

A SCHOLARLY JOURNAL – ISSUE 16 June -2022

# Religions

Published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue

## Physical and Spiritual Well-being: Religious Perspectives



FIFA WORLD CUP  
Qatar2022

ISSN: 2218-7480  
Price :\$15/QR50

Published by the Doha International  
Center for Interfaith Dialogue  
P.O. BOX: 19309 Doha, Qatar

http://www.dicid.org/journals.php  
dicid.admin@dicid.org  
dicid.news@dicid.org  
http://www.qscience.com/loi/rels

Tel : +974 44864666  
44865554

Fax : +974 44863222  
44869900



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY  
School of Foreign Service in Qatar

## RELIGIONS Journal

### Editorial Board

• **Dr. Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi**

Chairman, Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue.,  
Editor-in-chief

• **Dr. Ahmed Abdelreheem**

Arabic Editor, Senior Researcher, Doha International Center for  
Interfaith Dialogue

• **Dr. Senad Mrahorović**

Lecturer at Sultan Omar 'Ali Saifuddin Centre for Islamic Studies  
(SOASCIS), Universi Brunei Darussalam (UBD)

### International Advisory Board

- Dr. Rodney Blackhirst, Philosophy and Religious studies, La Trobe University, Bendigo, Australia.
- Dr. David Bakewell Burrell, C.S.C., Hesburgh chair of Theology&Philosophy, Notre Dame University, United States of America.
- Dr. James Cutsinger, Professor of Religious studies, University of South Carolina, Unites States of America.
- Dr. Eric Geoffroy, Professor Arabic and Islamic studies, University of Strasbourg II, France.
- Dr. Aicha al-Mannai, Director of the Centre for Muslim Contributions to Civilization.
- Dr. Ibrahim Kalin, Professor of Religious Studies, George Washington University, United States of America.
- Dr. Oliver Leaman, Professor of Philosophy and Judaic Studies, University of Kentucky, United States of America.
- Dr. Rusmir Mahmutcehajic, Professor, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina.
- Dr. Kenneth Oldmeadow, Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies, La Trobe University, Bendigo, Australia.
- Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Professor of Islamic Studies, George Washington University, United States of America.
- Dr. Eliezer Segal, Professor, Department of Religious Studies, University of Calgary, Canada.
- Dr. Reza Shah-Kazemi, Researcher, The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, United Kingdom.
- Dr. Arvind Sharma, Birks Chair of Comparative Religion, McGill University, Montreal, Canada.
- Dr. Ali Ben Mbarek, Faculty of Humanities, University of Tunis, Tunisia.

### Designing

- Osama Abuhawala

# RELIGIONS

Published by the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue

**RELIGIONS** is an annual and bi-lingual (English and Arabic) publication in interfaith studies published by the Doha International Center for interfaith Dialogue with an emphasis on interreligious dialogue and the relation between Islam and the other faiths.

In a world of the religious misunderstandings, violence and hijacking of religious faith by political ideologies the **RELIGIONS** intends to provide a welcome space of encounters and reflections upon the commonalities and shared goals of the great religions of the world. The title of the Journal suggests religious diversity, while suggesting the need to explore this diversity to develop keys to both a deepening of one's faiths and a meaningful opening to other creeds. The Quran suggests a commonality of faiths and a striving for the Truth within the context of religious diversity:

*“To reach among you, we have prescribed a law and an open way. If God had willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so, strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to God; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute.”* (The Table Spread: 48, version of Yusuf Ali).

As a refereed international publication published by the Doha International Center for interfaith Dialogue, **RELIGIONS** finds its inspiration in the universal message of the monotheistic broadly understood, while engaging the various religious faiths that share common principles and values within this broad defined context.

**RELIGIONS** encourages comparative studies and interreligious exchanges in a spirit of dialogue and mutual enrichment. Its aim is to promote understanding between religious faithful of various traditions by exploring and studying the rich field of their theological and spiritual common grounds, their mutual and constructive relationships, past, present, and potential future, a better understanding of the causes of their conflicts, and the current challenges of their encounter with atheism, agnosticism and secular societies.

In addition, **RELIGIONS** wishes to highlight and revive the universal horizon of Islam by fostering studies in the relationship between Islam and other religions and civilizations in history, the arts, and religious studies. This is also away to revitalize intellectual discourse in Islam, within the context of an interactive and cross-fertilizing engagement with other faiths.

The essays published in **RELIGIONS** exclusively engage the intellectual responsibility of the authors, and necessarily reflect the views of the **DICID**. They are published as part of an ongoing dialogue on religions, and should not be construed as the expression of the positions of any sponsoring organizations.



# CONTENTS

## Editorial

*Prof. Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi* ..... 4

### **A Dialogue between “Religions” and H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi,**

Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy - FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022..... 6

### **Spirituality and Sport: A Way towards Perfection**

*Senad Mrahorović* ..... 18

### **Empowering Muslim Women and Girls through Sports**

*Alena Demirovic* ..... 34

### **A New Age for Religious Demand: Spiritual Care and Mental Well-Being**

*Makoto Mizutani* ..... 44

### **Psychological Well-Being and Islam**

*Mohammad Aamir* ..... 58

### **Spirituality in Play**

*Muhammed Shaahid Cassim* ..... 68

### **Islam, Malay, Women and Sports from the Brunei Darussalam Perspective**

*Rozaitul Matzani and Majdey Zawawi*..... 80

### **The influence of religious music in all religions: Empowering spirituality and psychological well-being among people**

*Saleem Zoughbi* ..... 92

### **Physical Health Promotion in Light of the Holy Qur’an and Islamic Sunnah**

*Samar Elkhalfa and Wishah Elkhalfa* ..... 110

### **Torah, Bible, and Qur’an: Ethical Codes to Combat Racism in Sports**

*Sekou Marafa Toure* ..... 122

### **Book Review” Training the Body: Perspectives from Religion, Physical Culture and Sport”**

*Senad Mrahorović* ..... 136

**Biographies** ..... 144

# Editorial

Those who have been following our peer-reviewed journal *RELIGIONS* since its first publication in 2010 are familiar with the approach taken in all previous issues to ensure the integration of knowledge and apply a comprehensive view to build bridges between the academic research work on the one hand and the problems of reality and the needs of people on the other, especially with the new problems that arise during the preparation period for the next issue of the journal. Moreover, we feared that the participation of researchers would decrease with each issue. The reason for this is either the lack of sources and references on the chosen topic, a new topic that has not yet been written about yet, or an old topic that has not been discussed for a long time, such as the topic (Religions: Epidemics and Diseases). However, we are always surprised at how many sober research papers are submitted to the journal. If this means anything, it is an indication of a deep understanding and awareness by our researchers and authors of the importance of the role of research and the need to integrate and live reality rather than getting lost in theories and ideals.

Against this background, our peer-reviewed journal, published by Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue is pleased to present to its esteemed authors, readers, and all followers its sixteenth issue, entitled “Physical and Spiritual Well-being: Religious Perspectives.” The choice of this theme is, of course, in line with our strategy and method in selecting journal topics, as this issue is published in conjunction with the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, the first-ever World Cup in the Middle East. The issue aims to provide a platform for researchers and academics to seriously explore the following topics: Religions, the priority of physical and psychological, and human well-being. Undoubtedly, man has been and still is at the center of religion when it comes to the well-being of his soul and body because religions teach the purification of the soul and the protection of the body, which is shorthand for worship and spirituality. Just as man elevates himself spiritually through faith, he also elevates himself through his physical strength. This is so true and clear in the prophetic tradition handed down in the authentic hadith book of Imam Muslim. Thus, he reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “A strong

believer is better and dearer to Allah than a weak one, and both are good.” This comprehensive view of man’s physical and mental well-being paves the way for the sport to be a religious commandment. This is because the healthier a person is, the more able he/she is to perform worship and religious duties, and to observe other religious responsibilities as a vicegerent of Allah on earth. In fact, the sport in its reality not only has to do with the physical health of a person but also affects the psychological status, behavior, and ethics of a person; due to this indisputable fact that sport is one of the most important aspects that affect the human soul, even before the physical condition. In addition, the comprehensive view requires that we do not limit sport to fun and art, but that it contributes to instilling in a person various ethical values and manners such as honesty, integrity, modesty, discipline, patience, and teamwork, not to mention that sport brings forth the principle of respect for the rival, as people observe.

Finally, I am glad to present to our esteemed authors, readers, and all followers the sixteenth issue of our peer-reviewed journal **RELIGIONS**, published by Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue. It contains a variety of intellectual papers and discussions in Arabic and English on the topic of Physical and Spiritual Well-being: Religious Perspectives. I believe that this issue will be an added value for libraries.

**Prof. Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi**

Editor-in-Chief

Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue



**A Dialogue between “Religions” and His Excellency**

**Hassan Al Thawadi,**

**Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for  
Delivery & Legacy - FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™**

.....  
Dialogue conducted by: Dr. Ahmed Abeelreheem  
.....



**Religions: I would like to start this conversation with a quote from you in a lecture you gave at Cambridge College entitled “The Middle East’s first World Cup - a rebirth for La Convivencia through the power of Sport.” There you said, “There is no better place or audience than sport to spread the message of pluralism and coexistence.” What is the role of sports in general, and football in particular, in achieving coexistence, peace-building, and the recognition of pluralism?**

**H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi:**

The essence of coexistence and understanding stands for mutual acceptance, an acknowledgment and respect of the existence of other faiths and beliefs and how a pluralistic society can thrive when differing strands of humanity engage and work together – inclusion over exclusion.

I want to place a spotlight on Andalucía and Convivencia because its hypothesis is a glowing manifestation of relative interfaith harmony in a period of time better noted for pillaging and expulsions, lack of tolerance and brutal conflicts fought in the name of religion. The human achievements during this era were astounding, encompassing fields varying from medicine to astronomy, mathematics and physics, philosophy, sociology, economics, engineering, art and architecture. A sophisticated legacy, advanced beyond

its time.

La Convivencia, Islamic Spain, and what it represents in history as an important juncture for interfaith understanding and as an example of the three great monotheistic faiths coexisting together and flourishing. Pluralism flourished through the principles of Convivencia and created an environment for the development of societies and civilisations with incredible historic legacies, tangible and intangible - that still exist and are revered today.

And so to the current geopolitical climate where it appears that division, separating people, manufacturing conflict and promoting the idea of a clash of civilizations is gaining momentum. Fundamentalists in different corners of the world seize on the weak and vulnerable and use them as pawns in their political maneuverings. Isolationism appears to be returning as a viable international relations policy. Forces in major powers appear to be retreating from globalization in spite of the trends that globalization itself sparked.

Therefore, sport – and in particular football, is one of those platforms that touches the human spirit regardless of location, beliefs, culture or politics. At its best – at both elite and more importantly at grassroots levels - it teaches honesty, integrity, humility, professionalism, discipline, work ethic, teamwork and above all –

sportsmanship and a respect for your opponent, which can help anyone overcoming adversity.

At a time when global dialogue is emphasizing cultural differences rather than similarities, platforms such as the FIFA World Cup provide an opportunity to bring people together and build bridges of mutual understanding between them.

***Religions:* There is no doubt that modern means of communication and technological development have a significant impact on the dissemination of sporting events, and a greater one than in the past. What impact does this have on coexistence, mutual respect and understanding?**

**H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi:**

Technological innovation and its impact on communications has brought the world closer together – at no stage in history have humans from different cultures, classes, faiths, religions and political backgrounds had better access to a vast array of information, theories and opinions. And yet in spite of this closeness and interconnectivity, this enhanced access to information, there are strands of our societies drifting further apart.

Instead of opening our minds, and entering into considered debates and discussions, people are now able to

easily access opinions and beliefs that suit their own. They are able to create their own networks that support their own belief systems at the exclusion of others.

These trends are dangerous, and history has proven this to be the case on numerous occasions. It is therefore of the utmost importance that those of us who understand the importance of coexistence work together to create platforms for cultural and interfaith understanding, nurture them and utilize them responsibly to ensure that we combat forces that seek to exacerbate divisions.

***Religions:* Do you remember a practical example of a sporting event that succeeded in bringing people together regardless of their different cultures and religions?**

**H.E Hassan Al Thawadi:** I remember seeing an image of an Afghan child that had spread on social media. The child's brother had made a white and blue shopping bag into an Argentine national jersey, with 'Messi' and the number 10 inscribed on the back. This powerful image, and the joy that football brought this child – in my mind, symbolized the incredible reach and potential that football possessed. That year, we were hosting a friendly match between FC Barcelona and the Saudi Arabian team, Al Ahli Saudi FC.



We wanted to do something, to bring this boy – Murtaza – together with his hero – and to be clear – for reasons of substance and not publicity, and he met his hero, walking on to the field with him before the match started. He would not let go of Messi – the depth of emotion and what it meant to Murtaza was evident to everyone in attendance, and billions around the world via news and social media, and a demonstration of football’s power to unite and inspire. A child from a war-torn nation was able to live his dream through football. And for a moment - to place the hardships aside and revel in the pure unadulterated joy of standing alongside his hero.

This moment will be forever etched in my memory – not only for its sentimental value, but for its demonstration of how sport transcends

all boundaries and brings people together.

**Religions:** Certainly, there are different opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of football, whose biggest sporting event worldwide is the World Cup. In your opinion, what has changed in this game, and do the positive aspects outweigh the undeniable negative aspects?

**H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi:** The World Cup is where football’s potential to create lasting memories and legacies is at its most powerful.

No event has an extraordinary global reach comparable to the World Cup.

The British sociologist, and author of ‘The Ball is Round,’ David Goldblatt,

describes the magnitude of the event profoundly: ‘If there is a global culture and a global humanity, then the World Cup, more than any other phenomenon, is where those tales are told. We are fortunate then that the game we have chosen as our collective avatar should be so inventive a storyteller that a single game of football – the World Cup final – can, for 90 minutes, bind so many strands of this turbulent planet together.’

The history of the FIFA World Cup often reflects important geopolitical junctures – ones that live on through our emotional memories of the tournament.

Following the challenging years of the pandemic, the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 is one of the first opportunities for people from all around the world to come together and celebrate their common humanity and passion for football.

**Religions: In the context of the FIFA World Cup, some note that there are many big and complex issues that seem to surpass sports in impact and even danger, such as political and economic issues.**

**Do you see a close connection between sports and these issues?**

**H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi:** There are

numerous examples of the immense power of the World Cup to transcend politics and enable humanity to blossom.

In 1998 – after almost 20 years of diplomatic non-recognition, 11 Americans and 11 Iranians took to the field at the Stade Gerland in Lyon, France during the group stages of the FIFA World Cup. Iran won the game 2-1, but the true victory was one of public diplomacy, one of tensions between nations being defused through the power of sport. This game laid the foundations for a friendly match between the two teams that took place in California 18 months later. The World Cup and the vagaries of the random draw did something that the world’s finest diplomats and statesmen couldn’t do – bring two nations virulently opposed to one another politically together through a common platform.

Another potent example of the power of sport – and one of specific relevance to our region is Iraq’s victory at the 2007 Asian Cup. At this time, Iraq’s sectarian divisions had escalated to unprecedented levels. Violence and death had – unfortunately - become everyday matters. Yet on the day of the Asian Cup final, a divided country united. Reports everywhere noted that violence stopped. In a modern history tarnished by war, insurgency,

corruption, political instability and sectarianism, the day Iraq triumphed and united behind a team comprised of all elements of Iraqi society is testimony to sport's, and in particular football's, immense power to bring people together where politics and other methods fail.

South Africa's World Cup in 2010 was mired in criticism and controversy in the years leading up to the event and yet they demonstrated that the African continent could successfully host a major event. Instead of watching the rest of the world – the traditional powers – hosting and showcasing their capabilities – this was Africa's time to display their own unique, warm hospitality, passion for football, and ability to organize an event as good as any held in the history of the World Cup. South Africa was able to showcase to the world a nation that had truly arrived on the global stage, celebrating diversity and inclusion, overcoming one of the worst periods of separation and division in modern history.

Since Qatar bid to host the FIFA World Cup back in 2010, its vision for the tournament has always been that it is one for the entire region that will showcase the best of its capabilities and culture to the rest of the world and drive human, social, environmental

and economic development.

It's our opportunity to showcase the Arab world and Middle East to the population of the world through a new and refreshed lens, and we are certain people will leave with new perspectives, understanding and appreciation of our similarities.

**Religions: Can you explain the relationship between sport and the sustainable development of countries and how sport can change the path of entire countries and move them forward in their development?**

**H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi:** The history of the FIFA World Cup often reflects important geopolitical junctures – ones that live on through our emotional memories of the tournament.

An example that I have discussed in the past and remains relevant is that of Germany's history with the World Cup. They first lifted the trophy in 1954. Nine years after the conclusion of a war that tore Europe apart, the West German team – against the odds - triumphed in Switzerland. West Germany was mired in an era of economic disaster, grappling with how to handle nationalism and its role in a new era of international relations and suddenly it had an opportunity to celebrate. According to Der Spiegel's edition printed the day after the final, winning the World Cup was the

‘founding cultural moment’ of the Federal Republic.

Shift the focus onward 52 years. The World Cup in 2006 in Germany is considered one of the most memorable sporting events of contemporary history. Sixteen years post-reunification, the German nation invited the world to experience an economic powerhouse – a truly vibrant multicultural society. Stereotypes previously propagated about Germany were dismantled. I have spoken to many German friends who have told me that a new national identity was cemented through hosting the FIFA World Cup in 2006. On the day after the final, The Times of London ran the headline ‘Never mind the finals, the true winners are Germany.’ Germany’s 2006 motto was ‘A time to make friends’ – and it played out this way. Effective, efficient and divided Germany was now fun-loving, modern, creative, united, and within two years was considered the most admired country brand in the world.

The State of Qatar has always recognised the ability of the FIFA World Cup and the power of football in facilitating social and economic development – which is why we bid to host the tournament.

From the economic perspective, the State has always viewed the FIFA World Cup 2022 as being a catalyst for accelerating not only the growth of the local economy by providing

opportunities for local businesses, companies and contractors, but also wider infrastructure and nation-building projects aimed at transforming Qatar into a modern state.

Winning the right to host the World Cup accelerated existing infrastructure investment in Qatar. The legacy will be an infrastructure system used by generations to come. The Doha Metro, our upgraded road networks and expanded airport are just a few examples of this.

Our state-of-the-art stadia, sporting infrastructure and expertise are all stepping stones to making Qatar the region’s sporting hub as the country continues growing its sports events hosting portfolio. The country is bidding for a number of sports events after 2022, and for example, is hosting the 2030 Asian Games.

**Religions: I would like to follow up on the previous question and address you for you are the Secretary General of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy in Qatar. What are Qatar and the Middle East preparing for by hosting the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East, and what message can Qatar and the Middle East send to the world?**

**H.E Hassan Al Thawadi:** For Qatar, the Middle East, and beyond – we will strive to ensure that the FIFA World Cup 2022 serves as a platform



for enhancing cultural understanding in this era where voices of extremism promote exclusion instead of inclusion. It is an opportunity for people to travel to the region, meet people, and delve beyond the stereotypes that have been perpetrated for decades and centuries. The importance of people-to-people relations should not be underestimated and there is no more effective vehicle for this than football, and the World Cup. This event can utilize the power of football to bring people together, act as a catalyst for change, and drive economic diversification and development in our region.

The Middle East deserves its chance to showcase its own special brand of hospitality to the world. It deserves its

chance on the international stage to be in the headlines for reasons other than war and conflict.

The United Nations Development Program 2016 Arab Human Development Report focused specifically on youth. It noted that one-third of the Middle East's population is aged between 15 and 29, and a further one third is aged below 15. The report's authors state that the empowerment and engagement of our youth is essential for building durable foundations for stability. The report painted a dark picture of the present and future for the youth of our region. I consider it unfortunate that the report overlooked platforms that exist that can serve to turn the tide for our region – such as



the FIFA World Cup 2022.

It is up to us in the Arab world to mobilize and work against the trends that this report outlines. It should serve as inspiration to us to identify moments that can assist in fighting against these trends.

We have a responsibility to ensure that the World Cup's legacy benefits our region in the long-term. We are working to ensure that the youth of the Middle East reap the benefits of this event. We are working intently to maximize the potential of the event, and to ensure it serves as a vehicle that inspires a vibrant sporting industry in the Middle East, providing new economic opportunities to the region's young and educated populations.

We are practising what we preach and laying the foundations – through the World Cup - that can serve to battle against the trends that the UN report focuses on. We founded an academic centre of excellence for the sporting industry – the 'Josoor Institute' – the

Arabic word for 'bridges'. The institute provides academic and practical courses for young professionals in the region with the aim of enhancing the technical skills of those already in the sporting industry and providing a foundation for those starting out. Josoor provides these young professionals with a network, and serves as a vehicle for these individuals to benefit from the job creation and economic boost that we believe the World Cup in 2022 can inspire. I'm proud of the fact that among the many young professionals from a vast array of countries enrolled in Josoor are individuals from countries such as Palestine and Yemen who travel to Doha – through serious obstacles and hardship – in order to study and take back their skills to implement in their own nations.

We have also launched an initiative called 'Challenge 22' which seeks to inspire the brightest young thinkers in the region to create innovative solutions that can serve to enhance the FIFA World Cup 2022. Young innovators and entrepreneurs present their ideas and those with the best ideas are connected with research and development teams from top universities and tech companies in order to assist in transforming their concepts to reality. Our vision is to provide an environment for creativity and entrepreneurship to flourish and to ensure that the finest young minds





in our region are provided with the ultimate platform for their ideas and concepts - being part of the fabric of the World Cup in 2022. The response to this initiative has been phenomenal. For me, Challenge 22 symbolised a window into the young talent that we have in our region and the hunger and desire that exists to develop that talent. The first pilot edition was aimed at the Gulf nations, and since then we have expanded it to more countries in the region, embracing the entire Arab world and the Middle East.

**Religions:** **To what extent do you see a connection between football represented in the organization of a global event in an Arab country and the search for solutions to the problems facing our world**

**today? Is such an event really capable of overcoming the cultural, civilizational, and ethnic differences between peoples?**

**H.E. Hassan Al Thawadi:** I want to reiterate that we know and understand that the FIFA World Cup isn't a catch all solution for the problems that our region and the world faces.

The cynics may argue that what I am suggesting are simplified solutions to complex issues.

However, I will not play down its importance as a common platform for enhancing understanding and dialogue between common citizens and reviving what La Convivencia stands for.

We must encourage people to let go of their certainties and embrace doubt and curiosity – to embrace humility. We must encourage people to seek greater



understanding of cultures, faiths and beliefs that differ to their own if we are to harness the spirit of golden eras of coexistence.

We will strive to ensure that this World Cup resides in a special place in history and is remembered as an important juncture in terms of people to people relations, in terms of cultural understanding, and in the history of our region.

To highlight just one example of

the tournament's immense global reach, the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Volunteer Programme has set a record for applicants, with more than 420,000 registrations received. I'm immensely proud to say that there are over 155 nationalities, from six continents, among selected volunteers.

The event has already inspired conversations and debates around the



world – it will also help forge new friendships and shared experiences. We will continue to embrace the positive and the negative and will continue working to ensure that the event is the catalyst for progress and change that we firmly believe it to be. We will not settle for 64 football matches on Qatari soil and merely handing over the torch to the next hosts. We refuse to countenance failure to utilise this platform and

missing the opportunities that it offers. We will not be derailed by those who prefer the climate of fear and division.

Through the FIFA World Cup 2022, we will endeavour to provide a platform for our people and our region to demonstrate their innovation, their humour, their passion and above all – their humanity. To respect, accept and celebrate our differences.



## Spirituality and Sport: A Way towards Perfection

Senad Mrahorović \*

### Abstract

Being a universal value, perfection of oneself through a variety of means, manifests itself in every form of human interest of which spirituality and sport among others, occupy most vivid places. Although, the two notions might seem to contradict each other, the first being seen as of a metaphysical or religious nature, the second being regarded as of a physical or secular sort of action, the link between them as manifested in the goal of perfection that both notions are sharing, will reveal much similarity between these two centuries-long occupations undertaken by numerous human beings across the globe. This article, therefore, deals with the idea of perfection as it has been understood within the context of both spirituality and sport, respectively.

**Keywords:** Spirituality, Sport, Faith, Practice, Perfection

### Introduction

The fact that Qatar is the first among Muslim countries to host one among most spectacular events of modern times, namely, the Football World Cup 2022, suggests that religion, in this case, Islam, does not in any way stand against such an event.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, Islam not only permits sport but also strongly emphasizes its significance in terms of one's physical and spiritual development. Like in any other religion, Islamic religious rituals, from daily prayers to annual pilgrimage, besides intellectual or spiritual concentration and activities, involve also physical actions that, apart from its symbolic meaning

---

(\* ) A Lecturer in Islamic Studies at SOASCIS, Universiti Brunei Darussalam and a Researcher at DICID

for a given rite, provide benefits for one's physique and fitness. Much has been written about physical aspects and health benefits of certain Islamic spiritual rituals and practices. This relationship between spirituality and physical culture is not only associated with Islamic religion, but also with other religious tradition. Going back to ancient Greek tradition based on which the modern form of Olympic games was founded, many historians believe that besides all political and economic aspects the ancient Olympics projected for the general benefit of people, religion was a major cause for its inception.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity, one finds a close connection between somatic and spiritual exercise that are often conducted in the sense of a complementary mode to each other. The aim of such an exercise in most cases is to achieve the balance between body and soul, a belief still being maintained in all religious traditions.<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, my aim in this paper is to examine the process of achieving one's perfection in terms of spirituality and sport. Although the two disciplines are often considered far distinct from each other, they nevertheless share very similar methods concerning the way towards one's perfection in either spiritual or somatic development or in a combination

between the two. Needless to say, the usage of the term "perfection" in this context refers primarily to the highest pinnacles attainable by human beings in the process of their inward or outward developments. As the study on the relationship between spirituality and sport has rapidly increased during the past decades, the scholars involved in it, have created a kind of new discipline dealing with sport that could be termed as "spirituality of sport" apart from already established fields in psychology, sociology, philosophy, and other branches of sport studies. Situating this study within the context of spirituality and sport, I will analyze three major aspects, namely, faith (belief), practice (training) and perfection (triumph) that underpin the way of spiritual growth as well as physical progress towards achieving a desired goal set by a wayfarer.

### **Faith - Belief**

The fundamental principle of any spiritual way is the notion of faith or belief. In this context, that is, spirituality and sport, I will not delve into philosophical and theological specifications and differentiations between faith and belief. Both terms in this study are to be considered as synonyms to each other. Although I acknowledge the degree of distinct meanings

that they are both implying when treated within certain disciplines such as theological, theosophical, or philosophical framework of a specific religious tradition,<sup>4</sup> I prefer to deal with them in broad terms as long as they represent psychological state of mind, regardless of person being a spiritualist or sportist. In this respect the notion of faith or belief might be defined as:

1. Allegiance to duty or a person, that is, loyalty; fidelity to one's promises; sincerity of one's intentions.
2. Belief and trust in and loyalty to God; belief in traditional doctrines of a religion; belief in something for which there is no proof.
3. Strong convictions in something such as a system of religious beliefs.<sup>5</sup>

The foregoing definitions of faith present varying aspects of it, including belief, conviction, loyalty, and trust. This concept of faith is precisely what is needed for the purpose of this study, as the given aspects of faith or belief in variable degrees are situated in minds of all those who are interested to embark on the way of spiritual development or athletic progression in a certain discipline. As such, the concept of faith understood in light of its diverse dimensions resembles one

of the major psychological factors that influence and to certain extent, determines a desired action by either a mystic or sportist. In his exposition of different domains of faith within the intellectual tradition of Islam based on a hadith<sup>6</sup>; W. Chittick has concluded that “[t]he Prophet’s tripartite definition of faith designates the same three domains as the Hadith of Gabriel<sup>7</sup> – body, tongue, and heart; or activity, thought, and awareness. The body’s realm is defined by the Sharia, the tongue’s realm is expressed in theology..., and heart’s realm is associated with doing the beautiful in the depths of the soul. To achieve the last, the heart must be rooted in awareness of truth and reality in a pre-cognitive manner. Beautiful acts must well up from the depths of the heart spontaneously, before mental articulation and physical activity.”<sup>8</sup>

This perception of faith or belief belongs to the traditional Islamic perspective, including not only theological and philosophical aspects of faith, but also spiritual or Sufi depiction of it. In other religious tradition one finds similar understanding of faith. In Christianity for example, faith as an inner conviction or trust is defined as “the divinely inspired human response to God’s historical revelation through Jesus Christ.”<sup>9</sup> Another definition of faith is found

in Bible: “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11.1).<sup>10</sup> For the Orthodox Christianity however, there are two aspects of faith, the first being explained as “faith in someone or something, faith as the recognition of these persons or things as real, true, genuine, and valuable; for example, faith in God, in Christ, in the Holy Trinity, in the Church. The second is faith in the sense of trust or reliance. In this sense, for example, one would not merely believe in God, in his existence, goodness, and truth; but one would believe God, trust his word, rely upon his presence, depend securely and with conviction upon his promises.”<sup>11</sup> As for the Catholic perspective, faith is something that must be considered objectively and subjectively. For the objective consideration, faith represents “sum of truths revealed by God in Scripture and Tradition...”<sup>12</sup> As for the subjective regard, faith “stands for the habit or virtue by which we assent to these truths.”<sup>13</sup>

Although in the foregoing viewpoints of faith to which Judaism can be ascribed as well,<sup>14</sup> religion plays very important role in understanding of faith and its various dimensions, the concept of faith is not always in correspondence with reason or knowledge understood in rational sense. This is especially

underlined within the context of the Christian tradition which holds that faith and reason on the one hand, and belief and knowledge on the other hand, are two different things.<sup>15</sup> Similar description of faith is maintained in western philosophical narratives where the notion of faith is defined as “The epistemic attitude of holding a proposition  $p$  to be true where there is some degree of evidence, though not conclusive evidence, for the truth of  $p$ . Clearly related to knowledge, belief may be characterized as stronger than mere ungrounded opinion but weaker than full knowledge.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, one should be careful, as W. Proudfoot claims, “not to protect claims of affect and religion from rational inquiry.”<sup>17</sup> The reason for this is that given claims, i.e., beliefs, convictions, and attitudes are considered rather strictly personal be they religious or spiritual, or even in sport disciplines, because, as mentioned earlier, such experiences or feelings amounting to the abovementioned notions of faith or belief, might not fall into category of an absolute consistency with a proposition or object of belief.<sup>18</sup> That is why the right communication between masters and their disciples in spirituality, or trainers and their athletes in sport is of crucial importance for the psychological well-being of spiritual spirants or athletic trainees. For the

latter, the faith usually depends on the quality of proper training which ideally takes a holistic character, including not only physical exercise but also mental strength.

