

CONTEMPLATION

AN ISLAMIC PSYCHOSPIRITUAL STUDY

MALIK BADRI



With an Introduction by
SHAYKH YUSUF AL-QARADAWI

THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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Translated from the Arabic by
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THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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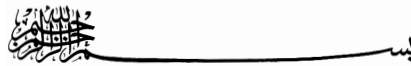
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FOREWORD



Of knowledge, we have none, save what
You have taught us. (The Qur'an 2:32)

The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) has great pleasure in presenting this treatise on Islamic psychology, which, though small in size, is rich in meaning. The author, Professor Malik Badri, is a well-known scholar who was a pioneer of the school that is striving to present psychology from an Islamic perspective, and has encouraged and inspired a number of researchers and scholars to participate in this ongoing research.

The first Arabic edition, *Al-Tafakkur min al-Mushāhadah ila al-Shuhūd*, which was published in Cairo in 1991, generated a very positive response and at times spirited remarks from scholars. Some admitted that the book had greatly improved their practice of worship and believed that it would have the same effect on others. Since then, the book has been reprinted and has been reviewed favorably in various professional journals that have considered it a best seller. It has also been used as a postgraduate reference for Islamic psychology and education in various Arab universities.

We hope that this English edition, with its ground-breaking paradigm and ideas, will not only make an important contribution to the field of the Islamization of the behavioral sciences, but also attract wider attention and generate greater interest among specialists to analyze and further develop the ideas and theories presented and discussed. Having said that, it needs to be emphasized that this is not a book for specialists, scholars and intellectuals alone, and that it provides interesting and useful reading for the general reader. Indeed it is

a book for anyone who is interested in the Islamic approach towards the urgency felt by modern societies for the rediscovery of the long-forgotten and neglected spiritual aspect of their lives.

Rather than writing a new introduction for the English translation, we found that an abridged edition of the original introduction by Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi could serve as an excellent introduction for the English edition.

The IIIT, established in 1981, has served as a major center to facilitate sincere and serious scholarly efforts based on Islamic vision, values and principles. Its programs of research, seminars and conferences during the last nineteen years have resulted in the publication of more than two hundred and fifty titles in English and Arabic, many of which have been translated into several other languages.

We would like to express our thanks and gratitude to Professor Malik Badri, who, throughout the various stages of the book's production, co-operated closely with the editorial group at the London Office. He was very helpful in responding to our various queries, suggestions and slight amendments.

We would also like to thank the editorial and production team at the London Office and those who were directly or indirectly involved in the completion of this book: Alexandra Grayson, Sylvia Hunt, Shiraz Khan, Sohail and Sarah Nakhoda. May God reward them, the author, and the translator for all their efforts.

Shawwal 1420
January 2000

ANAS AL-SHAikh-ALI
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INTRODUCTION

*Praise be to God, and Prayers and Peace be upon His Messenger,
and all his Companions and Followers*

One of the problems of the Muslim world today is that it has become dependent on the West in all branches of modern knowledge. Those who judge religion by the behavior of the so-called religious people of today falsely attribute this to our religion or our values. However, in the past the Islamic civilization was one of the richest in the world: the universities of the Muslim world were centers of knowledge that attracted students from East and West; the books of their renowned scholars became international sources of reference; and Arabic played a fundamental role in the transmission of knowledge. This position is acknowledged by historians such as Robert Briffault, George Sarton, Gustave le Bon and Will Durant.

The pure sciences are essentially neutral because they are not affected by race, nationality, religion or culture, except maybe in their philosophy and the way in which they are taught. Human and social sciences, however, are closely connected with people, and are greatly affected by their behavior and relations, and their values and beliefs. Although some intellectuals claim that these disciplines are cross-cultural, they have nevertheless become fundamentally Western in thought and outlook, even in application, since they were initiated in the West and cater for the Western vision of life. This state of affairs represents a danger to the Islamic culture and its spiritual, moral and human values which are left largely unobserved.

Muslim specialists should therefore take an independent line in the study of these disciplines and adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism instead of passive acceptance. They should also explore the rich cultural heritage of Islam and draw from the extensive resources

available in the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the works of the outstanding people of this Ummah. Not only will this provide new useful data which can help them solve many problems faced in these disciplines but, more importantly, it will reduce the materialism, fanaticism and narrow-mindedness that some of these disciplines have acquired.

I am not suggesting that all the achievements of the West in these disciplines should be discarded and replaced by a totally new and independent field, for knowledge is like a chain where each new link comes to reinforce, correct or at least improve the other. However, no knowledge is infallible, and Muslims should be allowed to select from Western thought that which suits their norms and beliefs.

