

ISLAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY: IṢFAHĀNĪ'S TREATMENT OF ANGER, FEAR AND SORROW

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Abstrak

Artikel ini memperkatakan tentang psikoterapi Islam dengan tumpuan khusus diberikan kepada rawatan emosi. Artikel ini mengkaji kaedah rawatan kurun ke sebelas oleh al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, merangkumi kaedah merawat perasaan marah, takut dan sedih. Iṣfahānī tidak mencadangkan kaedah untuk menghapuskan sifat-sifat ini, atau memperkatakan tentang daya perangsang bagi sifat tersebut, namun menekankan dari aspek kaedah pengawalannya. Psikoterapi baginya adalah berkaitan rawatan emosi-emosi yang melampau, yang mengganggu keseimbangan tiga daya yang terdapat dalam jiwa manusia. Jiwa yang terkawal mempengaruhi mental yang sihat dan sebaliknya jiwa yang terganggu boleh mengakibatkan kecelaruan mental. Artikel ini juga menyentuh secara ringkas pandangan-pandangan Ibn Miskawayh dan Imām al-Ghazzālī mengenai persoalan tersebut.

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Introduction

The term 'psychotherapy' evokes the idea of treating mental disorders by psychological methods only. This is because it is associated with Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychotherapy. Before modern psychotherapy people turned to family, friends and religious leaders who acted as practical counsellors of the soul. We use the term here in its holistic sense which also includes exploring the spiritual aspect of the self.

Although there were always disorders such as accidents and sprains where only the body could be taken into consideration for immediate purposes of treatment, ancient medicine emphasised the importance of treating the body and mind together. Islamic medicine and Islamic psychotherapy belongs to this tradition, and assumes that the body, mind and spirit are inseparable. Since the Renaissance the medical profession tended to concentrate on the body, yet the belief that physical disorders were the result of the psyche still persisted. Emotional conditions such as sorrow, fear or anger were not disregarded as causes of organic diseases such as headaches, backaches, constipation, diarrhoea, and indigestion. It is now accepted grudgingly by the medical profession that some people fall ill due to some inadequacy of the mind. The purpose of this article is not to examine the emotional causes of organic ailments, but to look at the emotional conditions themselves, particularly of anger, fear and sorrow. Our focus will be on al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī,¹ and his treatment of these emotions in the eleventh century.

¹ Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī died around 1050 AD and wrote his ethical treatise *Kitāb al-Dhari'ah ilā makārim al-shari'ah* (The Means to the Noble Qualities of the Revealed Law). This ethical work became an important source for al-Ghazzālī's ethical treatise *Mizān al-'Amal* (The Scale of Action) and to a lesser extent for his *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. For more detail on Iṣfahānī's life and moral thought, see Yasien Mohamed, "The Ethical Philosophy of al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī," *Journal of Islamic Studies*. 1996, 6 (1) 51-75.

The Islamic psychotherapy of al-Rāghib al-Işfahānī attempts to bring about a synthesis between Platonic psychology, Aristotelian ethics, and Islamic metaphysics. This therapy assumes the Platonic division of the soul into the rational, the concupiscent and the irascible. Their moderation and balance lead to mental health and their immoderation and imbalance lead to mental illness. We deal here with the irascible faculty (*al-quwwat al-ḥamiyyah*) or the faculty of anger. Moderate anger leads to virtues such as courage and justice, but immoderate anger leads to vices such as foolhardiness and cowardice. Since our subject is therapy, we assume the immoderate anger that requires moderation. Anger in itself is not evil, but it is harmful to the soul in its extreme form. Işfahānī's treatment is therefore not aimed at their removal, but their control. We will also deal with his treatment of sorrow and fear, and will compare his views with Miskawayh (d. 1030), author of the first Islamic psycho-ethical treatise.