Sport psychology is now well-established science that deals with all psychological factors that may influence athletic performance and how training or exercise in turn can affect spiritual as well as physical well-being of athletes. Thus, the training process apart from physical exercise has to emphasize has to include performance enhancement, spiritual or mental motivation, stress management, anxiety control, and mental toughness among others. However, the entire process of training also requires the right methodology of communicating the preparation strategies to benefit the entire team involved in a play or performance. In this context, Richard M. Ryan has underlined the value of the said communication between trainers and athletes in the foreword to Routledge Psychology of Sports, Exercise and Physical Activity: “Effective communication allows both parties (e.g., athletes and coaches, students and instructors) to derive greater benefits and satisfactions from their interactions. Anyone who has been a part of sport and physical training activities knows how rich and deep these satisfactions can be – the experiences

of accomplishment, teamwork, and the intrinsic motivation inherent in competition. But on their dark side, experiences in training and sport can negatively impact self-perceptions, physical health, and mental wellness. Accordingly, in a domain where fitness and progress can be central to identity, communication is important not just because it can enhance performance and output, but because it impacts wellness and life satisfaction.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Practice - Training**

The second aspect of spiritual and physical developments chosen for this study is practice or training. Here too, the terms practice and training are taken to convey the same or at least very entwined meaning, donating to the exercise of what one believes, deems, and holds to be true or possible mean towards a certain objective. It is a well-known fact that to excel in something, one needs not only to attain the theoretical knowledge but also the practical experience or mastering of such a knowledge if an undertaken discipline requires the latter. In the context of spirituality and sport the training or experience predominates a mere theoretical knowledge or hypothesis concerning a known object, unlike in speculative or rational sciences wherein deductive reasoning is used to discover a



certain truth or reality. What matters in spirituality and sport is rather the personal experience of a spiritualist or sportist who, by excelling at his or her discipline, gradually gains more attested knowledge and qualified proficiency in it.

In Islamic spirituality, as noted by S.H. Nasr, the way of knowledge is regarded as the central to the Sufi (mystical or gnostic) path, since religion of Islam is, first and foremost regarded as the religion of knowledge. However, the knowledge in question is always combined with love, faith, and action, that complement each other along the way. “The knowledge of which Sufi speaks is not mental knowledge but a light that illuminates the beholder of this knowledge and in fact all around it and finally returns the human being to its Source, the Supreme Sun.”<sup>20</sup> Nasr has further emphasized that Sufi knowledge or realization of the Truth derives directly from spiritual practice. Therefore, such a knowledge is not to be regarded as simply theoretical or philosophical speculation. “There are two main gates to the Garden of Truth: knowledge and love... The roads leading to these gates, however, are paved with human actions. To exist as a human being is to act, and how we act in this life – whether we perform good or evil actions – affects our soul and

its ability to love and know God. Therefore, no spiritual path can neglect the plane of action, and Sufism is no exception.”<sup>21</sup>

Even though spiritual paths from one tradition to other, may differ in certain aspects or forms, they are all concentrated upon the aforementioned qualities, namely, knowledge, faith, and love. In the Christian mysticism much emphasis is stressed on love, without however, neglecting the significance of knowledge and faith as they are well incorporated within the overall spectrum of the Christian mysticism. Here too, the distinction is evident between theoretical or philosophical (*theoria – vita contemplativa*) and practical or spiritual (*praxis – vita activa*) nature of mysticism.<sup>22</sup> Similarly with the Sufi stance on the relationship between knowledge and action, Christian mystics have developed the idea of union between contemplation and action. In her exposition of Christian mystics’ perspectives concerning contemplation and action, Charlotte Radler discussed among others, Meister Eckhart’s interpretation of the said union. “In his mystical theology,” she said, “Eckhart posits a living union and harmonious continuity between the active life and the contemplative life, as actions abound from the inner divine source. “One ought not to avoid or

escape or deny the interior,” he tells his Dominican novices, “but one should learn to work in it and with it and from it precisely so that one lets inwardness break out into activity and activity lead into inwardness, and one becomes accustomed to act freely...”<sup>23</sup> Based on the foregoing arguments, it becomes clear that a quality of contemplation or doctrine will certainly reflect the quality of action in a mystical endeavor regardless if its traditional background.

-Going back now to physical training and exercise in sport disciplines, one finds very similar interrelatedness between a motivation of an athlete provided by numerous sources, and his or her physical fitness. The process of conveying the right messages by trainers or coaches to the athletes and the results they produce in latter’s performances are too comparable to the correlation between *theoria* and *praxis* in spirituality. What motivates a mystic on a spiritual path is the way he or she perceives the notions of love, faith, or doctrine as the major principles underlying spirituality as such. On the other hand, in sports, “[c]ommunication skills are critical not only for helping to sustain motivation and prevent burnout during continuous training, but also for facilitating the assimilation of the detailed instructions and inputs that

will enhance the athlete’s abilities. Directives and instruction can be highly informational, constructively aiding the individual’s acquisition of greater capacities and skills. But some forms of instruction and feedback can also diminish feelings of competence or interest, such as when coaching inputs are experienced by the recipient as overly critical, controlling, or irrelevant.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, athletes’ fitness and performances depend not only on the motivational skills and the way they were delivered, but also on they individual perception of the given motivation.

As for the actual training and exercise, it is worth noting, as suggested by Paul Rowan, that “the Ancient Greek word for ‘training’ (practice/exercise) is *askesis*, which gave rise to a word which has become a key concept in the spiritualities of many world religions: asceticism.”<sup>25</sup> Defined by Collins, the word ‘askesis’ is a noun that donates “the procedure of demonstrating self-control and determination of action and purpose.”<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, a derivative from this word is asceticism, that is, “a simple, strict way of life with no luxuries or physical pleasures.”<sup>27</sup> It stands as a synonymous to self-denial, austerity, rigor, celibacy, abstinence, harshness. In mystical traditions of monotheistic religions, namely,



Islam, and Hinduism, or self-extinction in a form of liberation, as in Buddhism.”<sup>28</sup>

Needless to say, in sport disciplines, one form or another of the said aspects of asceticism is practiced for specific ambitions and goals. Apart from an ordinary exercise or training, the control of nourishment that involves strict diet for certain period, at least, abstinence from sensual pleasure, including alcohol and tobacco, isolation, contemplation, and meditation are among those ascetic measures being practiced by athletes in order to achieve desired levels of fitness and physical ability required for play or competition. The asceticism in sport, therefore, is practiced almost for the same aim as in any religious or spiritual tradition. The common goal of asceticism understood in the foregoing terms is to enhance one’s physical or spiritual strength, or both, for the purpose of attaining the highest reward, that is, perfection in terms of spirituality or triumph in terms of sport disciplines.

### **Perfection - Triumph**

The final aspect of spiritual or physical development selected for this study is perfection or triumph. It is to be understood in terms of championship that comprise of competition and accomplishment not only between individuals, but

also between inner desires within a person who has chosen the path of spiritual or physical improvement and growth. In attaining one’s desired aims in either path, lies the state of a champion or winner, who has become a fully transformed being, representing a role model for masses to be looked upon and followed by those interested to undertake the same transformation either by choosing spiritual or physical path, depending on one’s orientation and direction. The state of spiritual or somatic perfection or triumph, apart from being the highest possible station attainable by an individual or a group, carries along an enormous responsibility by the winners who became after all, direct or indirect representative of their respective teams, organizations, or even countries on behalf of which they participated in competitions and earned the title of a champion. In fact, they have become international stars and heroes for youth across the globe. The names such as Pele, Muhamad Ali, Schumacher, Nadal to name but a few, have transcended the boundaries of their respective sport disciplines and became global figures, reaching the ranks of saintly personalities among their admirers. Similarly, certain individuals in religious traditions have achieved the same status, becoming spiritual authorities not limited to their own

tradition, but rather on the global scene, such as Ibn 'Arabi, Mahatma Gandhi, Jalaluddin Rumi, Francis of Assisi and others.

The kind of knowledge and wisdom these personality possess is achieved in most cases as a result of their own personal dedication and struggle, experience and exercise undertaken along the path they followed. As such their knowledge is not and cannot be hidden within a closed circle of the followers but rather exposed to all who are interested to follow their ways. Most of the spiritual masters or sport champions have themselves been engaged in transmitting their knowledge and skills to younger generations. In spirituality a number of paths has been developed based on the teachings of a certain master. Thus, Franciscan order in Christianity,<sup>29</sup> most of Sufi orders in Islam,<sup>30</sup> Buddhism as an entire religious or philosophical system are all founded based on the teachings of a person after which given orders or schools were formed.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, most of prominent personalities in sport after retirement from the professional game have remained closely connected to their sport disciplines or organizations and continued their engagements in sport by coaching to transmitting their knowledge and skill by other means.<sup>32</sup> Some of them work as UN

special or goodwill ambassadors for various causes such as Roger Federer and Leo Messi or in other organization for promoting peace, justice and other human rights across the globe.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, from childhood dreams and humble beginnings from various corners of the globe, these great individuals have travelled the path of their choice, yearning, and giving their best to achieve their goals, perfection, and triumph in their respective disciplines. With many sacrifices, ascetic disciplines, and enormous efforts, they have certainly succeeded, setting example for many others who are on their way, looking up to them, or for those who are yet to embark on this long journey of spiritual and physical enlightenment and development supported by robust faith and belief, by enduring practice and training, and finally, by longing for perfection and triumph as the final stage of their spiritual and physical endeavor.

## Conclusion

In order to summarize the message from this article concerning the spiritual and physical development that takes place through the three main forms or stages, namely, faith – belief, practice -training, and perfection – triumph, I will use a *hadith qudsi* (sacred saying), also known as the hadith of Gabriel,<sup>34</sup>



narrated from the Prophet of Islam in which he provides descriptions or definitions of the three dimensions of Islamic religion. These are *islam* (submission), *iman* (faith), and *ihsan* (excellence). According to the *hadith qudsi*, submission is bearing witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is God's messenger, performing the ritual prayers, paying the alms tax, fasting during Ramadhan, and performing the pilgrimage to Holy Places if possible; Faith means having faith in God, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day, and Divine Decree, its good and its evil; Excellence (perfection or doing what is beautiful) is worshiping God as if the worshiper sees Him, for even if the worshiper does not see God, God sees the worshiper.

With a slight rearrangement of the

aspects of spiritual and athletic development in this study, placing faith before training, as in the hadith, the process of arriving to the stage of excellence or perfection (*ihsan*) is the same as in shown in spiritual and athletic paths. They might seem different in nature and context, but the method used in each course involves in principle the same intention and acts. For the spirituality, the hadith perfectly applies. As for the sport, only the context is different or the point of emphasis, namely the physical strength, which for its part, as shown in this article, requires a firm belief, some aspects of asceticism as part of training strategy for both, mind and body, and finally the triumph or transformation of a voyager into a winner at the very end of play.

## References

1. Audi, Robert. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* – Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
2. Baker, William J. *Playing with God: Religion and Modern Sport*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
3. Chittick, C. William. *Sufism: A Short History*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2007.
4. Coomaraswamy, Rama P. (Ed.). *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition*. Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006.
5. Deeza, B.S. “Asceticism: A Match Towards the Absolute,” IAFOR Journal of Ethics, Religion & Philosophy, volume 3, issue 2, 2017.
6. Flew, Anthony. *A Dictionary of Philosophy*. London: Pan Books, 1979.
7. Jackson, Ben, Dimmock, James A., and Compton, Josh (Eds.). *Persuasion and Communication in Sport, Exercise, and Physical Activity*. New York: Routledge, 2018.
8. Murata, Sachiko and Chittick, William C. *The Vision of Islam*. Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2005.
9. Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam’s Mystical Tradition*. New York: HarperOne, 2007.
10. Rowan, Paul. “Training the Body (Stretching the Mind) and Moulding the Spirit: Sport, Christian Asceticism and Life as Self-Gift,” in David Torevell, Clive Palmer and Paul Rowan (Eds.). *Training the Body: Perspectives from Religion, Physical Culture and Sport*. New York: Routledge, 2022.
11. Radler, Charlotte. “Actio et Contemplatio/Action and Contemplation,” in Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckmen (Eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
12. Trothen, Tracy J. (Ed.). *Sport, Spirituality, and Religion: New Intersections*. Basel: MDPI, 2019.

## Online references

13. <https://www.gco.gov.qa>
14. <https://www.britannica.com>
15. <https://www.merriam-webster.com>
16. <https://www.biblegateway.com>
17. <https://www.oqa.org>
18. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com>
19. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com>
20. <https://www.peace-sport.org>
21. <https://www.unicef.org>

## Endnotes

1- According to the first article of the Constitution of the State of Qatar which states: “Qatar is an independent sovereign Arab State. Its religion is Islam and Shari’ah law shall be a main source of its legislations. Its political system is democratic. The Arabic Language shall be its official language. The people of Qatar are a part of the Arab nation,” Qatar is considered among those Muslim countries ruled primarily by the Divine Law or Shari’ah. Thus, the legislative policy of such a state operates in light of the Islamic jurisprudence as the main source for the Islamic system of governance and all what it entails. <https://www.gco.gov.qa/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/GCO-Constitution-English.pdf>.

2- In his article published by Britannica, David C. Young writes the following: “The Olympic Games, like almost all Greek games, were an intrinsic part of a religious festival. They were held in honour of Zeus at Olympia by the city-state of Elis in the northwestern Peloponnese.” For further details of the article visit: <https://www.britannica.com/sports/Olympic-Games>.

3- For more details on the relationship between various religions and sport see William J. Baker, *Playing with God: Religion and Modern Sport* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 6-22.

4- William Chittick for example has pointed out the distinction between the meaning of faith and belief within the context of the Islamic intellectual tradition. He argued that “[i]n English we usually make no distinction between faith and belief. However, Wilfred Cantwell Smith has pointed out that the word faith – even without considering the Arabic context – needs to be differentiated from the word belief. When we say that people believe in something, we mean that they have confidence that something is true, but frequently we are implying that they are mistaken and are flying in the face of all the evidence. In Islamic languages, the word iman has no such negative



connotation. Iman involves confidence in a truth that is really true, not a supposed truth. There is no suggestion that people have faith in a falsehood. The object of their faith expresses the objective reality of things. Moreover, faith means that when people have this confidence, they commit themselves to acting on the basis of the truth that they know.” (Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* [Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2005], pp. 37.

5- <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/faith>.

6- “Faith is to acknowledge with the heart, to voice with the tongue, and to act with the limbs” (William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Short Introduction* [Oxford: Oneworld, 2007], pp. 6).

7- It is a hadith qudsi in which the Prophet of Islam defined the three dimensions of Islamic religion, namely, islam (submission), iman (faith), and ihsan (perfection) (Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, pp. xxxii-xxxiv).

8- William C. Chittick, *Ibid*, pp. 7.

9- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/faith>.

10- <https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Hebrews%2011:1>

11- <https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/doctrine-scripture/the-symbol-of-faith/faith>.

12- Rama P. Coomaraswamy (Ed.), *The Destruction of the Christian Tradition* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2006), pp. 78.

13- Rama P. Coomaraswamy, *Ibid*, pp. 78.

14- The Hebrew term “Emunah”, similar to the Arabic “Iman”, is usually translated in English as faith or belief. It is as well largely shaped by the biblical narration of faith and its perception. For further elaboration of faith in Judaism see Menachem Kellner, “Emunah: Biblical Faith” at <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/emunah-biblical-faith/>.

15- For detailed analysis of this, see <https://www.oca.org/orthodoxy/the-orthodox-faith/doctrine-scripture/the-symbol-of-faith/faith>.

- 16- Anthony Flew, *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (London: Pan Books, 1979), pp. 38.
- 17- Tracy J. Trothen (Ed.), *Sport, Spirituality, and Religion: New Intersections* (Basel: MDPI, 2019), pp. 6.
- 18- Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy – Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 78.
- 19- Ben Jackson, James A. Dimmock, and Josh Compton (Eds.), *Persuasion and Communication in Sport, Exercise, and Physical Activity* (New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. xxi.
- 20- Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam’s Mystical Tradition* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), pp. 32.
- 21- Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ibid*, pp. 82.
- 22- Charlotte Radler, “Actio et Contemplatio/Action and Contemplation,” in Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckmen (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp 212.
- 23- Charlotte Badler, *Ibid*, pp. 216
- 24- Ben Jackson, James A. Dimmock, and Josh Compton (Eds.), *Ibid*, pp. xx.
- 25- Paul Rowan, “Training the Body (Stretching the Mind) and Moulding the Spirit: Sport, Christian Asceticism and Life as Self-Gift,” in David Torevell, Clive Palmer and Paul Rowan (Eds.), *Training the Body: Perspectives from Religion, Physical Culture and Sport* (New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 76-77.
- 26- <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/askesis>.
- 27- <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/asceticism>
- 28- B. S. Deezia, “Asceticism: A Match Towards the Absolute,” *IAFOR Journal of Ethics, Religion & Philosophy*, volume 3, issue 2, 2017.
- 29- It relates to a Roman Catholic religious order founded in the early 13th century by St. Francis of Assisi (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Franciscans>).

30- The Sufi orders such as Qadiriyyah, Naqshibandiyyah, Shadhiliyyah and others are all related to Sufi masters and scholars as they were called after their names respectively. Thus, Qadiriyyah is related to ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166), Naqshibandiyyah to Baha al-Din Naqshiband (d. 1389) and Shadhiliyyah to Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 1258).

31- Buddhism is based on the teachings of the ascetic and spiritual master Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (d. 400 BCE).

32- After retirement from his football career, Edson Arantes do Nascimento, or simply, Pele for example, took a position in the government of Brazil as the Minister of Sports. Sir Alex Ferguson, after years of managing different football clubs, has taken a long-term teaching position in Executive Education at Harvard Business School.

33- See for example Peace and Sport Organization at <https://www.peace-sport.org/about-us/>, or UNICEF at <https://www.unicef.org/goodwill-ambassadors>.

34- The full text of this hadith qudsi see Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *Ibid*, pp. xxv-xxvi.



# Empowering Muslim Women and Girls through Sports

**Alena Demirović \***

## **Abstract**

As female Muslim athletes face many challenges, Western societies, Islamic institutions, and communities are still to address. Sport is becoming more popular as new generations of Muslim girls try to blend into the school teams and communities they live in. While Islam and schools in many countries encourage sports and physical activity participation, obstacles, interventions and Islamic stipulations need to be worked out for Muslim female athletes to feel they belong, have autonomy, and build relationships with other team members. Ultimately, this article will demonstrate Islam's view on sports, the best explication to utilize sport, cultural awareness and religion, and its impact and importance for Muslim girls and women worldwide.

## **Introduction**

Could sports be the long-awaited solution for the inclusion of Muslim women into societies where they have been identified as oppressed due to strict religious rules? Sport has been recognized to help within-group socialization, promote social cohesion, represent new identities, and eventually become a building bridge between our differences. Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to the interrelationship of sports and religion. Despite the idea and the interest in coexistence and blend of cultures, the lack of Muslim women participating in various sports lacks specific representation in the media and literature.

---

(\*) A Secretary General at the Institute for the Research of Genocide, Canada

The article begins by examining the relationship between sports, cultural inclusivity, and religion - Islam. The article then explores how Muslim women's participation in the said relationships can help bridge the differences and help form a new set of tolerant identities that will lead our societies to the right path of tolerance and coexistence.

### **The cultural dilemmas**

The activity of Muslim women in sports in the past has been minimal or non-existent. However, there has been an increase in the last decade, but it is still insufficient compared to the opposite sex. ("Muslim Women in Sport" 2010) This situation is still due to firmly entrenched male-female roles associated with cultural traditions and lack of proper Islamic knowledge. Subsequently, we cannot ignore such an issue, as a younger Muslim generation of women becomes more involved in sports.

There is a Hadith in which the Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) said: "A strong believer is better and is more lovable to Allah than a weak believer, and there is good in everyone..." Islam promotes a healthy lifestyle that includes physical activities; however, Islam prohibits co-ed gender sports activities due to temptation, seduction,

and corruption. While most Muslims agree that there is a great need for Muslim women's participation in sports, many have different opinions of what is appropriate. ("Muslim Women in Sport" 2010) Some believe that Muslim women should play sports behind closed doors. Others believe that it is ok to exercise outdoors in proper Islamic dress code but not in mixed environments. (Alamri 2013) At the same time, the majority believes that Muslim women can play sports wherever they prefer, provided that they follow the Islamic dress code. (M. Haq 2022) Generally speaking, Muslim females are allowed to play sports as long as the Islamic stipulations derived from the Shariah (Islamic law), such as, to name a few, no hostility and no exposing of body parts that must be covered ('awrah). (Nasr et al. 2015)

"There is no blame on you if you enter public places where there is something of benefit for you. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, and not to reveal their adornments<sup>1</sup> except what normally appears. Let them draw their veils over their chests, and not reveal their 'hidden' adornments except to their husbands, their fathers, their fathers-in-law, their sons, their stepsons, their brothers, their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, their fellow women, those 'bondwomen' in their

possession, male attendants with no desire, or children who are still unaware of women's nakedness. Let them not stomp their feet, drawing attention to their hidden adornments. Turn to Allah in repentance all together, O believers, so that you may be successful.

The main reason for the difference in opinions on what is appropriate and what is not is the cultural perspectives that override Islamic thought even though they should not. The foundation of Islamic thought and practice derives from the holy book Quran. However, the divergence in interpretation of both due to different cultural perspectives is why different opinions occur. While in America, Sofia, a 16 year old Muslim girl, dressed in proper Islamic attire approved by her coaches, plays on a girls high-school volleyball team, Sophia in Afghanistan is not allowed to. Here we can agree that culture and traditions play a significant role in social standards within the Muslim communities worldwide.

### **Barriers and Importance**

Barriers to Muslim girls' participation in sports most of the time are the traditions and culture they are born into, the lack of proper knowledge about Islam, and its view of women's participation in

sports. The main barrier that needs mentioning is social stigma due to the Islamic attire they are required to wear. Many Muslim girls and their families are still not familiar with the sports designed head-covers and body gear specially designed by Nike, Adidas, and others for Muslim athletes. Even though the gear was introduced back in 2011-2012 and worn by Olympic athletes, Muslim females fell behind in sports participation due to a lack of support. However, many other barriers keep them from playing, such as lack of access to facilities, sponsored school sports, transportation, safety issues, departmental program cuts due to school budget cuts, and families unable to afford it. Moreover, most importantly, not enough role models that they can look up to in the area they live in.

Being healthy and in shape for any Muslim is recommended in order to better perform the duties of Islam such as five daily prayers, the fasting month of Ramadan, and performing a Hajj (fifth pillar of Islam). Besides being good for a woman's health, playing sports, in general, is also beneficial for building her confidence. Playing sports early, especially in teams, girls learn how to turn a failure into success, communicate effectively, and overturn shyness. The Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon

him) once said that, “Taking proper care of one’s health is the right of the body.” Many great Muslim athletes, such as Ibtihaj Muhammad (American Sabre fencing team) and Kübra Dağlı (Turkish Taekwondo champion), credit their success to critical thinking, persistence, and leadership skills learned while playing sports. (Sawalha 2021) The Prophet (peace and blessings of God be upon him) was a keen spears-man and a fierce warrior who never fled the battle and always fought on the front lines. He was an exemplary leader who persisted in spreading the word of God and succeeded. Such an

example of agility and leadership is an excellent way for Muslim leaders to promote sports participation in their congregations. (Steve 2015)

### **Interventions and Solutions**

There is confusion about women’s role in Islam, the ignorance of Islam, female athletes, and its importance created by responsible Muslim institutions, and the lack of interest from Muslims and substantial educational institutions. Western societies have always and still assumed that Muslim women are oppressed and forbidden to



participate in sports and that Islam hides behind cultures. Such a view has created a false representation and needs to be changed.

Paramount to the Islamic institutions and Muslim communities' agendas should be the empowerment of Muslim women and girls. In order to attain a culturally competent relationship between western cultures and above mentioned institutions and communities is to achieve meaningful communication because that could be the only solution to attaining an empathetic understanding of the cultural worldview of others. For a long time, sports have been a tool for understanding different cultures and social integration, especially in the increasingly diverse world we are living in. However, in general, Muslims lack interest in sports and the benefits it can reap not just individually but also for the community. Positive Muslim female role models and their promotion within the Muslim communities are a must if the goal is to increase Muslim girls' sports participation.

The Olympics and Muslim Olympic athletes are great role models. They often advocate for proper Islamic attire designed for sports where Muslim girls compete. Moreover, they are great ambassadors of Islam as they did not find it a decision-making factor when

deciding to play sports. Nevertheless, instead, they found Islam to be a guide for their athletic morals and behaviours. These athletes often have real-life experience that includes the culture they grew up in and the obstacles they went through to become Olympians. Great success stories of the support they were yearning for when they started and how tremendously it changed and offered after their medals.

A great example of a professional Muslim athlete is Bahrain's Roqaya Al-Gassra, who won the gold medal in athletics in the 2006 Asian Games in Doha and had a special attire designed to follow the modesty stipulation and headscarf obligation. 'A'isha told that when she was with God's Messenger on a journey she raced him on foot and beat him, but when she grew she raced him and he beat her. He said, "This makes up for that beating."

Another successful Muslim female athlete, a Bosnian-born Indira Kaljo, who grew up in the USA, is a former basketball player who was not allowed to play professionally due to wearing a headscarf (hijab). After the denial in 2015, Kaljo started a campaign against International Basketball Federation's (FIBA's ) ban that went global. In 2017, the ban was overturned, and Muslim athletes wearing headscarves, and anyone



who wore headgear of any kind were allowed to play professionally. (Jazeera 2017) What a great role model and place in history for Ms. Kaljo indeed.

Muslim communities need continuing education programs where Muslim leaders must teach the core of religion Islam and the philosophy of Islamic law at all levels. These programs should pertain information from fundamental family law to Muslim women/girls' participation in sports and how sports can empower them to become self-sufficient and productive members of our universal, diverse society. Such programs should be designed based on cultural dilemmas and competency in mind, preferably by Muslim women, for parents, educators, and sports facilitators to understand the diverse needs Muslim female athletes have. Using sports to rebuild communities after wars, terrorist attacks, and decades of islamophobia for Islamic institutions and governments should be of great importance.

A great emphasis needs to be placed on the parents, educators, facilitators, and communities and how they perceive someone visibly different, i.e., a girl wearing a headscarf and playing sports. Furthermore, teaching them how to navigate religion and culture in the athletic environments, such as training

around Ramadan, challenging stereotypical understanding of Muslim women in sports, and how to delegate for an abundance of Muslim female athletes as coaches and more media exposure. The outcome of these educational programs, in the end, should be the commitment by all parties involved to start working towards building culturally inclusive sporting environments for Muslim women and girls.

### **A way forward**

The Qur'an tells us that a person was created for a great cause. Muslim women and girls and their families are yet to see substantial opportunities and benefits that sports participation can bring. Sports participation is critical to empowering Muslim women and girls. It can not be emphasized enough how beneficial short and long-term sports participation is for Muslim women and girls and ensuring that most Muslim communities have access to sports activities available for their members. Having such access, communities then become, first of all, healthy and then successful in empowering their female members.

*“truly We created man in the most beautiful stature,”*

True oppressors who are in a way for Muslim women and girls



compete but instead, not having the support is the problem. All three mentioned that those Muslim female athletes from other countries who experience issues in their native countries often change clubs and move to a foreign land to compete professionally, as changing clubs is easier than receiving citizenship.

