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Abū Zayd Al-Balkhī's Sustenance of the Soul and the Development of Self-Control

Afifah Shamsuddin*

Amilah Awang Abd Rahman @ Jusoh**

Abstract

This study aims to explore the view of Abū Zayd Aḥmad Ibn Sahl al-Balkhī on the sustenance of the soul and the development of self-control. The authors focus the discussion on the definition, the nature of self-control and its development, the healthy and unhealthy soul development that manifest into good and bad behaviour. The type of research used for this study is qualitative research as it is to be more helpful to gain in-depth understanding of underlying reasons and thoughts on this topic. This research will employ the descriptive and analytical methods on the content of primary sources and modern secondary sources. Finding reveals that Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's framework of sustenance of the soul in the development of self-control is significant and relevance to be implemented in developing human character and behaviours. He believed that someone who has a healthy soul possesses high self-control and can control their action to do just good deeds and abstain themselves from doing evils.

Keywords: Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, *ʿIlm al-naḥs*, Psycho-Spiritual, Ethics, Islamic Philosophy

Introduction

Soul is one of the most important subtle entities of a human being. Soul has been mentioned several times in the Quran and hadith and has been discussed widely by many scholars. Abū Zayd al-Balkhī is one of the classical scholars who stressed the importance of having a healthy soul to keep one's physical wellbeing or to maintain psychological health.¹ He strongly believed that healthy soul plays a vital role to regain the state of wholesome wellbeing.² He stressed that man has to take care of

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¹ Abū Zayd Aḥmed ibn Sahl Al-Balkhī, *Masāliḥ Al-Abdān Wa Al-Anfus* (Riyadh, Saudi: King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, 2003),

<https://ia600109.us.archive.org/14/items/a1043n/a1043n.pdf>. p. 238.

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

the soul more than he should take care of the body. This is because the soul is the master while the body is the obedient servant.¹

He believed that the health of the soul and its tranquillity can be attained through a consistent struggle in facing any circumstances in everyday life activities.² In this context, one has to struggle to regain the health of the soul or maintain his soul's health. His idea of sustenance of the soul is significant as it is associated with the development of self-control. During the proses of struggle, self-control is required and needed to achieve the sustenance of the soul. The higher the level of self-control is, the healthier the soul will be and vice-versa. Often time, in the venture to take good care of one's soul, self-control is gradually developed as one must practically train and discipline himself to fulfil the sustenance of soul.

Abu Zayd Al-Balkhi's Biography

Abū Zayd Aḥmed ibn Sahl Al-Balkhī³ or also known as Abū Zayd al-Balkhī in the place he was born, was a great Muslim polymath and a prominent scholar in the ninth century.⁴ He was born in a Persian village⁵ called Shamisitiyan, which is in Balkh⁶ in 849 CE.⁷ Balkh is the modern-day Afghanistan. He died at the age of 85 in 934 CE.⁸ He lived between mid-8th century to mid-9th century. During his lifetime, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī had the privilege to study under a renowned philosopher,⁹ Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī¹⁰ (800-870 CE).¹¹ Although Abū Zayd al-Balkhī studied

¹ Sheikh Salman al-Oadah, "The Partnership Between Body and Soul," *The Religion of Islam*, 2014, <https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/10667/partnership-between-body-and-soul/>.

² *Ibid.*, p. 81.

³ Malik Badri, *Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's Sustenance of the Soul: The Cognitive Behaviour Therapy of A Ninth Century Physician*, 1st ed. (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2013). p. I.

⁴ Fatimah Abdullah, "Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkh," *Jurnal Akidah Dan Pemikiran Islam (AFKAR)*, 2011. p. 77.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. II.

⁶ Tamim Mobayed, "Abu Zayd Abū Zayd al-Balkhī: The 9th Century Psychologist Centuries Ahead of His Time," *Ilmfeed.com*, 2017, <https://ilmfeed.com/abu-zayd-Abū-Zayd-al-Balkhī-the-9th-century-psychologist-centuries-ahead-of-his-time/>.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. II.

⁹ *Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's Sustenance of the Soul*. p. IV.

