

## INVESTIGATING THE SELF-MANAGEMENT MODEL FROM THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*Islam states that the creation of man is a composite of the material and spiritual. This is based on the creation of Adam who was the beginning of man on earth from a material thing. Because of that, man is inseparable during his life from material provisions in order to survive particularly the tendencies to obtain material benefits and satisfy basic instincts in this world are very high. The Qur'anic verses also explain that Allah has breathed into Adam His Spirit which means that the potential to be good was implanted into him. As long as man preserves his spirit pure he may maintain good moral values. This atmosphere signifies that man's dealing with material things would coincide with the spiritual values. So that he can manage his greedy, selfishness, pride and prone to neither transgress in worldly matters and spiritually nor deny all material pleasures. In this way man as a potential leader may be able to manage his selfish personality with other people and the living system in society. This concept paper attempts to discuss the efforts on how to manage man's selfishness by monitoring spiritual aspects with the need of materials based on the Qur'an and Sunnah.*

**Keywords:** Man is a composite of the material and spiritual, material things would coincide with the spiritual values, man's selfishness can be monitored through these aspects

### INTRODUCTION

According to Islamic concept, Man is a composite of the material and spiritual. This is based on the creation of Adam who was the beginning of man on earth. The Qur'anic verses precisely explain that Allah says:

“And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels: “I am going to create a man (Adam) from dried (sounding) clay of altered mud” (15: 28).

This verse indicates that man was created from a material thing. The Qur'anic verses also explain that Allah has breathed into him His Spirit that makes him higher than other

“So when I have fashioned him completely and breathed into him (Adam) the soul which I created for him, then fall (you) down prostrating yourselves to him” (15: 29).

Due to the fact that man was created from material thing, we may grasp the point that man is inseparable during his life from material provisions in order to survive. In other words, his tendencies and endeavors to obtain material benefits and satisfy basic instincts and achieve happiness in this world are very high.

However the divine spirit, which has implanted in man the origin of good, may elevate him to attain a higher noble character. Therefore, as long as he preserves and keeps his spirit pure he may maintain good moral values; otherwise he will lose these values as soon as the spirit is

corrupted. Islam teaches man to keep these two dimensions (material and spiritual) in equilibrium. This signifies that man's dealing with material things should conform with spiritual values and vice-versa so that he is not greedy, selfish, proud and prone to transgress in worldly matters or spiritual matters, nor to deny all material pleasures. A Muslim faces conflict if he does anything which is not permitted by Allah and resolution of that conflict can only be achieved with the light of Quran and *Sunnah*. The behavior of a Muslim is to be modified according to *Sunnah* as behavior in all matters of life is guided by the teachings of the Holy Prophet (pbuh). This is because the psyche of a Muslim is guided by teachings of the Qur'an. Human psyche deals with both conscious and unconscious matters, which are guided by the Quran. So any deviations or distortions of thinking in a human being are to be corrected only in the light of the Quran. Any other logic which is not in keeping with its teachings is not acceptable to a Muslim (Quadri, 2010). Thus the attainment of balance and harmony between the material and the spiritual is crucial in preserving man's superiority, nobility, dignity, and restrain him from being a selfish person.

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

Berman and Small (2012) contended in their study that the relationship between self-interested pursuits and happiness is complicated. They also reported that much research in decision-making finds that people often fail to choose what makes them happy, and as a result may not be choosing what is best for them. Furthermore they asserted that prosocial behavior has been shown to increase happiness—sometimes even more so than self-interested behavior.

Additionally, most people sacrifice their wants for other people and such persons who sacrifice their own needs for the good of others are admired and respected. Society also believes that allowing people to follow their inner desires will inevitably lead to chaos or, at the very least, imbalance. But in our society today, many people act for many reasons; but the reason with which they act is for whom? or for what? or should they act—for themselves? or for God (Allah) and for the good of the planet? Can an individual ever act only according to her own interests without regard for others' interests? Conversely, can an individual ever truly act for others in complete disregard for her own interests? The answers will depend on the willingness of a person because, The Ever Glorious Quran stated that “Verily We showed him the way; whether he be grateful/ungrateful” (76:3) Allah swt. said “Surely, those who believe and do righteous deeds are the best of creation” (98: 7)

Islam is a religion (ad-Din) revealed for the betterment of man. The religion of Islam came to teach to believe in the oneness of God and to follow His guidance in order to achieve peace of mind and heart and then have a character that aims for perfection. Therefore, it is expedient for man to strive and manage himself/herself well in order to live according to the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah of the Prophet. By so doing, man could be able to maintain and match his personality with other people and his/her living strategy in the society.