1. Anger and Its Treatment

Anger should be understood in relation to the psychology of the soul; it is located in the irascible faculty, which is one of the three faculties of the soul, and plays a vitally important role in the control of desire or the concupiscent faculty, because it is more amenable to reason than desire. The Aristotelian rider-horse metaphor is used to illustrate this. Furthermore, it is not the suppression of anger which is virtuous, but rather its control. If it is disciplined by reason it will be useful, if it is not under the control of reason it will be destructive. There can be no courage without anger, and there can be no war without courage. Needless to say, the war has to be a just war, not one that kills innocent civilians. Anger is an important part of self-respecting response to the evils of society. It implies a dignified punishment for wrongdoing, but it has to be moderate and self-contained. Anger is useful because it makes us fighters; fighters against injustice, and protective against any kind of harm to one's dignity and one's family. If a man sees his father slaughtered and his mother raped, will he not be naturally enraged?

This is the response of a good man; a man who is not impervious to the wrongs of the society.

On the other hand, anger can be destructive when it is uncontrolled. It is prone to exceed the boundaries of reason. People's zeal, aspiration and desire for power, can be so obsessive, that it causes the individual to lose complete control of his emotions, the result of it is that he displays his anger in the form of violence, or inappropriate aggression. He becomes a psychopath; destructive towards all those around him. The religious zeal of the preacher that is not tempered by reason can also result in an authoritarian and extremely judgmental attitude. His anger hardens his spirit and he turns against humanity to the point of becoming cruel. Negative anger is rooted in fear and hatred, and it is a reaction to some external target that is perceived to be the cause of injustice and harm to one's person, property, family or country. Anger and aggression that emerges from it is an attempt to resist the pain that is inflicted by the external targets. Sometimes the rage lies within the soul, and the blind reaction causes the person to identify the wrong target; blaming and attacking those who are innocent. There is a need for control and balance. This is where reason comes into play. Reason tempers the severe emotions and alters the incorrect judgments. Reason directs anger towards injustice. This is a spiritual anger as it is borne out of righteous indignation. Its absence is a vice. It means silence in the face of injustice; it means fleeing from the dangers of brutality that threatens the lives of one's family and fellow-citizens. It is the vice of cowardice.

We do not wish to delve into the debate about whether anger is innate or whether it is something entirely nurtured by the external environment. It is indeed a part of human nature, and it has a positive role to play, but at the same time it usually emerges on account of some provocation from the external environment. It is therefore not something to be obliterated or suppressed, but to be controlled. And this control should be within the limits of reason and the revealed law. Aggression is always connected to some reason. Someone is to be blamed for a wrong that was done, and anger is directed at that wrongdoer. Since this emotion is connected

to the apprehension of a certain wrong or injustice, it can be tempered by modifying one's perception of the wrong, or of the person alleged to have committed the wrong. So if the perception is misdirected at the wrong person, with modification, it could be redirected at the right person.

With self-critical examination, the individual can doctor himself; he can monitor and control his anger. Without reflection a person is unable to explore his own emotions, and he will therefore not be able to realise the extremity of it. With reflection of oneself, and also of the external circumstances, one creates the opportunity of a proper judgement of whether the anger is justified and whether it is properly directed. If, for example, a person has done a wrong due to the pressures of circumstances, and the wrong was not wilful, then the victim who knows this will prefer pardon over vengeance. Although a judge in the court of law is obliged to implement justice, he will also be obliged to lessen the sentence of the accused if he is aware of the mitigating circumstances that led up to the crime.

The violence that emerges from this emotion is what makes a person mad. Two qualities of human experience lead one to madness. One is pride (or vain-glory and self-conceit) and the other is dejection of mind. The excess of anger that emerges out of pride may be called rage or fury. Excessive desire for revenge, excessive love (with jealousy), and an excessive opinion of oneself, may all lead to rage. Dejection leads to needless fears, which leads to a kind of madness which may be called melancholy. It may be due to loss of hope or loss of power. This leads to strange and unusual behaviour as in the form of superstitious behaviour, fear of something or someone. Anger is temporary insanity, and can be destructive when it blocks the natural heat of the heart.