Having undergone a great change in the hands of the behaviorist school – with its developed programs, workshops, experimentations and statistics – psychology has become one of the human sciences that could benefit from the input of an Islamic perspective. Such an approach would include the study of the human soul, in its inherent potential and its observable behavior, in the light of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. It would also incorporate the ideas of some outstanding Muslim scholars who combined 'worldly' and spiritual knowledge.

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have been contributing to what is now referred to as the 'Islamization of knowledge'. In the field of psychology, these pioneers include the Egyptian scholar Muhammad Othman Najati who published *Al-Qur'an wa 'Ilm al-Nafs* (The Qur'an and Psychology) and *Al-Hadith wa 'Ilm al-Nafs* (The Hadith and Psychology) and, in the Sudan, the author of this book, Malik Badri, who is an outstanding research psychologist, scholar and therapist. Amongst other things, he initiated a school that approaches the human psyche and its behavior from an open-minded Islamic perspective, combining traditional and contemporary knowledge. Indeed, he has treated several psychological conditions with prescribed potent cures which he deduced from Islamic practices, beliefs, morals and legal judgments. The Prophet said: "God has not created an illness without its cure; some may know it and some may not"¹ – a saying that can be applied to psychological as well as physical illnesses.

In this work, *Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospiritual Study* (*Al-Tafakkur min al-Mushāhadah ilā al-Shuhūd*), Badri approaches a

highly important subject from both an Islamic and a modern psychological perspective. The Arabic title, which can be translated as ‘Contemplation from perception to spiritual cognition’, reveals the author’s intention to progress from the stage of sensory perception, which is the basis of experimental science, to the stage of cognition and insight which is implied by the Prophet in his explanation of *iḥsān*: “It is when you worship God knowing that, even if you cannot see Him, He sees you.”²

The author examines the Islamic injunction to contemplate and judge according to the guidance of honest and calm thought. Indeed, the Qur’an says: “I admonish you on one point: that you stand before God, in pairs or alone, and reflect...” (34:46).³

Badri also examines the meaning and importance of contemplation as a form of worship. It is reported that Ibn ‘Abbās said, “One hour of contemplation is better than a whole night of vigil in worship,” while other authorities also said that, “One hour of contemplation is better than a whole year of worship.” Furthermore, contemplation is a free form of worship which, short of contemplation of the Divine Being Himself, is not hindered by any limitation of space or time, or any obstacles, seen or unseen. In his endeavor to distinguish Islamic contemplation from other forms of meditation, Badri compares it to thinking and especially transcendental meditation which has achieved much following in the West in recent years. However, he suggests that when Muslims contemplate the creation, the self and the laws of the Almighty therein, they excel over other contemplators because they have higher incentives and expectations from God.

In this work, the author has chosen to liberate himself from the pressures of the behaviorist school of psychology which was established by J. B. Watson and is endorsed by many universities and research centers. The behaviorist school reduces all human intellectual and complex activities to a series of stimuli and responses, in order to turn psychology into a strictly experimental science. They have even gone so far as to consider human beings as mere instruments that simply need to be exposed to certain environmental stimuli in order to obtain the responses expected by the researcher. Badri criticizes this approach, confirming what the famous British scholar Cyril Burt said,

namely, that modern psychology had lost its mind after having lost both its soul and its consciousness. Indeed, for psychology to be an experimental science, the behaviorists present humans as being totally devoid of conscious feelings as well as any intricate mental, intellectual or spiritual essence.

The author also denounces the attempt of the materialists to turn psychology into a material science, like physics or chemistry, because he believes strongly that, unlike matter, human beings cannot be controlled. He refutes their claim that the thinking mind is nothing but reflections of the inherent changes in the chemistry of the brain and its electrochemical reactions. In doing so, Badri has made use of the achievements of cognitive psychology which override all the schools that tried to imprison human behavior in a narrow theoretical impasse, and proves what was already established by Islam: namely, that contemplation of the signs of God, of the self, and of creation, is central to an individual's faith and is the source of every good deed.

This book is an example of how the human sciences can support faith and spiritual values, and how, when a mind is guided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah, it will be graced by the light of faith and the light of revelation, as well as the guiding light of reason. May God reward the author for his efforts.

YUSUF AL-QARADAWI

Doha, Qatar

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

This book is in many ways very different from the original written in Arabic, as I have updated and rectified some of its content, including the title, and have added new material amounting to more than fifty-two pages – almost half its original size.