Additionally Saddiqi (2001) strongly believes that it is possible for human beings to have unity with diversity; because, in the world in which we are living today, and it is rightly called “the global village”, we cannot imagine having unity without diversity. It is not only that people in different parts of the world are diverse, but now we have a lot of diversity in our own cities, towns, indeed in our neighborhoods. People who live next door to us are often very diverse in colors, cultures and religions.

Despite multitudes of studies done however, together with various Quran verses and hadiths of our Prophet (pbuh), strategies employed by the men in ensuring self-management remains an intriguing and obscure research area of interest, because the Prophet has said: “The greatest Jihad is the Jihad against our own selves,” meaning the greatest jihad is the jihad against our own nafs which governs the ‘self’ or the personality of a person in Islam. So therefore, what are the strategies employed by the men to achieve self-management in order to get rid of selfishness and egoism? This is what this study intends to find out or explore.

### Research Questions

1. What and why selfishness?
2. How is selfishness managed in Islam?

### Purpose of the Paper

The two main purposes of this study are: Firstly, to examine and analyze documents from the primary sources (Al Qur’an and *Sunnah*) on how to manage selfishness. Secondly, to investigate Islamic educational models from the Islamic perspective in order to stabilize human egoism and selfishness.

### Research Methods

This is a qualitative study which is involved on document analysis from the two primary sources namely the Qur’an and the *Sunnah*. The supported documents from the Muslim and Western intellectuals, journals which are related to the topic shall also be used in this study.

## DISCUSSION

### What and Why Selfishness?

What is considered to be selfish in a collectivist’s culture differs totally from an individualistic culture. In a collectivist society, uniqueness and individualistic differences are considered as impediment to proper self-growth (Kim and Choi, 1994). While in an individualistic society people develop belief in their own uniqueness and diversity (Miller, 1988). This difference in the collectivist’s culture and the individualistic culture shapes the structure of self-concept as well as determines belief regarding how self-development should proceed. However, in a collectivist’s society, selfishness is considered as stinginess resulting from a concern of self-welfare and a disregard of others welfare ([wordnetweb.princeton.edu/ped/webwm](http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/ped/webwm)). It is also considered as a procedure given in thought or deed to the self-interest or self-concern, i.e. an act of placing one’s own needs or desires above the need or desires of others ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/selfishness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/selfishness)) which is considered immoral.

According to psychological egoism, people are basically selfish where they usually act for their own narrow and short-range self-interest. From the Islamic point of view, selfishness is the disease of man’s heart because of the eagerness to dominate worldly matters and at the same time leading to failure to strengthen his iman through the purification of his soul by the renewal of covenants; and building up a strong relationship with Allah through the concepts of love, patience and gratitude, fear and hope. Allah swt. stated this in the Qur’an: “Mankind was one community and Allah sent Prophets with glad tidings and warnings, and with them He sent down the Scripture in truth to judge between people in matters wherein they differed. And only those to whom (the Scripture) was given differed concerning it after clear proofs had come to them through hatred, one to another. Then Allah by His leave guided those who believed to the truth of that wherein they differed. And Allah guides whom He wills to a

straight path” (2:213). But, if man strives and aims to secure his material possessions completely, he will end his life style with selfishness and as commented by Harun Yahya (2012), selfishness brings nothing but loss.

### **Selfishness and Egoism**

**Psychological Egoism** - This is the claim that humans by nature are motivated only by self-interest. Any act, no matter how altruistic it might seem, is actually motivated by some selfish desire of the agent (e.g., desire for reward, avoidance of guilt, personal happiness). This is a descriptive claim about human nature and since the claim is universal, Psychological Egoism is of the opinion that all acts are motivated by self interest. Additionally, it will be difficult to find an action that the psychological egoist will acknowledge as purely altruistic, however there is almost always some benefit to ourselves in any action we choose. For example, if I help my friend out of trouble, I may feel happy afterwards. But is that happiness the motive for my action or just a result of it? Perhaps the psychological egoist fails to distinguish the beneficial consequences of an action from the self-interested motivation. After all, why would it make me happy to see my friend out of trouble if I didn't already have some prior concern for my friend's best interest? Wouldn't that be altruism?

**Ethical Egoism** - This is the claim that individuals should always endeavour to act in their own best interest. It is a normative claim. If ethical egoism is true, that appears to imply that psychological egoism is false; because there would be no point saying that we ought to do what we must do by nature. But if altruism is possible, why should it be avoided? Some writers suggest we all should focus our resources on satisfying our own interests, rather than those of others. Society will then be more efficient and this will better serve the interests of all. By referring to the interests of all, however, this approach reveals itself to be a version of utilitarianism, and not genuine egoism. It is merely a theory about how best to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number.

