Significance of the Relationship Between Khusyu’ Praying, ʾiḥṣān and Mindfulness in Restoring Mental Health When Facing the COVID 19 Pandemic

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Abstract: This paper views of spirituality and religiosity are two fundamental beliefs that have meticulously moulded human behaviour since the beginning of human civilisation on his earth. These two fundamental beliefs are a pre-requisite in life because various pertinent views exist in this post-modern world and it is not a meaningless perspective. Religion as a belief that manifests itself in a practice, such as ceremonies, aqidah (religious belief or creed) towards God or veneration, which is similar to what is found in the five major religions in the world, namely Islam, Christianity, Zionism, Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as in several other minor religions. There are numerous different meanings of spirituality in aspects related to the self or nature, finding eternal serenity, belief in a higher being, seeking hope and harmony, existence of several levels of divinity and involvement in activities that provide a meaning in life.

Keywords: Khusyu’ Praying, ʾIḥṣān, Mindfulness, Mental Health, COVID 19 Pandemic

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Introduction

The fundamental concept of religiosity and spirituality clearly indicates that both are almost similar in some practices or veneration activities (Ahmad Munawar et al. 2018; Mohd Noor, A. Y., 2012; Zaizul et al. 2018), such as dharma in Hinduism, meditation and mandala in Buddhism, attending church and reading the Bible for Christians, faith (iman), prayers (solat), fasting (puasa) as well as performing the Hajj in Islam and going to the Jewish synagogue, as being some of the main practices of major religions around the world (The Big Religion Carta, 2014; Jaffary Awang et al. 2017; Zaizul et al. 2018). These practices play a prominent role in a person’s mental health by helping to overcome disappointment, anger, fear, low self-esteem, anxiety and self-isolation (Schumaker 1992). Koenig et al. (2001) examined 100 studies that investigated relations between behaviour, religious practices and psychological well-being (happiness, positive effects and satisfaction with life), out of which, 79 studies indicated a positive and significant relationship between religious practices and psychological well-being (Koenig et al. 2001; Ab Rahman et al. 2020; Rafiza et al. 2017). This is evident from several series of studies on religious psychology, such as religious practices related to the increase in positive psychological effects, as in a better quality of life, a stable marriage, as well as the relief of anxiety and depression (Koenig et al. 2001; Rahman, Z.A. et al. 2019).
Prayers According to Islam

The word “solat” originates from Arabic and it is the derivative noun (masdar) from the verbs (fi’li) solla, yusolli, solatan, which means doa (supplication prayers), istighfar, al-maghfīrah, al-rahmah, al-Islam, al-din (Ab Rahman et al (2018), (2019), (2020); Rafiza et al (2017). According to Islam, prayers (solat) affect a person’s mental health. The ibādah (religious duties of worship) of performing prayers is the second pillar of Islam, after the proclamation of the ‘dua kalimah syahadah’. It is one of the pillars of Islam that has been bestowed onto Muslims who have become mukallaf (Che Zarrina (2015); Ab Rahman, Z. et al (2018); Rahman, Z.A. et al. 2019).

Teaching how to perform prayers (solat) begins when a child is seven years old and children at the age of ten who do not pray can be physically reprimanded (caned). Anyone who does not perform prayers is tantamount to have desecrated his own religion. The command to perform prayers is strongly emphasised in Islam, as exhorted by Allah SWT in Surah al-Baqarah (2:238):

“Observe the ‘five obligatory’ prayers—especially the middle prayer—and stand in true devotion to Allah.”

Allah SWT also exorted in Surah Al-Nisa’ (4:103):

“And when you have completed the prayer, remember Allah standing, sitting, or [lying] on your sides. But when you become secure, re-establish [regular] prayer. Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon the believers a decree of specified times”
The verses above clearly indicate that prayers (solat) are one of the religious stipulations that is obligatory and requires serious attention from each mukallaf. The word used in the al-Quran for performing prayers (solat) is yuqimoona (Al-Baqarah: 3), which originates from the Arabic word ‘iqamah’, meaning to straighten. This word motions not only the proclamation or performance of prayers (solat) but rather to perform prayers (solat) correctly and in whatever possible manner by observing all the stipulated pre-requisites involving the performance of prayers (solat). The verse also indicates that prayers (solat) were a gift from Allah SWT to HIS subjects at almost the end of time during the night of israk mikraj, which comprised 50 prayer sessions per day and eventually, as a blessing from Allah SWT to the Prophet SAW’s subjects, it became 5 prayer sessions (Shafi 2005, pg. 108-109). Allah SWT exhorted:

“Those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of Allah. Surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find comfort"

(Ar-Ra'd: 28)

“Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, "genuine" prayer should deter "one" from indecency and wickedness. The remembrance of Allah is "an" even greater "deterrent". And Allah "fully" knows what you "all" do” (Al-‘Ankabut: 45)
A calm heart is a sign that the mind is at peace, whereby a person is free from anxiety and depression. The al-Quran mentions that those who perform prayers (solat) with full concentration will not experience any fear (khaof) or despair (yahzanoon). According to Islam, performing prayers (solat) in this manner has a tremendous effect on the individual in terms of reducing or eliminating fear and various problems in life. Prayers (solat) are the first practice in a Muslim’s life to be assessed in the afterlife. This is mentioned by the Prophet SAW in the Hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah R.A:

“Practices that will first be assessed from a subject on the day of reckoning (kiamat) is prayers (solat), if the prayers (solat) are proper. If not, the complimentary prayers (solat sunat) that have been performed by my subjects, if there are complimentary ones then make proper the obligatory prayers (solat fardu) with these complimentary prayers (solat sunat)”

**Ihsan for Evoking A Sense of Khusyu’ During Prayers (Solat)**

The Prophet SAW exhorted concerning ihsan when he replied a question by Archangel Gabriel, whereby the answer was permitted by Gabriel, who said, “You pray to Allah as if you can see Him, and when you cannot see Him, then verily He sees you” (HR. Muslim). This hadith also shows that although one has done some good to others, however, the appropriateness intended must be indicated in his ability to see Allah SWT through his heart, feel His presence or be aware of Him with full
confidence that good deeds are noticed, monitored and assessed by Him.

The confidence of seeing Allah SWT or to be seen by Allah SWT is the main platform or tenet of an action that is called *ihsan*. Based on the hadith above, it is understood that the meaning of *ihsan* refers to instructions on how humans should worship Allah SWT with full khusyu’ in a situation where one is able to see Allah SWT, which is called *musyahadah* (lay witness). Whereas, if we were to imagine that Allah SWT can see us, then that is called *murâqabah* (feeling of being watched). Al-Asqalâniy, who had gathered the views of al-Nawawi who said that verily a muhsin is always ethical because he feels he can see Allah SWT and Allah SWT is watching him.

This is because in a situation where Allah SWT is surely constantly watching him for eternity, but he is unable to see HIM; hence, he must always do good as an effort to beautify and adorn his practices of worship to Allah SWT. For a Muslim, the degree of *ihsan* is the most honourable degree of servitude. The degree of *ihsan* is accomplished through worship that contains aspects of *raghbah wa thalab* (to wish and to seek) until the individual almost feels that he has seen Him. One who has accomplished a degree of *ihsan* will feel *muraqabah*, so much so that he will amend and make proper his practices (Bukhari 2007). The Prophet SAW exhorted, “*instruct to prostrate until people feel the patience*”. Ali Abu Talib ra. said, "*when I wish to talk to Allah, I go and offer prayers of supplication (doa)*".
Mindfulness in Prayers (Solat)

According to Fachri Fahmi (2018); Ab. Rahman, Z. (2018); Salasiah Hanin, et al, (2020) mindfulness in Islam is akin to muqarabah, which refers to an individual’s practices in a situation where he has completely surrendered himself to Allah SWT, which is reflected in the calmness, peacefulness and awareness evident in him after doing so. Muqarabah is an Arabic word meaning “to see, appreciate and pay full attention”, whereby the individual always realises that Allah SWT is Forever Looking and Knowing about everything concerning him. The Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research stated that the fundamental feature of the muqarabah concept is that an individual always sees and knows everything that occurs until it actually penetrates into the thinking, feeling as well as the exoteric (zahir) and esoteric (batin) elements in the individual. The practice of tafakkur in Islam is also the practice of mindfulness and it is also presumed to be a form of meditation. Tafakkur refers to the focused observation of every creature created by Allah SWT (Habannakah, 2000; Ahmad Yunus, 2019; Ahmad Munawar et al, 2018, 2019) a practice very much encouraged in order to produce a deep sense of servitude towards Allah SWT as well as the thinking and feeling of HIS supremacy. Mūsā Shahīn (2002); Ahmad Yunus et al, (2019) stated that the meaning of the ‘sky’ in the Hadith refers to the changing of day to night, or the coming and going of the stars with the entire universe being under the control and power of Allah SWT, The Most Powerful.
“Verily, people who say that, ‘Our God is Allah’, then they consolidate their stand, then the angels will come down to them (by saying), ‘Do not be afraid and do not feel sad; and be happy with the (obtained) heaven that has been promised to you’.”