Isfahani mentions twelve causes of anger: conceit, boasting, quarrel, obstinacy, joking, confusion, injustice, mockery, rivalry, envy and the desire for vengeance. Miskawayh mentions eleven causes of anger: 'vanity, boastfulness, bickering, importunity, jesting, self-conceit, derision, perfidy, wrongfulness, and the seeking

of things that bring fame, and for which people compete and envy one another. He also identifies the following consequences of anger: 'repentance, expectation of retaliatory punishment, change in temperament, and quickening of pain'. Miskawayh deals with each of these causes of anger and suggests remedies for them. Iṣfahānī describes some of these causes under the vices of the concupiscent faculty.²

Iṣfahānī compares man's anger to the igniting of fire. Some people are like grasses: quick to burn and slow to be put out; others are like leaves, slow to burn and slow to be put out. Differences are also relative to one's nature: one with a hot and dry temperament has a fiery temper, while one with a cold and humid temperament has a mild temper. Differences in temper also depend on custom: Some people are quiet and calm, described as gentle and modest; others are noisy and thoughtless, becoming furious over small things like a dog who barks at a person without knowing him. Young boys, women and the old are prone to become quickly angry; to be sure, their anger is most easily aroused.³

Al-Ghazzālī identifies four kinds of people with respect to anger: those who are quickly angered and quickly appeased, those who are slowly angered and slowly appeased (they are the most praiseworthy), those who are quickly angered and slowly appeased (they are the worst), and those who are slowly angered and slowly appeased. In the *Mizān*, al-Ghazzālī distinguishes between three kinds of anger, and he uses religious terms: Praiseworthy anger (*maḥmūd*) is the anger of righteous indignation; permissible anger (*makrū'*) is admissible, but it is better to avoid, and also depends on a person's temperament as it is a natural form of anger; blameworthy (*madhmūm*) anger is prohibited (*ḥarām*), it comes from the vices of pride, envy etc. The best person exercises praiseworthy

² Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Dhari'ah ilā makārim al-shari'ah*, Ed. Abū l-Yazīd al-'Ajāmī. Cairo 1987, p. 345, 16; 346, 1-12; Miskawayh, ibn Muḥammad, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq*, Ed. Constantine Zurayk, Beirut 1966, p. 195; English Translation by Constantine Zurayk, *The Refinement of Character*, Beirut 1968, p. 173.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 345f.

anger, which is the mean between two extremes, and which is nurtured by religion and directed towards the love of God.⁴

It is a virtue to control one's anger. Those who suppress their anger in battle are brave. The revealed book describes them as beneficent. "*Those who curb their anger and those who pardon their fellow-men. Allah loves the beneficent!*" (Q. 3: 134). The Prophet said to some people who were lifting a stone: "*Shall I inform you of the strongest among you? It is the one who has controlled his anger.*"⁵

Thinking and waiting, rather than reacting impulsively, helps with the control of anger. Retaliation against one's subordinate is easy, but it is better to be calm. Revenge against one's superior is unwise; it is better to wait patiently until one is in a stronger position to demand justice.⁶ 'A learned man said: "Block anger before its fire enrages your flesh and blood, for it can still be extinguished before it spreads, but not when in flames"' and 'A ruler asked a wise man: "How shall I prevent anger?" He said: "Remember to obey and not only to be obeyed, to serve and not only to be served, to endure and not only to be endured, and to know that God watches you at all times. This will prevent or lessen your anger."⁷

The general treatment of anger is through forbearance (*al-ḥilm*) and pardon (*'afw*),⁸ and to avoid being too hasty in blame and con-

⁴ *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 5 vols, Beirut, n.d., (corrected by A. A.I. al-Sirwan), III, p. 172f.