### **How Is Selfishness Managed In Islam?**

Man has to take proper care of the development of material and the spiritual aspect because both are complementing each other hence both should be inseparably developed (Sharif 1964). Islam teaches man to manage these two dimensions in equilibrium by instilling *Tawhidic* knowledge (the one-ness of Allah), *ibadah* (Islamic proceedings) and *akhlaq* (appropriate manners) as well as Islamic law (sharia). All these encompass the knowledge on how human beings should live according to rules and regulations which have been preordained by Allah (swt) (Sidek Baba 2010). Therefore, man is responsible for managing his nobility with which Allah has made him through doing of righteous deeds, otherwise he will fall into greedy, selfishness, pride and also prone to transgress in the worldly affairs. Hence, in order to balance his physical and spiritual entity, man should be educated through divine educational models and guidance, particularly in reducing the attitude of egoism or selfishness.

The divine revelation and the *Sunnah* show some aspects of *tarbiyyah* which may refine the heart and the character of an individual Muslim. These exercises of *tarbiyyah* may influence spiritual development, dealing with the relationship between an individual Muslim and Allah and observation of the *Sunnah*, and harmony with the activities of life. The outcome of this nature of *tarbiyyah* may radiate peace and prosperity of soul and goodness, and inspire the attributes of sincerity and honesty simply for the sake of Allah. The tendency of this process of *tarbiyyah* which may be achieved by a Muslim is the management of selfishness in life. Amir Al-Muminin (r.a) said: “Know with certainty that you cannot achieve your desire and

cannot exceed your destined life. You are on the track of those before you. Therefore, be humble in seeking and moderate in earning because often seeking leads to deprivation. Every seeker of livelihood does not get it, nor is everyone who is moderate in seeking deprived.” We will thus attempt to examine some of these aspects of *tarbiyyah* in the following views.

### **Self-Management Model from the Islamic Perspective**

#### ***Tarbiyyah in the Love of Allah and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)***

All Muslims are brought-up to Love Allah and His messenger Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The Qur’an trains us how to love Allah and the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) through Love, fear and hope. Therefore, whenever we do a good thing we should hope for a good return, but at the same time we need to develop fear and struggle to do our best because we do not know if our deed has been accepted or not. At the same time when we do a wrong thing, and then repent we should develop hope that Allah has forgiven us but at the same time develop fear and question ourselves; have we really been pardoned or not? And thus struggle to do more good to cover for the bad deeds. Allah says in the Qur’an “Verily! Allah will not change the (good) condition of people as long as they do not change their state of (goodness) themselves” (Al-Rad 13:11). In doing good Allah guides us in the Qur’an to give nothing but that which we love the best. Allah says in the Qur’an “By no means shall you attain Al-Birr, unless you spend of that which you love; and whatever of good you spend, Allah knows it well (Al-Imran 3:92).

Love of Allah the Almighty and love of the Prophet constitute one of the most significant principles in the establishment of good morality and justice in Islam. In this regard Tabbarah (1978) has noted that, “A believer’s sense of delight and comfort stems from his obedience to God and from never disobeying His Orders; thus he is ready to stand everything to this effect with delight and satisfaction filling his heart.” (Afif A. Tabarah, 1978). However the absence of this love in man, according to al-Ghazzali causes a disease in the heart which induces injustice and is the root of all the vices in conduct. (Al-Ghazali, 1971). How can we correlate this love to with the character of man? The fact is that a good feeling, which is then translated into good action, derives from anything we love. This is because “love is a natural inclination towards objects that give pleasure.” (M.Umaruddin, 1962). Indeed, the love of Allah is absolute and is subject to no limitation. (2 : 165) It signifies that believers at all times choose their activities in life through obedience to Allah and keep away from the temptations of *Shaitan*.

Those who love Allah would be motivated to follow the path shown by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as laid down by the Qur’an. Allah says:

Say (O Muhammad [peace be upon him] to mankind) “If you (really) love Allah then follow me ( follow the Qur’An and the *Sunnah*), Allah will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (3: 31)

Muslims love and obey Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) because Allah ordained that they should do so, and were also inspired by the *Hadith* for the attainment of *halawatul iman* (the grace of faith). Therefore a Muslim, who has reached this stage, is almost ready to spend his life helping and sacrificing himself for others. Because of this, the attributes of selfishness and hypocrisy will never remain in him.

