarding. Some are more involved in community activism, some in studying the Qur'an, some in *sadaqah*, and so on. Many diverse individual paths to God are encompassed by the Straight Path of the Islamic religion. Imam Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751 AH) writes:

> *The path to Allah is one path, inclusive of all that which pleases Allah, and what pleases Him is numerous and diversified according to times, places, people, and situations. All of these are Divinely pleasing paths, which God made numerous out of His Mercy and Wisdom for the differences of people in their dispositions (isti'dadat) and their hearts (qulub). And had God made them all one category despite the differences in people's minds (adhhān), intellects (uqul), and strengths and weaknesses of their dispositions, none would traverse the path to Him except [a few individuals,] one by one.*[30]

---

[27] *Madarij as-Salikin*, vol. 1, p. 132, as cited in Anjum, Ovamir. Sufism without Mysticism? Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah's Objectives in *Madarij as-Salikin*." *Oriente Moderno*, 2010, 1, p. 175.
[28] *Sahih Bukhari*, Accessed online.
[29] See the discussion of Imam al-Ubbi (d. 827 AH) in his super commentary on *Sahih Muslim*; *Ikmal ikmal al-mu'lim sharh Sahih Muslim*, (Egypt: Matba' al-Sa'adah), vol. 1, p. 119. Aside from the gate of fasting however, there is no scriptural proof for which deeds correspond to which gates.
[30] Ibn al-Qayyim. *Tareeq al-Hijratayn wa Bab al-Sa'adatayn*, p. 385.

Ibn al-Qayyim then describes how this may manifest differently depending on one's spiritual personality. He says, "there are people whose chief action and path through which they worship Allah is the path of knowledge and learning." Such people may spend all their time in this pursuit, exhausting all of their resources and time in the thirst for knowledge of God. On the other hand, there are those "whose chief action is *dhikr*" and "whenever they find themselves lacking in it, they feel cheated and in loss." Still others may strive towards God with voluntary prayers, others with alleviating the afflictions and calamities that beset people, others with enjoining good and forbidding wrong, others with fasting or reading Qur'an. Others focus on spiritual introspection (*murāqabah*), examining their internal thoughts (*khawāṭir*), and preserving their time from being wasted. And some are able to combine multiple categories.[31]

Imam Malik was once asked why he was busy in circles of knowledge and not other aspects of Islam. He replied by explaining the diversity of spiritual personalities, "Certainly, Allah has divided good actions like he has divided His providence (*rizq*). It may be that prayer has been facilitated for a person, but fasting hasn't. Another person may have a tendency for charity but not fasting… And I am happy with what Allah has facilitated for me (the pursuit of knowledge). I don't think what I am focused on is lower than what you are focused on. Rather, I hope that we are both upon goodness and righteousness."[32]

From the foregoing discussion, we see that people naturally differ in what their spirituality drives them towards, and what activities in the faith they find themselves most passionate about—some towards the social aspects of faith (e.g., feeding the hungry, sheltering the oppressed, etc.), and others towards the solitary and reflective practices (e.g., recitation, contemplation, etc.).[33] It also influences

[31] Ibid, pp. 386-388.
[32] Al-Dhahabi, *Siyar an-Nubala*: Accessed Online.
[33] Of course, it goes without saying that these differences are with respect to voluntary actions, while obligatory actions are required of everyone. Jamaal Zarabozo writes, "This reality is all by the mercy of Allah. Beyond the obligatory deeds, people are free to pursue those good voluntary deeds that they are most attracted to. There are so many areas of voluntary deeds that it seems inconceivable that a person could not find some voluntary deed or deeds that he would like to perform in order to get closer to Allah. Allah's path to paradise is wide enough to accommodate all of those different leanings. However, this is all dependent on the individual first fulfilling, in general, the obligatory deeds. If the person does not do that, then he may not be on the straight path at all." (*Commentary on the Forty Hadith of al-Nawawi*, vol. 2, p. 1154).

how they experience spirituality and to which reminders their faith is most responsive. Two people may listen to the same reminder or *khutbah* and find different aspects of it more compelling—for one person it may have been a new insight about a verse, for the other it may have been a practical story about helping others. Such differences are captured in the conceptualization of spirituality types, traits, or tendencies that coalesce to form one's unique spiritual personality. For this reason, it is important for Islamic speakers and educators to diversify their messages to cater to different members of their audience. This is in line with the style of the Qur'an,

> *And We have certainly diversified in this Qur'an for mankind from every kind of example. But, mankind has above all else always been argumentative.* (Qur'an, 18:54)

> *And thus we have sent an Arabic Qur'an down and diversified the warnings in it so that they may become conscious (of God) or it would inspire remembrance.* (Qur'an, 20:113)

Spiritual personality refers to how an individual manifests their spirituality. Just as our personalities result in different approaches to relationships and work, our spiritual personalities result in a variety of approaches to spiritual practices, religious beliefs, and identity. There may be some that find the sense of belongingness and community (*ummah*) cultivated through communal prayers (*salah*) and Islamic conferences especially invigorating.

The greatest example of the concept of spiritual personality is seen through the generation of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. The companions were not homogenous in the way they served Islam. There were those who were focused on knowledge, such as Abu Hurairah, Mu'adh bin Jabal, Abdullah ibn Mas'ood, and Abdullah ibn Abbas. Then there were those who were known for their bravery and courage, such as Khalid ibn al-Walid, Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah, and Zubayr ibn al-Awwam. There were those known for their intense devotion in praying and fasting, such as Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-Aas, who also combined the virtue of narrating *hadith*. Hassan ibn Thaabit, on the other hand, was artistic, and

used his poetry to defend the honor of Islam. Uthman ibn Affan was particularly known for his modesty and shyness and Abu Bakr as-Siddeeq was known for his loyalty to, and companionship (*suhba*) with, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. All of these companions and many more served Islam based on what was facilitated for them from their spiritual personality.

Categorizing Spiritual Tendencies

At this stage, the most pressing questions that present themselves relate to what types of personalities are associated with the different aspects of Islam. What makes a person focus more on knowledge over prayer or charity and activism over knowledge? If we know our personality type, will we be able to enhance our understanding of ourselves, our spiritual strengths, and our spiritual weaknesses?

To answer these questions, let us first examine the psycho-spiritual foundations of the human being. Ibn al-Qayyim explains that all human activity goes back to two fundamental processes: The capacity to know and the capacity to act.[34] The results of these processes are *'ilm* (knowledge) and *'amal* (behavior) respectively, two terms that are at the epicenter of the entire Qur'anic and Prophetic discourse on virtue. At any moment in time, we are either acquiring knowledge to build and enhance our understanding of the world or we are interacting with the world to change or maintain the order of things. This is what makes us human. Therefore, any variation in spiritual personality should ultimately be a consequence of variation in approaches to knowledge and action.