⁵ *Al-Dhari'ah*, p. 345, 14-15.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 346. Cf. Y. Mohamed, "The Moral Education of Işfahānī," *Plato's Philosophy of Education and its Relevance to Contemporary Society*, Eds J.D. Gericke and P.J. Maritz, 2 vols., Pretoria, 1998, 2, p. 257.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 346; cf. Mohamed, 'The Moral Education of Işfahānī', p. 257f., for the same passage and the same words and examples in al-Ghazzālī, *Mizān al-'Amāl*, ed. Sulayman Dunyā, Cairo 1964;

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 342-344; 58, where Işfahānī mentions forbearance (*al-ḥilm*) and pardon (*al-'afw*) and as the divine qualities which could also be used to describe man; cf. *Mizān* where Ghazzālī discusses the virtues and vices; cf. *Ihyā'*, III, pp. 169-178, where Ghazzālī deals with these two concepts separately and Işfahānī deals with them under one section.

demnation. Forbearance means self-restraint in times of anger; it is 'to manage the soul and temper when it is aroused to anger'⁹ The attempt to acquire this quality is called *taḥallum*, and it is done by restraining the body: the hands from violence, the tongue from indecency, the ears from eavesdropping, and the eyes from excessive gazes. It is expressed through pardon and forgiveness (*ṣafah*). Pardon is to free a person from a penalty due for an offence, and it is when the wrong was done to the pardoner, such as grabbing his wealth or hurting his dignity. Forgiveness is to pardon someone for a mistake or an offence, but if it transgresses the Law, then it is up to the ruler to pardon the offence, provided there is an element of doubt over the offence. But if the person is definitely guilty and has to be punished, then exacting punishment should not be out of anger. Delay in punishment is therefore recommended to help abate the anger, and perhaps even to see if there is a need for pardon. Alexander the Great forgave a criminal, so a man came up to him and said: 'If I were you, I would have killed him.' So Alexander said, 'So since I am not you and you are not me, I will not kill him'.¹⁰ The pleasure of pardon is better than the pleasure of retribution; the former will lead to a praiseworthy end, and the latter to a blameworthy regret. Retribution is also a form of justice as suggested in the verse: "*The reward of evil is an evil like it*" (Q. 42: 40).

Al-Ghazzālī defines pardon as "to be in a position of retribution and yet not exercise right, rather it is to exonerate the (guilty) person from paying blood-money and compensation; it is not forbearance, nor the subduing of anger." Al-Ghazzālī provides a clear definition of pardon. Iṣfahānī's definition is brief and vague. He concentrates on explaining Arabic terms, and makes a distinction between justice, pardon and forgiveness. Al-Ghazzālī interchanges these terms.¹¹

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 342; cf. Lane, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 1-2, Cambridge, 1984, p. 632.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 343, 13-15; cf. *Taḥdhib*, p.204/trans. Zurayk, p. 181, for the same anecdote.

¹¹ *Iḥyā'*, III, p. 174.

2. The Treatment for Sorrow (*ghamm*) and Fear (*khawf*)¹²

Miskawayh devoted a large part of his ethical treatise to the treatment of fear and sorrow,¹³ and it attracted the attention of later Muslim philosophers who adopted some of his ideas, which proved to be beneficial rather than controversial to Islamic ethics. Miskawayh's focus was on the fear of death, examining its causes and its remedies. He applied a kind of cognitive therapy; critically examining the reasons for people's fear of death. Miskawayh states: It has become evident that death is not an evil, as the mass of the people supposes, but that the evil, indeed, is the fear of death, and that whosoever is afraid of death is ignorant of it and of his self.¹⁴

There are various kinds of sorrow, which takes on different forms and different names. Sorrow due to the discovery of some defect of ability, is shame. It is the apprehension of something dishonourable in oneself. Sorrow over the calamity of someone else is pity, and may arise out of the feeling that such a condition might also befall oneself. Sorrow over the success of a competitor may lead to emulation in so far as one wants to equal or exceed that person in ability, but if it is to hinder the progress of the competitor, then it is called envy.