There seems to be a new wave of younger American Muslim girls generations who take playing sports to a whole new level. Sophia, a 16-year-old American-born high schooler, plays on a volleyball team and, as a Muslim girl who wears a headscarf, has not experienced any issues so far. She is happy that her parents encourage and support her and her siblings (long drives to games and competitions on weekends throughout the season). She and her parents worked out the modest attire uniform adjustment with her coaches to match the team's uniform, and no one had any issue with it. Her mother, Faiza, further praised her kid's coaches and school for being so open to new cultures and considering the Islamic dress code and Ramadan for Muslim girls. The new Muslim generations of female athletes seem to have all the necessary tools to succeed in their future athletic endeavours. However, is society as a whole ready to do the same?

Those who started to change

the stigma about Muslim women athletes started the movement, such as Muslim weightlifter Kulsoom Abdullah, who in 2011 challenged the International Weightlifting Federation to approve her modest attire for competition and won. To Khadijah Diggs, a Muslim member of the U.S. triathlon team who had to sew her outfits, to 14 Muslim female athletes who won medals at the 2016 Olympics in Rio. Even though years have passed since they first encountered the problems, they still exist. The question remains why are the Muslim women athletes still lacking the support of their own families and Muslim communities, and why are the sports facilitators still apprehensive about accepting them into the professional teams?

Designing and implementing continuing education programs on proper knowledge about Islam and its jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is of great importance for all Muslim communities and sports facilitators. Understanding each other and finding the needs of women and girls from different cultures is ample for coexistence. In the diverse worldwide society that we live in today, having strong and resilient women leaders and athletes is of great importance, and to raise them, one must agree with an old African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child."

## References

Abeer, Ahmed Alamri (2013). "Participation of Muslim Female Students in Sporting Activities in Australian Public High Schools: The Impact of Religion." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 33:3, 418-429, DOI: 10.1080/13602004.2013.853980.

Bukhari as-Sawm 55, an-Nikah 89, Muslim as-siyam 183, 193, Nisai

Ekici, Hasan. 2021. "Importance of Hajj to Muslims | Why Is Hajj So Important? | Pilgrim." *Pilgrim*. December 18, 2021. <https://thepilgrim.co/importance-of-hajj/>.

Gillen, Nancy. 2021. "Afghanistan's Female Volleyball Players & Cyclists Speak of Fear since Taliban Takeover | GiveMeSport." *GiveMeSport*. GiveMeSport. September 23, 2021. <https://www.givemesport.com/1757833-afghanistans-female-volleyball-players-cyclists-speak-of-fear-since-taliban-takeover>.

Haq, Maheen. 2022. "The War on Muslim Women's Bodies: A Critique of Western Feminism | Georgetown Immigration Law Journal | Georgetown Law." *Georgetown Law*. January 27, 2022. <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/immigration-law-journal/blog/the-war-on-muslim-womens-bodies-a-critique-of-western-feminism/>.

Haq, Sana Noor. 2021. "'It Makes Me Feel like Possibilities Are Endless': Meet the Muslim Women Parkour Athletes Taking up Space - CNN." *CNN*. CNN. September 10, 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/09/10/sport/muslim-women-parkour-empowering-spt-intl/>.

"Hadith on Marriage: The Prophet Has Fun with His Wives." 2012. *Daily Hadith Online*. December 7, 2012. <https://www.abuaminaelias.com/dailyhadithonline/2012/12/07/prophet-fun-wives-play-race/>.

Islamic Terminology." 2022. *Islamic Terminology*. May 14, 2022. <https://islamic-dictionary.tumblr.com>.

"It Takes a Village to Raise a Child Definition | Law Insider." n.d. *Law Insider*. Accessed June 5, 2022. <https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/it-takes-a-village-to-raise-a-child>.

Jazeera, Al. 2017. "FIBA Allows Hijab in Professional Basketball | Basketball | Al Jazeera." *Breaking News, World News and Video from Al Jazeera*. Al Jazeera.

May 4, 2017. <https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2017/5/4/fiba-allows-hijab-in-professional-basketball>.

Kulkarni, Triveni. 2021. "Acknowledging and Understanding Cultural Differences in Sports." MFP Psychology. MFP Psychology. March 23, 2021. <https://www.mindfirstperform.com/post/acknowledging-and-understanding-cultural-differences-in-sports>.

"Mishkat Al-Masabih 3251 ." n.d. Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم). Accessed June 5, 2022. <https://sunnah.com/mishkat:3251>.

"Muslim Women in Sport." 2010. [www.Womeninsport.Org](http://www.Womeninsport.Org). Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation and Sporting Equals-Sporting Equals. January 2010. <https://www.womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Muslim-Women-in-Sport.pdf?x99836>.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, Caner K. Dagli, Maria Massi Dakake, Joseph E.B. Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom. 2015. The Study Quran. Harper Collins.

"Sahih Muslim 2664". Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم). Accessed June 4, 2022. <https://sunnah.com/muslim:2664>.

Sawalha, Nebras. 2021. "30 Influential Muslim Women Who Are Reshaping the World to the Better." Crescent Wealth Super. <https://www.facebook.com/CrescentWealth/>. March 24, 2021. <https://crescentwealth.com.au/muslim-community/30-influential-muslim-women-who-are-reshaping-the-world-to-the-better/>.

Steve. 2015. "4 Sunnah Sports of Prophet Muhammad - Life in Saudi Arabia." Life in Saudi Arabia. Life in Saudi Arabia. June 8, 2015. <https://lifeinsaudiArabia.net/sunnah-sports-in-islam/>.

"Taekwondo Star Kübra Dağlı Eyes European Gold in 2021." 2021. Red Bull Content Pool. March 8, 2021. <https://www.redbullcontentpool.com/news/CP-S-13375>.



## A New Age for Religious Demand: Spiritual Care and Mental Well-Being

**Dr. Makoto Mizutani \***

### Foreword

It is noteworthy that attention is increasingly drawn to questions of mental well-being for the spiritually impoverished: those suffering from serious disease or facing the final stage of life, those harshly damaged through various natural disasters, or those subjected to lonely conditions even in materially affluent societies. In many cases their agony is expressed to people not only locally but around the world.

Faced with this new need for an enhanced spirituality, it is only natural that religions are called to play a vital role, but the target may be somewhat different from a more traditional emphasis on grand or Big Questions: creation, life and death, sin and atonement, recognition of the Absolute, heaven and hell, and so on. The recent questions are more in line with individual requirements on a limited scale or Small Questions: finding spiritual tranquility as an individual, feeling happiness through certain activities, healing mental pains by listening to music, among others.

One may cautiously view this development as a shift for a new age of religious demand, though there is no denying that Small Questions existed previously, and Big Questions maintain continued relevance in this new age. The intent of this article is to draw attention to Small Questions as a source of newly growing religious demand, and to set them in their proper context as they may be a vital test for the future of religions themselves.

---

(\*) Representative, Congress for Reviving Religious Belief in Japan. Executive Director, Japan Muslim Association

## 1. **Shift From Big Questions to Small Questions**

Four main factors have set the stage for the new age of religious demand. The first three are more enduring, while the last is more fleeting. A quick overview:

### a. **Aging Society**

Societies where people aged over 65 occupy more than 25% of the population have become common in most developed countries while many others are moving in that direction. This phenomenon of aged society has ushered a set of issues onto the main stage of living in those countries, starting from the economic implications of a declining Gross National Product as well as psychological aspects of national life and identity. These psychological impacts relate to questions such as mental anxiety among elders, relief from pains of illness and loneliness in daily life, and a loss of hope for the future.

While medical approaches have naturally been applied to these psychological issues, many have sought religious interventions. Religious clerics themselves have readily engaged in response, though they may not have been trained on these specific issues. Religious leaders have offered many group and one-on-one consultations, whether in newly established facilities for the

elderly or in private homes.

These psychological issues might be addressed or mitigated through a set of traditional teachings for Big Questions; however, they are driven in each case by their relationship to the Small Questions and accordingly require quite different responses. This may well mean that clerics who have received only traditional training would need to deeply consider these issues and innovate new techniques to tackle such Small Questions.

### b. **Postmodernism**

The term “Modernism” is employed to characterize a mode of thinking centering around such ideas as conviction in material and technical improvement as the main method for human development, reason as the sole driver and foundation of human life, and preference for mechanized mass production in place of traditional processes of manual work on a limited scale.

Since the last phase of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an opposing philosophy has been advanced under the term “Postmodernism,” which is characterized by pluralism and relativism, rejecting the universal validity of stable identity and hierarchy, emphasizing the rights of minor and weaker segments of the population, and calling for social participation of women, for example. This stance has given rise to a call for slow food rather than fast food and

slow life in general. It is exemplified in the saying “small is beautiful.” Ultimately, it may be viewed as the decline of a more traditional set of values privileging the “big and strong.”

This Postmodern stance has shifted more attention to individual questions among ordinary citizens, viewing these topics as worthy of serious and authentic treatment. “Small and weak” entities started to advance beyond the opposite, while minoritized groups protested in streets and women demanded more equitable educational and social opportunities. In this context, one may well expect an enhanced need for individual care whether physical or mental. Many facing psychological difficulties have turned to practicing yoga and training in Zen meditation, among others.

c. Advanced Communication

It goes without saying that a great leap in information technology has transformed practically every aspect of social life around the globe since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As an example, many readers of this article may be very well informed about daily developments in Ukraine as attacks go on across the nation.

One may say that the development of communication technology contributed, among other things, to an increased attention to Small Questions. One small voice in a

remote village, for example, can now be easily and quickly heard across many continents. Each teardrop can be an object of public viewing on the other side of the earth, just as a glimpse of happiness can likewise be shared. The weak and powerless have started to be given more equal chance to be seen and heard anywhere instantly.

The agony of a refugee in a country can be felt in another country and can even be compared with other global cases. Those hard hit in a natural disaster can communicate with others to share their pain and can talk to doctors in remote clinics to seek assistance. Homeless people are likewise endowed with resources that may save their lives when they lead to more food and shelter. Clerics now wish to employ all methods available, and they try best to side with those suffering in support of their spiritual recovery.

d. Impact of COVID-19

At the time of writing, the impact of COVID-19 has not subsided around the world. People have had to accommodate many new practices and a new style of life such as hiding their faces behind masks; keeping social distance; remote work, including education and business at home; and so on. All these adjustments have naturally created a set of new mental health issues such as loneliness and depression on top



of additional physical problems like obesity and declining vocal function due to social isolation.

Many problems caused by COVID-19 physically and mentally have been handled by medical doctors together with clerics, though of course the situation was unprecedented for all involved. All tried their best while innovating new approaches to the issues facing them. Thus COVID-19 has intensified and highlighted the seriousness of these small and individual questions.

One may naturally expand this observation to pandemics in general. COVID-19 will not be the last, as there have been many others in the past. In this sense, the overall impact of pandemics should be assessed as an enduring factor drawing attention to Small Questions.

## 2. **Mushrooming of New Studies**

Small Questions have rapidly increased and stepped up to the main stage of society. Faced with this phenomenon, strenuous efforts have been made to tackle these sometimes amorphous, but urgent, issues. Let us start with the development of new fields of academic research, followed by discussion of actual practices on the ground.

### a. Study of Death and Grief Care

Study of Death (thanatology) entails the description or investigation of death and dying and people's psychological coping mechanisms, hence, it aims to contribute to alleviating sorrow and stress experienced by the dying and to the treatment of mental pain of all those who suffer in the last stage of life. The field has developed since the 1970s, following several major publications on the subject in the USA and Europe, when the proportion of elderly people in society began to increase.<sup>1</sup> Along with thanatology, more specialized study such as nursing methods at death beds, including musicology and others, have also developed.<sup>2</sup>

Study of grief care is another field rather quickly developed. The case in Japan is the Institute of Grief Care, established in 2010. It is the first of its kind in Japan to deal with the subject of grief care at large. It is now headquartered at Sophia University in Tokyo, after its transfer from another university in Japan. The Institute is carrying out research on how to cope with the mixed emotions that people experience when they lose someone close to them as well as many other related subjects such as rehabilitation methods and experiences of addicts of alcohol and drugs.<sup>3</sup>

This Institute was established after a great loss of lives in a major train accident near Osaka, Japan, in 2005, hence, the aging society was not a

factor in this case. The deep emotional damage of the bereaved families as well as nationwide expressions of sympathy toward them as reported by the media were the main impetus, as victims were not satisfactorily taken care of by the perfunctory service of clerics, who mainly followed fixed rituals with joint group praying and recital of traditional verses.

#### b. Study of Body-Mind Transformation Technology

Certain treatment or training can bring about certain physical and mental effects, and these co-relations are the topics of such study. Here treatment and training mainly include the following: meditation, religious practices, art performances, martial arts, sports, physical and talk therapy, and many other training courses.

Mindfulness has become a big subject whereby, it is argued, one must release all one's tension to accept and react to whatever stimulates the senses, and this natural state of mind creates the ultimate readiness to face this ever-changing world.<sup>4</sup> This psychological approach coupled with medical treatment has led to a development of so-called integrated treatment or Integrative Oncology.<sup>5</sup> The study of mental effects also includes such extreme examples of spiritual violence as the Aum Subway Incident of 1995 in Tokyo. The terrorists in this case resorted to using a lethal sarin gas aiming to

attack the heart of the government establishment. Their organization based on a sect of Buddhist origin was outlawed afterwards, though it is still active underground. This case indicates an extreme example where the training of special meditation worked as spiritual oppression and led to psychological fracture.

Three main characteristic aspects of this field may be outlined as follows:

- Scientific aspect: Scientific research is carried out to study and analyze

the function of the brain, for example. Extending beyond traditional empirical methods would make it possible to look closely into the question with more objective data. Some are interested in learning how religious belief can be attained by analyzing scientifically brain function, though any concrete results are yet to come.

- Cultural anthropological aspect: Effects of certain religious rites, such as

those of Shamanism in Mongolia, are studied on objective and equal footing as other rites like the one of American Indians, though they may be far apart in time and space. This anthropological approach of objective observation by way of equation without any value bias is necessary, widening the scope of research and bringing about a more



comprehensive outcome by covering more Small Questions.

- **Medical aspect:** Medical science is readily employed, and, in fact, this

study works hand in hand with medical science, expecting a mutually beneficial outcome. Many medical doctors are finding certain limits to previous approaches of Western medical science and seek new opportunities by mixing it with more Oriental, or holistic, approaches. In some cases, some also claim that patients should play a more prominent role in applying medical treatments since they best know the details of their individual cases.

In the end, it is evident that these studies of body-mind transformation

technology have expanded the scope of academic research in dealing with Small Questions while they constitute the prominent source of problems for many around the world.

### c. Study of Spirituality

Despite wide-ranging arguments on this subject, let us focus here on the aspect of dealing with questions of individual nature, placing an emphasis upon the well-being of the mind.

During the 1990s, when people became more distanced from Christianity in the USA, the term “Spiritual but not Religious,” or “SBNR” gained currency.<sup>6</sup> One cannot deny that in any religion, there are spiritual elements, just as in any spiritual affairs, there are

religious aspects. However, those in this generation who retreated to “spirituality” shared the following negative attitude towards existing religions: a religion requires belonging to its community and submission to its authority and demands that one follows a certain absolute as a ruler and creator of all.

This basic move away from religions developed in waves in many sectors and areas of the world mainly through the following three stages. First, it developed as a pursuit of self-development and personal growth. Hence, much training was advanced by way of meditation, and achieving mindfulness was a major target of those who hoped to find a new sense of self. Second, it focused on healing and mental care of all who were suffering in one way or another.<sup>7</sup> Third, it placed an emphasis on atheism. The last development is the result of emphasizing human bondage and healing of many in a distressed situation. Hence, we heard a call for establishing a new community full of mercy, for example.<sup>8</sup> An initiative of the World Health Organization to establish the Alliance of Healthy Cities in 2003 was greatly supported by this internationally expanding idea.

Spiritual concerns have been and still are very numerous and wide ranging. We have already touched upon Zen Buddhist meditation and

Indian yoga training as seen in Europe and the USA. Further it is clear that many have favored a slow-life and environmentalist attitude in many walks of life, with a spiritual ethos. One may even recall spiritual aspects of pop culture as well.

All these amorphous activities have been gathered under the term of Spirituality. This study sheds a proper light on these activities and presents them as a vital and growing collection of issues in contemporary society.

### 3. Practices on the Ground

A thorough accounting of relevant cases is impossible here due to their numbers and variety but let us focus on a small number of typical examples, as they will suffice to indicate similar cases around the world.

#### a. Responses in the Universal Context

Work aiming to heal distress and improve mental care for elders, those suffering from COVID-19, and many others outside of the social safety net, like jobless youngsters and homeless people, generally falls along the following universal patterns.

- Aging societies

Elders around the world suffer in similar ways from diseases, mental

depression, distress, and anxiety, so care can be provided through similar actions, for example, counselling, participation in group activities of all sorts, and rehabilitation training. These efforts can be carried out both collectively and individually. This question was properly addressed in a comprehensive report: *Integrated care for older people: guidelines on community-level interventions to manage declines in intrinsic capacity*. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017.

□□ Measures are being pursued on multiple levels and from numerous angles. Systems for medical care, nursing services, and pension systems provide basic services and infrastructure as well as access to social participation, lifelong learning, and even new job opportunities. Special care facilities are set up by private and governmental/public institutions with services provided by regulated and unregulated caregivers. For example, public institutions might require certification of mental health counsellors via a qualifying test.

Until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, psychiatry and religion were closely connected. Religious institutions were responsible for the care of the mentally ill. But the situation has changed, and now things are typically left to individual arrangement. Reporting from the USA tells us that

faith-based depression treatment services have been used in the community, especially by persons from racial-ethnic minority groups. As a result, collaborative efforts between religious organizations and traditional health services may increase effective approaches to depression services for African Americans and Latinos.<sup>9</sup>

- Securing due reward

Wealth on the earth is limited and unevenly distributed. Therefore, we see a great number of those deprived of due reward of life, such as homeless people, jobless youth, and students, who all suffer from similar mental illness and depression. One might further include those harmed by COVID-19 as the most recent universal group of patients.

Here again institutional measures are called for, just as individual and spiritual care is required with or without religious involvement. While Christianity traditionally has stayed one step ahead of other religions in social relief work due to its philanthropic bent, as we will see below, Islam and Buddhism are now adapting to growing needs even in affluent societies.

- b. Emergence of Islamic Chaplaincy

Acute daily and individual need for Islamic care is not sufficiently

provided for by traditional Muslim clergy members across the continents.

- Muslim chaplains in the West

Appointment of Muslim chaplains started in a federal prison in the USA in 1984, when the number of Muslim inmates became considerable, along with their suffering from mental distress. This was established in other federal and state prisons, to be followed by many others. In 1999, the US Army followed suit, while several universities (Brown, Princeton, Yale, Duke, and others) did likewise in 2015. Further similar examples can be found in such places as health care centers and correctional institutions.

What followed was the establishment of formal organizations such as the Association of Muslim Chaplains and the Association of Campus Muslim Chaplains. Meanwhile, methodology advanced to include a holistic approach, including traditional Islamic learning and spiritual, behavioral, and social sciences. A formal qualifying process was also considered, following the most rigorous standards set by professional chaplaincy associations, such as the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC) in the United States and the Canadian Association for Spiritual Care (CASC) in Canada. Each of these associations requires those seeking professional

certification to possess a graduate theological degree, complete 1,600 hours of clinical pastoral education, and undergo a review of professional competencies.<sup>10</sup>

The merit of these Muslim chaplains, different from traditional clergy or imams, is evident in that traditional imams have not undergone a training of psychological pastoral work or counselling to sit at the side of the distressed.

- Popular preachers in the Arab lands

Some recent popular preachers or New Preachers (al-Duat al-Judud) are an Arab version of chaplaincy. They are characterized by unconventional modes and manners of presentation, using SNS and other information technologies and more colloquial discourse on top of topics of commonality.

One such preacher is the Egyptian Amr Khalid (1967-). He graduated from the Department of Commerce, University of Cairo, and started his career as an accountant in a Dutch insurance company. He became extremely popular in his secular style after he appeared in the Saudi satellite TV program, Read (Iqraa), in 1999. He was further chosen as one of one hundred influential personalities in TIME 100 in 2007.

Another figure worthy of mention is Aid al-Qarni (1960-). He is a



Saudi imam, however, he has been successful in adapting a new style in his presentation. His major work, *Don't Be Sad (Laa Tahzan)*, was first published in 2002 and reached its 23<sup>rd</sup> edition in 2009. It has sold ten million copies around the world and is now translated into thirty languages. The text has been revised and augmented

over time, but he consistently and characteristically refers to various texts such as the Quran, prophetic traditions, and many other speeches by Western leaders and writers. The main intent is to side with sad readers to help alleviate their pain. <sup>11</sup>

c. Grief Care Work in Japan

Japan's history is full of sorrow and sad incidents with daily earthquakes, yearly typhoons, major floods, and occasional volcanic eruptions, and, in fact, such negative circumstances and the need for spiritual healing and mental health care have been a source of the basic character of the culture, as expressed through literature, various stage performances, and the famous tea ceremony.

The most recent incident was the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011. The triple disaster began with an exceptional earthquake of a scale to happen just once in everyone thousand years, which led to the ensuing tsunami, in turn destroying electricity generators of the nuclear power plant in Fukushima and causing a meltdown. Casualties numbered over 18,000.

A special national tax rate of 2.1% was enacted over and above the standard income tax of every citizen to cover the cost of rescue and reconstruction. In addition, it was striking to see helping hands extended from across the nation and the world to the people of the region, including support from many religious clerics of Buddhism, Shintoism, Christianity, and others. Clerics were sent to the disaster area to participate in actual reconstruction work and to serve in providing basic water and food. Many clerics devoted themselves to counselling and psychological treatment. In the

past, Buddhist and Shintoist leaders used to be content just carrying out traditional rituals for the public within religious facilities such as temples and shrines, but after the disaster they opened those facilities as shelters and emergency clinics.

These efforts of religious clerics and the sincere welcome by the residents of the damaged areas have set the stage, as it were, for a new tide of religious passion. Some see a true chance for a religious revival in Japan. One may recall here that previously religions in Japan experienced an extreme setback after the end of World War II in 1945, because people felt betrayed after religions were used to support Japanese pre-war militarism. But now in 2011, religious entities involved in rescue work grew so numerous that a nationwide network, the Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief, was established among them in April 2011. This further led to the Congress for Reviving Religious Belief in Japan in August 2020. Through these and other activities, religious revivalism in Japan has become a hotly debated issue internationally.<sup>12</sup>

Additionally, Japan has a long history of reckoning with many other major disasters and their aftermaths, such the atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Other incidents bearing heavy repercussions were those related to



industrialization because enterprises, hard-pressed by government calls for economic recovery, resorted to measures and methods that were very harmful to human well-being. Residents of Minamata City in Southern Japan were victims of factories which released wastewater containing mercury. The agony of the patients and slow pace of government response eventually became a top news story in papers and sympathy was expressed nationwide. Throughout all these earlier examples, however, the role played by religions was less significant than that after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.<sup>13</sup>

Disasters are occasions when much is done for individual care and healing as highlighted above; however, the manner and the degree of religious involvement differs in each case. At the time of writing, it seems that religions have become more mobilized and conscious of the social and spiritual role they could play.

#### **4. A New Challenge for Religions**

Attention paid to Small Questions should increase with the aging society, and much more information must be communicated quickly and in detail, with improving communication systems. In this environment, we will have many more qualified experts to deal with

Small Questions, who are trained in medical science, counselling, and therapy treatment. These secular professionals are often supported by laws and public institutions as well as budgetary arrangements.

On the other hand, men of faith seem to be less prepared to cope with the growing demand for spiritual care and mental well-being, though initially these were their intrinsic concerns. Here one must see a serious gap between supply and demand, which will need to be filled by emphasizing training of religious clerics in the various New Studies as described above, as well as therapy, counselling, and psychological methods. After all human beings, in particular patients, are entitled to mobilize a full power and talents including those of faith on top of scientific and secular ones.<sup>14</sup>

A pitfall for Small Questions, as I see it, lies in the fact that they are not as weighty and philosophical as Big Questions, hence, they might not satisfy observers' intellectual or metaphysical interests. This hurdle may well be overcome by reaffirming that religious faith is after all a bundle of wishes, prayers, and convictions, which ultimately constitute half of human affairs, while the other half deals with more mundane interests. With the support of spiritual and religious treatments, mental well-being can be fully achieved and balanced with the other half of human nature.

## (Endnotes)

1- For example, the model of five stages of death fear was presented by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, Routledge, NY, 1969. The argument was expanded by Robert Kastenbaum, *The Psychology of Death*, Springer Publishing House, NY, 1976.

2- Ikue Satomura, *Music-Thanatology*, Shunjuusha, Tokyo. 2021.(in Japanese)

3-[https://www.sophia.ac.jp/eng/research/research/affiliated\\_r/griefcare.htm](https://www.sophia.ac.jp/eng/research/research/affiliated_r/griefcare.htm)

4- David S. Black, 'A Brief Definition of Mindfulness,' *Mindfulness Research Guide*, 2011. (<http://mindfulnessclassroomdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/a-brief-definition-of-mindfulness.pdf>)

5- David I. Adams and Andrew Wile, ed., *Integrative Oncology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

6- Among others: Sven Erlandson, *Spiritual but Not Religious: A Call to Religious Revolution in America*, iUniverse, NE, 2000.

7- An indicative reference is, Andrew Wile, *Natural Health and Natural Medicine*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 2004.

8- Allan Kellehear, *Compassionate Cities*, Routledge, London, 2005.

9- Michelle Dalencour and others, *The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in the Depression Care of African Americans and Hispanics in Los Angeles*, Published Online:15 Nov 2016 <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201500318>

10- Ibrahim J. Long, Bilal Ansari, 'Islamic Pastoral Care and the Development of Muslim Chaplaincy,' *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, Routledge, Michigan, vol. 12, issue 1, 2018.

11- Aid al-Qarni, La Tahzan, al-Ubaikan, Riyad, 2002 (in Arabic). English translation: Aaid al-Qarni, Don't Be Sad, International Islamic Publishing House, Riyad, 2005.

12- Ian Reader, 'Secularization, R.I.P.? Nonsense! The 'Rush Hour Away from the Gods' and the Decline of Religion in Contemporary Japan,' Journal of Religion in Japan 1 (2012) 7-36 Brill, Leiden.

13- Kouta Ishi, Inorino Genba (Dialogues with Religious Clerics facing Tragedies in Japan), Publishing House Sanga, Tokyo, 2015. (in Japanese only),

14- Takahashi Hara, 'What kind of Religiosity is Necessary in Care Settings?,' Annal of the Institute of Thanatology, Toyo Eiwa University, Tokyo. Vol. XIII, 2017. 23-40pp. (in Japanese with English summary)



# Psychological Well-Being and Islam

**Mohammad Aamir \***

## **Abstract**

Psychological well-being is just as important as physical well-being in terms of health. We do believe that attention to both is the best way to create a healthier and better lifestyle. Psychological well-being and physical well-being go hand in hand and taking care of both is key to achieving total Well-being. There are many ways to protect and improve psychological well-being and physical well-being. Exercise and sports are very important ways to do the job. They are helping hand for the complete well-being of a human being. Physical well-being, psychological well-being and sports are very important topics in Islam to be addressed. Psychological well-being does not come as a matter of chance; it does require abidance to follow good manners and healthy habits. In this regard, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that “I have been sent to perfect good character.” Islam endeavors to have good health by following healthy physical activities, avoidance of unhealthy practices and taking a balanced diet. Striving toward one’s psychological potential and toward balance in one’s life and happiness might bring one closer to optimal psychological well-being. This is what Islam teaches us to make our life better and fruitful.

*Keywords:* Psychological well-being, Islam, sports, Muslims, religious psychology

## **Psychological Well-Being and Islam**

Psychological well-being is about lives going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Sustainable well-being does not require individuals to feel good all the time; the experience of painful emotions (e.g.,

---

(\*) A Procurement Manager at Meridian International School, Kathmandu, Nepal

disappointment, failure, grief) is a normal part of life, and being able to manage these negative or painful emotions is essential for long-term well-being. Psychological well-being is, however, compromised when negative emotions are extreme or very long lasting and interfere with a person's ability to function in his or her daily life.

The concept of feeling good incorporates not only the positive emotions of happiness and contentment, but also such emotions as interest, engagement, confidence, and affection. The concept of functioning effectively (in a psychological sense) involves the development of one's potential, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose (e.g., working towards valued goals), and experiencing positive relationships.

## **Psychological Well-Being**

According to Pavot and Diener (1993), psychological well-being refers to the subjective experience of two aspects of one's psychological experience:

1. Emotional or affective experience (i.e., positive and negative affect)
2. Conceptual or cognitive experience (i.e., satisfaction with life, relationships, work, and leisure)<sup>1</sup>

Psychological well-being is defined as one's level of psychological happiness / health, encompassing

life satisfaction, and feelings of accomplishment. At the risk of being dualistic and separating physical well-being from psychological well-being, it is helpful to note that physical well-being encompasses physical health, including disease states, fitness level, and ability to perform activities of daily living. Psychological well-being encompasses the person's perspective on life, including not only perceptions of physical health but also of self-esteem, self-efficacy, relationships with others, and satisfaction with life. A monistic perspective, wherein it is recognized that physical well-being and psychological well-being are integrally interrelated, is preferable.