#### ***The Self-Control for Wealth***

The crucial *tarbiyyah* guards against selfishness, greed and rebellion which lead to corruption and hypocrisy. Islam often encourages, and warns the Muslim about his dealings with wealth

and property. For example the Qur'an says, "Woe to every slanderer and backbiter. Who has gathered wealth and counted it. He thinks that his wealth will make him last forever!"(104: 1-3). Sayyid Qutb (1998) has commented that, "It is the scene of the vile, mean one who is given wealth and uses it to tyrannise over others – until even he cannot bear himself. He thinks that wealth is the supreme value in life...He feels that since he possesses wealth, he controls other people's destiny..." Sayyid Qutb (1998).

This means that man has to aware about the rivalry in the gathering of wealth which sometimes leads him to take pride in it and dominate over others. In fact, the search for wealth is permissible in Islam as long as its sources are lawful and not against the injunction of the *Shari'ah*. Obviously, the desire for possession and love of wealth is in the nature of man because he uses it through out his life to spend on such things as food, clothing, housing, family and to acquire things. Without wealth and the fulfilment of these needs, he is actually unable to secure and enjoy his life properly. Man also by nature has a great desire to increase and keep his wealth as much as possible.

The Qur'anic verse and the *Hadith* give a clear indication regarding this matter. For example in the Qur'an, Allah says, "And you love wealth with much love."(The Qur'an 89:20). And in the *hadith*, the Prophet said: "If there were a valley of gold for the son of Adam, he would long for another one, and his mouth will not be filled but with dust, and Allah returns to him who repents."(Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, 1990, vol.2A, p.115). In another *Hadith* the Prophet (pbuh) said, "The son of Adam (i.e., man) grows old and so also two (desires) grow with him, i.e., his love for wealth and (a wish for) a long life." (Muhammad Muhsin Khan, 1997, Bukhari, vol. 8, p. 237). This means that man is never satisfied with his wealth and yields to worldly temptations; the phenomenon of love for wealth is very apparent in previous and present times.

The habitual love for wealth often accompanied by pride and misery, and gaining wealth, possibly through unlawful sources, may eventually lead to rebellion and oppression. Moreover, the love of wealth also may lead him into bad moral habits such as selfish, greed and misery. In accordance with this nature of man, Islam promotes the way of *tarbiyyah* in order for him to be aware of such behaviour. The most vital warning is about the temptation of wealth and property, and its deceitful enjoyment. Allah says, "Your wealth and your children are only a trial..." (The Qur'an 64:15). In another verse "...and let not your eyes overlook them, desiring the pomp and glitter of the life of the world..." (The Qur'an 18:28). This signifies that every Muslim essentially needs to be aware that he must earn and expend wealth legally, and not be greedy. Thus, he who gains and spends his wealth in virtuous deeds, a great ample reward awaits him in the Hereafter, whereas he who is miserly will be dragged to Hell Fire.

The other crucial *tarbiyyah* for individual Muslims is the encouragement of generosity and sincerity for the sake of Allah in the gaining and spending of wealth throughout his life. These spheres of *tarbiyyah* perhaps affect a Muslim's conduct towards the desires of wealth; and decrease or remove the love of wealth from his heart and ensure his generosity and willingness to spend his beloved wealth for the sake of Allah. The Qur'an says: "You will not attain righteousness unless you give (freely) of that which you love; and whatever you give, Allah is Aware thereof. (The Qur'an 3:92). Man may recognise that his wealth is a gift and trust from Allah and that he should not be arrogant, greedy and selfishness with it. Allah will repay whatever he spends from his wealth for the sake of Allah with great reward and great increase.

### *The Commandment of Justice in life*

Allah has created and designed His creation including the universe and its nature, and human beings in balanced proportions. (The Qur'an 54: 49). If there is any deviation from this balance, the whole system of creatures may collapse or function badly. Therefore, human beings must preserve this balance since they are dealing with others. In this regard, every Muslim is ordered to be concerned with the importance of justice throughout his life, and this must be the basis of all his relationships with others. According to Abdulrahman Abdulkadir Kurdi (1984),

A Muslim must fulfil the ideal of justice without considering any relationship or social rank; by doing so he accepts the heavy mission to be a witness of God. This duty is more than an honorable task designed for the Muslim; it is an obligatory order for which the believer will be accountable in the hereafter.