Sorrow in modern medical terms is called 'depression', which implies treatment through medication. But if the cause of this sorrow is circumstantial, such as in losing a job or a dear one, then medication might only provide temporary relief. It cannot treat the root cause of the problem. We therefore prefer to use the terms

¹² *Al-Dharī'ah*, pp. 332-334.

¹³ Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb*, pp. 209-222/Trans. Zurayk, pp. 185-196. Miskawayh, however, also included the treatment of anger under 'The health of the Soul'. Isfahānī also discusses the treatment of anger under the section relating to the irascible faculty. Miskawayh cites al-Kindī and paraphrases from his work, 'The Art of Dispelling Sorrow'. See, al-Kindī, *Risālah al-Hilāh li-daf' al-aḥzān*, ed. H. Ritter and R. Walzer, ed. and Italian translation, *Uno Scritto morale inedito*, 1938-1939; B.H. Siddiqi, "Miskawayh's Theory of Spiritual Therapy," *Journal of the Regional Cultural Institute*, 1 (1968), pp. 22-36.

¹⁴ *Tahdhīb*, p. 216/Trans. Zurayk, pp. 191.

'sorrow', 'grief' or 'melancholy'. These do not convey the sense of an unredeemable malady, but are natural human emotions that help to find cure, healing and meaning. It could also be used destructively. The elderly could be melancholic on account of unfilled dreams, losses, or even weakness.

The emotion of fear is also powerful. We all feel a sense of fear for ordinary things such as not being able to complete a task on time, or for some visible object, but immoderate fear is highly exaggerated and has little basis in truth or reality, it is pure fantasy, imagination. The fear of death is common among the elderly. It is no fantasy, for we all have to die, but it is not only death itself that people fear, it is often other things associated with death that brings about the fear.

Işfahānī's understanding of sorrow pertains to the loss of someone or something dear, and also to the failure of fulfilling a desire. Central to this feeling of loss is the belief that transient things will endure. Işfahānī attempts to show the folly of such sorrows or fears over matters of a transient nature, and seeks to remind us of the nature of this temporal world and how we should approach it. If a foolish belief can be altered, a remedy can be found for sorrow. A change in the belief that transient things will endure to a belief that they will perish, makes a big difference to one's attitude to life. One will then begin to direct all energy to those things which have permanent value, such as the four cardinal virtues of the soul. With this change in perspective, one will not grieve over one's loss, and will always be joyful and happy. One will see that happiness depends on an attitude of detachment of material goods, which should only be pursued as a means to an end, which is to attain the permanent goods of the soul in this world, and the consequent permanent happiness in the hereafter.

Işfahānī states that man's duty is to know that the world is full of calamities.

Sages said: the causes of sorrow are the loss of a beloved one or an unfulfilled desire; no person can claim to be free of these [human sufferings] as stability and permanence

are absent in this world of generation and corruption. So he who would like to live forever along with his family and dear ones, is devoid of intellect because he desires to own that which cannot be owned, and to have that which cannot be had. It behoves a man to never allow his heart to be bereft of the realization that trusts ultimately must return to their owners and that calamities descend upon their victims.¹⁵

About those things which cause sorrow Işfahānī states: 'It behoves a man to decrease those gains that lead to depression. A sage explained to someone why he was not sad: "That is because I do not acquire things, which if I lose, will make me depressed." Someone asked a sage, "Is it possible for humans to live peacefully?" He replied, "Yes, provided a person avoids wrong, is content with his wealth, and does not grieve over what afflicts him, then it is possible."¹⁶

Sorrow (or anxiety) about the future exists in three cases: either in something impossible, in something necessary or in something possible. In the case of the impossible, no intelligent person will be concerned with it; if it concerns something necessary (or inevitable) as in the case of death, then [one must know] that it is the lot of servants; if its existence is possible, but cannot be repelled, like the possibility of old age, then sadness over it is ignorance, and it will procure sorrow upon sorrow. However, if it is something possible, and permissible to repel, then he should repel it with swift action, without sorrow. If to avoid it is not possible, then he should exercise patience, and let him realize the meaning of God's saying: 'Not a disaster befalls in the earth or in yourselves but is in a Book, before We created it. That for Allah is an easy matter. So that you