Subjective well-being can be addressed from a primarily psychological perspective. Ed Diener suggested that subjective well-being is comprised of the presence of positive affect, the absence of negative affect, and high levels of life satisfaction. However, research indicates physical well-being should be considered as well in evaluating psychological well-being. Psychological well-being can range on a continuum from the absence of well-being, identified as ill health or even mental illness in some cases, to optimal well-being, perhaps having attained the state of self-actualization described by Abraham Maslow. Many individuals will identify their psych as being on the wellness side of the continuum. Striving toward one's

psychological potential and toward balance in one's life and happiness (perhaps noting a positive psychology approach) might bring one closer to optimal psychological well-being. A "sound mind" can be examined from several perspectives within an exercise and sport psychology framework: assessment of physical capabilities, including fitness; social relationships; level of athletic or exercise identity; the balance in life across a variety of domains, including social, work or academic, and spiritual; and feelings of accomplishment and progress toward attainment of an individual's potential.

The first perspective involves assessment of physical capabilities, including fitness. Psychological well-being is certainly affected by fitness level, both in terms of exercise and sport participation but also in an individual's ability to perform activities of daily living. Ability to perform activities of daily living (e.g., self-care or personal hygiene, mobility, housework) will likely affect one's psychological well-being. Impairments in ability to perform activities of daily living may decrease psychological well-being due to decreased independence and subsequent reliance on others and/or assistive devices to help in accomplishing activities of daily living. Psychological well-being would be expected to be high to

the degree that one is fit enough (fitness encompassing cardiovascular capacity, muscular strength, muscular endurance, and flexibility) to perform in preferred exercise and sport modalities. Psychological well-being level may be affected by goals. If a person is striving to improve exercise or sport performance, then increases in psychological well-being would accompany increases in fitness (perhaps also tied into performance, which may encompass skill development in aspects of a given exercise or sport, such as the backhand stroke in tennis). Bonnie G. Berger and David A. Tobar addressed physical activity and quality of life more extensively.

In terms of social relationships, most individuals desire some level of social interaction (e.g., No man is an island). Psychological well-being would be expected to be higher if a person has the level of social interaction desired. If an individual has fewer close friends than desired, however, then psychological well-being would be expected to be lower. Social relationships and social interactions are often found in exercise and sport settings; examples include friendly get together for a Sunday basketball game or a bicycle ride in one's area or attending a local sporting event. Exercise or sport can be an excellent vehicle for meeting people, such as at a local health club or fitness center or

at participatory events such as running road races or triathlons.

In summary, psychological well-being is just as important as physical well-being in terms of health. We do believe that attention to both is the best way to create a healthier and better lifestyle. Psychological well-being is affected by an array of factors associated with physical and mental health. Exercise and physical activity and sport play key roles in both physical and mental health, and therefore have profound effects on psychological well-being.

### **The effect of sport on psychological well-being**

The most popular variables that are closely related between sport and psychological well-being are: cognition, coping, positive affect and self-efficacy, and it is that those people who perform sport tend to have better results in all of them. Below each one of them is explained more carefully:

#### 1. Cognition

The way we must see and understand the world, the ideas, thoughts and beliefs we have about us and everything that surrounds us is closely related to our well-being. Through sport at an early age the child's intellectual development can be enhanced and it is even proven that performing very brief but intense physical exercises

presents an improvement in their mental abilities such as attention.

#### 2. Coping

It is demonstrated that those people with high psychological well-being use coping strategies oriented towards the problem and emotion versus those that show low well-being, which have a more passive coping mode and focus on avoidance. All this has to do with the role we take when facing a situation or problem. We have two options: to assume our responsibility in the situation and to improve everything that is in our hands or to flee from the problem, to hold everyone responsible and to succeed. From both options we will obtain a very valuable learning that can improve or hinder our standard of living giving us capacity for decision and autonomy.

#### 3. Positive affect

The quality of our personal relationships will be a determining factor in our assessment of life satisfaction. Sport, and more specifically that which takes place in teams, fosters the construction of a wider social environment in which share emotions, thoughts and sensations especially in stages of development, where the social circle is of vital importance.



#### 4. Self-efficacy

It is defined as beliefs in one's capacity to organize and execute the required actions and to handle future situations. If we believe that we can reach an objective, we will find the resources to achieve it.

### **Islam and Psychology**

The word Islam comes from an Arabic word "Salama" meaning peace and safety, whereas the word "Muslim" denotes the person who follows the way of Islam. Islam endeavors for having good health by following healthy physical activities, avoidance

of unhealthy practices and taking a balanced diet. Highlighting the significance of character, behavior, and deed, Almighty Allah says in the holy Qur'an: "...He prohibits them from all that is foul..." (Al-A'raaf: 157)

Psychology and Psychological well-being are very important topic in Islam to be addressed. Psychological well-being does not come as a matter of chance; it does require abidance to following good manners and healthy habits. In this regard, the holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that "I have been sent to perfect good character." (Al-Muwatta' 1614)





## Sports and Islam

Many recommended practices in Islam keep the body moving: praying 5 times a day with a preference given for prayer in the mosque, walking to and from the mosque, and participating in many social activities. Fasting, in addition to the fasting in Ramadan, is highly valued in Islam, and fasting is an exercise of all the organs in our bodies.

Islam places great importance on sports in training the Muslims and making their bodies healthy and sound. Muslims must take care of their spiritual, emotional, and physical health. We should not neglect our bodies, and regular physical exercise is an essential part of maintaining a

healthy lifestyle.

About the position of play in Islam, the holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said, “Entertain [yourselves] and play, for indeed I dislike harshness to be seen in your religion.”<sup>2</sup>

Participation in sport is the activity of healthy and fit ones. If a person is healthy, he/she can excel in sport and dominate in performance. But in the case of otherwise, outstanding performance is nothing more than a dream. Islam advocates in favor of good health and sound physique. Healthy and fit Muslim is better than the weaker. Regarding health and fitness, the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said: “A strong

believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer.”<sup>3</sup> About the significance of refreshment and revitalization of the minds and soul, the holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said, “Refresh your hearts from time to time.”<sup>4</sup>

At the time of the advent of Islam, limited events of sport were common among the masses. Since then, a considerable number of new events of sport have come into existence which has been popular in different parts of the world. From the perspective of Islam, legality or otherwise of these newly invented sport events can be evaluated and determined by the scale of Islamic teachings. Meaning that participation in all those sport events that are in conformity of the spirit of Islam and wherein the participant does not violate the Islamic guidelines with reference to participation in sport like gambling, gender mixing, violating the Islamic cloth code and disregarding the “Fardh” (obligatory religious practices like five times daily prayer, fasting in the month of Islamic month Ramazan etc.), is allowed in Islam.

It is evident from the available sport record that the prominent events of sport in which, the holy Prophet (PBUH) himself or his companions participated in, were walking, running, wrestling, swimming, archery, spear-throwing horse-racing and camel-racing. These sporting events

were carrying significance from the perspectives of health and fitness with reference to taking part in “Jihad” (the holy battle fought for the cause of Islam). These sport events were meant for improving the vital battle-oriented skills of the masses.

## **Walking**

About the significance of walking the holy Prophet (PBUH) highlighted upon the benefits of walking by saying, “Compete in archery, have a fit body and walk barefoot.”<sup>5</sup> Our beloved Prophet (peace be upon him) was a perfectly healthy man, thus he was able to lead an army during the war and bring our religion amount of victory. The Prophet used to walk to maintain his health. There are indeed many benefits of walking that we can also gain, like, maintaining the weight, gaining a healthier body like the Prophet, following the Prophet’s sunnah, to be a strong believer, improving the digestion, making the heart healthier, lowering blood pressure, boosting the psychological well-being, etc.

## **Running**

As reported by Ayesha, once the holy Prophet (PBUH) entered the running competition with her (Ayesha), which she won but later when I put on some weight, we ran again, and this time He won, the Prophet (PBUH), who won

the race, said, “This is the revenge of the first race; now we are level.”<sup>6</sup> With the objective of promoting health and fitness of the children, the holy Prophet (PBUH) used to conduct running competitions among them, narrated by Abdullah bin Harith.<sup>7</sup>

## **Wrestling**

Accepting wrestling challenge from the renowned wrestler Rukana bin Abdulyazid, the holy Prophet (PBUH) beat him in wrestling.<sup>8</sup> To see and determine the fitness level of the young children, the holy Prophet (PBUH) conducted wrestling competitions among them with reference to their participation in Jihad.<sup>9</sup>

## **Swimming**

Swimming is the sport that is very much emphasized in the Islamic literature. Ata bin Abi Rabah (RA) narrates that the Prophet (PBUH) used to conduct swimming competitions among the youngsters.<sup>10</sup> About the significance of swimming, Umar (PA) is reported to have said “Teach your children how to swim.” On another occasion Umar (RA) is reported to have said “Teach your children swimming and archery and tell them to jump on the horse’s back.” It is reported that at the young age, our holy Prophet (PBUH) used to swim in the pool situated in the garden of his maternal uncle.<sup>11</sup>

## **Archery**

The skill of Archery was regarded as one of the basic and effective tools for participation in Jihad. The holy Prophet (PBUH) said to his companions, “All of you should know the art of Archery.”<sup>12</sup> The holy Prophet (PBUH) used to admire those companions who were expert in the skill of Archery. During the Battle of Uhud, Sa’d bin Abi Waqqas showed his excellence in throwing the arrows in target, the holy Prophet (PBUH) appreciated him with the remarks, “May my mother and father be sacrificed for you.”<sup>13</sup> On another occasion the holy Prophet (PBUH) said, “Archery is not simply an entertainment, but it is the best thing that you do for entertainment.”<sup>14</sup> About the importance of the skill of Archery, the Prophet (PBUH) said, “Whoever learnt the art of shooting then left it, is not from us.”<sup>15</sup>

## **Camel-Riding and Horse-Riding**

With reference to the significance of Camel racing, horse racing and archery as the skills of war for Jihad, the holy Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that “There are presents for three things: Camel racing, horse racing and archery.” He admired the position holders of three events.<sup>16</sup> The holy Prophet (PBUH) is also reported to have said, “Every game a person plays

are futile except for archery, training one's horse and playing with one's wife."<sup>17</sup> According to the narration of Ibn Umar, the holy Prophet (PBUH) used to train his horse and then He take part in competitions with it.<sup>18</sup>

## **Spear Throwing**

Once the holy Prophet (PBUH) saw competition of spear throwing He said to them, "Throw it (i.e., their spears), O children of Isma'eel, for your father was a spear-thrower."<sup>19</sup> Abu Huraira narrates that once, in the presence of the holy Prophet (PBUH), a few Ethiopians were practicing spear throwing in mosque. Umar (RA) stopped them from doing so. But the holy Prophet (PBUH) directed Umar (RA) with the remarks "O Umar let them play."<sup>20</sup> Explaining the justification of playing in a mosque, Imam Bukhari (RA) says that since spear-throwing is a skill of Jihad, and Jihad is the act of worship, therefore the holy Prophet (PBUH) allowed them to carry on spear throwing in the masjid.

Keeping in view the Islamic approach with reference to participation in sport it becomes evident that promotion and maintenance of the health, sound physique, vitality and fitness and the state of preparedness to meet any emergency in the life are all vital in Islam. In addition to having reward from Allah by following the Sunnah,

(doing the act of the holy Prophet (PBUH), the sport events, which have been participated in or played in the presence of the holy Prophet (PBUH) and His companions, serve the objective of promoting health, having entertainment, getting physical fitness. Islam never refrains Muslims from getting and promoting their health and fitness.

### Etiquette of sports in Islam

Islam stresses the importance of spiritual and moral training that should accompany physical training, in order to achieve the desired effects. Islam places some stipulations regarding sports.

## **Tips for a Muslim in practicing sports**

- A Muslim should not occupy himself with sports to the extent that leads to neglecting religious and other essential duties and responsibilities towards school, work, or family.
- A Muslim is not permitted to practice sports in a way that inflicts harm on others.
- Blind fanaticism in favor or against a team has nothing to do with Islam, for this really contradicts the Islamic teachings calling for unity and love.
- While practicing sports there should be no room for slandering, misbehavior, hostility, or cheating.

## References

1. (Pavot, W., & Diener, E. (1993). Review of the satisfaction with life scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 5, 164-172.)
2. (Suyuti, al-Jami' al-Saghir and Sunan al-Kubra of al-Bayhaqi)
3. (Muslim Sahih, Book of the Divine Destiny, Hadith No. 34)
4. (Abu Dawud in his Marasil)
5. (Majmaul Zawaid, 5:136)
6. (Abu Dawood, al-Jihad, Vol.3, Hadith No.2571)
7. (Ahmad bin Hanbal, Musnad, Vol.1, p. 216)
8. (Abu Dawud, Libas 21)
9. (Ibn Hisham, al-Seerah al-Nabawiyah, Vol. 2, p. 66)
10. (Nasaee, Sunan al-Kubra, Vol.5, p.302)
11. (Nasaee, Sunan al-Kubra, Vol.5, p.302)
12. (Sahih Muslim, Ijarah 168)
13. (Bukhari, Maghazi 18)
14. (Kanzu'l-Ummal, 4:292)
15. (Sahih Muslim, Al-Ijarah, Chapter on the Virtues of Shooting, Vol. 7, Hadith No. 1919)
16. (Abu Dawud, Jihad 67)
17. (Sunan Tirmidhi, Musnad Ahmad, Sunan Ibn Majah)
18. (Abu Dawud, Jihad 67)
19. (Sahih Bukhari)
20. (Sahih Bukhari, Page 406, volume 1)



## Spirituality in Play

Muhammed Shaahid Cassim \*

### Abstract

This article presents compassion as a definitive universal value for the expression of human spirituality in play. Using an Islamic indigenous approach, in the form of a *Tawhīdic* ontology, it presents compassion as a definitive universal value for the expression of spirituality within Islam, and neighbouring religious communities. Arguing against a secular and religious dichotomy, this article explains what is meant by spirituality in play using acts of compassion within the context of soccer to show how spirituality manifests, in ordinary and extraordinary circumstances.

**Keywords:** Compassion, Islamic Indigenous Methodology, Islamic Values, Soccer, Spirituality, *Tawhīd*

### Introduction

Soccer<sup>1</sup> is the people's game. Unfettered by sophisticated and expensive equipment requirements, soccer is as much a favourite of happy, barefoot children on a barren, dusty field, as it is of proud professionals on a championship pitch. Accessible to all, the heroes on a championship pitch are often the products of humble beginnings on a dusty field. Either way, soccer's global audience and dedicated following often bear witness to players of different faiths praying, prostrating and reaching out to a Higher Power in thanks, or for support, each in

---

(\*) A PhD candidate in Islamic Governance at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Universiti Brunei Darussalam

their own way. Both on and off the field, iconic images of players connecting with their own faith in moments of tribulation or jubilation reflect an undeniable ‘spirituality in play’. Such images of religiosity, in the form of overt signs and acts of religious worship, cannot account for all reflections of spirituality in play. Similarly, spirituality is not limited to sacred spaces and times, prayer mats and alters. This is especially true, when the nature of spirituality is positioned as a process whereby the innate moral values naturally accompanying the Divine truth of the soul are reflected from the inner realm of the hearts of human beings into their character in everyday life.

This article, approached from an Islamic indigenous research methodology perspective, aims to present compassion as a definitive *universal* value for the human expression of spirituality in play. Although the concepts and ideas presented within the article can be applied to many different contextual spaces, this article is limited to the game of soccer and its field of play, both from the perspective of the individual player, the team, and the organization of the game as an international sport. The article explores the notion of spirituality in play across four sections. Firstly, an explanation of the Islamic indigenous approach in the form of a *Tawhīdic*

ontology. Secondly, how this *Tawhīdic* ontology derives compassion as a definitive universal value for the expression of spirituality within Islam, while showing the acceptance of compassion employed as a definitive universal value in other religious communities. Thirdly, the article explains what is meant by spirituality in play and finally, expressions of compassion within the people’s game are explored to show how spirituality manifests, in ordinary and extraordinary circumstances.

### **A *Tawhīdic* Ontology<sup>2</sup>**

This article uses an Islamic Indigenous methodology approach. As such, it is essentially based on an Islamic conceptualisation of spirituality derived from a *Tawhīdic* ontology – a holistic understanding of human reality wherein spirituality is experienced through a relationship with the Creator, and creation. As such, a *Tawhīdic* ontology defines reality in terms of *Tawhīd*<sup>3</sup>, meaningfully encapsulated by the verse central to Islamic belief, {So, know that there is no deity other than Allah}<sup>4</sup>. A *Tawhīdic* ontology maintains the reality that Allah is *Al-Aḥad* (The Singular)<sup>5</sup>; *Al-‘Alīm* (The All-Knowing)<sup>6</sup>; *Mālik al-Mulk* (The Owner of Sovereignty)<sup>7</sup>; *Al-Hayy* (The Ever-living)<sup>8</sup>; *Al-Khāliq* (The Creator)<sup>9</sup> of all time, space, matter, dimension and consciousness.



Ontologically therefore, *Tawhīd* emphasises a reality defined by the existence of The Creator, and experienced by creation in all manner and form.

In doing so, *Tawhīdic* ontology signifies a relational ontology wherein meaning is continuously derived from relationships involving the constant Divine Reality of the Creator, and the changing temporal nature of creation. Reality is therefore understood in terms of both constant Divine absolute truth and the fluid complexity of creation. This understanding challenges notions of

a purely fugacious material reality devoid of Divine cause, purpose and design. Instead it emphasises spiritual purpose within the inherent relational nature of reality itself.

Further, by acknowledging that human beings are limited in what is known and what can be known within the greater design of reality, a relational *Tawhīdic* ontology challenges claims that reality begins and ends with what human senses can perceive or human intellect is willing to acknowledge. Spirituality, and enlightenment, for that matter is not limited to a purely individualist endeavour. Rather, it is significantly



realised in relationship with the other. Ultimately, in terms of *Tawhīd*, the reality of truth and the truth about reality includes the Creator and creation. It is from this relational perspective that compassion is presented as a universal definitive value for the expression of human spirituality.

Insight into the pervasive multi-dimensional sphere of spirituality in Islam is therefore defined in terms of a *Tawhīdic* ontology involving the reality of a relationship with the Creator, and the reality of a relationship with creation. Significantly, a relationship serving the Creator is often realised through the relationship with the creation. Thus, the compassion of the Messenger ﷺ, is exemplified through his relationship with creation in the societal space – his Prophetic Sunnah. Spirituality, according to *Tawhīdic* ontological perspective, is thus a part of natural lived experiences realised and experienced through personal relationships in everyday life. This conceptualisation of spirituality therefore involves more than ritual prayers and litanies, and pervades all aspects of life in every socio-cultural ecosystem. Although spirituality is in itself an intangible concept, expressions of spirituality in action can be explored through more tangible values, and compassion is presented as a universal definitive

value for the expression of spirituality.

### **Compassion is Spirituality**

Definitions of compassion reflect multiple elements including: kindness, love, concern, consideration, tolerance, sensitivity, empathy, care, benevolence and humanity. In this regard, elements that underpin how compassion is understood in terms of a relationship with the other are: “1) Recognizing suffering; 2) Understanding the universality of suffering in human experience; 3) Feeling empathy for the person suffering and connecting with the distress (emotional resonance); 4) Tolerating uncomfortable feelings aroused in response to the suffering person (e.g. distress, anger, fear) so remaining open to and accepting of the person suffering; and 5) Motivation to act/acting to alleviate suffering”.<sup>10</sup> In this frame, compassion is a process which is consciously felt internally, as a matter of the heart, in relation to the plight of another, and typically results in some form of action – hence an ‘act of compassion’ is a term increasingly finding its way into contemporary parlance.

Within a *Tawhīdic* Ontology, the Qur’ānic term *rahmah*, or compassion, is the active expression of spirituality. It should be noted that while *rahmah* is most often translated as *beneficent*, this article opts instead

for the use of *compassion* as it encompasses the human process by which the ends of mercy are achieved. Every chapter, except for one concerning seeking forgiveness, out of the 114 chapters of the Qur'ān starts with the verse, {In the name of Allah, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful}. Compassion is the core of Prophet Muhammad's ﷺ mission. His compassionate mission is proclaimed in no uncertain terms in a Qur'ānic verse, wherein he is informed by Allah, {And We did not send you except as compassion to all the worlds}<sup>11</sup>. In invoking compassion as spirituality built on the relational elements inherent within Tawhīdic ontology, the Ḥadīth Qudsi below most eloquently shows how compassionate service to others is in fact service to Allah, Most High:<sup>12</sup>

Allah will say on the Day of Resurrection: O son of Adam, I fell ill and you visited Me not. He will say: O Lord, and how should I visit You when You are the Lord of the worlds? He will say: Did you not know that My servant so-and-so had fallen ill and you visited him not? Did you not know that had you visited him you would have found Me with him? O son of Adam, I asked you for food and you fed Me not. He will say: O Lord, and how should I feed

You when You are the Lord of the worlds? He will say: Did you not know that My servant So-and-so asked you for food and you fed him not? Did you not know that had you fed him you would surely have found that (the reward for doing so) with Me? O son of Adam, I asked you to give Me to drink and you gave Me not to drink. He will say: O Lord, how should I give You to drink when You are the Lord of the worlds? He will say: My servant So-and-so asked you to give him to drink and you gave him not to drink. Had you given him to drink you would have surely found that with Me.

Importantly, this Hadith Qudsi defines the universal nature of compassion, and merciful action that accompanies it, as an expression of spirituality in direct relation to the Divine. In the above universal address by the Creator, Allah, to the “son of Adam”, referring to all the children of Adam, the Hadith Qudsi speaks to the nature of every human being, and humanity at large.

The Prophet ﷺ himself being an exemplar for the manifestation of spirituality, it is important to note that while the Prophet ﷺ did not play soccer, examples of his engaging in play can

be found in his Prophetic Sunnah. According to a narration, from Aishah the wife of the Messenger ﷺ, they raced against each other on foot while they were travelling together on a journey. First she won the race, but years later he ﷺ won a race, and playfully teased her about his victory as recompense for her previous victory.<sup>13</sup> Compassion, and levity – even in competitive play – is therefore inherently part of the Prophetic Sunnah, thereby amplifying an Islamic perspective developed from *Tawhīdic* ontology that compassion is an expression of spirituality in action.

Similarly, the idea of compassion<sup>14</sup> as an expression of spirituality in play is not unusual within the different religious communities living together on *terra firma*. Notably in 2016, the Vatican held a conference on “Sport at the Service of Humanity”, identifying six virtues that can be taught through sports: joy, compassion, respect, love, balance and enlightenment.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, believing that, “sport possesses an inescapable spiritual and ethical dimension that merits academic exploration and practical application”, Neumann University, rooted in the Catholic, Franciscan tradition also established the *Centre for Sport, Spirituality and Character Development*.<sup>16</sup> According to Thomas Keating, a priest of the Order of

Cistercians of the Strict Observance (commonly known as Trappists), “Service to others is the ongoing movement of the heart prompted by compassion. It neutralises the deep-rooted tendency to become preoccupied with our own spiritual journey and how we are doing. The habit of service to others is developed by trying to please God in what we do and by exercising compassion for others, beginning with those with whom we live.”<sup>17</sup>

In practice, compassion toward the other negates the natural human propensity for selfishness – those moments when the ego takes flight to centre stage and begins to address itself as the rationale of its own imagined universe. An event akin to that moment on the pitch when a player, pursuing personal glory at the expense of the team, consistently refuses to pass the ball to team members in better positions. The teamwork that allows ‘dream teams’ to seamlessly work in sync requires a dulling of any sense of ‘self’ and a heightening of outward compassion. Hence, the mutually compassionate acknowledgement of the teamwork and assistance involved, when goals are celebrated with teammates.

### **Spirituality in Play**

In the people’s game, encouraging soccer players toward honourable



and respectable behaviour is a part of any good coach's repertoire of skills. Compassion is a crucial foundation for such behaviour, not only toward fellow team members but also toward the opposing team. In competitive sport, compassion could be perceived in a negative manner, as a weakness. This is far from the truth. Compassion calls for motivated hearts and cool minds, both elements of highly productive, focussed winning players who can tolerate and remain unaffected by the taunts of opponents, or the jeers of an overly zealous crowd. Such players reflect significant composure and dedication since concern and consideration for the success of the team as a whole is a

natural consequence of their character. Hence, the compassionate player extends a helping hand in support to a fallen or injured team member or opponent. Similarly, the compassionate player reaches out to shake hands in congratulation or sympathy with their opponents regardless of victory or loss. Giving importance to the other in this manner creates a sharing of compassion. Significantly, compassion is a relational act of spirituality in play. Compassion is not a solitary spiritual experience. As a relational act, compassion affects the heart and emotions of both the giver and receiver – a sharing of spirituality in play. Even the spectator who



unwittingly bears witness to compassion as a relational act of spirituality in play between players is open to being affected by it. In this manner, one act of compassion becomes a spiritually significant event for the many engaging in some way or other with the game being played.

In the game of soccer, compassion as a definitive universal expression of spirituality in play is most vividly demonstrated in the notion of ‘Fair Play’. FIFA declares fair play as “football in its purest form”<sup>18</sup>; engaging the game with respect, whether to fellow players, fans, coaches or support staff, being one of

three criteria for fair play. Cases of fair-play awards in recent years demonstrates how compassion is readily expressed on, and off, the field. Consider the 2015 award, granted to football organisations who supported the refugees during the crisis brought on by the Syrian war. The award was in recognition of numerous football organisations welcoming the refugees, providing them with their basic needs including shelter, and helping them rebuild their lives. The award was accepted by the Ghanian-born son of a refugee, Gerald Asamoah, who stated:<sup>19</sup>

“Ultimately it’s about standing up for something that should be completely normal –

opening our hearts to vulnerable people. I know first-hand what it's like to arrive in a foreign country and be accepted, and that's why committing to a cause like this makes perfect sense for me. Of course, it's an honour for me to accept this award on behalf of all the people who fight for these values”

Consider too the 2019 award, given to a Colombian club team, Atletico Nacional.<sup>20</sup> The club was meant to face off against Brazilian club in the *Copa Sudamericana* final, when tragedy struck and Chapecoense lost most of their players and staff in a plane crash. It was reported that Atletico “held a vigil inside their Estadio Atanasio Girardot at the time the first leg was due to be played, chanting the name of their intended opponents”<sup>21</sup> and later Atletico asked CONMEBOL (the South American Football Confederation) to award the trophy to Chapecoense in the wake of the tragic loss. In so doing, sacrificing and giving Chapecoense automatic entry into the next year's tournament. Similarly, beyond FIFA's fair play awards, wonderful examples of expressing compassion, grace and gratitude came from Japanese players and fans during the 2018 World Cup, held in Russia.<sup>22</sup> The Japanese team made headlines when, after being defeated by Belgium and exiting the

World Cup, they bowed to their fans in gratitude, and then went to extraordinary lengths to clean up their team locker room, and left notes of thanks, in Russian, to the cleaning teams who had seen to them over the duration of their stay in the Cup. Japanese fans similarly made headlines, when earlier in the tournament, they stayed behind after a Japanese victory, to clean up the stadium. These acts of compassion, in the guise of gratitude through, and for service, are definitive expressions of spirituality in play. Such moments cannot be scripted, they issue from the very depths of the innate and universal human desire to recognise others, their condition, and a desire to either reciprocate or acknowledge this, through kind actions.

## Conclusion

While some may simply write off play as secular and mundane, and others search for its “theological truth”<sup>23</sup>, *Tawhīdic* ontology finds and encourages acts of compassion as definitive universal expressions of spirituality – even in play. With every compassionate act, the hearts of human beings score winning goals, not only for themselves, but for their team and the betterment of humanity. In this manner, spirituality is not bound to the walls of any one sacred space, rather meaningful human endeavour allows every space to

become sacred when action manifests definitive universal values such as compassion. Within the *Tawhīdic* understanding of the human being as the recipient of a spiritual core in the form of a soul, and thereby innately prone toward spiritual truth and goodness throughout the journey of life, there is no real separation between “the sacred and the profane”,<sup>24</sup> or between ‘secular life and religious life’ – there is only a singular lived reality, and spirituality is an innate, natural, part of it. Thus, beyond the songs of victory and the tears of loss, beyond pride and bruised egos, beyond statistics and salaries, in the heart of every compassionate player, spirituality is in play.