Indeed, Ibn al-Qayyim describes a categorization of thinking based on these very attributes:

> *Thinking (fikr) is of two types: a type of thinking that pertains to knowledge (`ilm) and recognition (ma'rifah), and a type of thinking that pertains to pursuit (talab) and will (iraadah). So that which relates to knowledge and recognition is thinking which discerns truth and falsehood and matters*

[34] Ibn al-Qayyim. *Tareeq al-Hijratayn wa Bab al-Sa'adatayn*, p. 403.

> *affirmed and negated, while the latter relates to the thinking which distinguishes that which is beneficial and that which is harmful.*[35]

How one thinks and approaches knowledge varies between people, and similarly how a person thinks about that which they pursue (goals, motivation, behavior) also varies between people. A close examination of Islamic theology and scripture integrated with psychoanalysis yields two approaches for knowledge and two approaches for behavior, elaborated in the subsequent sections.

Knowledge Type: Experience vs. Judgment

The Islamic tradition heavily emphasizes the value of acquiring knowledge. The Qur'an praises the people of knowledge by bearing witness on their behalf to the Truth and mentioning them alongside the angels (Qur'an 3:18). The Qur'an encourages the use of the mind in over 750 places, demonstrating the importance of knowledge in the life of a Muslim.[36] The Qur'an describes the locus of true knowledge as the signs of God (*ayāt*). It is through discovering and interpreting these signs, that we grow in our knowledge of God, drawing closer to Him.

One's learning can be inclined more towards experiences (*ahwāl*) or judgments (*ahkām*).[37] Everyone uses both hands, but some people are right-hand dominant and others are left-handed; there is a natural tendency towards one or the other. The Qur'an and Sunnah contain many evidences that describe the experiential dimension of learning. In several passages, the Qur'an describes the importance of journeying through the earth, whether to witness the outcome of perished nations or to witness how creation begins (29:20), or journeying in order to obtain beneficial knowledge using one's heart and hearing (22:46). The Prophet ﷺ also referenced the experiential form of knowledge when he said, "Consult your heart;

---

[35] Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madarij al-Salikin*, vol. 1, p. 166. Online. He also further classifies a subtype of the second category which is thinking about how best to achieve benefit or avoid harm, or the means to the goal, and then mentions that "These are the six categories of thinking, for which there is no seventh."

[36] Abdul-Latif ibn Abdul-Aziz al-Rabah. *Makanat al-'Ulum al-Tab'iyyah fi'l-tarbiyah Islamiyyah*. Doctoral dissertation, p. 267.

[37] The term *ahkām* is not used here in its narrow jurisprudential usage to refer to legal rulings but rather linguistically to describe knowledge-related judgments. Being oriented towards *ahkām* entails a pragmatic approach and focus on structure, decisions, good versus bad, true versus false, etc.

righteousness is that which grants ease to the soul and makes the heart tranquil. Wrongdoing is that which troubles the soul and causes uneasiness in the chest, even if people have repeatedly given their legal opinion [in its favor]."[38] Another term used to describe this form of experiential learning is *dhawq* (lit. tasting), which the Prophet ﷺ also used with reference to faith.[39] Through developing one's spiritual insight (*baseerah*) into experiences, one may attain realizations "that cannot be acquired or studied."[40]

On the other hand, there is the judgment-oriented approach towards knowledge, focused on acquiring knowledge of rulings, of drawing value-laden judgments about matters that will guide practical decision-making in the performance of good deeds. The Qur'an contains many passages that emphasize reliance on authority, obedience, and objectivity (eg. 4:59); there is an emphasis on enjoining the good and forbidding the evil (3:104), racing to do more good deeds (3:133). Equipped with a very clear structural view of right and wrong, people with the judgment orientation are well-suited to make major changes in society. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ emphasized the numerical magnitude of reward associated with different deeds.[41] Judgment-oriented people are also heavily motivated by a sense of duty and justice, perceiving the complex interweb of roles, rights, and responsibilities that govern human relationships. The distinction between experience- and judgment-based learning is also manifested in the juxtaposition by many scholars of the terms *ma'rifah* (recognition) and *`ilm* (knowledge). The Prophet ﷺdescribed experiential learning with the verbal form of *ma'rifah* when he said, "Recognize Allah in times of prosperity and He will recognize you in times of adversity."[42] On the other hand, he also described the knowledge attained

[38] *Forty Hadith of Imam Nawawi,* Accessed Online. The Prophet ﷺ gave this advice to Wabisah ibn Ma'bad and very similar advice to Nawwas ibn Sam'an. Ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 974 AH) makes the interesting observation that this advice applies to those persons similar to Wabisah who possess that faculty of inner perception (*idrak*), while others may need more explicit religious rulings of commands and prohibitions, and thus the Prophet addressed everyone with the advice most suited to them; see Al-Haytami, *Fath al-Mubin*, (Dar al-Minhaj 2008), p. 465. For judgment-oriented people, they may need objective definitive rules to avoid succumbing to personal bias (*hawa'*) and desires (*shahawat*).

[39] *Sahih Muslim*, Accessed online. Ibn Al-Qayyim cites this *hadith* as proof in *Madarij al-Salikin*, and also explains that a certain measure of *dhawq* is necessary for all people, without which they may succumb to doubts in their faith (vol. 3, p. 92, online).

[40] Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madarij al-Salikin*, online. (Arabic: "*Alati laa tanalu bi-kasb wa la dirasah*").

[41] *40 Hadith Nawawi*, no. 37, accessed online, which describes the multiplication of rewards in general.

[42] *40 Hadith Nawawi,* no. 19, accessed online.

through study and analysis: "Verily, knowledge (*`ilm*) is only through study."[43] For greater clarity, if we combine these terms with the aforementioned terms, we can designate the first spiritual tendency as *ma'rifah al-ahwal* (recognition of experiences) and the second tendency as *'ilm al-ahkam* (knowledge of judgments). Interestingly, these two tendencies have also been described in other spiritual traditions, including Christianity.