¹⁰ Al-Kindī was born in Basra but he further his studies in Baghdad. Abū Zayd al-Balkhī went to Baghdad to study with al-Kindī and he left as he went back to his hometown after Al-Kindi died in 870 CE while Abū Zayd al-Balkhī was around 19-20 years old.

¹¹ Peter Adamson, "Al-Kindi," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018,

medicine, he was not a practicing physician rather, he excelled in theoretical medicine.¹ One of his contributions is his prominent book *Masālih al-Abdān wa al-Anfus* which was found in Ayasofya Library, Istanbul. This manuscript consists of two parts, namely the sustenance of the bodies or physical medication and sustenance of the soul/psyche or psychological and psychosomatic issues.² In this monumental manuscript, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī first addresses physical health, after which he delves into the area of the soul. His second part of the *Maṣāliḥ al-Abdān wa al-Anfus* (Sustenance of Bodies and Souls), describes about aspects of soul in eight chapters. In the last five chapters, he focussed on the ways to sustain the healthy soul.

Abū Zayd Al-Balkhī's Concept of Sustenance of The Soul

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī is one of the classical scholars who explored the sustenance of soul. His second part of the *Masāliḥ al-Abdān wa al-Anfus* (Sustenance of Bodies and Souls), describes about aspects of soul in eight chapters. In the last five chapters, he focussed on the ways to sustain the healthy soul. He believed that the health of the soul and its tranquillity can be attained through a consistent struggle in facing any circumstances in everyday life activities.³ In this context, one has to struggle to regain the health of the soul or maintain his soul's health. His idea of sustenance of the soul is significant as it is associated with the development of self-control. During the proses of struggle, self-control is required and needed to achieve the sustenance of the soul. The higher the level of self-control is, the healthier the soul will be and vice-versa. Often time, in the venture to take good care of one's soul, self-control is gradually developed as one must practically train and discipline himself to fulfil the sustenance of soul.

Abū Zayd Al-Balkhī's Framework of Sustenance of the Soul

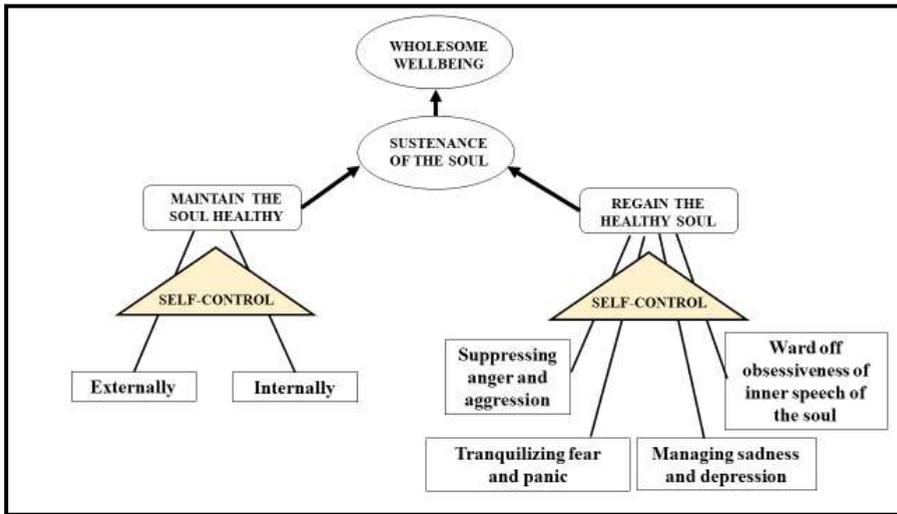
Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's idea of sustenance of soul can be followed easily by reading his *Masālih al-Abdān wa al-Anfus* (Sustenance of Bodies and Souls). His framework of Sustenance of the Soul can be pictured in the following Figure 1.1.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/al-kindī/>. p. 26-33.

¹ Ibid., p. IV.

² Badri, *Abu Zayd Al-Balkhi's Sustenance of The Soul: The Cognitive Behavior Therapy of A Ninth Century Physician*. p. III.

³ Ibid., p. 81.