Mūsā Shahīn (2002)

The application of mindfulness in Islam is the result of integrating the mindfulness concept that contains Islamic values (Fachri Fahmi (2018), Jaffary Awang et al. (2017), Ahmad Munawar et al (2018). Muslims believe that when they think about Allah SWT, either when performing prayers (solat), prayers of invocation or supplication (doa) or just in the heart, then Allah SWT will pour HIS blessings onto them. The blessings of Allah SWT are the most invaluable gift a human can expect throughout his entire life. The three main aspects in life that are internalised by Muslims are faith (iman), Islam and ihsan. Ab Rahman, Z. (2020); Jaffary Awang et al. (2017), Ahmad Munawar et al (2018) mentioned that ihsan is a form of mindfulness taught in Islam, which is the realisation that Allah SWT is always with every Muslim and every action should be carried out only in the name of Allah SWT. In addition, when a Muslim is worshiping, it is as though Allah SWT is watching him. Clearly here, ihsan is when a Muslim practise any form of worship or an admirable action (e.g., acts of benevolence), he should be aware that Allah SWT is watching him and his behaviour, besides forging in his heart that all his actions are solely intended to seek the blessings and love from Allah SWT.
The mindfulness practiced in Islam, which is in the form of muqarabah, tafakkur and ihsan, is found in every type of worship or the practice of good deeds in everyday life (Ab Rahman, Z. (2020); Jaffary Awang et al. (2017), Ahmad Munawar et al (2018). Therefore, it reflects a high degree of awareness in a Muslim and the confidence in knowing that he is constantly under the supervision and patronage of Allah SWT because he is confident and has faith in all the virtues of Allah SWT, such as the Most Watching, Most Knowing and the Most Powerful.

The al-Quran and Islamic law have repeatedly highlighted the significance of being cautious when performing prayers, which is mentioned in the following verse below.

“It is truly I. I am Allah! There is no God ‘worthy of worship’ except Me. So, worship Me “alone”, and establish prayer for My remembrance” (Ta-Ha: 14).

The absence of which is a form of deterrent to remember and pay full attention; whereby one who does not contemplate about Allah SWT when performing prayers (solat) is not fulfilling his obligations, especially his obligation to pray to Allah SWT. In another part of the al-Quran, namely in Surah al-Araf verse 205, it states that:

"Remember your Lord inwardly with humility and reverence and in a moderate tone of voice, both morning and evening. And do not be one of the heedless." (Al-A'raf: 205).

Prayers (solat) are a very important form of worship and it functions to mould an individual’s personality. The
more a person performs prayers (solat), the stronger his faith (iman). Hence, performing prayers (solat) can help hinder evil and harmful actions, as exhorted by Allah SWT in Surah Al-‘Ankabut (29: 45).

“Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, ‘genuine’ prayer should deter ‘one’ from indecency and wickedness. The remembrance of Allah is ‘an’ even greater ‘deterrent’. And Allah ‘fully’ knows what you ‘all’ do”

All the four eminent Imam (Ima’am Abu Hanifa, Ima'am Malik, Ima'am Shafi and Ima'am Ahmed Bin Hambal) firmly belief about that the perception while uttering ‘Allahu Akbar’ or ‘Takbirraturihram’ or the first takbir (uttering the Allahu Akbar kalimah) in the beginning of a prayer (solat), are the tenets of a prayer (solat) that are uttered 13 times in each obligatory prayer (solat fardhu). During the ‘takbiratur ihram’, the person has to totally focus on Allah SWT, the place where he surrenders himself. Hence, if a person does not attain an appreciable level of khusyu’ when performing prayers (solat), then his actions would be wasted (Shafi 2005, pg. 208).