> *In the last century only, two approaches are characteristic: the deductive one, strongly theologically oriented, and the inductive one, starting from lived experience.*[44]

We can analyze both tendencies—experience and judgment—from a psychological standpoint as well. Conceptually, the experiential tendency appears connected to the Big Five personality trait of Openness, or the Jungian function of 'intuition.' Openness is comprised of different domains. These include active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, preference for variety, and intellectual curiosity.[45] For a Muslim, this refers to a person's creativity, insight, and visionary thinking. People who are more focused on experiential knowledge, may find themselves seeking 'spiritual experiences' in the world. They search for what can heighten their perception and experience of Allah's Names and Attributes, the Justice of His commandments, and the realities of the next life.[46] Regarding Islamic knowledge, they are interested in learning about spiritual concepts, philosophy, and theology, and less interested in learning the minutiae of technical details of Islamic rulings. They possess a strong capacity for abstraction, which enables them to understand difficult philosophical and theological ideas.[47]

---

[43] Al-Albani, *Sahih Al-Jami al-Saghir* 2328.
[44] Waaijman, K. (2007). What is spirituality? *Acta Theologica*, *27*(2), 1-18.
[45] Buxant, C., Saroglou, V., & Tesser, M. (2010). Free-lance spiritual seekers: Self-growth or compensatory motives? *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, *13*(2), 209-222.
[46] For instance, Hatim al-Asamm described his strategy of attaining *khushu*' in prayer: "I stand to pray, imagining that the Ka'bah is in front of my eyes, Paradise to my right, Hell-fire to my left, and the Angel of Death behind me. I imagine that it is the last *Salah* I am about to perform, stand up in hope (in Allah, His Paradise and reward) and fear (of Allah's torment in the Hell-fire) and recite the *Takbir* with concentration." (Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ihya*, vol.1, p. 179).
[47] It might strike some as paradoxical for experience-oriented individuals to have an aptitude for highly theoretical subjects. However, it is their intuitive capacity that enables them to transform the seemingly theoretical into a strong lived experience. People with this approach to knowledge are also not content with merely learning what is; they want to know why it is. They have a strong need for true understanding, and a recognition of the wisdom in the

The judgment approach to knowledge appears to overlap with some areas of conscientiousness from the Big 5 personality trait model and the process of judgment described by Jung. Conscientiousness comprises six dimensions, including industriousness, orderliness, self-control, responsibility, traditionalism, and virtue.[48] There is a focus on knowing how to act correctly on even the seemingly most miniscule of matters. Their strong sense of judgment colors everything they learn, endowing them with a very strong sense of right and wrong, truth and falsehood. Regarding Islamic knowledge, they are interested in tangible subjects and approaches to learning. In terms of subjects, they are interested in what is directly relevant in their lives and what can be tangibly implemented. They are keen to learn about the practical aspects of Islam, even if they may be dry and technical. Some may even be fascinated by detailed issues of Islamic law regarding worship, social dealings, or business transactions. Some may be motivated by their strong sense of duty to engage in political or community activism and learn about what can be done practically to help those in need.

In the Myers-Briggs personality theory, Isabella Myers quite aptly describes the difference between perception and judgment in a way that also captures the difference between experiential and judgment approaches to knowledge in our spiritual personality classification:

> *The judging types believe that life should be willed and decided, while the perceptive types regard life as something to be experienced and understood. Thus judging types like to settle things, or at least to have things settled, whereas perceptive types prefer to keep their plans and opinions as open as possible so that no valuable experience or enlightenment will be missed.*[49]

Ibn Al-Qayyim explains that *ma'rifah* is to *'ilm* as the soul is to the body.[50] Islam is characterized by both substance and spirit. The substance represents the guidelines, boundaries, rules, and doctrines, while the spirit represents the internal connection

---

rulings and rituals of Islam. This goes back to their desire for experience. Without understanding the wisdom, it is hard to experience what is intended by those religious practices.

[48] Roberts, B. W., Chernyshenko, O. S., Stark, S., & Goldberg, L. R. (2005). The structure of conscientiousness: An empirical investigation based on seven major personality questionnaires. *Personnel Psychology*, *58*(1), 103-139.

[49] Myers, I., & Myers, P. (2010). *Gifts differing: Understanding personality type*. Nicholas Brealey, p. 69.

[50] Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madarij al-Salikin*, vol 1, p. 147. Online.

to Allah and spiritual states that are felt deep within one's being. Both are necessary and vital, and the religion cannot exist without either element. One's natural tendency toward one side can be cultivated to attain great spiritual gifts, but if the other aspect is neglected it can result in fatal weakness and spiritual failure.

Weaknesses

Both tendencies have vulnerabilities related to going to extremes in the tendency. For instance, a person who goes to an extreme in searching for spiritual experiences may fall into innovation by prioritizing experience over knowledge. Their aim becomes to achieve a 'spiritual high' rather than a meaningful relationship with Allah; this may be seen in the Qur'anic criticism of monasticism (Qur'an 57:27), which was invented to seek more intense religious experiences. An extreme focus on seeking experience could also result in a person neglecting their responsibilities. A strong focus on experience, if not properly regulated, may also make such individuals prone to sins relating to pleasure-seeking or addiction. The trait of openness has been correlated with higher sexual drives[51] and increased likelihood of trying recreational drugs.[52] Thus, religious individuals may find themselves engaged in such actions and subsequently feel a strong sense of shame. Also, if they are caught in an addictive cycle, they may find it very hard to break free. One of the clearest examples of this phenomenon is the *hadith* that describes a man being brought repeatedly to be punished for drinking alcohol despite having love for Allah and His Messenger.[53] When the Prophet ﷺ found that anyone was excessive in pursuing the experiential dimension of religion, he balanced that tendency in them by reminding them of the judgment dimension comprising rights and responsibilities.[54]

---

[51] McCrae, R. R. (1994). Openness to experience: Expanding the boundaries of Factor V. *European Journal of Personality*, *8*(4), 251-272.

[52] Terracciano, A., Löckenhoff, C. E., Crum, R. M., Bienvenu, O. J., & Costa, P. T. (2008). Five-Factor Model personality profiles of drug users. *BMC Psychiatry*, *8*(1), 22.

[53] *Sahih Bukhari*, accessed online. This story demonstrates how this companion had a strong experiential commitment to Islam through the love in his heart that he felt for Allah and His Messenger. The repeated commission of this sin was not interpreted as evidence of a lack of faith. Rather, it was clear that this particular individual had an addiction alongside his strong love for Islam.