Figure 1.¹ Al-Balkhī's Framework of Sustenance of Soul

The figure clearly shows Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's Framework of Sustenance of the Soul. He suggested that a healthy soul is something that should be maintained for those people who have attained it and regained it back when one loses it. To achieve sustenance of the soul, one has to maintain his soul's health by external and internal ways. Those with unhealthy soul should treat the soul by suppressing anger and aggression, tranquilizing fear and panic, managing sadness and depression, ward off obsessiveness of inner speech of the soul. In the struggle to maintain the soul's health or to regain back the soul's health, self-control is the essential weapon to be used. With the absence of self-control, one's effort to fulfil the sustenance of the soul will only be in vain. By using and sharpening this essential weapon consistently, self-control is slowly nurtured and well developed. Once the sustenance of the soul is fulfilled, one will then be able to regain the state of wholesome wellbeing. The wholesome wellbeing can be explained as a person who possesses high self-control that leads to the core of all positive state that he experiences like calmness, tranquillity, bliss, pleasure, and delight.¹

¹ Fatimah Abdullah, "Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkh." p. 81.

Ways to Maintain the Soul Healthy

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī mentioned that to have joy and happiness one must take good care of the health of the soul.¹ Those people who already possess healthy souls should maintain it and avoid it from being unhealthy. He suggested that one of the most significant ways of enabling people to reinforce or improve their mental health is by helping them understand that their soul or self is their most valuable possession or perhaps, even better.² As a result, they will try to preserve and protect the health of their soul or self, and they will make it as one of the priorities in life. Abū Zayd al-Balkhī explained that one has to maintain his soul's health in order to fulfil the sustenance of the soul.

He suggested two methods to maintain the soul's health: the internal and external methods. For the internal method, he suggested the person has to control the distressful feelings that appear with an optimistic thought which are created within the soul.³ While for the external method, it involves treatment through the help of other people.⁴ Both ways required one to perform and practise his self-control to maintain the soul's health.

Internal Method of Maintaining the Soul Healthy

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī stressed the importance of having a healthy soul as much as having a healthy body. He emphasized that the health of the soul should be taken care of as much as one takes care of his body.⁵ He recommended a few ways to maintain the soul healthy through internal method. This method involves taking actions to protect the soul from internal elements of negative thinking. Negative cognitions or thoughts are one of the biggest factors of someone having problems regarding the sustenance of the healthy soul. To fight with the negativity, one should practice his discipline to control himself to use the positivity. This form of struggle is one of the ways to align his thought to reach the stable state of mind.⁶

He suggested that one should keep healthy thoughts or positive cognitions⁷ and feelings in his mind to avoid unexpected emotional outbursts,

¹ Al-Balkhī, *Masālih Al-Abdān Wa Al-Anfus*. p. 242.

² Fatimah Abdullah, "Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkhī." p. 89.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴ Badri, *Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's Sustenance of The Soul: The Cognitive Behaviour Therapy of A Ninth Century Physician*. p. 54.

⁵ Fatimah Abdullah, "Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkhī." p. 87.

⁶ Yusuf, "Abū Zayd al-Balkhī on Depression."

⁷ *Ibid.*,

just like a healthy person who keeps some drugs and first aid medicines close by for unexpected physical emergencies.¹ He emphasized that if one is quick to find the medicine for any bodily sickness they suffer, one must also be aware of the significance of the remedies to treat the symptoms of unhealthy soul. He used the approach of relating the actions taken by one in dealing with his body when he discussed about taking care of the soul.

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī suggested that one should learn to ignore the annoying and provoking elements that can disturb the tranquility of the soul. He should train himself not to overreact to the incidents that he saw and heard and try to tolerate this irritating experience. By doing so, his self-control develops and improves over time. But one cannot have the positivity while having a crisis. So, one needs to bank them and store them when one is in a very good and stable condition. Storing healthy thoughts and cognitions must be done when a person is in a tranquil and relaxed manner. This method helps a lot especially when one is amid negative thinking.