### Bibliography

- Al-Alwani, Taha Jabir. *The Islamization of Knowledge: Yesterday and Today*, Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1995.
- Armstrong, Karen. *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*. London: Bodley Head, 2011.
- Baker, William J. *Playing with God: Religion and Modern Sport*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Chilisa, Bagele. *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011.
- Durkheim, Emile. *The Elementary forms of Religious Life*. New York: Free Press, 1965.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (trans. Willard R. Trask). Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1961.
- Ellis, Robert. *The Games People Play: Theology, Religion, and Sport*. Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2014.
- Al-Faruqi, Ismail Raji. *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Workplan*. Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982.
- Keating, Thomas. *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*. New York: Amity House, 1986.
- Scholes, Jeffrey and Sassower, Raphael. *Religion and Sports in American Culture*. Routledge, 2013.
- Simon, Robert L. *Fair Play: The Ethics of Sport* (3rd Edition). Colorado: Westview Press, 2010.
- Strauss, Clara et al., “What Is Compassion and How Can We Measure It? A Review of Definitions and Measures,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 47 (2016): pp. 15-27, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2016.05.004>.
- Watson, Nick J. and Nesti, Mark “The role of spirituality in sport psychology consulting: an analysis and integrative review of literature.” *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 17 (2005): pp. 228-239. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10413200591010102%20>

## (Endnotes)

1. Although the term football is commonly used, preference has been given to the term soccer. For a comparative history on the terms, see: Stefan Szymanski, “Its Football, not Soccer”, University of Michigan, May 2014. <http://ns.umich.edu/Releases/2014/June14/Its-football-not-soccer.pdf>
2. The conceptualisation of a Tawḥīdic Ontology was developed using an Indigenous research methodology approach for the author’s PhD dissertation on Islamic Governance. The term Tawḥīdic was not previously used within the context of Indigenous research methodology. See forthcoming article by the author. See also: Bagele Chilisa. *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011).
3. The use of Tawḥīd to define Islamic research methodology has been supported and encouraged by researchers in their attempts to “Islamise” the social sciences. See, Ismail Raji al-Faruqī, *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Workplan*, (Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982). Also, Taha Jabir al-Alwani, *The Islamization of Knowledge: Yesterday and Today*, (Herndon, Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1995).
4. Qur’ān. Sūrat Muḥammad: 19.
5. Qur’ān. Sūrat al-Ikhlās: 1.
6. Qur’ān. Sūrat al-Baqarah: 32.
7. Qur’ān. Sūrat Āl-’Imrān: 26.
8. Qur’ān. Sūrat al-Baqarah: 255.
9. Qur’ān. Sūrat al-Ḥashr: 24.
10. Clara Strauss et al., “What Is Compassion and How Can We Measure It? A Review of Definitions and Measures,” *Clinical Psychology Review* 47 (2016): pp. 15-27, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2016.05.004>, 19.
11. Qur’ān. Surah al-Anbiyā:107.
12. <https://sunnah.com/qudsi40:18>, accessed 19 Mar 2022.
13. <https://sunnah.com/mishkat:3251>, accessed 19 Mar 2022.
14. For more on the use of compassion as a value for world peace, see: <https://charterforcompassion.org>



15. See: [www.sportforhumanity.com](http://www.sportforhumanity.com)
16. [www.neumann.edu/mission/csscd](http://www.neumann.edu/mission/csscd)
17. Thomas Keating. *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*. New York: Amity House, 1986.
18. <https://www.fifa.com/the-best-fifa-football-awards/fair-play-award>, accessed 19 Mar 2022.
19. <https://www.fifa.com/news/asamoah-football-has-the-power-to-bring-people-together-2756166>, accessed 19 Mar 2022.
20. <https://www.goal.com/en/news/745/fifa/2017/01/09/31324512/atletico-nacional-win-fifa-fair-play-award-for-chapecoense>, accessed 19 Mar 2022.
21. <https://www.goal.com/en/news/745/fifa/2017/01/09/31324512/atletico-nacional-win-fifa-fair-play-award-for-chapecoense>, accessed 19 Mar 2022.
22. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/03/football/japan-belgium-russia-thank-you-locker-room-trnd/index.html>, accessed Mar 19, 2022.
23. See: Robert Ellis. *The Games People Play: Theology, Religion, and Sport*. Wipf & Stock, 2014.
24. For use of the terms sacred and profane as commonly reflected as binary opposites within religious studies discourses, see: Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary forms of Religious Life*, (New York: Free Press, 1965): 234-250. See also: Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* [trans. Willard R. Trask], (Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1961).

# Islam, Malay, Women and Sports from the Brunei Darussalam Perspective



**Majdey Zawawi \*1**



**Rozaitul Matzani 2**

## **Abstract**

Perspectives on sports are often multi-dimensional and multi-faceted encompassing multiple fields studying a single phenomenon. This article discusses the overlapping dimensions of women participation in sports and religion, within a particular cultural context. The study is conducted through an interview with a representation of religious authority in Brunei regarding Sports in Islam, as well as the issue surrounding women participation of sports. Through this interview, the study will interpret how sports, religion, culture, and gender all intertwine dynamically, while expounding upon the several negotiation and articulation processes to understand the Islamic viewpoint on sports, and the participation of women, particularly Muslims, in sports.

---

(\*1) A Lecturer in Islamic Studies at SOASCIS, Universiti Brunei Darussalam.

(2) A PhD Candidate at SOASCIS, Universiti Brunei Darussalam.

**Keywords:** Islam, Muslim, Women, Sports, Culture, Brunei

## Introduction

Islam encourages its adherents to maintain their physical and spiritual by utilising different forms of exertion and maintenance. ‘playing’ sports involve physical and non-physical activities to achieve specific goals or objectives.<sup>1</sup> Physical sports such as swimming, football or wrestling typically involve enormous exertions of physical energy. In contrast, some sports, such as chess or draughts, concern using the cognitive mind to achieve the desired objectives. Regardless of how sports are played, the overarching principles in participating in sports can often be attributed to different facets of life, fulfilling both humankind’s physical and spiritual needs. This intersection produces the question of how sports, as a social phenomenon, is congruent to the similar principles of well-being maintenance Islam promotes. Sports as a concept, through a multi-dimensional perspective covering different research areas, have resulted in numerous studies that cross into several areas within social sciences such as gender studies<sup>2</sup>, sociology<sup>3</sup>, political science<sup>4</sup>, and even international relations.<sup>5</sup> Humanities and Cultural studies have also looked into how sport as a phenomenon is founded upon a

particular philosophical idea and the impact of sports in politics and, especially, culture.<sup>6</sup> Several studies have also delved into the religious aspect of sports from different faith perspectives. In Islamic Studies, numerous academic works have been produced to understand the intersection between Islam, sports, culture and identity.

The subject of sports, Islam and the cultural context have been investigated from the context of Muslim minorities living in the west.<sup>7</sup> The interaction between sports, Islam and policymaking in Malaysia has also been extensively studied.<sup>8</sup> The added element of gender participation, whether equal or unequal gender representation in sports, has been narrowed down to either culture or sometimes religion within a particular socio-political context. Another set of studies has tried to uncover the concept of sport derived from the Quran and Sunnah perspectives.<sup>9</sup> Previous studies concerning the position of Islam when it comes to the issue of participating in sports not only becomes a religious issue but could also involve social and cultural components. The issue consistent within these discussions on the intertwined concepts is understanding the concept of sports in Islam. More importantly, how do religious scholars, especially those who operate within the confines of the

state, dissect the constant negotiations between religion and culture when it comes to sport and the extent to which women can participate in sports? The article will gain insight from the Brunei Darussalam state socio-political lens to expand on existing studies, generating more robust data, shedding more light on the discussion about the socio-political aspect of sports, especially when the supporting the demand to investigate whether Islam allows its adherent to participate in sports, all the while remaining within the confines of how much culture is involved in finally determining the relationship between Islam, sports, and culture.

Located on the northern coast of Borneo, Brunei Darussalam is considered among the youngest nations within the southeast Asian region. It came out under British rule in 1984, declaring itself as an independent nation upholding the *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Islamic Monarchy), more commonly referred to as MIB, as its nation's principle. Islam is constitutionally declared as the state's official religion, with the Monarch proclaimed as the head of the Islamic faith in Brunei, adhering to the teachings of the *Ahl Sunnah Wal Jamaah* prescribing to the Shafi'i School of Law or *madhhab*. The institutionalisation of Islam in Brunei, through the constitution,

allows for the appointment of a religious council tasked with advising on religious matters, as well as the appointment of the state mufti as the head of the Brunei Religious Council (*Majlis Ugama Islam Brunei*). The current State Mufti Yang Berhormat Pehin Datu Seri Maharaja Dato Paduka Seri Setia Dr Ustaz Haji Awang Abdul Aziz bin Juned was appointed as Brunei Darussalam's State Mufti in 1994.<sup>10</sup> Under the Bruneian Constitution, fatwas or Islamic legal rulings on Islamic law or doctrine can only be issued by the Council, Chaired by the State Mufti. Therefore, the interview conducted by the author is to highlight the religious viewpoint coloured by the Malay culture integrated through the MIB national philosophy. The interview was conducted by the author in relation to an ongoing study that is built upon the issue of women women's participation in sports from a multi-dimensional perspective including religion, culture and socio-politics. The interview with the State Mufti was scheduled, with seven (7) questions submitted beforehand, conducted in a formal and structured setting. The interview was conducted in Malay, the official Language of Brunei and translated and analysed by the authors to discern patterns of religious and cultural elements within the responses. The article's structure will present the questions in their

original sequence, while the answers will incorporate a condensed textual analysis to extract recurring religious and cultural themes. The conclusion of this article will summarise the findings and suggest further studies.

### **Interview with the State Mufti of Brunei Darussalam**

**Question 1:** What is, in your view, the importance of sports in Islam?

**Answer:** Islam takes great concern in ensuring the maintenance of physical well-being, especially considering good health is what everyone wants. By having an optimum, healthy and strong body, people can fight diseases and can carry on various worldly affairs, especially in performing their worship in a well and proper manner. Islam demands this principle as the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ has said:

الْمُؤْمِنُ الْقَوِيُّ خَيْرٌ وَأَحَبُّ إِلَى اللَّهِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِ الضَّعِيفِ،  
وَفِي كُلِّ خَيْرٍ

*A firm believer is better and favoured by Allah than a weak believer, even though both are good.*<sup>11</sup>

Islam does not see gender as a prohibiting factor from engaging in sports as long as the sports activities are not against Islamic principles (*shara'*). Sports have both physical and mental benefits since the Prophet ﷺ himself was the best *qudwah* (example) in this matter of leisure or

sport. The Prophetic *sīrah* has told stories of the Prophet ﷺ organising self-defence training such as martial arts, running, swimming, archery, horseback riding, wielding and so forth. Looking into the benefits of these types of Sports not only helps to preserve and improve health but also improves physical fitness, enhances skills and strengthens a person's defensive capabilities. Even the law recommended (*mandūb*) or *fard kifāyah* if these activities are conducted for preparation against the enemy or defence. However, even though sports are a must, whether they are meant to maintain health or for leisure, Islamic law has also prescribed sports as forbidden (*ḥarām*) if it is conducted in a particular manner or situation that goes against Islamic law, teachings, procedures, rules and Islamic values. Thus, Islam as a religion of Allah ﷻ does not allow anything, including sports done without proper guidelines.

In order to facilitate the correlation between Islamic teachings and the conduct of sports, the State Mufti has shared the contents of the guidelines as follows:

- Remain vigilant towards obligatory worship such as prayers or Islamic principles (*shara'*).
- Wear garments or clothing materials that cover the

person's 'awrah, do not look conspicuous and do not invite slander (*fitnah*). Keep in mind that light, thin or tight clothing might show skin or body colour must be avoided even though it covers the 'awrah.

- Avoid mixing between unmarried men and women because it was prohibited by *shara'*. Therefore, sports activities have to be segregated.
- Avoid behaviour and interaction that may give rise to slander (*fitnah*) for resembling the opposite gender or challenging the Islamic moral values (*akhlāk*) and '*aqidah*.

For example, the Sharī'ah prohibits women from resembling or imitating any fashion or acting as men's behaviour, style and actions (and vice versa). It is forbidden (*ḥarām*) and can cause a great sin as well as *la'nat* (damnation) by Allah ﷻ.

Based on the State Mufti's response, the understanding and the importance of sport is taken entirely based on the religious perspective, where both the prescription and guideline provided by the mufti are compiled from the Islamic Principles of *Fiqh*, *Akhlaq* and *Aqidah*, to name a few. This first question intended to draw

out a purely religious perspective as a basis for comparison to subsequent questions during the interview.

**Question 2:** Do you agree with the notion that Bruneian culture and Islam play essential roles in dictating sports participation among women in Brunei?

**Answer:** Islam and the Bruneian Malay culture play an essential role in shaping the extent of women's involvement in sports. Islam and Malay in the context of Brunei Darussalam are intertwined, firmly established based upon the concept of Malay Islamic Monarchy. All these elements strongly reinforce Brunei's resilient and salient identity. The Malay ethnic culture and heritage are part of the nature of the Malay lifestyle, particularly how the culture perceives the status of women within their respective cultures. Malay women are considered shy, gentle and polite, symbolising the personification of Malay ethnic identity.

Furthermore, religion also imparts the same characteristics to pious women. For example, humility is a character that impedes people, especially women, from behaving in a way that is uncondusive to the Sharī'ah. Allah ﷻ makes a woman very humble, always beautiful and honourable in the eyes of society. In other words,

humility is a crown for women.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

الْحَيَاءُ لَا يَأْتِي إِلَّا بِخَيْرٍ

*Humility does not come (to anyone who has it) but to the good of everything (to anyone who has) but to the good of everything.*<sup>12</sup>

By being humble or reserved, a woman fulfils the demands of the Islamic principles by preserving her purity while preserving her honour and dignity from disgrace or 'aib. Particularly in sports, when something can cause a 'violation of morality and disgrace a woman, either in terms of dress or behaviour, it must be avoided. This means that women's sports involvement follows Malay culture and Islam perspectives.

**Question 3:** Are there any contradictions in sports participation among women with Islamic teaching and Brunei Culture?

**Answer:** Islam is the religion which Allah ﷻ revealed to His Prophet Muhammad ﷺ. Islam is the only religion that Allah ﷻ values based on the concept of *tauhid*, in which there is guidance for all human acts as a guide in leading life and resisting any challenges that may come. The Malays are considered a group of people who have their value system. The Malay culture, therefore, has

inherited noble values, customs, and manners from their predecessors, including adherence to their religion; to Allah ﷻ and Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and loyalty to the King and country. His Majesty Sultan of Brunei Darussalam clearly states in one of his speeches explaining the value, nature, tradition and cultural heritage in the context of Brunei Darussalam:

*“As Malays, our sense of duty comprises our behaviour and character full of courtesy, respect, love for children, compassion for the poor and the elderly. The essence of a Brunei Malay reflects in their clothing, social etiquette, thinking patterns and actions. Let us not put others before us, get along, and think and act carefully. Malays and Muslims are required to be civilised manners and morals following our Malay culture and Islam.”*

It can be understood that Malay culture and customs align with Islamic teachings, and in a conflict between the two, that culture should be put aside. This can also be seen in the expressions describing the customary bond with Islamic law: 'customs under the law; based upon the Qur'an. Manners, heritage and the Bruneian Malay culture

have distinctive patterns or shapes. So, whether in actions, speech, association, thought, or otherwise, the values of the Malay culture and Islam is duly brought, instilled, maintained and practised continuously.

Currently, conduct and sport etiquette still does not fully conform to Islamic teachings or even fully reflect the Brunei Malay culture. For example;

- i. Regarding socialisation, it is still important to understand the mahram between men and women and avoid interaction unless necessary.
- ii. In terms of preserving dignity, it is essential to understand how it fulfils the requirements of the Sharī'ah.
- iii. From the point of view of conduct as a Muslim woman during a conversation, morals and manners still need to be improved to conform to religious expectations.

In the current meaning of sports, there is still room for improvement in research and study, as the adherence to the Sharī'ah is not yet at the optimum level.

**Question 4:** Is there any talk done to the public addressing the matter of sports participation among men and women in Brunei Darussalam?

**Answer:** So far, the discussions have only been held internally at the State Mufti Office to issue a *fatwā* or guideline to answer public inquiries or at the request of specific government departments, bodies and institutions. These are some of the more common issues, touching on how men and women engage in leisure activities and sometimes in particular sports.

**Question 5:** About the fatwa during the Jummuah sermon (below), are there other additional fatwa or discussions on this subject?

*"...All sports activities shall not involve or allow men and women to mingle freely. Nowadays, participation in sports is not only common among men but also women, particularly in football. What is seen nowadays is that more and more women are involved in playing football. This is not a new issue; it has been mentioned before in a fatwa over 30 years ago, the Mufti of Brunei issue number 22, in 1976, page 64. Football is a game commonly played by men, as well as tug of*





*war, in the words of Al-Imam Ibn Hajar: women resemble men for certain things in terms of urf or Ghalib (normality), such as clothing, the way we engage in conversations, male-like gestures and body language is a great sin. According to the interpretation of Al-Imam Ibn Hajar, it also involves playing football, tug of*

*war or race-walking as they are considered games played by men". (Bersukan, 2006)*

**Question 6:** What is the rationale behind prohibiting tug of war and football sports among women in Brunei Darussalam?

**Answer:** When it comes to guidelines for sports Sharī'ah as mentioned earlier, there are sports that women

need to steer from to avoid imitating the opposite gender. Tug-of-War and football are usually sports played by men only because the form of the game is appropriate and matches the physicality of the men with the agility, intensity, strength and skill of the game. In addition, it also requires much energy and sometimes hard work to outdo the opponent. All these situations indicate that sports like Tug-of-War and football games are not suitable for women as they generally do not fit the characters usually identified with women. When women play sports such as Tug-of-War and football, then, of course, their behaviour resembles the style of men and, at the same time, eliminates their feminine characteristics. Undoubtedly, such acts are contrary to the Sharī'ah. Therefore, this sport must be avoided as the hadith narrated by Ibn A'bbās Raḍiyallāhu a'nhumā, the Prophet ﷺ said:

لَعَنَ اللَّهُ الْمُتَشَبِّهَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ بِالرِّجَالِ، وَالْمُتَشَبِّهِينَ مِنَ الرِّجَالِ بِالنِّسَاءِ

*Allah ﷻ has cursed men who resemble women and men, and Allah has cursed men who resemble men and women.*<sup>13</sup>

**Question 7:** What things can be done to improve sports participation among men and women in line with Islamic teaching and Malay culture?

**Answer:** Martial arts such as karate, taekwondo, and wushu are intended to defend against perpetrators. Martial arts emphasise the development of both physical and mental. It is about self-defence, establishing self-discipline, strengthening physical resilience, sharpening mental states, enhancing perseverance and establishing community harmony. The involvement of women in martial arts should be with the sole intention or purpose of learning the art as a weapon to protect oneself from the intrusion or assault of evil men. However, all restrictions Islam imposes on sports should also be strictly adhered to, such as covering the body, mixing men and women and the like. These include:

- i. All are subject to the organiser of the sport/sporting event to fully consider the ratification of the rules in conducting any such sport.
- ii. Educate and familiarise the younger generation with acceptable sports practices from the primary level.
- iii. To provide shara' guidelines of sports for official use (utilised by athletes, coaches and others involved in this field) as well as for guidance on people engaged in leisure or sports activities.

To build a sports facilities or multipurpose complex that meets the requirements of the Shari'ah.

### **Analysis and Conclusion**

The interview structure was to draw out the interlacing between religion and culture within the area of sports and women's participation. The interview was conducted with the state mufti of Brunei Darussalam, as someone wielding religious authority in Brunei Darussalam while simultaneously immersed within the socio-political culture, as an official whose duty is to uphold the MIB philosophy. What can be discerned from the interview with the state mufti is that in the context of Brunei, the interlacing of religion and Malay culture is heavily implied. The State Mufti identifies that the cultural aspect within the particular context has to undergo a double-filtration process whereby Islam and the Malay cultural elements are inseparable from practical activities when perceived from the societal lens. For that reason, the State Mufti highlighted that Malay culture and customs are in acquiescence with the Shari'ah, insomuch in the event of a conflict between the two,

Islam will always supersede culture in the context of Brunei Darussalam.

What is evident from this study is that the dynamics between sports, culture and the perception of gender equality are highly dependent upon the context. The culture and societal norms dictate how gender participation, particularly in sports, is regarded within society. In order for the cultural element to remain significant, the Bruneian constitution allows the authority that Islam permeates gives the Malay culture or adat credence in the eyes of the state, and hence, society.<sup>14</sup> However, the limitation of this study does not include the individuals who participate in the sports themselves and their perception and understanding of how Islam and culture shape their perspective on women's participation in sports. What is evident is that our perspectives are only limited to our context, i.e. the place and time where we live. With the swift and accelerated advancement in science and technology that we are experiencing currently, questions persist as to how Islam and culture will respond to the constant emergence of new and innovative ways sports are conducted, either physically, mentally or even in the virtual space, remains to be seen.

## =Bibliography

1. Testa, A. and Amara, M., 2017. *Sport in Islam and in Muslim communities*. Routledge.
2. Houlihan, Barrie. 2003. *Sport & Society. A Student Introduction*. London: Sage.
3. Benn, Tansin, Gertrud Pfister, and Haifaa Jawad. 2011. *Muslim Women And Sport*. London: Routledge.
4. Mohammadi, Ali. 2012. *Islam Encountering Globalization*. Hoboken: Taylor and Francis.
5. Kweyu, Issah. 2011. *Islam And Sports Participation*. Lambert Academic Publishing.
6. Clarke, Gill, and Barbara Humberstone. 2016. *Researching Women And Sport*. London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited.
7. Issah, K. Wabuyabo, K. Wamukoya Edwin, and M. Bulinda Hannington. "Influence of Islam on gender participation in sports among Muslim students in Kenyan universities." *Journal of Physical Education and Sport Management* 6.9 (2015): 82-89.
8. Khan, Mohammad Younis, et al. "Female students opinion about women's participation in sports." *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 2.9 (2012): 275.
9. Kay, Tess. "Daughters of Islam: Family influences on Muslim young women's participation in sport." *International review for the Sociology of Sport* 41.3-4 (2006): 357-373.
10. Mastor, Khairul A., Putai Jin, and Martin Cooper. "Malay culture and personality: A Big Five perspective." *American Behavioral Scientist* 44.1 (2000): 95-111.
11. Ong, Aihwa. "State versus Islam: Malay families, women's bodies, and the body politic in Malaysia." *American Ethnologist* 17.2 (1990): 258-276.

## (Endnotes)

1. Rowe, D. Charles, Maguire, . Joseph Anthony, Thompson, . William N. and Guttman, Allen. "sports." Encyclopedia Britannica, September 16, 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/sports/sports>.
2. Arat, Yeşim. "Religion, Politics and Gender Equality in Turkey: implications of a democratic paradox?." *Third World Quarterly* 31.6 (2010): 869-884.
3. Silverstein, Paul A. "Sporting Faith: Islam, Soccer, and the French Nation-State." *Social Text* 18, no. 4 (2000): 25-53. [muse.jhu.edu/article/31887](http://muse.jhu.edu/article/31887).
4. Gift, Thomas, and Andrew Miner. "'DROPPING THE BALL': the understudied nexus of sports and politics." *World Affairs* 180.1 (2017): 127-161.
5. Boyacıoğlu, Fuat, and Ahmet Gürsel Oğuz. "The role of sports in international relations." *Acta Universitatis Danubius. Relationes Internationales* 9.1 (2016).
6. Carrington, Ben, and Ian McDonald. "Marxism, cultural studies and sport: Mapping the field." *Marxism, cultural studies and sport*. Routledge, 2008. 35-46.
7. Agergaard, Sine. "Religious culture as a barrier? A counter-narrative of Danish Muslim girls' participation in sports." *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 8.2 (2016): 213-224.
8. Aman, Mohd Salleh. "Sport policy and Islam in Malaysia." *Sport in Islam and in Muslim Communities*. Routledge, 2015. 207-220.
9. Marwat, Mohibullah Khan, et al. "Islamic perspectives with reference to health and participation in sports." *Asian Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* Vol 3.3 (2014).
10. <https://www.mufti.gov.bn/SitePages/Mufti%20Kerajaan.aspx>
11. Sahih Muslim 2664 Book 46, Hadith 52
12. Sahih al-Bukhari 6117 Book 78, Hadith 144
13. Jami` at-Tirmidhi Vol. 5, Book 41, Hadith 278
14. Zawawi, Majdey. "Manoeuvring Power Dynamics: The Brunei Constitution 1959." *The Journal of Islamic Governance* 3 (2017)

The influence of religious music in all religions:  
**Empowering spirituality and  
psychological well-being among people**



**Dr. Saleem Zoughbi \***

## **1. Introduction**

People generally are inclined to show, act and behave in ways where they can express their feelings and ideas. Individuals make a genuine effort to express their feelings in different forms, such as words (spoken or written), actions, sounds, visual artifacts and so on. The impact of these expressions can be sensed by other people through visual, audible, touch, smell and other sensory ways with intellectual understanding and questioning. These various forms of expressing or applying human creative skills usually appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power. Although art is traditionally appreciated primarily for its beauty or emotional power, it has been historically until today viewed also as an expression of philosophical or political expression or social commentary. Religious feelings and thoughts are certainly a major motivator to develop art, and not only to express them.

Music is a fundamental type of art that is widely recognized in different cultures and civilizations from ancient times till today. Since the dawn of time, music has been man's medium of communication with its divinity/divinities. In practicing religion, different tones, and sounds, with different rites, music has been the most natural way of such communication. Most religions, if not all of them irrespective of their origins, have considered music as fundamental form of practicing religion, using the elements of melody, harmony, rhythm,

---

(\*) A Senior advisor for Information and Communication Technology- Palestine

and timbre. Human voice in music used in religious practice is very basic, although it can be alone without any instrument (a Capella) or accompanied by instrumental music.

Music has strong relationships with religion. It is a standard part of many religious practices, not only prayers, but also carrying out traditional religious ceremonies. Emotions generated by religious thoughts and prayers are expressed majestically through sounds, be they human voice prayers, hymns, songs, or instrumental music. Most likely the music combines human and instrumental sounds. This has been since the dawn of man, culturally embedded in civilizations. Religions have relied on music in a fundamental way.

The purpose of this article is to present three main themes:

- ✓ The different types of religious music, as understood and defined by many religions.
- ✓ The role and impact of music in religious life
- ✓ The impact of religious music on the development of a healthy mind and heart that is enriched with what religion brings to the mind

and heart, in emotions as well as in religious and spiritual thoughts

## 2. Religion in Everyday Life

Our humanity on this planet has taken over millennia different shapes and identities. With the advancement of culture and science, such as philosophy, history, culture, sciences and other domains of knowledge, a very valuable identity for humanity is religion.

Since ancient times, all religions have appeared in the life of societies as a shining star leading them according to ethics, values, and teachings. Religious leaders, people and societies have nourished, practiced, and developed in religious life according to the teachings and spiritual messages advanced by these religions.

The idea of the world becoming a global village is not only true, but it implies a lot of change in the life of people in all aspects. Normally this is seen as a change in socio economic development mostly, and in many other areas, with the help of information technology and communications. In terms of religion, this globalization is enhancing the opportunities of religions meeting and sharing, and therefore, the need to develop a positive and strong attitude

through which understanding and interaction among all the world religions has increased manifold. Humanity is facing an ever-increasing threat of dangerous, tragic situations and other risks. The Covid-19 pandemic is perhaps a simple example. One could clearly see the rising crime rate, drug and human trafficking, natural disasters such as climate change and earthquakes etc. This is why ethics, morality and faith as presented by religions are major support to human sustainability not only in eth afterlife, but the current life. It is widely accepted that the primary and fundamental teaching of all world religions promotes love, compassion, tolerance, peace, mutual respect, understanding and cooperation.

There is an ongoing need always to have people of different faiths and religions to come together, join in social and cultural relations, joining hands for not only initiating but also maintaining a dialogue and interaction with each other in order to make this world a peaceful place for everyone regardless of his religion, creed, and ethnic identities. Art and particularly music is one of these important ways of doing so.

The route that religion has taken today is a much-institutionalized form. In sociological terms, religion is viewed as a system of sacred belief and practices both in the tangible

and intangible context. However, this institutionalization has enabled religious orders to act in dual role of ideology as well as institution. Today, religions are being faced by two conflicting attitudes of people: the first is the liberal and thriving religious practice and belief, and the second is a narrow-minded and extremist approach.

Religions are philosophically and ethically broad-minded, liberal, and tolerant. The advance of civilization has enabled societies to witness real advantages of religions today, such as the following:

- ✓ Cultural Identity

People of different religions have a clearly different cultural background, a cultural identity that is common. Although for religions as widely spread, such as Islam that joins Arabs and Pakistanis for example, their cultural background is different socially, but when it comes to the teaching of Islam and the traditional practice of Islamic life, there is a lot in common. The same is for Christianity that have believers from Western Europe and others from other parts of the world. They have different cultural background socially, but they share a



common cultural identity when it comes to Christian life. Each religions have different festivals, traditions and social practices that are part of the tangible and intangible heritage of the country. In this context, religions contribute to the protection of this heritage and also adds to the diversity in the country.

✓ Values and Ethics

Nobody can contest the importance of religions and religious education in creating an ethical agenda and a regulator for values in day-to-day life of the people. This is essential in developing the social and character traits of a person. The enhanced development of socialization among worshippers helps in building values like love, empathy, respect, and harmony. Traits that are well expressed and enhanced by creative arts, such as music.

✓ Spiritual Connect

All over the world, different people struggle to sustain their life through accomplishing attainment of economic and material needs. Through spiritual life, beliefs and faiths, people can

through religion establish connection to the divine. In this regard, the components of prayer, chants, hymns, sacred music, etc. create the spiritual bond.