[54] Allah's Messenger ﷺ said, "O `Abdullah! Have I been informed that you fast all day and stand in prayer all night?" I said, "Yes, O Allah's Messenger ﷺ!" He said, "Do not do that! Observe the fasts sometimes and also

On the other hand, the judgment approach to knowledge also has its extremes. If a person goes to an extreme with this focus, they can begin to lose the spirit of Islam and focus exclusively on rules and regulations. This can result in a harsh and rigid manifestation of the religion that is often responsible for turning many people away, rather than softening their hearts. The Prophet ﷺ warned of this tendency, "Verily the religion is ease, and no one made it difficult except that it overwhelmed him, so be steadfast and moderate."[55]

Moreover, since the judgment tendency entails searching for clarity and closure on issues, such individuals may be prone to overestimating the amount of knowledge and certainty they possess. This can lead to a dogmatic approach to the religion that can manifest as sectarianism (*hizbiyya*) and divisiveness within the community. It can also lead to an ends-justify-the-means mentality, side-stepping the ethical dimensions and focusing on objective end-points. In modern times, this mentality is most obviously seen in extremist interpretations of Islam that justify violence, cruelty, and torture for their misguided utopian ends. Their neglect of the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the faith render them capable of committing acts of atrocity without conscience. It is no surprise that the trait of conscientiousness, which we identified as being connected with judgment, is also correlated with right-wing authoritarianism.[56]

Behavior Type: Action vs Restraint

We can also categorize approaches to behavior based on actively pursuing goodness versus restraining oneself from wrongdoing. When we examine the following description of believers in the Qur'an, we can appreciate this distinction:

> *Certainly the believers have succeeded. Those who are humbly submissive in their prayer. Those who turn away from ill speech. Those who observe charity. Those who protect their chastity.* (Qur'an 23:1-5).

---

leave them (the fasts) at other times; stand up for the prayer at night and also sleep at night. Your body has a right over you, your eyes have a right over you, and your wife has a right over you." *Sahih Bukhari*, accessed online.

[55] *Sahih Bukhari*, accessed online.

[56] Sibley, C. G., & Duckitt, J. (2008). Personality and prejudice: A meta-analysis and theoretical review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *12*(3), 248-279.

This verse describes four qualities. Two of them refer to actively pursuing goodness (prayer and charity) and the other two refer to refraining from wrongdoing (ill speech and chastity). This distinction is obvious in many places in the Qur'an, which sometimes focuses on descriptions of restraint (*ijtināb*) and avoidance (Qur'an, 53:31-32), and other times focuses on performance of good deeds (Qur'an 2:2-3), and sometimes combines both together (Qur'an 2:275). Conceptually, we see this distinction manifest in Islamic law as well in the categorization of commandments and prohibitions in religious rulings (*Ahkām Shar'iyya*).[57]

This distinction between pursuing good and refraining from evil has been used by Ibn al-Qayyim to describe two broad categories of spiritual personality. He explains that there are two manifestations of *ṣabr*: (1) Will-power necessary to act forthrightly in the world; and (2) Will-power necessary to abstain from evil and vice.[58] For some people the first type of *ṣabr* is dominant and so they excel in performing good deeds, but due to the weakness of the second type, they are prone to falling into sin.

> *And some people's ṣabr for good deeds that bring benefit is stronger than their ṣabr against what brings harm. So they will have the ṣabr necessary to do the most difficult and challenging of tasks, but will not have any ṣabr that averts them from their desires.*[59]

He gives the following example:

> *Many people have the ṣabr to pray the night prayer in the heat and in the cold, as well as [to endure] the difficulty accompanying fasting. But they*

[57] Imam al-Juwayni. *Al-Waraqaat*, (Riyaadh: Dar As-Samee'ee), p. 7. There is also a historical discussion amongst the classical scholars on whether it is worse to do something prohibited or to abandon something obligatory. The former was stated explicitly by Imam Ahmad (d. 240 AH) as noted by Ibn Rajab in *Jami al-Ulum,* and is the position of the majority as noted by Ibn Hajar al-Haytami in *Fath al-Mubeen*. Meanwhile, the latter is the opinion of Imam Sahl al-Tustari (d. 284 AH) and advocated by Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim in *al-Fawa'id* (1/119). The reality is that both sides have strong arguments and evidences in their favor and are easily reconciled with reference to the concept of spiritual personality such that it may depend on the person in question and their individual weaknesses.

[58] Ibn al-Qayyim. *Iddat as-Sabireen*, (Jeddah: Dar `Alam al-Fawa'id) p. 26.

[59] Ibid.

> *can't seem to control themselves in something as simple as averting their gaze.*[60]

He also gives the counter-example of a person whose second type of *ṣabr* is stronger than their first.

> *There are many people who have the ṣabr to control their gaze, but they don't have the ṣabr necessary to preach goodness and discourage vice*.[61]

These archetypes described by Ibn al-Qayyim are still relevant in the contemporary period. The vulnerability of the action-focused personality he described can be seen, for instance, in the recent wave of pornography addiction amongst practicing Muslims who pray five times a day, go to the mosque regularly, and even offer voluntary fasts.[62] The weakness he mentions of the restraint-focused personality is also witnessed in our times. It is not uncommon to find Muslims who will not eat pork or non-*zabiha* meat nor consume alcohol, yet they may not pray or fast regularly.

People who are action-focused approach Islam by trying to do as much as they can. They may be known for their unbridled enthusiasm and contagious passion. They are always willing to lend a helping hand or take advantage of an opportunity to do good. In contrast to the action-focused types, people who are restraint-focused are more concerned with the prohibitions and ensuring they are not transgressing the boundaries. One may understand this duality with reference to the Qur'anic emphasis on two qualities: *birr* and *taqwa* (Qur'an 5:2) which respectively signify performing virtue and refraining from vice.[63] Those who are action-focused embody the pursuit of *birr* (righteousness) by working to build their faith and make the world a better place, seeking to accumulating as many of the diverse categories of virtue described in the Qur'an (2:177). Those inclined to restraint focus more on magnifying *taqwa*, ensuring that their path of life is in line with Islamic guidelines. Ubayy ibn Ka'b explained to Umar ibn al-Khattab that *taqwa* is like cautiously

---

[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid, p. 27.
[62] https://muslimmatters.org/2007/08/19/pornogrpahy-addiction-among-muslims-stories-tips/
[63] Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, *Jami al-Ulum wal-Hikam*. Vol. 2, p. 98. Online. Arabic: *wa qad yakun urida bil-birr fi'l al-wajibat wa bi-taqwa fi'l al-muharramat*.

walking on a thorny path to ensure that you do not get pricked.[64] Both *taqwa* and *birr* are required of every believer, and every believer must cultivate both, but depending on one's spiritual personality, one may have a natural strength in one domain and have to exert greater effort to make up for weaknesses in the other domain.