Writing for English readers requires a slight change in content and style because of having to produce a faithful translation of the verses of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (ṢAAS);¹ this also applies to quotations of beautiful Arabic prose and poetry. Indeed, Arabic is a very articulate language with words and expressions that are not found in English. For example, I could not find an exact English equivalent for a number of religiously-oriented Arabic terms that describe subtle inner emotions such as *khushūʿ*. This term, which originates from the verb *khashaʿa*, refers to a state of total humility to the extent of becoming motionless, silent, fearful and subservient. For the Muslim, it carries the sentiments of emotional appreciation of the greatness of God mixed with love, submission and fear. In Arabic-English dictionaries it is often translated simply as 'submission', although 'submission' in Arabic is *istislām* and not *khushūʿ*, since a person may fully submit to a forceful power without loving it or appreciating its magnificence; he may even hate it! Thus *khushūʿ* will, by necessity, include submission, but the opposite is not true. Another example of a possible confusion due to translation is the verb *yaghbiṭ*. In Arabic it means that one admits to oneself that somebody else is better in a certain way, that one envies them and strongly wishes to be like them, but without wanting to deprive them of what they have. This is considered a good emotion. However, if one's feelings are destructive and include a desire for the other person to lose what they have, then the Arabic term used is *ḥasad*, and is considered to be a sinful emotion. The fine differentiation between these good

and evil emotions is not found in English where no word exists to express a kind of jealousy that is positive, or at least not sinful. Therefore I had to rewrite many passages in order to make sure that my thoughts were portrayed correctly.

Tafakkur, which is the central theme of this book, also does not have a precise English translation. The two words that are closest to it in meaning, namely ‘meditation’ and ‘contemplation’, do not give the term *tafakkur* its true Islamic religious dimension. As the reader will see throughout this study, *tafakkur*, like contemplation and meditation, involves deep thinking and reflection, but the aim of this meditative contemplation is necessarily spiritual in nature. It is a refined form of worshipping God by appreciating His creation in His vast universe. The words ‘contemplation’ and ‘meditation’ are frequently used as synonyms in English dictionaries, although meditation is usually reserved for contemplation in spiritual matters. However, the term ‘meditation’ has been so often used in relation to the spirituality of Eastern religions that its use to explain *tafakkur* can be misleading. This is particularly the case when we know that the meditative procedures of Eastern religions tend to sacrifice conscious sober thinking in order to obtain altered states of consciousness, whereas *tafakkur* as an Islamic form of worship is a cognitive spiritual activity in which the rational mind, emotion and spirit must be combined. It is for this reason that I have preferred to use ‘contemplation’ rather than ‘meditation’ in the title of the book. It should also be stated that whenever words such as contemplation, meditation, reflection, deep thinking, cogitation or similar terms are used, they are simply the nearest terms available to express *tafakkur*.

I have intentionally avoided detailing definitions and intricate semantic differences of a few other Arabic terms, like spirit (*rūḥ*), soul (*nafs*) and heart (*qalb*), because this would require a whole volume in itself and would detract the reader from the simple message that I wish to convey. Although I do not subscribe to al-Ghazālī’s conception that all these terms refer to only one spiritual entity and that the different names stand for the different functions that it performs, I have nevertheless adopted it in this book.

I wish to conclude by expressing my indebtedness to the IIIT office

in Khartoum, Sudan, who allowed me to use the library resources for writing the original Arabic edition. In particular, I would like to mention the director, Abdallah Makki, and Mrs. Sittana Hamad, who wrote the whole book by hand from my dictation, as in the 1980s neither of us was computer literate!

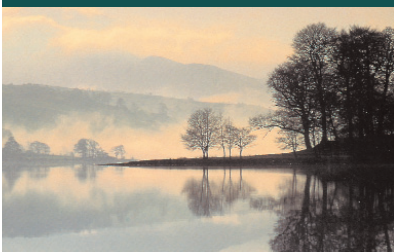
I would also like to express my gratitude towards Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the scholar and internationally known author, who honored me by accepting my request to write an introduction to this book.

I am grateful to IIT for deciding that my work should be translated into English, and the London Office for their hard work in copy-editing and bringing my attention to missing references and points needing to be clarified. I am also very grateful to Professor Abdul-Wahid Lu'lu'a for taking on the difficult task of translating my work.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this book to the blessed souls of three women who shaped my life: my mother Nafisa and my two aunts Maymoona and Sakina.

Dhu al-Qa'dah 1419
March 1999

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Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



Cover Photo
Bala Lake, North Wales
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DELVING into the true meaning and experience of Islamic spirituality, based on a person's awareness and recognition of his existence and place in Creation, Malik Badri reveals the limitations and contradictions of the current prevailing schools of psychology that deny the existence of the soul and perceive humans as mere machines acting on external stimuli.

Combining the rich traditional Islamic wisdom with contemporary knowledge, the author advances a unique approach to the understanding of the human psyche and the self that gives a central position to meditation and contemplation as forms of worship in Islam.

It is a book addressed to anyone who is interested in the Islamic approach towards the urgency felt by modern societies who are yearning for the rediscovery of the long-forgotten and neglected spiritual aspects of their lives.

MALIK BADRI is Professor of Psychology at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), Malaysia. He is a qualified therapist and the author of a number of books including *The Aids Crisis: An Islamic Socio-Cultural Perspective* (1997).

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