### 3. Religious Music

Music in religions initially took a limited and narrow approach during the centuries. A major argument was to scope the ultimate goal and role that music would have within religious life. To whom the “bells” should toll? In other words, too whom the music should be celebrated and in religions life: To God almighty? To the religious leaders? To the people worshippers? Two religious leaders expressed their thoughts about these questions. Pope Pius X (Pope from 1903 to 1914) believed that sacred music has the important role of both as a means of lifting up the spirit to God and as a precious aid for the faithful in their “active participation in the most holy mysteries and in the public and solemn prayer of the Church”. Another important leader is the 5th Dalai Lama, who said: “Filling the sky, earth and the space in between, let passionate melodies, bone trumpets and cymbals resound! ... To give delight to the Protectors of Religion and their followers offer brilliant music, like the roar of a thousand thunders.”

Religious music, especially sacred music, must be true art and well composed, otherwise it will be impossible for it to affect the minds of those who listen to it in religious context. It is also important to note that with different religions and different philosophical and religious aspects in each religion, the music used for practicing, praying and celebrating religious events would employ different forms and types of sacred music, but the main purpose and principle is universal: the celebration of prayers and the holy divine

One could define religious music as of three types in relation to religion:

- ✓ Religious music: This is the broader type of such music and a generic one. All kinds of music that are connected to religion, such as text of chants or songs, or instrumental and sound instruments, behavior and celebrations of events related to religious occasions are called religious music. They assume different forms and styles.
- ✓ Sacred music: This is a kind of religious music that is created for the celebration of divine worship and prayers, according to religious rules and traditions that are

special for each religion. Normally it assumes defined forms of music structure and such from reflects the purpose of using this music for during religious prayers and practice. It is not an incidental addition.

- ✓ Spiritual music: This is a kind of religious music that although was developed for a certain religion and by a certain group, it became wider in context and had room to different religious expressions in music. Originally spiritual music appeared at the time of slave trade across the Atlantic, among black slaves, in praising God and praying. The music was composed of songs mostly that are affected by African cultural heritage with the experiences of being held in bondage in slavery. Such music included songs of religious themes in form of simple folk songs. The concept spread to different cultures. An interesting example is Missa Luba which is a setting of the Latin Mass sung in styles traditional to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

It is hard to tell whether, historically, sound was a major factor in understanding religious thoughts or religions had a fundamental role in the significance of sound in societies, and hence music, in the life of people. One could argue that these two statements are complementary to each other, and both have a large degree of truth. Yet, a major fact about sound and religion is that music, as a logical and more complex sound content, has been and still is a major and indispensable part of religious doctrines all over the world and in all times.

As Jeffers Engelhardt said:” The pervasive, profound relation between the sonic and the sacred is an essential aspect of musical practice, thought, and discourse and an enduring theme in music scholarship”. The use of sound is not necessary use of music. Music is a logical well-organized set of sounds based in forms and rules that may change in time, but they are not just managing sounds only.

As examples of religious sounds, in the Shinto religion, in Japan, there are many different celebrations that are held at different shrines throughout the year. In these celebrations traditional Japanese drums, called Taiko, are often sounded creating tremendous sounds. Such, and the roaring sounds of these drums have long been associated with religious ideas. There were times that these

drums were played only in religious occasions, and only by men who had been granted special permission by the priests.

One could speak of sonic theologies: use of chanting (or reciting with melodic sound) for religious worship such as the Rig Veda (Hindu hymn of sacred text), the Gitassara Sutta (The Oral Transmission of Early Buddhist Literature through chanting), the Psalms of David (in the Old Testament in Judaism), the Epistles of Paul (in the New Testament in Christianity), and the Surah 96 “al-’Alaq.” (Of the Holy Koran in Islam).

On the other hand, religious music has different forms through which religious celebrations worships can use. For example, Hindu chants are structured. Moslem call for prayers, Madih and Soufi music as well form a significant religious music contribution to workshop and prayers.

In Christian music, perhaps it is the most developed, exists in many different forms and took harmony and polyphony as an essential platform for Christian religious music, such as masses, cantatas, and so on.

#### **4. Effects of Religious Music on personality of worshippers**

A sensitive trait that is enhanced



by religious music is the emotional intelligence (EI). It is the ability to realize, be aware of, control, and express one's emotions. This directly affects the interpersonal relationships prudently and empathetically. These relationships are very much critical to individual interactions within a society. This becomes distinct particularly for religious communities, where members are involved in religious events, not only social ones, but such also as praying and practicing religious traditions.

Sacred and spiritual music helps individuals develop the following skills:

- ✓ Self-awareness. The person realized the emotional that are triggered in his soul and feelings through religious

music. It also helps strengthen self confidence

- ✓ Self-regulation. Listening, understanding, and performing religious music helps develop personal abilities to assuage negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, or depression. Some people call this spiritual healing as well. So, the person becomes able to sustain self-control. maintaining standards of honesty and integrity, taking responsibility for their actions and being open to new ideas.
- ✓ Motivation. Religious music provides a psychological strength that enable the person to keep motivated and hopeful. This motivation could be to follow higher standards of

thought, work, and goals. This motivation also includes the ability to sustain any obstacles and setbacks encountered.

- ✓ Empathy. Religious music enhances the ability to recognize how people feel and sympathize with others in times of distress and not only in times of happiness. Religious ethics urge the faithful to do sensitive, and religious music reaches the soul to strengthen this ethical characteristic.

Music conveys emotion, thoughts and inspiration surpassing race, religion, and culture, playing an integral role in the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of our lives. Although it is said that religious music is made first of all to God in form of prayers, then secondarily to each other. In religions, music carries a sense of adoration to the divine, and leads thoughts toward God rather than toward the people praying.

Different religions in the past used music in spiritual ceremonies in the form of human voice only, singing, chanting, traditional music instruments, drums, among others. This is true of course until our times, but enriched with modern instruments perhaps, new music styles and compositional structures, with the religious text and context.

One more interesting fact is that with modern medial and technology, which enabled sharing of music across different channels, religious music is widely shared for purposes other than worship only. For example, music and chants of praising god, celebrate religious events by listening to such music without actually being in prayers, helps personality development on the social and psychological level. On the other hand, religious music helps people of different religions to join hands in human brotherhood. For example, in 2020, in the 25<sup>th</sup> memorial of the Srebrenica massacre, the Kosovo Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Rafet Rudi, conducted Mozart's Requiem in D, which is well known Christian Sacred Music, for the memory of over 8000 innocent Muslims killed by extremist Christian military. In this context, religious music is almost a universal part of religions, although in different forms and tonalities. It fascinates human senses in a pleasurable way which, in turn, makes worship more gratifying.

## 5. Benefits of Spiritual Music

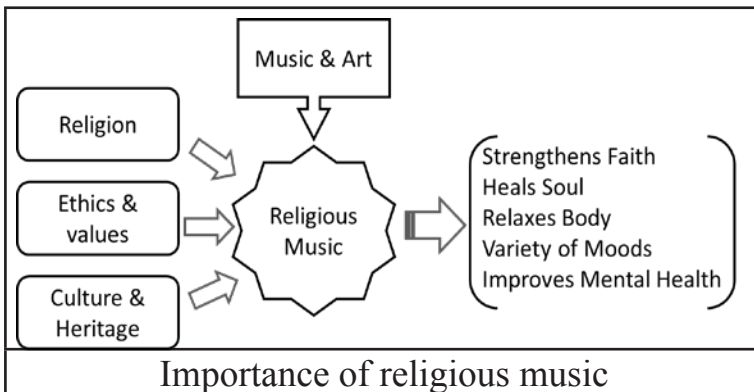
Religious music is not only to perform as part of a religious act, but also people can hear it and react

with. The individual interaction with religious music varies in many ways. Interaction is either listening, chanting, or performing (like playing instrument with or without body movement). The reaction is observed through the effect of religious music and the human reaction to it. One can argue that music in general provides relaxation of mind as well as relieving stress and anxiety, but with religious music this effect is stronger and penetrates deeper in the soul and heart, not only in mind. It is most effective and leaves a palpable impact can be identified as follows:

- a) It helps strengthen faith. Listening or performing religious music cultivates spirituality. Such music encourages hope, love, and commitment to religious beliefs. Such music or chants would pacify the heart and mind and become close to

God, in praise, prayer and adoration.

- b) It helps in healing the soul. Often people may feel depressed and their souls are heavy. Religious music invigorates the soul and pervades it with encouraging feelings.
- c) Provides relaxation to the human body. Religious music relaxes the body through relaxing muscles and letting biological response along mental and psychological relaxation, helping to release tension and to ease feeling stressed, drained, and exhausted.
- d) Religious music has different forms and genres.



This versatility of form and structure provides different listening modes and performance behaviors, which in turn can be shared with other family and friends and being touched by religious feelings that are expressed in sounds and music, not only alone, but with others.

- e) It Improves mental health. Actually, some studies show clearly that listening to religious music positively impacts a person's emotional and mental well-being, which generates more satisfaction and happiness in their lives.

An interesting scientific test was carried out in a study that Martin Lang and others have conducted in 2016. This study tested the effects of purely auditory religious symbols (instrumental music) on moral behavior across three different sites: Mauritius, the Czech Republic, and the USA. The participants in this study were exposed to one of three kinds of auditory stimuli (religious, secular, or mixed noise). After that they were given a chance to dishonestly report on solved mathematical test with an incentive to increase their monetary reward. Although results

showed cross-cultural differences in the effects of religious music on moral behavior, religious participants were more influenced by the auditory religious stimuli than non-religious participants.

## **6. Religions and Music**

### **6.1. Buddhist Religious Music**

The earliest records in history about music in Buddhism shows that chanting of religious scripts was the origin of Buddhist sacred music. It takes form of musical verse or incantation. In fact, this is similar to a worldwide historical practice of using narration in form of chant or melodic recitation. This practice is found in almost all other religions and faiths in the world. According to Buddhism, the mind and soul should be prepared in advance to meditate, as meditation is perhaps the most important part of Buddhist worship. It is not only because through meditation Lord Buddha was able to achieve enlightenment, but it helps achieve the right understanding (Samma ditthi), right thought (Samma sankappa), right speech (Samma vaca), right action (Samma kammanta) and right livelihood (Samma ajiva). To do such preparation, chanting of sacred text is necessary, hence the importance of Buddhist religious music (chanting).

However, music is still present in non-chanting form. In certain Buddhist traditions, playing traditional music performed by specialists, or of the ritual music that accompanies the chanting.

Music in Buddhist practice is at a base level a sound offering: a religious act. The religious tradition encourages worshippers to engage in religious music with proper motivation. Musical performance during worship is a method to clean the negative feelings and detach oneself from the realms of desire. Buddhist religious leaders stress the idea that the role of music in Buddhist practice is neither to express ancient reality nor to go beyond verbal manifestation. Ritual music in both forms vocal and instrumental, is meant as an offering to the divine and as a tool in Buddhist spiritual practice.

However, it is important to note that religious music in this religion is not worship or prayer, like for example in Christianity, it is an enabler of mind and soul. Buddhism considers music an offering to the gods, to oneself, and to all conscious beings. It should be used to lessen human sensual desires and transcend world pleasures. Some of these chants have become famous, such as the chant Om Mani Padme Hum is very well known around the world as both a praise of peace and the primary mantra. (... a word or

sound repeated to aid concentration in meditation). Other popular chants include those of Tara, Bhaisajyaguru, and Amitabha.

## 6.2. Islamic Religious Music

Islam is a religion that when appeared music was well known among the Arab tribes in Hijaz. Music was even more practiced in regions around such as the Middle East. As that was associated with dancing. Islam is said to ban a few music habits such as clapping publicly, singing in a sensual way, and dancing by girls.

Two major important facts that affected the spread do religious music in Islam. The first was that the Quran is recited and not chanted. There is no tune or music when you recite the Quran. The second was the wide spread of Islam in regions like the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia and the Far East, which caused the multi-ethnicity of the religion to encounter diverse musical expressions and forms. The indigenous musical styles since then that included Turkish, Andalusian, Persian, Central Asian, Indian and others, to shape devotional music since then till present day.

Apart from the call to prayers (Allahu Akbar call), all religious music in Islam is devotional and recitation in nature. For example, a Nasheed is



moral, religious recitations of text in various melodies by some Muslims of today with human voice only, with the exception of percussion such as drums or tambourine. Instruments developed later and used, such as an instrument similar to organ called the arghanūn, invented by the 10th-century philosopher Al-Fārābī. Amīr Khosrow, a 14th-century poet and mystic, produced a hybrid of Indian and Persian music and influenced the development of later Indian music itself. So Islamic religious music did not limit itself to vocal and simple chanting of religious text. The growth of more freedom in music development among Moslem scholars gave way to the appearance of dedicated religious music such as the Sufi music. More complex forms of Sufi music appeared especially in Pakistan and India, with great Sufi philosophers such as Jalal-ed-din Al-Rumi. Among those were the Kafi, and Qawwali. Other types of Muslim religious music include a Hamd, Ghazal, Tawashih, etc. In addition, there are specific religious songs and music for the public religious celebrations like Madih Nabawi. Thikriyeh, Ashurah, Ramadan Eid Tawshihat.

### **6.3. Hindu Religious Music**

It is said that Hinduism integrates

music more than any other religion, because Lord Shiva was so much fond of music and dance, hence worship depends a lot on music and dance.

Hindu religious music puts text as the main object, and let the melody be a follower. Sacred text are considered the content of four Vedas; a large body of religious texts originating in ancient India. These are: the Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda. They were written over 3000 years ago and contain over 20,000 verses in Sanskrit. These are hymns of Indian music that is influenced by Indian folk music and Persian traditions. In general, it is based on ragas and tala (rhythmic beat patterns) played on traditional Indian instruments. Hymns (or Samaveda) are traditionally sung by priests in a chanting style.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Century Indian musician Purandara Dasa is considered as the main founder of religious music that is not strictly for worship only. This music is known today as Carnatic Music. He was perhaps the first Indian musician who started singing and chanting about people as well as worship, so sacred and secular music that is derived from the Vedas. He also started using popular folk language and helped bring folk ragas into the conventional singing. It is important to note that many religious poets and

singers from India and Pakistan have produced devotional songs outside their religious traditions.

By tradition, in Indian culture it is believed that music in India is a gift of the gods to man for his enlightenment.

#### **6.4. Christian Religious Music**

Christian religious music is a rich and very resourceful for many reasons. Christian religion had music and integral part of its doctrine, from the Hebrew times of the Old Testament, such as the music of King David and others, but then established artistically and religiously through the Christian life of apostles and early church, particularly around the end of the sixth century. At that time chanting and singing hymns of religious text that is part of the actual worship became the adopted style of religious music. At that time Pope Gregory initiated such relations, and this is when Gregorian Chant started. Early attempts for music notation developed, hence making music a formal and essential part of worship.

Later in during the Middle Ages, pipe organs became more and more common in churches to accompany the worshippers and fill the room with sound. At later centuries, particularly during the Baroque period music has evolved into a mature science, art and

culture. Composers appeared with full artistic visions and creativeness, such as J.S. Bach and others. These composers were mostly Church supporters and religious. It was customary and expected that they would compose religious music that includes vocal singing and voice. Christians religious music thrived and developed to become a major necessity for worshippers, for church clergy, for personal prayers to God, and for personal soul and personality healing even if not in prayers.

Types of Christian sacred music varies. Choral music could include human voice alone (called acapella) or accompanied by music instruments, normally organ or an orchestra. Some of these works are as long as an hour or more, like Christian worshippers' liturgy of mass and cantatas. One other criterion for types of sacred music in Christianity is very sensitive to culture and heritage of the church. As the Christian church became global, and different Christians churches appeared, their sacred music became very special to these churches. For example, the music described here was Western catholic Church. Oriental churches such as orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian, Coptic, Assyrian and others have their own style of sacred music and chants, in their respective languages and music styles. It is also important to mention

that soul music, is Christian religious music by African Americans who have used folklore songs and free form-sacred music hymns in their worship. However, they all follow the Christian universal prayer parts, and share concept of religious festivals and events.

### **6.5. Jewish Religious Music**

Over the last several centuries the Jewish communities in different countries have maintained their religious beliefs, worship practice, and community traditions. However, these traditions have been affected by the local cultures and traditions in the countries they lived in. Their religious music also was affected in one way or another but kept the Jewish characteristics clearly. Jewish religious music has a wide range of genres. It is religious and secular at the same time. This makes the religious worship social and spiritual as well. A large part of the service and Torah is sung or chanted in Synagogues, but it is common that they are sung sometimes among families and private.

The sacred music in Judaism is characterized by a set of modes in music. These modes can identify different types of prayer following a liturgical sequence during the year. Further, some chnats and their relevant modes are set for specific

time of day. There are three main modes, as well as a number of combined or compound modes. The three main modes are called Ahavah Rabbah, Magein Avot and Adonai Malach. Traditionally, the cantor (the chanting person) is allowed to improvise singing prayers within the designated mode, while following a general structure of how each prayer should sound. During the religious service in a synagogue the reading of scripture from the Torah, the Jewish sacred book,

The synagogal reading of the parashah (the weekly extract from the Torah) and the haftarah (section from the Prophets), use traditional melodic forms defined by “cantillation” marks, which are the traditional notation representing the various traditional Jewish melodies to which scriptural passages are chanted. It is well observed that in practice the cantillation often echoes the tones and rhythms of the countries and ages in which Jews lived, notably as regards the modality in which the local music was based.

In general, there are different types of traditional songs, which most of them can be sung during worship as well. There are the Pizmonim songs and melodies praising God and describing certain aspects of traditional religious teachings. Typically, the genre and style of these songs are traditionally associated

with Middle Eastern Sephardic Jews (Sephardic), although they are related to the songs of the European Jews (Ashkenazi) known as Zemirot. In fact, Zemirot are hymns, usually

sung in the Hebrew or Aramaic languages, but sometimes also in Yiddish (Judeo-German) or Ladino (Judeo-Spanish).



## 6.6. Conclusion

Although there are more religions and traditions in the world that depend on sacred, religious, spiritual, or soul

music. They also conform to the framework of religious music role and impact.

There is no question about the fact that the human being lives with: the reconciliation of words and melodies in order to express not only the issues and thoughts of every day life but also the rich feelings of the soul as it transcends to connect with the Almighty, in every religion, in every culture and everywhere. In another way, when a perfect marriage happens between a text and tunes, something wonderful happens that makes words transcend to a completely new level full of thoughts and emotions. As this is done, the soul becomes healthy, and even life becomes happier. This is the pragmatic message of religious music for all religions, all people everywhere and all the time.

- They say that God gave man speech in the usual way to talk, for the deeper things men think and feel.
- God gave the poet words to reveal, for the heights and depths no word can reach,
- However, God gave man music, so his soul can have its own speech.



## References

- Al-Jauziyah, I. I. Q. (2013). *Healing with the Medicine of the Prophet (Peace be upon Him)*. Darussalam Publishers.
- Cao, H., Li, X., & Liu, J. (2012). An updated review of the efficacy of cupping therapy. In *PLoS ONE* (Vol. 7, Issue 2). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0031793>
- Erejuwa, O. O., Sulaiman, S. A., & Ab Wahab, M. S. (2012). Honey: A novel antioxidant. In *Molecules* (Vol. 17, Issue 4, pp. 4400–4423). <https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules17044400>
- Hanafy, M. S. M., & Hatem, M. E. (1991). Studies on the antimicrobial activity of *Nigella sativa* seed (black cumin). *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, 34(2), 275–278. [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-8741\(91\)90047-H](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-8741(91)90047-H)
- Heidari, S., Vojdani, F., & Hosseini, A. S. (2020). Explaining the Views of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali on Games and Physical Exercises and their Relation to the Relationship Between Body and Soul. *Dinamika Ilmu*, 357–366. <https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v20i2.2536>
- Heshmati, J., Namazi, N., Memarzadeh, M.-R., Taghizadeh, M., & Kolahdooz, F. (2015). *Nigella sativa* oil affects glucose metabolism and lipid concentrations in patients with type 2 diabetes: A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial. *Food Research International*, 70, 87–93. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2015.01.030>
- Khan, M. A. U., Ashfaq, M. K., Zuberi, H. S., Mahmood, M. S., & Gilani, A. H. (2003). The in vivo antifungal activity of the aqueous extract from *Nigella sativa* seeds. *Phytotherapy Research*, 17(2), 183–186. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ptr.1146>
- Kızar, O. (2018). The place of sports in the light of quran, hadiths and the opinions of the muslim scholar in islam. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 6(11), 2663–2668. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2018.061132>
- Lauche, R., Langhorst, J., Dobos, G. J., & Cramer, H. (2013). Clinically meaningful differences in pain, disability and quality of life for chronic nonspecific neck pain - A reanalysis of 4 randomized controlled trials of cupping therapy. *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, 21(4), 342–347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctim.2013.07.005>

org/10.1016/j.ctim.2013.04.005

- Loukas, M., Saad, Y., Tubbs, R. S., & Shoja, M. M. (2010). The heart and cardiovascular system in the Qur'an and Hadeeth. *International Journal of Cardiology*, 140(1), 19–23. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijcard.2009.05.011>
- Niri, S. A. M. H. (2021). Food Health in the View of Islam. In *Journal of Nutrition and Food Security (JNFS)* (Vol. 6, Issue 3).
- Patterson, R. E., Laughlin, G. A., LaCroix, A. Z., Hartman, S. J., Natarajan, L., Senger, C. M., Martínez, M. E., Villaseñor, A., Sears, D. D., Marinac, C. R., & Gallo, L. C. (2015). Intermittent Fasting and Human Metabolic Health. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 115(8), 1203–1212. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2015.02.018>
- Sultana, A., Rahman, K. ur., Farzana, M. ., & Lone, A. (2010). Efficacy of Hijamat Bila Shurt (Dry Cupping) on Intensity of Pain in Dysmenorrhoea-A Preliminary Study. *Ancient Science of Life*, 30(2), 47–50.
- Taha, M. M. E., Abdelwahab, S. I., Elsanousi, R., Sheikh, B. Y., Abdulla, M. A., Babiker, S. E., Elraih, H., & Mohamed, E. (2015). Effectiveness of Sidr Honey on the prevention of ethanol-induced gastrulcerogenesis: Role of antioxidant and antiapoptotic mechanism. *Pharmacognosy Journal*, 7(3), 157–164. <https://doi.org/10.5530/pj.2015.3.3>
- Zaoui, A., Cherrah, Y., Lacaille-Dubois, M. A., Settaf, A. ., Amarouch, H., & Hassar, M. (2000). Diuretic and hypotensive effects of *Nigella sativa* in the spontaneously hypertensive rat. *Therapie*, 55(3), 379–382.
- Zedlitz, S., Kaufmann, R., & Boehncke, W.-H. (2002). Allergic contact dermatitis from black cumin (*Nigella sativa*) oil-containing ointment.
- Zhang, S. J., Liu, J. P., & He, K. Q. (2010). Treatment of acute gouty arthritis by blood-letting cupping plus herbal medicine. *Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 30(1), 18–20. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0254-6272\(10\)60005-22](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0254-6272(10)60005-22).

# Physical Health Promotion in Light of the Holy Qur'an and Islamic Sunnah



**Samar Elkhalfifa** (\*1)



**Wishah Elkhalfifa** (2)

## Abstract

Religions promote a set of guidelines to live a better life. Guidelines vary from spirituality, daily aspects of life, governance, and even health and well-being, among others. Islam, for instance, provides Quranic verses and Hadiths in different settings highlighting several pivotal guidelines for healthy brains, healthy and stronger bodies, and preventive measures of illnesses and diseases. This paper aims to shed light on some of the forgotten and overlooked aspects of Islamic teachings in which human health is considered a priority. It looks at nutrition, physical activity, and the role of different Islamic pillars in maintaining the health and well-being of Muslims and those who choose to follow the guidance provided by Islam. The recent literature is also highlighted in order to arrive at a more comprehensive review and to provide this paper with the uniqueness and thoroughness needed to make it a reference of Islamic promotion and guidance of physical health.

**Keywords:** Islam, Physical Health, Diet, Exercise, Personal Hygiene

---

(\*1) PhD holder in Sustainable Energy and a researcher and engineer by profession

(2) A licensed pharmacist



## 1. Introduction

With the prevalence of diseases and physical health issues worldwide, it is important to understand the reasons for such problems and provide the appropriate solutions accordingly. Issues arise due to poverty, poor health infrastructures and services, emergence of new diseases that need the development of new vaccines and medications, and following wrong lifestyles that are mostly sedentary in nature and based on the consumption of processed food in enormous quantities. The question that arises then: what is the role of religion when it comes to physical health and well-being?

There has been a strong linkage between religions and the promotion of good health. In Islam, for instance, Muslims are advised to teach their children from an early age three sports activities which are swimming, archery and horse-riding. Evidently, these sports are recognized worldwide with several different physical attributes like supporting muscles build-up and increasing the fitness of the human body. There are several other occasions in Quran and Islamic Sunnah in which sport and physical health are encouraged.

There have been several scholarly attempts to tackle the topic of physical health in Islam. A study by Kızar (2018) looked at the place of sports in light of Quran, Hadith

and opinions of Muslim scholars. The author argues that some sports are indirectly forbidden in Islam such as animal wrestling, and automobile and motorcycle racing; justifying the forbidden nature of such sports due to the disruptiveness and physical damage they might lead to when practiced. Here, the authors support the first argument while oppose the latter. Racing does not lead to fatalities or accidents unless the vehicle is faulty or there are unforeseen events. It is therefore an acceptable sports activity that promotes competitiveness; similar to running races and the likes.

Another attempt to look at physical health from an Islamic perspective and specifically food health is the work of Niri (2021) who examined the influence of food and the impact it has on physical and mental health of people. According to the author, humans should avoid eating foodstuffs that are against human nature as guided by the fact that in Quran the criterion for food is to be lawful and pure. The paper covers guidance provided by Islam for lawful food that is suited for human consumption, forbidden food that is polluted or microbe-contaminated, and criteria for food consumption. As an extension of this previous work, the authors choose to cover the relationship between healthy and balanced diets and fasting to physical health.

Heidari et al. (2020) covered the opinions of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali on games and physical exercise and how they relate to body and soul. Since the current paper only focuses on the physical health aspects of sports in religion, the spirituality aspect is not emphasized. Also, the paper concluded that the two scholars agree that games and physical exercises lead to the recreation of energy and the rejuvenation of the body and soul. Evidently, the authors, Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali have similar opinions on the importance of playing games and being active from a young age.

However, to date, there has not been a comprehensive study on the promotion of physical health in Islam from its different perspectives. This paper aims to serve as the first paper of its kind in combining the different literature and evidence provided by Quran and Sunnah.

In the current analysis, the author will adhere to Quran and Sunnah while backing up by scientific evidence when necessary. The paper addresses the importance of healthy diet and nutrition in Islam, physical health, sports and exercise and their relation to acts of worship, the role of medicine and medications, and finally the role and importance of physical hygiene.

## **2. Importance of balanced and lawful diet, and fasting in Islam**

### **2.1 Balanced lawful diet**

Islam has placed great emphasis on the importance of maintaining a healthy and balanced diet. Miqdam bin Ma'dikarib said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (S.a.w) saying: 'The human does not fill any container that is worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat what will support his back. If this is not possible, then a third for food, a third for drink, and third for his breath.'"<sup>1</sup>

This implies the role played by dedicating your time and effort in having enough share of your food, drink, and self-care. It is vital to understand the implication of exceeding the limits your stomach can withstand. Many diseases have been linked to increased abdominal size, which is mostly the result of overconsumption of food and sedentary lifestyle. All are not recommended by Islam decree.

Additionally, Islam advises against overconsumption in eating and drinking. "Eat and drink, but do not waste. Surely, He does not like the wasteful."<sup>2</sup>

There is a strong interlinkage between overconsumption and obesity which is associated with a number of illnesses, discomfort and some problems with mobility. All

of this impact a Muslim's ability in performing acts of worships in the right manner. Islam provides options for ill people when it comes to worshiping Allah, however that does not imply one should not care about his/her health.

Furthermore, Islam advises that Muslims should avoid forbidden foodstuffs and drinks like wine, blood, dead animals, and pork. Wine is known to affect the mind and behaviors of people, and hence it is forbidden in Islam. The reasoning behind forbidding consumption of blood, dead animals, and pork is the unclean nature of these items which have a great potential to cause diseases and illnesses to people.

“He has only forbidden you ‘to eat’ carrion, blood, swine,<sup>1</sup> and what is slaughtered in the name of any other than Allah. But if someone is compelled by necessity—neither driven by desire nor exceeding immediate need—then surely Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”<sup>3</sup>  
“O believers! Intoxicants, gambling, idols, and drawing lots for decisions<sup>1</sup> are all evil of Satan's handiwork. So shun them so you may be successful.”<sup>4</sup>

As opposed to the aforementioned items that are unhealthy and forbidden, Allah instructed Muslims to consume lawful foodstuffs that are created for them.