Each group may have a preponderance of different spiritual emotions. Ibn al-Qayyim described those focused on performing acts of virtue as being dominated by the emotion of hope and reflecting on the rewards and promises of God, while those focused on avoidance of evil are dominated by the emotions of fear and reflecting on the warnings and punishment of God.[65] The former sees the world as an abundance of opportunities for good deeds while the latter sees the world as an arena of dangerous temptations and tribulations to be carefully navigated. An example of the latter would be the statement of Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman, "The people used to ask the Prophet about good, but I used to ask about evil for fear that it might overtake me."[66] People feel most spiritually invigorated when they can see the tangible fruits of their labor in the real world, whether the establishment of something good or the removal of evil.

From a psychological standpoint, the action-focused approach to behavior seems to be connected with some aspects of extraversion and the restraint-focus seems to be connected with some aspects of introversion. Jung conceptualized extraversion and introversion as attitudes towards the object (i.e., an external reality). Fundamentally, the introvert has a negative relation to the object while the extrovert has a positive relation to the object.[67]

---

[64] Ibn Kathir. *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Adheem*. (Riyadh: Dar at-Taybah, 1999), vol. 1, p. 164.
[65] Ibn al-Qayyim. *Tareeq ul-Hijratayn*, pp. 373-374. It should be clear that this is not a negative experience of fearing a vengeful and merciless deity. Rather, gathering all of the fears a person may have about the world and recognizing that only Allah is capable of Benefit or Harm, naturally dissipates their fear of this world. Fear of Allah alone becomes a source of immense courage, as a person recognizes that nothing in this world can harm them without the permission of Allah.
[66] *Sahih Bukhari* - Accessed online. Perhaps it was this unique spiritual personality of Hudhayfah that earned him the position of the keeper of the Prophet's secrets, which meant that the Prophet ﷺ confided in him the names of the hypocrites.
[67] Jung, C. (2017). *Psychological types*. Routledge, p. 307.

> *There is a whole class of men who at the moment of reaction to a given situation at first draw back a little as if with an unvoiced "No," and only after that are able to react; and there is another class who, in the same situation, come forward with an immediate reaction, apparently confident that their behavior is obviously right...As we know, the former class corresponds to the introverted and the second to the extraverted attitude.*[68]

The extravert is someone who is always ready to act and react to the world around them while the introvert is cautious and initially restrains themselves from acting on the world. In our model, it seems that extraversion and introversion relate to the action-focused and restraint-focused spiritual tendencies, respectively.

One other psychological trait that seems to correlate with the behavior dimension of spiritual personality is neuroticism on the Big-5 Personality Model. Neuroticism refers to an emotional reactivity to life events. This emotional reactivity is generally negative in nature such as fear, anxiety, and worry.[69] This seems to play a role in the restraint-focused approach to behavior, as a strong fear-response to potential harm can form the basis for a cautious approach to life.

The focus on restraining from sin can be manifested on a personal or public level. For these people, they may wish to to see vice, evil, and corruption eliminated from the public arena. They may be strong advocates for social justice and speak out for the oppressed. They may be vocal critics of what they see as harmful trends in the community. They have a strong focus on *Nahi al-Munkar* (Forbidding the Evil) on a communal level. For others, they direct this restraint inward and use it to refrain from personal transgressions. People with this quality are seen as wise individuals who are cautious and prudent. They are reluctant to take any action that would pose a risk to their well-being in this life or the next.

---

[68] Jung, C. (2001). *Modern man in search of a soul*. Routledge, p. 87.

[69] Kumari, V., ffytche, D. H., Das, M., Wilson, G. D., Goswami, S., & Sharma, T. (2007). Neuroticism and brain responses to anticipatory fear. *Behavioral Neuroscience*, *121*(4), 643-652.

Weaknesses

Both action and restraint relate to willpower, which has been described in psychology as a finite resource. As Kelly McGonigal explains, self-control and willpower are like muscles, and we can work ourselves to mental exhaustion and fall prey to our weaknesses.[70] Someone with a heavy focus on performing good deeds can burn their fuel and may find themselves unable to find the fuel necessary to resist temptation.[71] Thus, they can fall into sin and possibly addiction.[72] Part of the issue can be due to an overemphasis of hope over fear. Their focus on hope may make them complacently commit sins while thinking they will make up these sins later with better deeds and repentance.

As mentioned, people who are action-focused share traits with extraversion. A weakness of extraverts is that they may become heavily dependent on their surroundings. For extraverts, the environment acts as a magnet that draws mental energy toward it.[73] If this is taken to an extreme, they can lose themselves in the environment. This lends them to being easily influenced by others, lacking the strength to maintain their personal values and beliefs. This can result in weak faith that is easily given up at the first strike of adversity.

> *And of the people is he who worships Allah on an edge. If he is touched by good, he is reassured by it; but if he is struck by trial, he turns on his face [to the other direction]. He has lost [this] world and the Hereafter. That is what is the manifest loss.* (Qur'an 22:11)

---

[70] McGonigal, Kelly. *Maximum willpower*. (Pan Macmillan UK, 2012). p.52.
[71] This phenomenon has been described in a previous article: https://yaqeeninstitute.org/en/zohair/powerofmotivation/
[72] There is an established concept in psychology referred to as 'moral self-licensing,' whereby a person's past good deeds make them feel entitled to indulge in desires or make excuses for unethical behavior. For instance, see A.C. Merritt, D.A. Effron, B. Monin. (2010). Moral self-licensing: When being good frees us to be bad. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*,*4*(5), 344–357. This effect has also been examined in the context of failure to succeed in dieting: Prinsen, S., Evers, C., & De Ridder, D. (2016). Oops I did it again: Examining self-licensing effects in a subsequent self-regulation dilemma. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, *8*, 104-126.
[73] Jung, C. (2017). *Psychological types*. Routledge, p. 4.

> *And when We let the people taste mercy, they rejoice therein, but if evil afflicts them for what their hands have put forth, immediately they despair.* (Qur'an 30:36)

When a person goes to extremes in restraining evil, it can also have disastrous consequences. If their experience of fear dominates both love and hope, it becomes the primary motivator and can result in a strict, harsh, and potentially violent approach to establishing justice on earth. Another way extremism in this quality can manifest is in an adversarial relationship with the Muslim community. As a person recognizes the injustice that will inevitably exist within their own communities, they can isolate themselves and start to direct their rhetoric toward the community. Criticism, feedback, and progress are vital for the growth of any community, but often these types in the extreme setting become provocative, divisive, and hostile. This results in greater confusion and polarization within the community and stagnation rather than improvement.