Those who avoid the wrath and control themselves through a balanced mental power toward depression, anxiety, and similar injurious behaviours will maintain their good mental health.² It shows that happiness and contentedness will offer a better living status to many who would otherwise be sick and depressed because of needless misery, fear, worry, and anxiety.³ In discussing al-Balkhī's work, Fatimah Abdullah mentioned that holding healthy thoughts and feelings by pursuing logical cognitive care can help people learn to fill the mind with healthy thoughts and feelings.⁴ To Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, losing one's persistence is a greater tragedy than the imaginary or real conditions one may be worried about. People who cannot counter that negative thought will be inclined to get an unhealthy soul which can lead to an unhealthy life.⁵ Those people who can be optimist and patient will succeed and achieve a deep feeling of fulfilment.⁶ In lieu of the *āyah* in the Quran, Allah SWT said:

¹ Amber Haque, "Psychology from an Islamic Perspective," *Global Psychologies: Mental Health and the Global South* 43, no. 4 (2018): 137–50, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95816-0_8. p. 360.

² Nurdeen Deuraseh and Mansor Abu Talib, "Mental Health in Islamic Medical Tradition," *Construction* 4, no. 2 (2005): 76–79.

³ *Ibid.*,

⁴ Fatimah Abdullah, "Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkh." p. 91.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

O you who have faith! Take recourse in patience and prayer; indeed, Allah is with the patient.¹

Therefore, people should learn to counter negative thoughts that can lead to neurotic depression. Stirring up sentiments that can make one upset is not a good idea and therefore, it must be avoided.² Soul disturbances which can lead to an unhealthy soul should be avoided by everyone. One must train oneself to control his thought in the right way so that the pursuit of contentment and the enjoyment of spiritual happiness becomes an ingrained habit and an acquired feature,³ thus self-control is gradually developed.

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī believed that psychological symptoms do not have implicit origins, meaning that they are acquired behaviours that can be cured by learning and even unlearned.⁴ When encountered any problem, people tend to interpret it based on their past experiences. This can be taken as example when two people solve the same problem, the actions taken by each of the person is not always the same. However, according to Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, most of the problems can be solved if one keeps a positive mind and attitude thus keeping a healthy soul.

By concentrating on changing the inner-thinking and wrong beliefs one can help oneself to get rid of their emotional disorders. This simple step could help them to improve their sickened soul.⁵ In the struggle to train oneself to protect one's soul and control the distressful feelings that appear within the soul to maintain its health,⁶ self-control needs to be practiced in order to fulfil the sustenance of the soul. By doing so, self-control is slowly nurtured and well developed.

External Method of Maintaining the Soul Healthy

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī also elaborated some external ways to maintain the soul healthy. They involve the actions to protect the soul from outside elements that can interrupt the calmness and harmony of the soul. Outside elements can be in the form of words, information and news that

¹ The Qur'an 2:153 (Translated by Yusuf Ali)

² Fatimah Abdullah, "Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkh."p. 91.

³ Deuraseh and Talib, "Mental Health in Islamic Medical Tradition."

⁴ Mobayed, "Abu Zayd Abū Zayd al-Balkhī: The 9th Century Psychologist Centuries Ahead of His Time."

⁵ Fatimah Abdullah, "Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkh."p. 87.

⁶ Al-Balkhī, *Masālih Al-Abdān Wa Al-Anfus*. p. 267.

cause worry and disturb the emotion of the person who hears or sees them. Often times, it leads to negative responses like anger, panic, sadness, fear and any other psychological symptoms.

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī suggested a useful external method to maintain the soul's health is through the help of other people.¹ Abū Zayd al-Balkhī mentioned that one of the strategies to fight mental distress is to seek the help of other people. By listening to other people and actually taking their advice, one's soul calms. The method is supported by the following Hadith:

The Prophet (PBUH) said, "The *dīn* (religion) is *nāṣiḥah* (advice, sincerity)." We said, "To whom?" He (PBUH) said, "To Allah, His Book, His Messenger, and to the leaders of the Muslims and their common folk."² (Muslim)

Islam recommends that people seek help from their companions to lessen the burden they suffer. Other people views and perceptions would widen the horizon and open up one's mind to understand that any hardship or damaging loss befallen them is either similar or less serious than what other people have suffered.³ Abū Zayd al-Balkhī believed that human beings often find consolation in realizing that their difficult situations are not (unfairly) unique but as they are shared across the spectrum by many other people.⁴ He emphasizes that through the help of other people, one will know and understand more that heart-breaking or grievous experiences are a part of this life.