“ O believers! Eat from the

good things We have provided for you. And give thanks to Allah if you ‘truly’ worship Him ‘alone’.”<sup>5</sup>

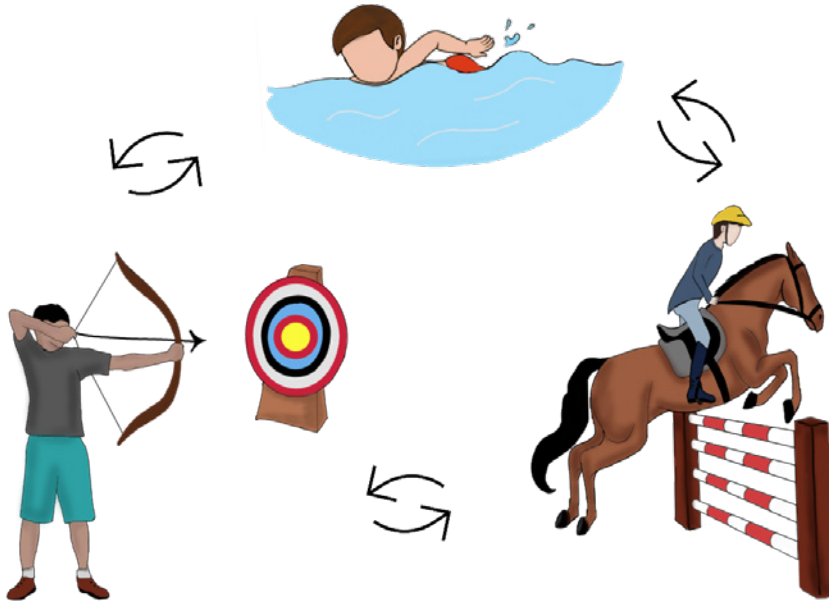
This is crucial as clean, lawful food is connected to physical and spiritual health.

## 2.2 Fasting

Normally, Muslims observe the month of Ramadan eagerly to commit to one of the five Islamic pillars, that is fasting in Ramadan. It gives Muslims immense feelings of satisfaction as they commit to Allah's guidance, feel the needy, lose weight or maintain good health by following a structured lifestyle of eating and foodstuffs consumption. The systematic way of life provided by Islamic fasting is a chance for major changes mainly spiritually, however changes in the way food and drinks are consumed are supposed to result after the end of Ramadan.

“ O believers! Fasting is prescribed for you—as it was for those before you—so perhaps you will become mindful ‘of Allah’.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition, Muslims are recommended to fast during other days of other months in the year. Research has shown that, intermittent fasting, for instance, is associated with great benefits when it comes to metabolic biomarkers such as insulin and glucose (Patterson et al., 2015). It is evident by the fact that patients are advised to fast for 8–12



hours before drawing blood samples, making it easy to achieve steady-state fasting levels for various metabolic substrates.

### 3. Physical health, sports and exercise and their relation to acts of worship

#### 3.1 Sports and physical exercise in Islam

Sports in different forms are advised in Islam from a young age. Figure 1 illustrates the three different sports promoted by Islam.

Figure 1. Depiction of three advisable sports activities in Islam (Picture courtesy of Dana Elkhalfifa)

Swimming, archery, and horse riding help shape the body, strengthen it,

and by playing sports both children and adults maintain a healthy lifestyle that is characterized by being free of illnesses and diseases resulting from being overweight or being inactive. Other sports promoted in Islam are already mentioned in a paper by Kızlar (2018). Examples of recommended sports include wrestling and running, which are associated with increased stamina, and muscles buildup; helping maintain a healthy body that is capable of practicing daily life activities and acts of worship with ease and comfort.

In addition to sports and physical exercise, prophet Mohammed mentions that it was narrated that Abu Hurairah said, attributing it to the Prophet (ﷺ):

“The stronger believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, although both are good. Strive to seek that which will benefit you and do not feel helpless. If something overwhelms you, then say: Qaddarallah, wa ma sha’a fa’al (It is the decree of Allah and what He wills He does). And beware of (saying) ‘If only,’ for ‘If only’ opens the door to Satan.”<sup>7</sup>

The reasoning behind that must be that a stronger person physically will be capable of performing acts of worships easily, leading a normal life, being free of illnesses and diseases that are due to sedentary lifestyle and habits.

### 3.2 The five pillars (Prayers and Hajj)

In addition to regular exercise, some of the five pillars of Islam are based on movement that are similar in nature to physical exercises. For instance, proper postures during prayers (Salah) resemble movements followed in yoga and other sports exercise practiced worldwide. This should, when performed five times daily, help strengthen the body and muscles, and hence maintaining a healthy and stronger body.

Similarly, acts of worship during Hajj are based on continuous movement and walking for long distances in order to complete the different rituals. This pillar does

not only teach equality, but also contributes to bettering the health of those performing the different tasks during Hajj. It requires good health; therefore, the performers know ahead of time that they need to be in the best shape possible.

### 4. The role of medicine and medications

Although the norm is that Islam or religion is concerned with the spiritual aspects of a human, Islam also is concerned with the physical well-being of humans, and hence Islam recommends seeking medical help and using medications when needed. Usamah ibn Sharik (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated: I came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and his Companions were sitting as if they had birds on their heads. I saluted and sat down. The desert Arabs then came from here and there. They asked: Messenger of Allah, should we make use of medical treatment? He replied: Make use of medical treatment, for Allah has not made a disease without appointing a remedy for it, with the exception of one disease, namely old age.”<sup>8</sup>

Muslims developed a medical compendium called Prophetic medicine that is widely used in the Muslim world. It is based on the Quran and the honorable hadith. The Quran and the hadith foster

development of spiritual, physical, and psychological well-being in Muslims. Those major Islamic sources mention the use of olive oil, dates, black seeds, honey and vinegar as medicinal treatments. In this paper, the authors will mention the benefits of some of these substances on the well-being of human body.

Prophetic medicine is a term given to the medical knowledge obtained from Quranic verses, teachings, honorable hadiths), advice and deeds of prophet Mohammed (PBUH) related to enhancement of well-being and disease treatment (Al-Jauziyah, 2013). It includes treatment recipes, by which the Prophet (PBUH) was treated, or he called people to be treated by. It comprehends legislations related to medication, medicine in practicing the profession, and the guarantee of the patient in the perspective of Islamic Law.

Loukas et al. (2010) stated that medical knowledge gained from Quran and hadiths can be an essential source of humanity medicine in light of their impressive agreement with modern medical knowledge.

Prophetic medicine (related to Prophet Mohammed) recommends Al-Hijamah: "Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "If there is a remedy that will reach the disease, then cupping will reach it."<sup>9</sup>

Recently, Lauche et al. (2013) reported clinical improvements in treating pain, disability and quality of life for chronic non-specific neck pain on cupping therapy as shown by reanalysis of four randomized controlled trials measured by visual analog scale (VAS) in these trials. Cupping therapy effectively treated musculoskeletal pain conditions as lumbar disc herniation, cervical spondylosis (Cao et al., 2012), and other types of pain e.g. dysmenorrhea (Sultana et al., 2010)<sup>10</sup> "type": "article-journal", "volume": "30"}, "uris": [{"http://www.mendeley.com/documents/?uuid=9933957e-3eda-328f-b8a7-28a3ea70eb35"}], "mendeley": {"formattedCitation": "(Sultana et al., 2010 and pain of acute gouty arthritis (Zhang et al., 2010).

Another example of prophetic therapy is Habbat Al-Baraka (Nigella sativa L.). Abu Hurairah narrated that he heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say: "In black seed there is healing for every disease, except the Sam." "Sam means death. And black seed is Shuwniz."<sup>10</sup>

It is effective in treatment of wide range of disease conditions including dermatitis by using the oil from the seeds and being applied topically (Zedlitz et al., 2002). Furthermore, it possesses both antimicrobial and antifungal

Activity. The antifungal effect was observed when the aqueous extract of the seeds was used in vivo studies (Hanafy & Hatem, 1991; Khan et al., 2003) spleen and kidneys. Treatment of mice with the plant extract (6.6 mL/kg equivalent to 5 mg of estimated protein, once daily for 3 days. It also has been shown that it has antihypertensive and diuretic activity when studied in rats (Zaoui et al., 2000). Moreover, a recent randomized double-blind, placebo-controlled trial showed the efficacy of *N. sativa* oil on glucose metabolism and lowering of lipid concentrations in patients with type 2 diabetes (Heshmati et al., 2015).

Another great example of therapeutic substances is honey which is considered one of nature's valuable functional and medicinal foods (Taha et al., 2015) 250 and 500 mg/kg, respectively. In the holy Quran, Allah the almighty says: And your Lord inspired the bees: "Make your homes in the mountains, the trees, and in what people construct, and feed from 'the flower of' any fruit 'you please' and follow the ways your Lord has made easy for you." From their bellies comes forth liquid of varying colors, in which there is healing for people. Surely in this is a sign for those who reflect."<sup>11</sup>

Honey is a natural food and is made of a mixture of sugars, in which fructose and glucose are the major

components. It has been shown to possess novel antioxidant (Erejuwa et al., 2012) and antimicrobial properties. The effect of honey supplementation on controlling blood glucose levels of alloxan-induced diabetic rats has been reported. The research noted that daily intake of honey for three weeks significantly lowered blood glucose levels in rats with alloxan-induced diabetes.

## 5. Personal hygiene

Islam is a religion that considers humankind's need for a balance between physical, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being. It puts great emphasis on both physical and spiritual, cleanliness and purification. As they are of essence to one's faith and set as requirements for performing acts of worship. Allah says in the Quran "Surely Allah loves those who always turn to Him in repentance and those who purify themselves."<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, prophet Mohammed informed his companions and all of us, about the importance of cleanliness as Abu Malik Al-Ash'ari (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: "Purity is half of Iman (faith)"<sup>13</sup>

### 5.1 Miswak

A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) reported that the Prophet (peace

and blessings be upon him) said, “The Prophet ( ﷺ ) said, “The Miswak (tooth-stick) cleanses and purifies the mouth and pleases the Rubb.”<sup>14</sup>

The great encouragement for cleaning teeth as shown in hadiths showcase to which extent Islam was particular about the details of personal hygiene.

## 5.2 Ghisl and Ablution (Wudu)

The Arabic word for purity is Tahara and which means to be free from filth, it divides into spiritual and physical purity. Spiritual denotes being free from sins and believing in oneness of God and it is as important as and physical cleanliness. Before attaining physical cleanliness, one has to achieve a special state that involves being free from sin, hypocrisy, and arrogance. This is critically important, especially when one stands before Allah for prayer. Once this state of purity is accomplished, then one can start with the second important stage which is purification from physical impurities, which is typically achieved using water.

Allah says in the holy Quran: “O believers! When you rise up for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, and wash your feet to the ankles. And if you are in a state of ‘full’ impurity,<sup>1</sup> then take a full bath.”<sup>15</sup>

According to scholars, cleanliness is of three kinds, purification, or ritual washing in order to perform prayer; keeping the body, clothing, and environment clean; and specifically removing the dirt or grime that collects in the various parts of the body, such as teeth, nostrils, and under the nails.

Purification from impurity (i.e., to attain purity or cleanliness, by taking a bath ghisl or performing ablu-tion wudu’ in states in which a bath or ablu-tion is necessary or desirable according to Islam).

Ghisl means washing off the body thoroughly and it cleanses the body of major impurities, whereas Wudu is a simple ablu-tion which rids the body from minor impurities. Wudu includes washing the hands, rinsing the mouth and nose, washing the face, washing the arms up to the elbows, wiping the head (and beard), washing the ears, including behind the ears and washing the feet up to and including the ankle.

## 5.3 Nails and hair

The main reason for keeping the nails short is for cleanliness and hygiene. Dirt, grime, and bacteria can easily be trapped under the nails and passed on to other people, especially when preparing food or when providing a medical service. Having dirty or long finger and toenails, is unhealthy and unsanitary. Hence, it is advisable





by Prophet Mohammed to trim and clean these parts of the body.

Prophet Mohammed made it clear to his followers that they should trim their moustaches but leave their beards. The scholars have different opinions about the state in which the moustaches should be, and whether it should be fully shaved. However, there is an agreement that trimming the hair is compulsory in order to achieve a level of cleanliness that is attained by trimming the hair above the lips and mouth. It leads to cleaning the area surrounding the mouth and keeps it from producing odors or attracting dirt.

## **6. Conclusion and recommendations**

Islamic teachings promote the adherence to healthy diets and healthy lifestyle. This is further emphasized through the Quran and

Islamic Sunnah in which different verses and occasions bring attention to the importance of maintaining balance in eating, drinking and in other life aspects. Sports are highly encouraged and pursuing them as supported by science and evidence result in great bodily and health benefits.

In this article, the authors have combined the different literature, which to date, needs further studies and analysis of the topic of Islamic health from a religious background, whether in Islam or other religions. Investigations of the role of Islamic teachings in dieting and exercise are needed and disseminating the results and implementing them in Islamic communities are highly advised. Basically, public awareness of forgotten and overlooked rules in Islam shall increase their willingness to pursue a healthier lifestyle that is guided by their own religion.

## 7. References

- Al-Jauziyah, I. I. Q. (2013). *Healing with the Medicine of the Prophet (Peace be upon Him)*. Darussalam Publishers.
- Cao, H., Li, X., & Liu, J. (2012). An updated review of the efficacy of cupping therapy. In *PLoS ONE* (Vol. 7, Issue 2). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0031793>
- Erejuwa, O. O., Sulaiman, S. A., & Ab Wahab, M. S. (2012). Honey: A novel antioxidant. In *Molecules* (Vol. 17, Issue 4, pp. 4400–4423). <https://doi.org/10.3390/molecules17044400>
- Hanafy, M. S. M., & Hatem, M. E. (1991). Studies on the antimicrobial activity of *Nigella sativa* seed (black cumin). *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, 34(2), 275–278. [https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-8741\(91\)90047-H](https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0378-8741(91)90047-H)
- Heidari, S., Vojdani, F., & Hosseini, A. S. (2020). Explaining the Views of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali on Games and Physical Exercises and their Relation to the Relationship Between Body and Soul. *Dinamika Ilmu*, 357–366. <https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v20i2.2536>
- Heshmati, J., Namazi, N., Memarzadeh, M.-R., Taghizadeh, M., & Kolahdooz, F. (2015). *Nigella sativa* oil affects glucose metabolism and lipid concentrations in patients with type 2 diabetes: A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial. *Food Research International*, 70, 87–93. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2015.01.030>
- Khan, M. A. U., Ashfaq, M. K., Zuberi, H. S., Mahmood, M. S., & Gilani, A. H. (2003). The in vivo antifungal activity of the aqueous extract from *Nigella sativa* seeds. *Phytotherapy Research*, 17(2), 183–186. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ptr.1146>
- Kizar, O. (2018). The place of sports in the light of quran, hadiths and the opinions of the muslim scholar in islam. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 6(11), 2663–2668. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2018.061132>
- Lauche, R., Langhorst, J., Dobos, G. J., & Cramer, H. (2013). Clinically meaningful differences in pain, disability and quality of life for chronic nonspecific neck pain - A reanalysis of 4 randomized controlled trials of cupping therapy. *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, 21(4), 342–347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctim.2013.04.005>
- Loukas, M., Saad, Y., Tubbs, R. S., & Shoja, M. M. (2010). The heart and cardiovascular system in the Qur'an and Hadeeth. *International Journal of Cardiology*, 140(1), 19–23. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijcard.2009.05.011>
- Niri, S. A. M. H. (2021). Food Health in the View of Islam. In *Journal of Nutrition and Food Security (JNFS)* (Vol. 6, Issue 3).

- Patterson, R. E., Laughlin, G. A., LaCroix, A. Z., Hartman, S. J., Natarajan, L., Senger, C. M., Martínez, M. E., Villaseñor, A., Sears, D. D., Marinac, C. R., & Gallo, L. C. (2015). Intermittent Fasting and Human Metabolic Health. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 115(8), 1203–1212. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2015.02.018>
- Sultana, A., Rahman, K. ur., Farzana, M. ., & Lone, A. (2010). Efficacy of Hijamat Bila Shurt (Dry Cupping) on Intensity of Pain in Dysmenorrhoea-A Preliminary Study. *Ancient Science of Life*, 30(2), 47–50.
- Taha, M. M. E., Abdelwahab, S. I., Elsanousi, R., Sheikh, B. Y., Abdulla, M. A., Babiker, S. E., Elraih, H., & Mohamed, E. (2015). Effectiveness of Sidr Honey on the prevention of ethanol-induced gastrulcerogenesis: Role of antioxidant and antiapoptotic mechanism. *Pharmacognosy Journal*, 7(3), 157–164. <https://doi.org/10.5530/pj.2015.3.3>
- Zaoui, A., Cherrah, Y., Lacaille-Dubois, M. A., Settaf, A. ;, Amarouch, H., & Hassar, M. (2000). Diuretic and hypotensive effects of *Nigella sativa* in the spontaneously hypertensive rat. *Therapie*, 55(3), 379–382.
- Zedlitz, S., Kaufmann, R., & Boehncke, W.-H. (2002). Allergic contact dermatitis from black cumin (*Nigella sativa*) oil-containing ointment.
- Zhang, S. J., Liu, J. P., & He, K. Q. (2010). Treatment of acute gouty arthritis by blood-letting cupping plus herbal medicine. *Journal of Traditional Chinese Medicine*, 30(1), 18–20. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0254-6272\(10\)60005-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0254-6272(10)60005-2)

## 8. Endnotes

1. Jami` at-Tirmidhi, 2380.
2. The Qur`an, 8:31.
3. The Qur`an, 2:173.
4. The Qur`an, 7:90.
5. The Qur`an, 2:172.
6. The Qur`an, 2:183.
7. Sunan Ibn Majah, 4168.
8. Sunan Abi Dawud, 3855.
9. Muwatta Malik, 27.
10. Sunan Ibn Majah, 3447.
11. The Qur`an, 14:68-69.
12. The Qur`an, 3:222.
13. Riyad as-Salihin, 1413.
14. Riyad as-Salihin, 1202.
15. Qur`an, 6:6.



## Torah, Bible, and Qur'an: Ethical Codes to Combat Racism in Sports

**Sekou Marafa Toure \***

### **Abstract**

Sports are an important global arena where people of different religions, backgrounds, nations, and races come together. Yet, a form of racism can be observed in various sporting activities. While the relevant bodies, human rights organizations, and civil society institutions have made tremendous efforts to combat the phenomenon of racism in sports, these efforts are not enough because they must be accompanied by an important source of guidance and an influential element in human life. Therefore, this paper aims to highlight the religious principles and ethical codes in terms of eradicating racism by examining the holy scriptures of the three revealed religions, namely Torah, Bible and Qur'an. Using an inductive method, the researcher collected verses from the aforementioned holy books to reveal their attitudes toward racism. Among the findings of the study are that the Torah, Bible, and Quran believe in the origin of humanity and human equality, and affirm justice for all without exception and regardless of differences in skin color, religion, and ethnicity. The three scriptures also urge their followers to treat others with respect and to heed the principle, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." These ethical codes derived from the three scriptures serve to eliminate racism in sports and complement existing efforts by sports federations, human rights organizations and concerned civil institutions.

**Keywords:** racism, Torah, Bible, Qur'an, ethical codes, sports, FIFA

---

(\*) Researcher at Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue, [sekou.toure@dicid.org](mailto:sekou.toure@dicid.org).

## **Introduction:**

There are many efforts by human rights institutions to eliminate racism. The voices of religious institutions and how religion can play a positive role in eliminating racism in sport are of additional value. For example, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has developed several work plans and recommendations to eliminate racism and racial discrimination in sport, including adopting and implementing anti-discrimination laws that ensure access to sport for all and criminalize racist acts, building coalitions against racism in sport, training police to recognize and address racist incidents in sport, and raising awareness about racism and racial discrimination in sport. The former refers to the role of religion in raising awareness and educating people from religious backgrounds to stay away from racism in sports<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, FIFA is aware of the deep feelings and concerns of footballers and the general public about racism and has repeatedly expressed its determination to fight racism and discrimination of all kinds. In addition, FIFA itself has promoted numerous anti-racism campaigns and frequently proclaimed the anti-racism message at matches organized under its auspices. FIFA President Gianni Infantino expressed his concern when he said, “We must all

say no to racism and all forms of discrimination.”<sup>2</sup>

But the question is what role should religious centers play in combating racism and discrimination?

This paper attempts to give an answer to this question, and for this purpose the paper is divided into three parts, as follows:

First part: facts about racism in sports.

Second part: The FIFA Sports Code with regard to the elimination of racism.

Third part: Implementation of the religious code of ethics to combat racism.

Conclusion

## **First part: facts about racism in sports:**

Various human rights organizations report and care about the phenomenon of racism in sports. In order to find a religious remedy to this phenomenon, it is good to know how dangerous it is and the different types of racism athletes encounter in different sports.

In her article, Ann Snook noted that the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport at the College of Central Florida recorded 52 cases of racial discrimination in sports in 2018 in the United States alone. Internationally, 137 cases of racism were recorded. These numbers are up from 41 and 79 incidents, respectively. Notably, a

larger number of People of Color are affected in each case. “Even LeBron James, one of the most successful basketball players of our time, is not immune to racism,” she said. In June 2017, the athlete’s home was graffitied with racist slogans the night before the NBA Finals. James responded to the incident by saying, “No matter how much money you have, no matter how famous you are, no matter how many people admire you, it’s hard to be black in America.”

Ann Snook added that athletes of color are harassed and discriminated against by teammates, opponents, team members, and spectators. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for them to hear racial abuse in the locker room or in the stands. Racial discrimination in sports can also be less obvious. In some sports, such as golf and tennis, minority athletes are not as welcome as in others. Because these sports are often played in paid clubs, socioeconomic barriers can exclude minority athletes, as people of color are overrepresented among the poor in America.<sup>3</sup>

In his annual report to the 2003 General Assembly, former Special Rapporteur Doudou Diène warned of the recent increase in racist and xenophobic remarks in the stands at sporting events. Such incidents were most notable in European soccer, where players of African

descent were greeted by spectators with monkey calls and racist insults and bananas were thrown into the stadium. Similar incidents have also been reported at major league tennis matches.<sup>4</sup>

### **Second part: The FIFA Sports Code with regard to the elimination of racism:**

To learn about FIFA’s efforts to promote pluralism and combat racism, it is useful to highlight FIFA’s various relevant contributions.

- First and foremost, the FIFA Code of Ethics highlights in Section 5: Rules of Conduct PART II. SUBSTANTIVE LAW Article 22 Discrimination and Defamation under the Code of Conduct clearly addresses discrimination based on race or religion: “Persons bound by this Code shall not violate the dignity or integrity of any country, private individual or group of individuals through contemptuous, discriminatory or disparaging words or actions based on race, color, ethnicity, nationality, social origin, gender, disability, language, religion, political or other opinion, wealth,

birth or other status, sexual orientation or any other reason.”

- Violations of this article are punishable by an appropriate fine of at least CHF 10,000 and a ban on participation in soccer-related activities for a maximum of two years. In serious cases and/or in case of repetition, a ban on participation in soccer-related activities for a maximum of five years may be imposed.

Between the lines, the reader can see that racism affects and violates human dignity. This will help to look at racism from the religious perspective.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to these ethical duties, FIFA has also taken some serious steps to combat racism and discrimination, including the following:

- 2002: FIFA began holding World Days against Discrimination and Racism - “Racism is an evil that we must eradicate with all our strength and determination,” FIFA President Joseph S. Blatter said at one of these days.
- 2002: Celebrities join FIFA’s fight - including Sir Bobby Charlton, Thierry Henry, Mia Hamm, Pele, Michel Platini and Lilian Thuram.

- 2004: Adoption of the Code of Ethics, which stipulates, among other things, that “officials, players and player agents shall not act in a discriminatory manner, in particular with regard to ethnicity, race, culture, politics, religion, gender or language.”
- 2006: Article 55 of FIFA Disciplinary Code amended - allows very severe sanctions to be imposed following racist or discriminatory acts in soccer.
- 2006 - “Say no to racism” campaign. In April 2006, FIFA launched its “Say no to Racism” campaign. Months later, large “Say no to Racism” banners were displayed at the FIFA World Cup™ during pre-match formalities.
- 2007 - “90 Minutes for Mandela” game. FIFA used the “90 Minutes for Mandela” match, played between an African team and a team from the rest of the world, to support the fight against racism.
- 2010: South Africa 2010 Anti-Discrimination Days - The captains of the teams that played the quarterfinal matches in South Africa

2010 on June 30 and July 1, FIFA Anti-Discrimination Days, read pledges against racism before the matches.<sup>6</sup>

These are some facts of the sports body about the eradication of racism. In the upcoming pages, the author will explain how the ethical code of religions can help in the fight against racism.

### **Third part: Implementation of the religious code of ethics to combat racism:**

For a religion to combat racism, it must eliminate the root cause of racism and emphasize the equality and dignity of human beings as human beings. The newly appointed Special Rapporteur in the General Assembly of UN in 2010 recalled that grassroots sporting events provide valuable platforms to mobilize people and convey important messages about equality and non-discrimination.<sup>7</sup>

Recently, not only team competitions that appeal to a wide audience, such as soccer, rugby, and basketball, but also individual professional sports, such as tennis and golf, have been affected by acts of racism. Most of the data and examples of racist acts come from Europe, largely due to the fact that numerous human rights organizations and civil society organizations catalog such incidents and that racist acts are common at sporting events around the world.

The most common are racist abuse of players and fans, as well as the display of racist banners and flags. These facts deserve serious attention from all institutions, including religion. The following efforts attempt to shed light on the fight against racism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

### **1- Mankind is one family, so there should be no place for racism:**

Almost all three religions believe that man is a special creation made by God,<sup>8</sup> and therefore they all belong to the same family. Therefore, there is no superiority of one over the other. In the Torah, there are many verses against racism. In Genesis, for example, it says that all creatures were created as pairs, with the exception of man, who was first created as an individual and only later became a pair. This is apparently to emphasize the idea that man and woman complete each other, “and they shall be as one flesh”<sup>9</sup>.

The Mishnah in Sanhedrin (4:5), however, points out that the first man was created as an individual in order to teach the infinite value of each person, that each person is unique, and that all are equal (“so that no one can say, My father was greater than yours”). These ideas are rooted in the biblical message that every human being is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Accordingly, any





# NATIONAL Public Health WEEK

First full week of April

kind of negative prejudice against another human being because of his or her creation is anathema to Judaism. After all, all human beings are created “in the image of God,” and therefore all human life is sacred.<sup>10</sup>

The Bible also confirms this fact and adopts it, as it also teaches that God originally created only one race, the human race, in His image (Gen. 1:26-27; 11:6). From Adam and his descendants arose a wonderful diversity of a human race created in the image of God (Acts 17:26). Therefore, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:28

The Bible clarifies that there is one human race: “From one man he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times of history and the boundaries of their lands” (Acts 17:26).

In Christianity, man’s deeds are the standard of salvation, not race or status of wealth. Therefore, the Bible teaches that there is no man or race superior to others.

Then Peter began to speak, “I now realize how true it is that God shows no favoritism. Romans 2:11.

Furthermore, bible stated: “Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly.” John 7:24  
“I the Lord search the heart and

examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.”

According to the Quranic verses, Islam emphasizes absolute unity in the diversity of the human race.

In his famous sermon on the Farewell Pilgrimage, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) declared “O you people! You are all related to Adam, and Adam was made of dust. No Arab is preferable to a non-Arab except because of his piety.”

In another hadith, he said, “Allah does not look at your images or your colors, but He looks at your hearts (intentions) and your deeds.” (Muslim)

In practice, Prophet Muhammad had among his closest companions Salman the Persian, Suhaib the Roman, and Bilal the Ethiopian. Two of the three companions were former slaves who were freed after they accepted Islam, namely Salman and Bilal.

In order to combat racism in sports, the author refers to another important ethical code in Islam, which is firmly linked to the Islamic faith itself, namely the affirmation of human identity without exclusion of religion, race or gender.

## **2- Justice is a religious duty for all people.**

Religions respect the dignity of human beings<sup>11</sup> and thus their right

to experience justice regardless of race or religion. This can be used effectively to eliminate racism in sports.

In Judaism for example Amos not only emphasizes the divine commandment of justice and righteousness, but also berates the Israelites on behalf of the Creator, saying, “Behold, you children of Israel are to me as the children of the Cushites (Ethiopians). I have not only brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, but also the Philistines out of Caftor and Aram out of Kir” (9:7). In other words, all people are dear to the Almighty, regardless of their skin color. Moreover, the redemptive presence of the Almighty is not only found in Jewish history, but also in the history of other peoples.

Human equality is the backbone of the elimination of racism. In the context of Judaism’s struggle against racism, it is therefore important to remember what the prophet Amos taught: “You Israelites are like Ethiopians to me, says the Lord. I brought up Israel from the land of Egypt, but I also brought up the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir” (Amos 9:7). Moreover, we should not forget the teaching of the great sage Hillel that we are to be like Aaron and “love all who are created [by God]-which explicitly includes non-Jews (Avot 1:12).

All men are created equal in the

image of God (Gen 1:26-28). Galle said, “For there is no difference between Jew and Greek; for one and the same Lord is Lord of all, and bestows his riches on all who call on him.” Romans 10:12.