On a personal level, extremism in restraint can result in great personal anxiety, becoming prone to feeling paralyzing shame.[74] One's disgust for evil is directed toward the evil perpetrated by their own self. This can result in self-deprecation, self-loathing, and obsessions regarding one's inadequate practice of Islam. Such people's feelings of hope are underdeveloped, rendering them unable to experience positive thoughts about Allah that could inspire them to action and reform.

One issue that emerges from this trait's potential association with neuroticism is fear that leads to cowardice. If a strong fear response is not channeled in the right direction, then a person may experience strong obsessions and anxieties about the future. The Qur'an mentions this as one of the tactics of *Shaytan*: "That is only Satan who frightens [you] of his supporters. So fear them not, but fear Me, if you are [indeed] believers" (Qur'an 3:175).

Being in a state of intense fear strips a person's sense of hope in the future and badly affects their faith. They may find it difficult to cope with hardships and be

[74] It is important to distinguish between healthy shame (*hayaa'*) ("I did something wrong") which helps one to avoid bad, and toxic shame ("I am a bad person") where one views oneself with contempt and unworthy of any good, falling into despair (*al-ya's*), effectively denying the power of God's mercy to reach oneself.

prone to blaming God for the suffering of themselves or those close to them. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ taught us to seek protection from Allah from the effects of anxiety and cowardliness:

> *O Allah! I seek refuge with You from anxiety and grief, from incapacity and laziness, from cowardice and miserliness, from being heavily in debt and from being overpowered by (other) men.*[75]

Since this trait seems to be correlated with aspects of introversion, it may share some of its weaknesses. For introverted individuals, the subject acts as a magnet that absorbs the environment.[76] They attempt to exert full control of the environment to ensure that their individuality is not compromised. Such an approach to the world can lead to a tyrannical relationship with those around an introverted person. They may manipulate the environment for their self-serving needs.

In the foregoing discussion, we have identified the core elements of spiritual personality based on two approaches to knowledge (experience versus judgment) and two approaches to behavior (action versus restraint). In the subsequent section, we identify how these categories interact to yield four distinct spiritual personality types.

A Typology of Spiritual Personality

Hitherto, we have described two spiritual personality dimensions that capture variation in approach to knowledge (experience vs. judgment) and behavior (action vs. restraint). A human being goes forth into the world acquiring knowledge through experience and through rational judgments. This knowledge forms a representation of the world that provides the individual with an understanding of how to behave. The individual constantly makes decisions on whether they should initiate an action or exercise restraint when encountering daily situations.

---

[75] *Sahih Bukhari*, Accessed Online.
[76] Jung, C. (2017). *Psychological types*. Routledge, p.4.

In constructing a complete typology of spiritual personality, we should first note the relative merits of the two main contemporary approaches to personality, namely the trait approach and the type approach.[77] Personality traits refer to a spectrum with a normal distribution.[78] This means that for any given trait, the majority of people are in the middle of the spectrum, with a minority being at the extremes. On the other hand, the type model assumes that there is a bimodal distribution. This means that the majority of people congregate to the extremes with a minority in the middle. Thus, the type model is only concerned with direction on the spectrum rather than with placement.

The trait model provides useful statistical models,[79] but the type model provides a better conceptual model to understand people. The type model allows the formation of distinct personality types that incorporate an archetypal pattern of thought, emotion, and behavior. People are categorized into distinct types and learn about the archetypal form of their personality traits. The trait model cannot be organized into distinct types, but provides an exact placement on the spectrum. Therefore, the trait model provides a higher resolution representation of an individual's personality, containing more information.[80]

The 16-personality website[81] incorporates both the trait and type model into their theory. This allows people to see their personality traits on each spectrum and to learn about the archetypal pattern of personality most closely associated with their results. No model can capture the full complexity of each individual person. Personality types are like maps. Although they do not capture the full reality of the actual landscape, they provide a useful representation that can provide guidance for a person.

---

[77] There are also specialities that focus on the genetic and biological basis for personality, but this is largely separate from the type vs. trait discussion, which is mainly a statistical issue.
[78] Bess, T. L., & Harvey, R. J. (2002). Bimodal score distributions and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator: Fact or artifact? *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *78*(1), 176-186.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Pittenger, D. J. (2004). The limitations of extracting typologies from trait measures of personality. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *37*(4), 779-787.
[81] https://www.16personalities.com/articles/our-theory

With this in mind, we propose an initial spiritual personality typology of 4 archetypal patterns. Within each spiritual personality dimension, a person may preferentially utilize one over the other. For instance, regarding acquiring knowledge they may utilize their experience more than relying on judgment. Regarding behavior, some may prefer to exercise caution rather than initiate an action. The more a person uses one over the other, the more developed that function becomes in fortifying the individual's faith. Everyone has a choice on how to process the world (Knowledge Type) and how to act on it (Behavior Type). The combination of their preferences in each domain yields the following four spiritual personality types.[82] The names have been constructed according to what best captures the essential theme of the spiritual personality type being described.

Hand of Power - When a person combines *Judgment* with *Action*, their spiritual passion for positive action merges with judgment to produce a practical solution-focused approach to doing good in the world, attempting to maximize benefit for those around them.

> *Example*. Ali Ibn Abi Talib is a clear example of this category, known for his incredible passion in serving the truth and performing unmatched feats of virtue (risking his life during an assassination attempt on the Prophet, performing the *hijrah* on foot, his bravery during the Battle of al-Khandaq and his heroism during Khaybar, etc). When the *fitnah* (tribulation) occurred after the death of `Uthman, the approach of Ali was to act pragmatically to take the reins of leadership to bring stability and unity to the *ummah.* According to Ali, "Opportunity passes as quickly as clouds, so make use of opportunities for good."[83]

Voice of Justice - When *Judgment* merges with *Restraint*, this results in judgment concerning evils. This personality type is powerfully motivated to eradicate injustice, immorality, and falsehood. This is the personality that best typifies the

[82] The names of these categories have been formulated by the authors to capture the central motif embodied in each spiritual personality.
[83] Ibn Muflih, *Adab al-Shar'iyyah*. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah 1999), vol. 1, p. 378. Arabic: *al-furus tamur mithl al-sahab*.