We have to say that the establishment of justice encompasses all spheres of life and runs through the entire community alongside the process of law and judgement. In other words, everyone should exercise justice throughout his life “as a sign of Islam in Muslims’ behaviour to distinguish them from other people (Abdulrahman Abdulkadir Kurdi, 1984) According to S.M Haider, 1985, “Justice is regarded as a virtue in an Islamic social setting. There is usually a natural urge to perform acts of justice, as there is for acts of benevolence...” In the comprehensive sense of a Muslim’s life and his social relations, the ideal type of justice which he should practice is far beyond a reciprocal concept such as returning bad for bad as well as good for good. This means that Islam encourages and educates a Muslim to act justly to everyone, even to those who create hatred and who are at enmity with him. Apart from this a Muslim also is educated and required to show justice parallel with the attribute of compassion. Allah says,

“Verily, Allah enjoins *Al-‘Adl* (i.e. justice and worshiping none but Allah Alone – Islamic Monotheism) and *Al-Ihsan* (i.e. to be patient in performing your duties to Allah, totally for Allah’s sake and in accordance with the *Sunnah* of the Prophet [pbuh] in perfect manner)” (16: 90)

The above verse orders all Muslims to act justly and compassionately, which implies that they have to do well to others with full consciousness of the presence of Allah. These attributes may restore the balance of social order. In a more comprehensive sense, justice is a religious duty that should be performed by every Muslim in such a way that every act of his will should conform to the will of Allah. This means that he should follow the commandments of Allah and abhor what is forbidden to him by Allah. Moreover, he who adopts a system of ideal justice will carry out his duties and responsibilities for the cause of Allah without discrimination even against himself, his parents and relatives. The Qur’an also warns that someone who commits injustice and oppresses others with the feeling of arrogance and selfishness will face severe punishment from Allah. Allah says: “The way (of blame) is only against those who oppress men and rebel in the earth without justification; for such there will be a painful torment.” (42: 42). Hence, the encouragement and commandment of *‘Adl* through the Qur’anic verses and the *Sunnah* may educate a Muslim to practise it in all spheres of his life and social contexts without any sort of egoism and selfishness.

### *Self-Exercise Of Soul in the Management of Selfishness*

In fact, the practice of good deeds in every activity of man’s life will keep stable his (soul) *nafs* and strengthen (believe) *iman* in Allah. If the inner characteristics of goodness are consistently built up in man, he will be drawn close to Allah. “*Tarbiyyah* based on permanent

values given in the Holy Qur'an opens out a vast vista of development to the *nafs*." (Manzoor-ul Haque, 1993). The Qur'an refers to three main categories of *nafs* which are: *nafs-ammarah*, which instigates evil such as may affect and paralyze the cognitive process. (12: 53). Sometimes, man becomes *ghafil* (heedless or negligent) because of its instigation. When *nafs-ammarah* dominates man's spiritual space, he is likely to become selfish. Nevertheless, if he tries to struggle away from it, then this effort upgrades the *nafs* to *nafs-lawwamah*. According to Ahmad Farid (1993), "The *nafs-al-ammarah* urges evil and openly opposes the *nafs-al-mutma'innah*. Whenever the latter presents a good deed, the former presents an evil one in return." Ahmad Farid, (1993). Therefore, *nafs-lawwamah* is a state of awareness in which when a person performs some noble deed, it praises and encourages him, and, in the case of his committing an evil deed, it also reproves him for it, (75: 2) and if *nafs-lawwamah* wins its struggle, then this may achieve the stage of *nafs-mutma'innah*. This third type of *nafs* is at the stage of tranquillity and peace in which one may successfully gain virtue in life in this world and salvation in the Hereafter. (89: 27). The struggle between the person and his *nafs* will result in the ideal personality in man, particularly when he achieves the stage of *nafs-mutma'innah*. The outcome of this kind of *nafs* may develop a man's character because the *nafs* can be actualised to the fullest extent, which qualifies him to be elevated toward a higher plane of existence and to drive him closer to Allah. Therefore, man should realise that his success of retraining of the selfishness depends on himself by keeping his *nafs* often at the stage of *nafs-mutma'innah*.

## CONCLUSIONS

The qualities in man's nature, as the foregoing discussion indicates are that man by nature has a great potential to become good. This is because Allah has fashioned him perfectly, and breathed His ruh (soul) into him. He has implanted into him the fitrah ready to accept truth and perform goodness. He has honoured him with the freedom to choose, and equipped him with intellect and senses such as hearing, eyesight and qalb, and granted him all sorts of blessings. In particular He has revealed the divine guidance in order to guide him to the right path and sent prophets and messengers to put this divine guidance into the normal human context as practical guidance. However, all these features and qualities of man are still subject to change because of his freewill, the influence of the environment and his inner nature, forgetfulness and the whispers and temptations of Shaitan. Therefore, in order to balance his readiness to be good or ability to be bad, man physically and spiritually should be educated through divine guidance. Otherwise, he will turn away from it and follow his lusts which lead to selfishness.

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