According to Fatimah Abdullah, this relativizing strategy may help some people to be thankful to God for saving them from a bigger disaster.⁵ In addition, people understand that they have a future to compensate for whatever loss they may have experienced. The problem-solving mentality helps people more than the victim-syndrome that paralyzes them and inhibits their mental energy.⁶

¹ Badri, *Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's Sustainance of The Soul: The Cognitive Behaviour Therapy of A Ninth Century Physician*. p. 54.

² عَنْ أَبِي زَيْدٍ تَمِيمِ بْنِ أَوْسِ الدَّارِيِّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: "الدِّينُ النَّصِيحَةُ." Hadith 7, 40 Hadith an-Nawawi. <https://sunnah.com/nawawi40:7>

³ Deuraseh and Talib, "Mental Health in Islamic Medical Tradition."

⁴ Al-Balkhī, *Maṣāliḥ Al-Abdān Wa Al-Anfus*. p. 268.

⁵ Fatimah Abdullah, "Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkh." p. 90.

⁶ Ibid., p. 87.

This approach is in line with Islamic teachings. Allah said:

And when your Lord proclaimed, ‘If you are grateful, I will surely enhance you [in blessing], but if you are ungrateful, my punishment is indeed severe.’¹

Those who are being grateful for all the bounties they get; indeed, Allah will increase the bounties. Accepting one’s fate is one way to be grateful to the creator for He knows what best for his servant. Once he accepts that whatever comes in his way is from Allah, he will be wiser and stronger. Usually, though not always, when people are asked to look at their experiences in a larger context, they understand that sorrowful and grievous mishaps are intended to be overlooked most of the time, as the past days usually reduces the sense of suffering induced by misfortune.

A similar approach as proposed by Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, is used with more complex and specialized methods in current behavioural therapy. The primary goal of spiritual and logical cognitive therapy is to confront, question, and alter maladaptive mental processes in avoiding depression. It is very important to prevent depression that can lead to an unhealthy soul.

Ways to Regain the Healthy Soul

Muslims are taught that human nature is dual; that every soul has good and evil attributes. An unhealthy soul requires immediate treatment to avoid the negative consequences. People with unhealthy souls must strive to regain their healthy souls. Abū Zayd al-Balkhī suggested that those with unhealthy souls should treat their souls by suppressing anger and aggression, tranquilizing fear and panic, managing sadness and depression, and ward off obsessiveness of inner speech of the soul.

Suppressing Anger and Aggression

In chapter five of the second part of *Maṣāliḥ al-Abdān wa al-Anfus* (Sustenance of Bodies and Souls), Abū Zayd al-Balkhī described the treatment and prevention of excessive anger. The treatments he suggested consist of two methods which are external and internal approaches that are based on the cause of the anger.² The external approach suggested by Abū Zayd al-Balkhī involves seeking help and advice from close associates, especially the wise ones. Those who intend to control and manage their

¹ The Qur’an 14:7 (Translated by Yusuf Ali)

² Fatimah Abdullah, “Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkhī.” p. 94.

anger need to accept those wise men as their close companions. They should permit them to counsel and remind them about the harmful aspects of uncontrolled anger and enlighten them on the righteousness of forgiveness. They should also allow them to politely intercede when they lose their temper or outbursts¹ to minimize the impact of a tragedy that might occur. Abū Zayd al-Balkhī also highlighted that when one gets angry, one is emotionally provoked. However, the stirred emotions can be healed as time passes.² This external approach requires one to have strong self-control in order to manage one's anger and aggression.

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī also suggested the internal approach used to counteract anger and aggression to be based on mental manoeuvring of thoughts. He suggested several mental tactics including counteracting angry-laden thought, contemplating about bodily disorder caused by anger, reflecting on the intense feeling of guilt after the angry moment, reminding the thinking soul of the great virtue of patience, practicing mercy and forgiveness, and thinking positively about the wrongdoers.³

In order to execute the mental tactics suggested by Abū Zayd al-Balkhī, one needs to struggle to manoeuvre his thoughts and control himself to reach the stable state of mind.⁴ He must practise to calm himself and then think positively before his condition worsens. By doing so, his self-control will develop and improve.