Prophetic saying, "The most virtuous struggle is a true word spoken in the face of a tyrant."[84]

> *Example.* Umar ibn al-Khattab is the obvious example of this category. His relentless commitment to eradicating evil and opposing injustice has been noted by all who have studied his life. He announced his Islam openly in front of the Quraysh chieftains, condemned transgressions, and denounced those who perpetrated them in the strongest of terms. His justice was manifest in his swift retribution punishing the son of a governor who abused a Christian peasant in Egypt, and asking his father, "When did you enslave people when their mothers bore them free?"[85] As harsh as he was on those who did wrong, he was always harsher on himself,[86] and this in turn led him to soften on others.[87]

Heart of Inspiration - A person who approaches knowledge with *Experience* combined with the behavior of *Action* possesses incredible vision, seeing the path that humanity must collectively tread in the pursuit of virtue and a better future. These are the visionaries the *ummah* needs as its guides and source of continued wisdom, compassion, and support.[88]

> *Example.* The prime example of this category is Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq. Without hesitation he was the first man to accept Islam, immediately seeing it for the truth that it was. One of the most remarkable aspects of who he was is the role he played in bringing so many of the other leading companions to embrace the faith and the intense amount of striving for good he

---

[84] *Sunan Abi Dawud*, Accessed online.
[85] Ibn Abdal-Hakam, *Futuh Misr*, vol. 1, p. 195.
[86] Such as Umar's asking Hudhayfah whether he was mentioned amongst the *Munafiqin* due to his great fear of being insincere in his faith (Ibn Hajar al-`Asqalani, *Matalib al-Aliya*h, vol. 14, p. 702, online).
[87] See for instance, Umar pardoning a man who was drinking (*Mustadrak al-Hakim* 8198, available online).
[88] The Qur'an actually mentions this combination in 38:45 and mentions Prophet Ibrahim as an example. His strong vision (*baseera*) and powerful pursuit of good (*ayd*) plays out multiple times in his life. It is what gave him the resolve to withstand the persecution of his people, and trust that his family would grow and prosper in the barren valley of Makkah. We also find a strong drive for action as he built the Ka'ba with his hands, and he physically broke the idols as part of his preaching. The Prophet Muhammad likened Abu Bakr to Ibrahim and Eesa, while he likened Umar to Nuh and Musa (*Musnad Ahmad*).

exemplified.[89] His experiential insight revealed to him meanings that were not readily apparent to others; when the Prophet announced that a slave was given a choice between this world and that which is with Allah and had chosen the latter, only Abu Bakr understood that the Prophet was announcing that he would soon pass away. Abu Bakr was a pillar of support for Muslims in the most calamitous moment the *ummah* experienced, namely the death of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, offering the powerful words that showed his insight: "Whoever worshipped Muhammad, let him know that Muhammad has died. And whoever worshipped Allah, then verily Allah is Ever Living, and shall never die."[90]

Eye of Vigilance - This spirituality type unites the caution of *Restraint* with the vision and foresight of *Experiential* knowledge, resulting in unparalleled awareness of the dangers and threats to true faith and worrisome trends in society. There is a focus on heeding warnings, escaping evil, and reflecting on the end-times and the afterlife.[91]

Example. The example of Uthman ibn Affan shines clearly in this category. He was not the most outspoken companion but rather was a tremendously reflective soul, contemplating the afterlife and punishment in the grave. It is narrated that when he stood over a grave, he would weep until his beard became wet.[92] He worried about the negative consequences of seemingly mundane actions.[93] His concern for preventing Muslims from differing about the Qur'anic text lead to his commissioning of Zaid ibn Thabit to compile

[89] The Messenger ﷺ asked, "Who is fasting today?" Abu Bakr (radi Allahu anhu) replied, "Me." The Messenger ﷺ asked, "Who has followed a funeral procession today?" Abu Bakr (radi Allahu anhu) replied, "Me." The Messenger ﷺ asked, "Who has fed a poor person today?" Abu Bakr (radi Allahu anhu) replied, "Me." The Messenger ﷺasked, "Who has visited a sick person today?" Abu Bakr (radi Allahu anhu) replied, "Me." The Messenger ﷺ then said, "Any person that has done these four things in one day will enter Paradise." (*Sahih Muslim*, online).

[90] Al-Baghawi, *Sharh al-Sunnah*, vol. 5, p. 323.

[91] A famous example of the contrast between the Hand of Power and the Eye of Vigilance is that of Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak (d. 181 AH), the warrior-scholar defending the frontiers of Muslim lands against the Romans, versus Fudayl ibn Iyad (d. 187 AH) the pious ascetic and bandit-turned-worshipper who was constantly worshipping in the Holy sanctuary of Makkah; the former wrote a well-known poem in this regard.

[92] *Sunan Ibn Majah* (Online).

[93] It was narrated from Humayd ibn Nu'aym that 'Umar and 'Uthman were invited to a meal, and when they set out, 'Uthman said to 'Umar: We have come to a meal where I wish we did not come. He said: Why? He said: I am afraid it was prepared in order to show off. (*Al-Zuhd* by Imam Ahmad, p. 126).

the *mushaf*.[94] He paid tremendous attention to the prophecies of the end-times and, when the rebels surrounded his home, he warned them of the internecine violence it would lead to, and he forbade anyone to shed blood in his defense. In one of his famous sermons, Uthman said, "O people fear Allah, for fear of Allah is a great treasure. The smartest of people is the one who checks himself and strives for that which comes after death, and gains from the light of Allah light to illuminate his grave."[95]

The aforementioned categories are summarized in **Table 1**. The entire typology has been diagrammatically summarized in **Figure 1**.