Another verse says, “The rich and the poor meet together; LORD is the Creator of all. Proverbs 22:2

To affirm equality, the psalm emphasizes the dignity of all people; we are all “a little lower than the angels” (Psalm 8) and have equal dignity as children of our Father in heaven. For this reason, every human being deserves our respect and is the object of God’s love. The teachings of Jesus make this clear. The greatest commandment is to love and worship God, but the second greatest is, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

On the other hand, mutual submission is the Christian ethic of love within human institutions. Mutual submission means caring for my neighbor and meeting his needs with my strengths and gifts. We all live in certain human institutions and organizations that make up our society and polity.<sup>12</sup>

Last but not least, the message of Islam to the world is that every member of the human race has been accorded honor and dignity by Allah Almighty, who says in the Quran: {We have truly honored the children

of Adam. We have carried them on the land and on the sea and provided them with good things and favored them above many of those whom We created with a special preference} (Al-Isra 17:70).

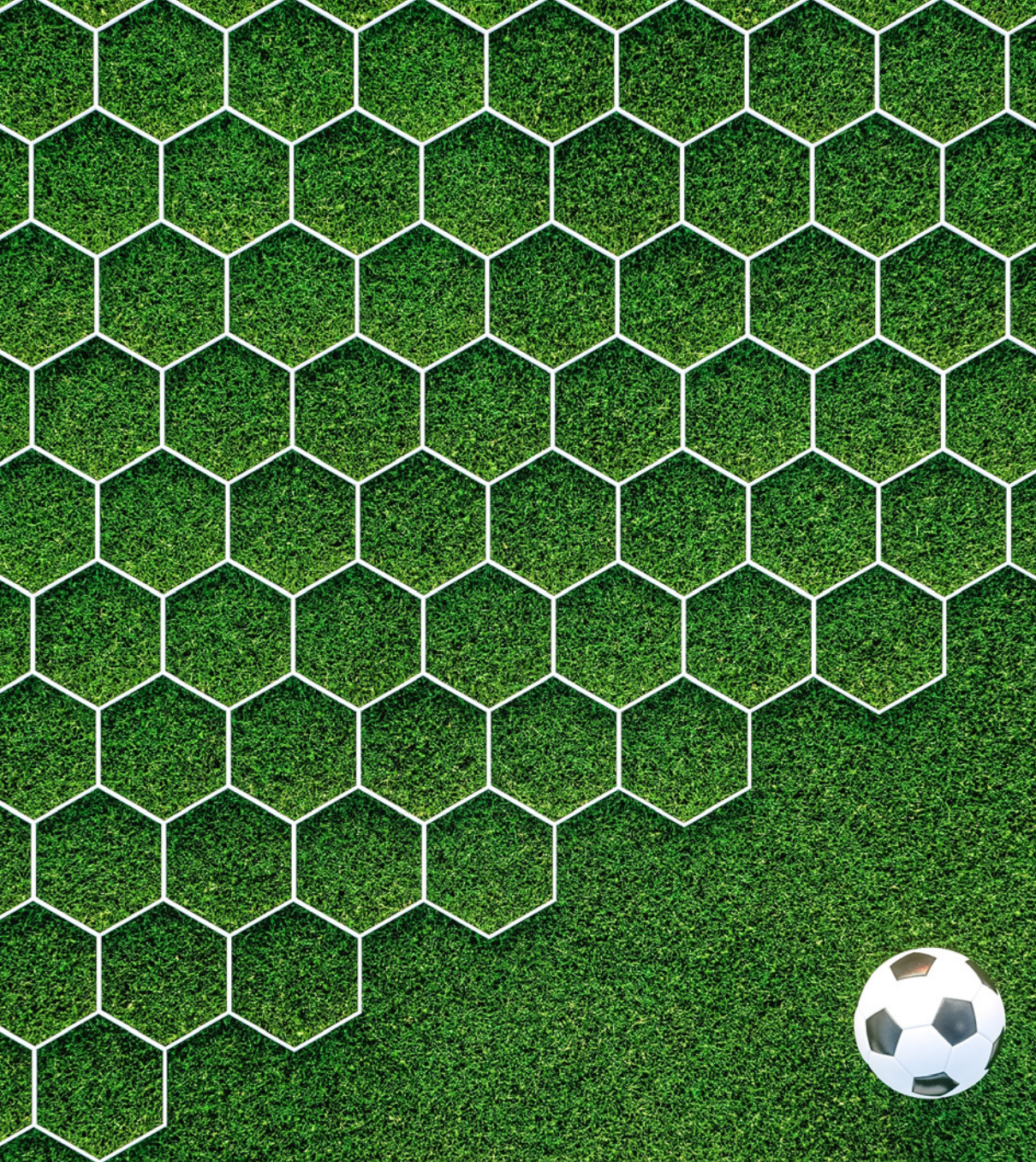
The concept of equality of people in Islam is another principle and ethical code to combat racism in sports from an Islamic perspective.

Allah (swt) honors the authority of an individual over others only on the basis of taqwa (religiosity) and not on the basis of race, creed, or skin color. The Holy Qur’an says in Chapter 49, Ayat 13.

“O people, I have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes so that you may know each other. Verily, the most honorable of you is the most righteous of you with Allah. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing and All-Knowing.

Islam rejects the idea that certain people or nations are superior because of their wealth, power, or race. Allah has created people as equals, differing only in their faith and righteousness.

It is reported by Muslim scholars that the first racial act in history occurred between Iblis (Shaitan) and Prophet Adam (AS). When Allah asked him (Iblis) to bow down to Prophet Adam, he refused and claimed that he was superior to Adam because he (Iblis) was made of fire and Adam (as) was made of clay.



**QATAR**

The Islamic doctrine of justice states that all people have equal rights regardless of their social status, caste, color, or tribe, as the Quran states, “O believers! Stand firm for Allah and bear true witness. Do not let the hatred of a people lead you to injustice. Be righteous! That is nearer to righteousness. And be mindful of Allah. Verily Allah is All-Knowing of what ye do. Chapter 5, verse 8. In conclusion, the author would like to tell the story of Julaybeeb, who was despised in the society for many reasons. No one wanted to consider him as a husband. So Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) went to the father of a beautiful, righteous woman and said, “I want to marry your daughter, but not to me, but to Julaybib.” He said, “Let me speak to her mother. He went to her and told her, “The Prophet wants to marry your daughter to Julaybib. She started shouting loudly, “JULAYBIB!” اللهُ (from her lungs. “I will never marry her to Julaybib!” The daughter heard the Prophet’s recommendation and insisted on marrying him. Uthman (ra) paid his Mahr for him.<sup>13</sup>

### **3- Various ethical codes in Torah, Bible and Qur’an ethical codes of combating racism in sports**

At the end of the paper, important points in each of these three religions are discussed.

Several Jewish religious communities have issued various statements condemning racial prejudice. In October 2015, the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America issued a proclamation on racism. In addition to emphasizing the universal dignity of the human race and the Jewish heritage of compassion for the persecuted, the statement noted that “the centuries-old American problem of white racism against African Americans remains a shameful, volatile contemporary reality, with both overt and insidious manifestations.”<sup>14</sup>

Concept of accepting Jesus as Savior, the doctrines of redemption and Jesus’ crucifixion as salvation from original sin can be used in Christianity to combat racism; the gospel proclaims that Jesus died for the sins of various groups of people and that God raised him from the dead (John 1:29; 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). Jesus now reigns with the Father over all things in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1:20-22). The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

In his article titled “A Gospel That’s Big Enough to Heal the Racial Divide,” Jarvis J. Williams clarifies that the gospel teaches people to love and respect one another regardless of racial and ethnic diversity. Throughout Scripture, the gospel



calls this diverse community to intentionally pursue one another in love (John 13:34-35; 1 John 2:10; 3:10-11, 14, 16, 18, 23; 4:7-12, 20-21).<sup>15</sup>

Finally, acceptance of the other and the stranger is another ethical principle taught in Christianity, and it helps combat racism. The Bible says, “And you shall love the stranger, for you yourselves were strangers in Egypt. Leviticus 19:33 (King James Version) also says, “And when a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not harass him.” Leviticus 19:33 (King James Version), The Gospel says that we are not only brought near to God, but also to those we once thought so different from

ourselves (Ephesians 2:13).

The Quran often emphasizes the rejection of racism and the recognition of Allah’s diversity in creation. Allah states:

“And one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and colors. Verily in this are signs for those who know”. Chapter 30, verse 22.

Malcolm X once said, “America needs to understand Islam because it is the only religion that erases the racial problem in its society. In my travels throughout the Muslim world, I have met, talked with, and even eaten with people who would have been considered white in America

- but the white attitude has been removed from their minds by the religion of Islam. I have never before seen sincere and true brotherhood practiced by all colors together, regardless of their skin color.<sup>16</sup>

**Conclusion:**

It is clear that religious traditions can play an important role in combating racism. Nevertheless, the three Abrahamic religions believe in the following main themes:

- 1- Humanity is one family, therefore there should be no place for racism
- 2- Justice is a religious duty for all human beings
- 3- Various ethical

codes in the Torah, the Bible and the Quran are ethical codes to combat racism in sports.

There is no doubt that the followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam should be against racism, promote equality and justice and affirm human dignity. The paper highlights the phenomenon of racism in sports, the FIFA Sports Code in terms of eliminating racism, and the implementation of the religious code of ethics to combat racism.

Thus, religion stands together with human rights organizations, civil societies and sports associations to say NO to racism.



## Endnotes

1. See: jonathan sacks, the dignity of difference: how to avoid the clash of civilizations (london: bloomsbury, 2002), p 52; <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-general-policy-recommendation-no-12-key-topics-combating-racism-a/16808d28f3>. Retrieved 15/ 07/ 2022.
2. <https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/organisation/media-releases/stop-racism-stop-violence-07-04-2021>.
3. ann snook, discrimination in sports: 5 types, 25 solutions, (2019 new messages! (i-sight.com).
4. un secretary-general, combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of the follow-up to the durban declaration and programme of action (united nation, 2014). P 4.
5. fédération internationale de football association, fifa code of ethics (zurich: fifa, 2019). P. 19.
6. <https://www.sportanddev.org/en/article/news/fifa-against-racism-decade-milestones>. Retrieved 11/ 07/ 2022.
7. fédération internationale de football association, fifa code of ethics (zurich: fifa, 2019). P. 5.
8. kedar nath tiwari, comparative religion (delhi: motilal, 2nd edition, 2014). P144, 172 and 197.
9. rabbi david rosen, judaism and racism, see <https://www.ajc.org/news/judaism-and-racism>. Retrieved 6/ 09/ 2022.
10. reuven hammer, tradition today: jews and gentiles  
The torah is democratic in viewing all citizens as equal before the law, including the jew and the stranger – the non-jew – in their midst. <https://www.jpost.com/jewish-world/judaism/tradition-today-jews-and-gentiles>. Retrieved 22/ 08/ 2022.
11. Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion (New York: harvest book, 1957). P 162.
12. See: alan g. Padgett, what is biblical equality? Priscilla papers academic journal , summer issue july 31, 2002.
13. elsayed elshabrawy ahmad hassanein. Inclusion, disability and culture (cairo:



sense publisher, 2015). P 163. See: «sahih muslim: the book pertaining to the merits of the companions (allah be pleased with them) of the holy prophet». Book 44, hadith 188, sunnah.com. Retrieved 6/ 08/ 2022.

14. rabbi david rosen, judaism and racism, see: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/judaism-and-racism-2/>. Retrieved 6/ 09/ 2022.
  15. jarvis j. Williams, a gospel that's big enough to heal the racial divide,
  16. August 21, 2017. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/august-web-only/christians-combat-racism-theologically-charlottesville.html>. Visited, july 2022.
- yusuf siddiqui, malcolm x, usa an article published on: the religion of islam, <https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/88/malcolm-x-usa-part-1/>

David Torevell, Clive Palmer and Paul Rowan (Eds.), *Training the Body:*

## Perspectives from Religion, Physical Culture and Sport



(London & New York: Routledge, 2022). 236 pp. ISBN: 978-1-032-12330-1 (hbk); ISBN: 978-1-032-12331-8 (pbk); ISBN: 978-1-003-22411-2 (ebk).

**Senad Mrahorović \***

In the past several decades an academic interest in sports has swiftly increased. Today, we have not only a bulk of literature produced in various sport disciplines, but several scholarly fields dealing with numerous aspects of sport such as psychology in sports, methodology in sports, sport philosophy etc. These are not to be confused with sports science, or exercise science which is a specific field of knowledge relating to the scientific study of physiology, psychology, biokinetics and biomechanics across numerous sport disciplines. In addition to that, a number of significant journals and periodicals in sport sciences has been founded by various academic institutions and organizations that usually provide undergraduate or postgraduate degrees in sport disciplines. However, as the current issue of *Religions*, a Scholarly Journal of Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID) is dedicated to exploring yet another significant theme involving the relationship between religion and sport or spirituality and physical activities, as a tribute to the State of Qatar for being the first Muslim country to host the Football World Cup 2022, I have decided to write a book review that explores the said relationship between religion and sport. Among several works recently produced on this topic, I have opted for D. Torevell, C. Palmer and P. Rowan's collaborative edition of a book entitled "Training the Body: Perspectives from Religions, Physical Culture and Sport," as part of Routledge Research in Sport, Culture and Society. The main reason for choosing this book for review is the fact that, besides

(\*) A Lecturer in Islamic Studies at SOASCIS, Universiti Brunei Darussalam and a Researcher at DICID.

its diverse content relating to a few religious traditions and its approaches to sports, the editors themselves are well established scholars in domain of religion and sports. One of them, namely, Paul Rowan is a religious figure, serving as a diocesan priest of the Archdiocese of Liverpool, UK. This book therefore offers a reader insight of different religions and sports from the perspective of accredited scholars in both disciplines as well as religious clergy.

Apart from introduction and acknowledgement, the study is divided into four main parts under the following headings: I. Personhood; II. Virtue; III. Asceticism and Aesthetics; and IV. Education, Gender and Mental Health. Each part consists of a few chapters dealing with subjects under a given heading. Consisting of three articles, the first part explores the relationship between Christianity and sport or physical culture.<sup>1</sup> The first article presented thorough analysis of the Church and Christian theologians' mixed treatments of sport and physical culture. The author has explored various treatments of sport and physical culture in general by different Christian

schools and notable theologians, philosophers, and clergy from earliest time of Christianity. From being a troublesome or necessary evil to becoming a virtuous and recreational play, sport and physical culture in Christianity has evolved into "a potential aesthetic faculty of the human being in the quest for ultimate meaning: the deepest truth of who we are in God's image and likeness" (Dries Vanysacker, 20). A promising message was underlined in the conclusion, especially after the Vatican document to which author has referred, that there is a potentiality for the new dialogue between the Church and sports in times ahead. Similarly, the second paper focused on a religious interpretation of body vulnerability in the context of marathons, from the Christian perspective. Here, the concept of marathon, as a sport discipline or physical activity, might be understood to represent any type of sport or form of physical culture that requires well spirited and strong body while the vulnerability is understood as something apathetic or weak that needs to be healed and overcome. However, delving into a deeper

---

1- The editors have made distinction between physical culture and sport. In their introduction, they offered a broad definition of sport as "any activity that involves physical exertion and skill where an individual or a team competes against each other for entertainment or rewards." On the other hand, physical culture is seen as an embodiment of sound mind and body, implying not only physical exercise, but also inclination towards socialization and discussion of philosophy (Introduction, pp. 1).

understanding of both, strength and vulnerability, the authors presented a reader with different perspectives on body vulnerability based on the Christian sermons delivered during given marathons. Apart from its negative connotation that needs to be overcome, the vulnerability can also be viewed as a positive element that transforms one's experience of life. As marathon participants are aware that through practice and exercise, they can achieve their physical power, they should also be aware that body has its limits, and it is only through its vulnerability that such an awareness is possible. Relating this experience to one's religious faith with an implication of its remedy, recovery, and renewal as with physical weakness, might certainly strengthen one's belief and hope for improvement regardless its nature. This certainly leads one to the perception of balance, a yin yang philosophy that manifest a useful doctrine of positive and negative energies or aspects which, if treated properly, will bring a fruitful union between them, and become complementary to each other in overall spectrum of opposing realities. The last article of the first part of the book is precisely dedicated to the notion of balance in religious training. Dealing with concept of personhood and its tripartite nature, namely, body, mind,

and soul, the author investigates the correlation between them in the context of Christianity. After a detailed discussion of religious forms of exercise practiced for the spiritual development of a personhood, as perceived in Christian tradition, the author argued the methods employed therein might be used as well in physical activities performed in numerous sport disciplines. Thus, creating a balance between physical training and spiritual exercise will likely bring a unity between body, mind, and soul, that will certainly benefit one's well-being in all its dimensions.

The second part of the book entitled "Virtue" contains three articles that deal with various relationships between body and soul, from rather ethical point of view. For her part, Trothen begins this section with pointing out the ethical concerns surrounding sport enhancements for athletes' better performances. This includes "a wide range of technological interventions including performance enhancing drugs (PEDs), training techniques, equipment, wearable devices, augmented reality programmes, and more" (Tracy J. Trothen, 59). However, instead of focusing only on physical augmentation of athletes, the author proposed the concept of "a virtue ethics" by which to bring equilibrium between body and soul,

or physical and spiritual development of human being at the same time. She rightly points out that winning is not everything, especially of such a win may carry a negative impact on oneself or others. This perspective was further extended by the following article entitled “Training the Body (Stretching the Mind) and Moulding the Spirit: Sport, Christian Asceticism and Life as Self-Gift.” In it the author delved into Christian asceticism and its correlation with human flourishing in accordance with Christian perspective. Highlighting the importance of three ascetic practices in Christianity, namely, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, which are not to be understood as ends in themselves, but rather means to become a person of love, or rather a saintly being, for our soul “needs to be moulded by life, such that we become a person whose existence in this world is an act of self-gift” (Paul Rowan, 90), the author enriched the concept of training and physical exercise with an ethical dimension derived from religious sources. To this union between religion and sport, Simon Lee contributed with many examples, past and present, exploring to what extent Christianity had influenced “the game” played not only by professionals but also laymen and ordinary people, far from sporting lights and Olympics. He presented a reader with numerous

instances where religious feelings and phrases seemingly helped athletes to win the game, or at least comforted them internally, serving therefrom as great inspiration and practice for others to follow.

Moving on to the symbolic and metaphysical aspects of certain sport disciplines to which the third part of the book is dedicated, a reader is presented with an artistic facet of gymnastics and martial arts. Clive Palmer in his article entitled “Aesthetics and Symbolism in Artistic Gymnastics: From Martial Discipline to Ritual Practices Embodied in Performance” discussed in-depth how different forms of gymnastics such as acrobatics, circus skills, dance, martial arts, yoga, pilates and calisthenics, have been shaped over time and developed to their current arrangements within physical culture and sport. From the earliest Greek interpretations of body exercise to some strict and mixed views from the Church whose stance on gymnastics was rather conditioned by certain rules, gymnastics eventually earned its justification and support on medical ground whereby the body training or physical exercise in a control manner was perceived beneficial for health reasons. Although one is reminded of three main reasons behind the use of gymnastics, it is perhaps health justification and further developments

in certain forms of gymnastics that the aesthetic features of it gradually emerged. The author further discusses a number of gymnastic aspects in the context of its aesthetics. For instance, the notions such as strength, the fluency of motion, bodyline in ballet, martial arts were all interpreted in terms of aesthetics that complement gymnastics in more symbolic and artistic ways that this sport certainly deserves. Taking the subject beyond its physical realm and rational boundaries, David Torevell contributed to this volume by composing “the metaphysical framework of transformational combat in eastern religions and martial arts.” Stepping out of Christian lands, Torevell ventured into the centuries-old Oriental traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism and their perspectives with regards to various kinds of training practices developed for both, corporeal and spiritual purposes, harmonizing as it were, the physical and the metaphysical forces of existence or projecting to its fullest meaning the yin-yang philosophy in one’s life. In addition, the author also discussed the martial aim of aikido which, like most of martial arts these Eastern traditions, represents both, spiritual practice, and martial art at once, offering a reader beneficial lesson that can be used in modern approaches to physical culture and sports, that are enormously lacking

any sort of transcendental qualities and connotations usually found in traditional forms of martial arts.

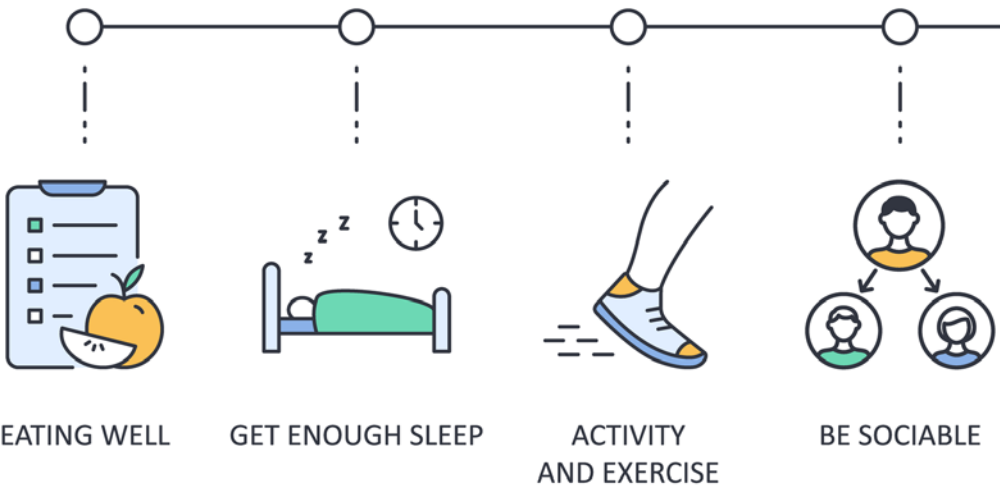
The final part of the book, consisting of three chapters, deals with equality in sports, gender issues and sport education. The first two chapters are exploring youth, especially girls’ struggle in physical culture and sport that have been for centuries dominated by men due to the so-called masculine Christianity, especially in the Western world. There are many instances, as pointed by the editors, where “inferences of what constitutes the good through sport may have been used, if not exploited by adults to reinforce gender stereotypes.” For example, in American culture, as suggested by Blazer, the notion of masculinity and femininity are treated as “binary with masculinity composed of traits like active, rational, intellectual, independent, public, and hard (both physically and emotionally) and femininity composed of the opposite set of traits – passive, emotional, embodied, dependent, domestic, and soft (both physically and emotionally).” A number of causes led to this divergence between women and men in sports are to be sought in religious traditions which were and still are in certain circles, regarded masculine. Added to that is societal structure where the treatment of women in various



early twentieth century onwards. Finally, the concluding chapter of the book is devoted to one of the main features of the globalization relating to transmission of knowledge from one cultural milieu to the other. In this case, it is a promotion of Western sports and physical culture in China, a case study presented by David Grecic. Before bringing the reader into his personal journey for the given task, the author firstly explained the main drivers behind the long history of Chinese tradition and culture. These are Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Chinese Communist Party. The rest of the

chapter is filled with reflections on the author's personal experience in China as someone who was actively engaged in promoting and teaching Western ideas in Physical education and culture within Chinese society. His mission was not that easy, as Physical education in China expectedly was firmly underpinned by the teachings of Confucius, Tao, Buddha, and the Chinese Communist Party. Nevertheless, for the future engagement in promoting Western ideas concerning sport in Chinese society, Grecic provided useful recommendations that might help bringing the gaps between modern

# MENTAL





Western and traditional Chinese approaches to sport and other physical activities.

As the concluding remark of this review, I would like to recommend the book for all who are interested in broadening their knowledge of the relationship between religions and sports. Although a range of important topics are discussed and vital concerns raised such as gender inequality, racial, religious, and ethnic issues in physical culture and sports, most chapters were almost exclusively devoted to the Christian perspective/s on the said issues. Islam for example, was completely

ignored in this volume, even though it is geographically, culturally, and religiously for being the last of three monotheistic religions, the closest to the West. In addition to that, more space could have been given to Eastern religious and spiritual traditions and their rich and centuries-long doctrinal and practical treatments of physical and spiritual dimensions of human being, or simply, body and soul. This, with the inclusion of Islamic perspective in relation to physical culture and sport, would have additionally enriched the content of the present work.

# HEALTH



## BIOGRAPHIES



### Senad Mrahorović

Senad Mrahorović is a lecturer and tutor at Sultan Omar ‘Ali Saifuddien Centre for Islamic Studies (SOASCIS), University Brunei Darussalam (UBD). He also works as a researcher and editor for Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue DICID. Mrahorović received a PhD in Philosophy, Ethics and Contemporary Issues from International Center of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Malaysia. His research interests include Religious Studies, Sufism, Orientalism, Philosophy and Religious Art. He has edited four volumes of Conference Proceedings for DICID and published several academic articles in various publications.

### Alena Demirović



Alena Lena Demirović is a General Secretary at the Institute for the Research of Genocide, Canada as well as a member of Sandžak Council of America and a Project Manager for North America region of the Bosniak Cultural Community Preporod, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Alena has extensive experience in advocacy and training on the protection of civil liberties and political rights, the promotion of economic and social justice, and international human rights law. She is in a process of receiving her AMP degree in Public Administration.



## Makoto Mizutani

---

Dr. Makoto Mizutani is a Representative of Congress for Reviving Religious Belief in Japan. He is Executive Director, Japan Muslim Association; Director, Center for the Contemporary Islamic Studies in Japan and Adviser, International Institute of Religious Studies, Japan. He writes in Japanese and English and has published dozens of publications in Islamic and other studies.

---

## Mohammad Aamir

---

Mohammad Aamir is a Procurement Manager at Meridian International School in Kathmandu, Nepal. He is also a teacher of the Qur'an and Arabic language as well as a Series Presenter at Ilm-o Hikmat Nepal YouTube Channel.



## Muhammed Shaahid Cassim

---

Muhammed Shaahid Cassim is a Phd candidate in Islamic Governance at the Institute of Policy Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. His research interests include: The Qur'an, Spirituality, Values, Ethics, Legal Theory, Innovation, Design, and Art, as well as exploring transdisciplinary connections between what appears to be disparate subjects. He is an avid youth soccer coach.



## Rozaitul Matzani

Rozaitul Matzani is a PhD Candidate at the Sultan Omar ‘Ali Saifuddien Centre for Islamic Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. She holds a BA (Hons) degree in Physical Education from Universiti Brunei Darussalam. She has a Master’s Degree in Sports Events Management from Leeds Met. University, United Kingdom. Her keen interest predominantly relate to Muslim women in sports, Islam, Malay culture and gender. Her current PhD research thesis discusses the struggle of Muslim women participated in sports including in the past and present for gender justice in Muslim communities around the world and Muslim women athletes in Brunei Darussalam. Her research also focuses theoretical framework for understanding Muslim debates of gender norms and practices.

## Md Majdey Zawawi



Md Majdey Zawawi holds a PhD in Islamic Governance from the Institute of Policy Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, and is one of the first in the world to have graduated with said degree and specialisation. His doctoral research titled “Power Dynamics between Religious and State Authorities: The Case of the Four Mujtahid Imams” employs the Islamic Governance Conceptual Matrix (IGC Matrix) as a conceptual tool for understanding the complex relational dynamics of power and authority between the four great mujtahids of Islam and their respective state authorities. diverse academic background (having been trained in three different fields) allow him to make use of a broad range of approaches in his thinking on Islamic Governance, Civilisation and Muslim politics. Although his research interests mainly revolve around Islamic Governance, Dr Majdey is keen on interdisciplinary research that traverses many disciplines.



## Saleem Zoughbi

Saleem was born in Bethlehem, Palestine. He followed academic studies information technology, but he continuously followed personal development in fine arts, particularly in music until today. He has over 45 classical music compositions, and several books about music and culture (other than his domain of technology). He spent time with UN in different regions of the world especially eth far east which allowed him to learn about different cultures and religions.

## Samar Elkhalfifa



Samar Elkhalfifa is a researcher and engineer by profession. She just obtained her PhD in Sustainable Energy from Hamad bin Khalifa University. Prior to that she obtained her MSc in Chemical Engineering from Texas A&M University, Qatar in 2016, and her BSc in Chemical Engineering from Qatar University in 2012. Her research interest includes Waste-to-Energy Technologies, Environment, Energy, Diet and Religion. She is the co-author of the “most downloaded” paper entitled “Food waste to biochars through pyrolysis: A review” for which the authors received an award in 2022. The paper was published in the Journal of Resources, Conservation and Recycling (RCR), 2019.



## Wishah Elkhalfifa

Wishah Elkhalfifa is a licensed pharmacist. She obtained her BSc in pharmacy from Qatar University in 2018. She is a coauthor of a number of papers pertaining to pharmacy topics. Her research interest is clinical pharmacy and practice.

---

## Sekou Marafa Toure

---



Dr. Sekou Marafa Toure worked as an assistant professor at the University of Sharjah, Department of Theology, Faculty of Sharia and Islamic Studies from 2017 to 2020. He also worked from 2013 until 2017 as an Assistant Professor and then Associate Professor at Al-Medina International University - Malaysia from 2013 to 2017. His area of expertise is theology and comparative religion (Islamic studies). He earned his Bachelor's degree from Qatar University Doha - Qatar in 2007; in SHARIA and Islamic Studies, specializing in Theology (USUL DIN). In 2010, he earned his Master's degree from the International Islamic University Malaysia, specializing in Usūl al-Dīn and comparative religion. In 2013, he received his PhD in Usūl al-Dīn and comparative religion from the same university. He is now a senior researcher at Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue since March 2022.