¹⁵ *Al-Dhari'ah*, p. 332. We have provided a free translation of the last sentence of this passage.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

may not grieve for what you missed, and rejoice at what came your way. Allah does not like the conceited and the boastful' (Q. 57: 22-23).¹⁷

Whoever believes in God's wisdom and pre-knowledge will not be worried about future misfortunes, nor will he regret the past misfortunes. People are deceived by the apparent abatement of calamities, but with some deep reflection they will realize the reality of the matter; they will come to know that this is only momentary and that calamities will recur.¹⁸

We turn now to fear, an emotion related to anger. Anger is a reaction to an external situation which one fears on account of the harm that it causes. It may be defined as a feeling of anxiety, an unpleasant feeling of apprehension, or distress caused by the presence or anticipation of danger. This is an irrational emotion; we do not know why or how it happens. It is called 'panic' when in public. The fear of death for Miskawayh is a powerful fear rooted in ignorance about the immortality of the soul and the mortality of the pleasures of the body. People who fear death because of a future punishment for past sins, could simply avoid this fear by living a good life, free of sins. It is not always death itself that people fear, but the separation from their wealth and their relatives. Here again, this fear is a result of the ignorance about the perishable nature of the world, with all the things and persons that it contains.¹⁹

Iṣfahānī follows the same line of thought, but he is more brief and concise. For him, four things are the cause of this fear: immoderate desire of the stomach and the genitals, the wealth one leaves behind, ignorance of one's outcome after death, and the fear of the effect of one's previous sins.²⁰ If the cause of one's anxiety (or fear) is the craving of one's stomach and private parts, it is like

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.334.

¹⁹ Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb*, pp. 209-222/Trans. Zurayk, pp. 185-196.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

wanting a sickness that leads to another one similar to it. It is like a man who does not find his food delicious unless he is hungry. His hunger is a sickness that he flees from, and its satiation is a sickness he flees to. He is like one who loves hunger to enjoy his food, or loves sitting in the sun to enjoy the shade. This is plain stupidity.²¹ If the cause of anxiety is the fortune he will leave behind after death, it is because of his sheer ignorance of its unimportance in relation to the more significant treasure that awaits the God-fearing in the Hereafter. Treatment for this anxiety is to acquire knowledge of the otherworldly reality. Ḥarīth said to the Prophet: 'It is like looking clearly at my Lord's throne and seeing how the people of paradise visit each other in it, and how the people of the fire try to assist each other in it'.²² If his anxiety is due to fear of the outcome of his past sins, then his treatment is repentance, and the insight into God's promise for the repentant.²³

The fear, according to Miskawayh, is not death itself, but God's punishment of his sins. The remedy is simply to avoid the sins. No mention is made of repentance.²⁴

People have various attitudes to this world and to death. Işfahānī identifies three categories of people.²⁵ Here follows a summary of his views. Firstly, there is the sage who is aware that worldly life enslaves him, and death will liberate him; that man's life in this world, even if long, is temporary, like a flash of lightning, which then disappears. He also knows that he is like an envoy to safeguard a seaport, and to govern and protect his country.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 334; cf. *Tahdhīb*, p. 211-212/trans. Zurayk, 187. Miskawayh discusses here the Stoic concept of voluntary death, which involves the suppression of desires, which refers to the true philosophers who despise the ephemeral.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 334; cf. *Tahdhīb*, p. 214/trans. Zurayk, p. 190; cf. *Mizān*, pp. 388-399. Miskawayh discusses this aspect under the section of the 'Fear of death: its causes and remedies.' Here his focus is on the pain of death, and deals with the treatment of grief in a separate section.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

²⁴ *Tahdhīb*, p. 213/trans. p. 189.

²⁵ *Al-Dhari'ah*, pp. 335-338; cf. *Mizān*, p. 395f.