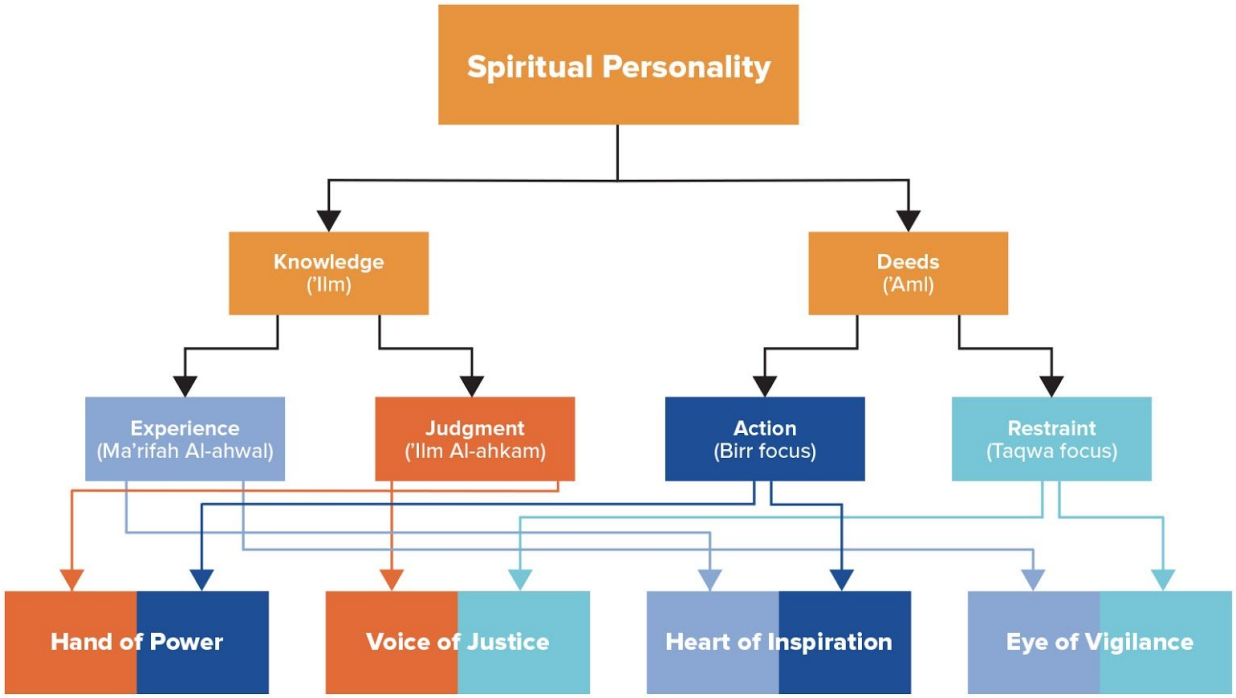


Figure 1. Spiritual personality typology. Every person's spirituality is comprised of knowledge (*`ilm*) and deeds (*`aml*). Their primary approach to knowledge may either be through experience of states or practical knowledge of rulings that aid in judging right from wrong. Their primary approach to deeds may either be focused on performing acts of virtue (*birr*) or restraining from evil (*taqwa*). Depending on which approach to knowledge is combined with

[94] For a detailed discussion see Al-Azami, M. M. *The History of the Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments.* (UK Islamic Academy 2003), p. 88.
[95] *Saheeh al-Tawtheeq fi Seerah wa Hayat Dhi'n-Noorayn*, p. 107 as cited in as-Sallabi, *The Biography of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan*. Darussalam 2007, p. 132.

which approach to deeds, a person acquires one of four possible combinations, each representing a distinct spiritual personality type— Hand of power, Voice of justice, Heart of inspiration, and Eye of vigilance.

Spiritual personality	Components	Motif	Description	Example from the *Khulafah*
HAND OF POWER	*Judgment Action*	*I am fueled by a passion to change the world*	Individuals with a tremendous passion to fill the world with good by focusing on large practical steps that make a positive difference.	Ali ibn Abi Talib
VOICE OF JUSTICE	*Judgment Restraint*	*I am every tyrant's worst nightmare*	Outspoken individuals devoted to campaigning for the rights of others, speaking truth to power, and forbidding oppression whether it is on the outside or within themselves.	Umar ibn Al-Khattab
HEART OF INSPIRATION	*Experience Action*	*I see a future worth striving for*	Visionaries with deep insight, drawing on their experiences to imagine a better world. They can be strong leaders, inspiring others to work toward a common goal.	Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq
EYE OF VIGILANCE	*Experience Action*	*I heed the danger lurking beyond us*	Wise and mindful souls who worry about the harmful trends in the world and the consequences of negligence.	Uthman ibn Affan

Table 1. Spiritual personality types. Four fundamental spiritual personality types are conceptualized here by juxtaposing their approach to knowledge (experience versus judgment) and approach to action (action versus restraint).

There are some important potential sources of misunderstanding that it is necessary to clarify with respect to spiritual personality. First, there is a difference between religiosity and spiritual personality. Just as different colors may be indistinguishable in the dark, one's spiritual personality type may remain latent in the absence of strong religious practice. The more one increases in religiosity, the more they may discover elements of their spiritual personality of which they were previously unaware.

Secondly, as mentioned previously, these different categories of spiritual personality describe *dominant tendencies*; they do not confine a person's spiritual expression. Thus, it would be wrong to presume that someone who exhibits the Hand of Power orientation is unconcerned with justice, or that the Heart of Inspiration does not see negative consequences. These spiritual personalities only describe what is the foremost tendency or greatest focus of one's passions. They may translate into a proclivity for different concrete actions, but righteousness includes all these actions and there is no reason why a person of one category can't excel in virtues typically dominant in other categories.

Thirdly, one may ask whether it is not possible for there to be more spiritual personality types; why limit it to four? Of course, each of these four could have many subcategories and further differentiation and variation, however given that it is constructed upon two psychologically evident and Islamically manifest conceptual spectrums (experience vs. judgment and action vs. restraint), which are both subsumed within the basic spiritual instincts in Islamic thought (knowledge and deeds), this categorization is conceptually fundamental. Moreover, its conceptual correlation with the psychological traits of the Big Five lends this classification an empirical basis for being considered fundamental as well.

Fourthly, one may ask whether one can change their spiritual personality. The answer is that one may acquire virtues of other categories but it requires expending somewhat greater effort or having unique life experiences, since those virtues would otherwise not come as easily. One would surmise however that the only human being who maximized and perfected the virtue of every single category,

mastering them all with equal brilliance, was the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who thus transcends any categorization.

Conclusion

It is especially important in our times to recognize the diversity that Allah has created in our spiritual personalities that manifest in our different approaches to the practice of Islam. We live in a world where many young Muslims are unable to experience a strong sense of belonging with the Muslim community because they find it so foreign to their natural orientation. When a person enters the community they may find themselves shamed for not being involved enough in a political movement or not learning enough about abstract theological issues. They may be shown a picture of a practicing Muslim that is focused on cultural dress codes and accessories. This can alienate our youth who find it impossible to express themselves and their own passions without fear of being judged negatively. Instead, we should recognize that practicing Islam beyond the obligations can be as diverse as life itself. These personalities should be utilized where they are best suited, allowing individual talents to flourish as they channel their passions for the sake of the Muslim community.

Reflecting on the tendencies of each spiritual personality type proposed can provide a Muslim with greater self-knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. It can also build tolerance and acceptance of different approaches to Islamic practice. Everyone has a role to play based on their spiritual personality.

> *Say: Everyone will act according to their nature, and your Lord knows best who is rightly guided* (Qur'an 17:84).