Imam Ghazali was very firm regarding the khusyu’ aspect (mindfulness in prayers) and considered it to be a criterion required for completing the prayer (solat) (Shafi, 2005, pg. 208). According to Imam Ghazali, prayers (solat) are the pillar of religion, self-confidence as well as the basis for various ways of getting closer to Allah SWT.

According to Islam, prayers (solat) that are performed with in a state of khusyu’ and mindfulness are considered as valid prayers. Koenig (2001) has strongly affirmed that performing religious practices enhances
mental health (Koenig et al. 2001). Specifically, it is valid for prayers of invocation or supplication (doa) that are frequently performed during prayers by Muslims who possess better mental health compared to those who do not frequently perform prayers (solat) (Javeed 2012).

Studies that relate prayers of invocation or supplication (doa) with yoga and meditation found that prayers (solat) have an effect on mental health (Sayeed and Prakash, 2013). Doufesh et al. (2014) have shown that when a person performs prayers (solat) in a state of khusyu’, there will be evident changes in their nervous system. This has implications on how a person relaxes because they found that prayers (solat) enhance relaxation and reduce anxiety, especially prayers of invocation or supplication (doa), which alleviate complications that arise from emergency or tension-filled situations, such as a person suffering from cardiovascular diseases.

Actually, mindfulness when performing prayers of invocation or supplication (doa) has an effect on the mental health of an individual. Mindfulness in this circumstance means that committal of full attention during prayers only occurs in the relationship between a subject and Allah SWT by reciting the holy verses of the al Quran in a tadabbur (deep introspection) manner. Individuals who have better knowledge about religion, will have both, general and specific knowledge, about prayers (solat). The optimum application of knowledge will lead to overall goodness culminating from performing ibadah in a sincere and khusyu’ manner because the individual involved in most fearful and closest to Allah SWT. Allah SWT exhorted:
And among people and moving creatures and grazing livestock are various colours similarly. Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Forgiving. (Faathir: 28)

Knowledge instils fear among Islamic religious scholars towards Allah SWT. Those who have in-depth religious or Syariah knowledge should be able to feel the supremacy and mightiness of Allah SWT and hence, become more fearful of HIM. Knowledge pertaining to aqidah (creed) makes humans more familiar with Allah SWT through naqli decrees (qauliyyah verses) in the al-Quran and hadith regarding the virtues, mightiness and supremacy of Allah SWT.

A knowledgeable Muslim possesses mindfulness when in prayer (solat) compared to a person who lacks knowledge. Abu Darda' ra. narrated that the Prophet SAW exhorted,

"And verily the main difference between one who is knowledgeable with one who likes to worship is like the full moon outshining all the other stars" (HR Tirmidzi, Ahmad).

Why do those who are knowledgeable ('alim) have more noble priorities compared to those who only worship tirelessly ('abid)? A simple analogy will be like a knowledgeable person who performs a two rakaat prayer, after performing the ablution correctly and steadfastly, is aware of the conditions concerning the tenets of performing prayers (solat) and conditions that nullify his worship. Meanwhile, another person is diligent is performing prayers, performing 8 to 12 rakaat every night
and yet does not understand what he recites or reads or the necessary requirements or its tenets. Allah SWT exhorted:

“O believers! When you are told to make room in gatherings, then do so. Allah will make room for you "in His grace”. And if you are told to rise, then do so. Allah will elevate those of you who are faithful, and "raise” those gifted with knowledge in rank. And Allah is All-Aware of what you do" (al-Mujadalah: 11)

Ibn Abbas ra. commented on the verse above by saying, “the position of Islamic religious scholars in comparison to a normal mukmin is that the former is 700 levels higher, and the distance between one level and another is equivalent to 500 years of travelling.

Similarly, a lack of knowledge about the al-Quran will impair a person from understanding pertinent religious recitals required when performing prayers (solat) (Ab. Rahman, Z. 2018; Salasiah Hanin, et al, 2020). Arabic is not the first language for most Muslims, so it would be difficult for them to internalise the meaning of the recitals when performing prayers (solat) (Ahmad Yunus, 2019; Ahmad Munawar et al, 2018, 2019). Hence, they only perform prayers (solat) to fulfil their daily obligations. Therefore, a lack of knowledge about the holy scripture (al-Quran) exposes an individual to a lack of mindfulness (total attentiveness) when performing prayers (solat).

References


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