He is happy to return to his Lord, and is not sad to leave this world, except for the lost opportunities to serve God and to be near to Him. His only anxiety is the uncertainty beyond death where he will meet his Lord for the first time, not knowing what he will say to Him, or what will be said to him.²⁶ Secondly, there is the person who is delighted by this world, and is reluctant to leave it, like the one who is accustomed to a dark, dirty house, and is reluctant to leave it. If people are satisfied with their sustenance and their countries, they would not complain of the poverty they might leave behind if they know what God has prepared for them of the inconceivable wealth; instead, they will be eager to take up permanent residence in the Hereafter, and say: "*Praise be to Allah who lifted off our sorrow. Our Lord is indeed All-Forgiving, All-Thankful*" (Q. 35: 34-35).²⁷ Thirdly, there is the man who is blind to the stains of his soul through his own bad deeds. He delights in the life of this world, and fears the Hereafter as unbelievers fear death. If he leaves this world and enters the next world, he would be as adversely affected as the fragrance of the rose is marred by the presence of the dung beetle. Since he is so morally defiled by the world, the heavenly hosts of Prophets, saints, jinn and angels will not accept him. Concerning such people who are blind to paradise, God states, "*And he who is blind in this world will be blind in the Hereafter, and will stray even more from the right way*" (Q. 17: 72). Therefore the Prophet states: 'The world is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the unbeliever'.²⁸ The righteous should therefore be nourished with knowledge and good deeds to obviate the problem of longing for this world, and not to loathe leaving it as the baby leaves his mother's womb crying in pain.²⁹

It is said if the virtuous man dies he is relieved of the world, and when the vicious man dies, the world is relieved of him. Death is the exit leading to human perfection, and whoever is averse to

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

²⁸ *Sahih Muslim*, Kitāb al-Zuhd, ḥadīth 2957, cited in 'Ajamī, *al-Dhari'ah*, p. 336.

²⁹ *Al-Dhari'ah*, p. 336.

his perfection has lost his soul. The rational person is constantly aware of death, benefits from it in three ways - by being contented with what God has bestowed upon him, by being repentant, and by being active in worship.³⁰ In sum, the virtuous man is detached from the world, he is fearless of death, and he is ready for the Hereafter.

Conclusion

The focus of this essay is on the psychotherapy of Işfahānī, but we have made some slight comparisons with the view of Miskawayh and Ghazzālī. A more in-depth comparative analysis is required, but we leave this for a separate article.

Işfahānī share the view that anger is a natural emotion that should be controlled, not obliterated. Appropriate anger produces the virtue of courage, but inappropriate anger produces the vice of violence, fear or sorrow. The psychotherapeutic tools that they propose for such emotional afflictions are: reflection, patience, pardon and detachment from the material world. Their general approach to therapy is similar, but Işfahānī adds a greater degree of Islamic orientation. For him, repentance and the consciousness of the Hereafter are important elements in the treatment of sin. His approach to fear is even more positive especially when it concerns the fear of the disobedience to God. This is for him a positive religious attitude, which purifies the soul, and serves as a remedy for the fear of death. In fact, the fear of death becomes transformed into the love for death.

Their Arabic styles differ. They both quote from the wisdom of the sages and poets, but Işfahānī cites extensively from religious sources and Miskawayh quotes frequently from Greek sources. Miskawayh uses effective analogies to clarify his abstract ideas, as well as interesting anecdotes from philosophers. He provides practical guidance for nurturing moral traits, and he writes in a

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 337f.

clear, logical and systematic style. For an illustration of their different approaches one might do well to compare some passages from their texts.³¹ Iṣfahānī had an impact on the ethical writing of al-Ghazzālī, and if we were to compare their views on anger, sorrow and fear, we will find similarity in their thought and style. But this will require separate treatment.

³¹ For an example of passages with similar content and with different styles, see *al-Dhari'ah*, 207, and *Taḥdhīb*, p. 333.