Tranquilizing Fear and Panic

In chapter six of his *Masālih al-Abdān wa al-Anfus* (Sustenance of Bodies and Souls), Abū Zayd al-Balkhī discussed about tranquilization of fear and panic to regain the healthy soul. He explained the factors of one's fear, how one should react towards each one of them it, and ways to overcome this feeling.⁵ Fear comes whenever someone is facing something that is quite threatening to him whether it is seen, thought of or heard.⁶ The real fear is immediately felt when the individual is threatened by an impending danger that may cause one unbearable pain or death.

¹ Badri, *Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's Sustenance of The Soul: The Cognitive Behaviour Therapy of A Ninth Century Physician*. p. 40.

² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

³ Fatimah Abdullah, "Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkh." p. 93-99.

⁴ Yusuf, "Abū Zayd al-Balkhī on Depression."

⁵ Muhammad Vandestra, *The Tale of Abu Zayd Abū Zayd al-Balkhī Great Muslim Psychologist from 9th Century*. p.10.

⁶ Al-Balkhī, *Maṣāliḥ Al-Abdān Wa Al-Anfus*. p. 270.

There are some tactics suggested by Abū Zayd al-Balkhī to overcome the fear of the frightened person. One of the tactics is to become fully aware that in most cases, the fear created by the expectation is much greater than the genuine experience itself.¹ Abū Zayd al-Balkhī explained that this tactic was suggested because most of what man fears is not as harmful as he thinks. He elaborated further that the method of tranquilizing fear and panic depends on the way one responds to the fearful situation. For those who are by nature strong in temperament, calm thinking tactic is suitable to tranquilize their fear. However, for those whose disposition is so reactive that they become stunned and unable to think of any way out, calm thinking tactic cannot be helpful. After a while when he starts to calm down and able to listen and weigh the matters rationally, thinking manoeuvre tactic can be used successfully.²

In conclusion Abū Zayd al-Balkhī explained that the best way for tranquilizing fear and panic is through the process of learning; that is, acquisition of knowledge and information about fearsome things and how to manage them. The effectiveness of this method relies mainly on how one applies and strengthens his self-control.³

Managing Sadness and Depression

In chapter seven of the second part of his prominent manuscript, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī talked about sadness and depression and the methods of dealing with these two conditions. Sadness can lead to severe reactions if not managed well.⁴ In this chapter, he elucidated the symptoms and effects of sadness and depression, and the ways to treat these two conditions. One may experience severe reactions when he is suffering from acute sadness and depression that may cause exhaustion to the body, drain the activities, and wearing out his wish for pleasurable and desires.⁵ The common cause of sadness reported in this chapter is loss of the loved ones or something the person loved and got attached to.

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī also mentioned the differences between fear, anxiety, sadness, and depression. Fear and anxiety are always caused by

¹ Awaad and Ali, "A Modern Conceptualization of Phobia in Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's 9th Century Treatise: Sustenance of the Body and Soul." p. 90.

² Yusuf, "Abū Zayd al-Balkhī on Depression."

³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

⁴ Fatimah Abdullah, "Virtues and Character Development in Islamic Ethics and Positive Psychology," *International Journal of Education and Social Science* 1, no. 2 (2014): 69–77

⁵ Deuraseh and Talib, "Mental Health in Islamic Medical Tradition."

the expectation of a future threat,¹ while sadness and depression are always caused by the experience.

Two types of sadness have been classified by Abū Zayd al-Balkhī. The first type is the one that has an obvious cause like the death of a beloved one or loss of wealth or something that the person loved so much.² The treatments suggested are divided into two categories; external and internal. The external categories should be treated through specialized counsellors.³ While for the internal, he suggested that the person has to control the distressful feelings that appear with an optimistic thought that is created within the soul.⁴

The second type of sadness refers to the sadness that has no obvious reasons and causes. It is an unexpected gloom and sorrow that descends over the affected person and makes him uninterested in the activities and the enjoyment of the things.⁵ The treatment for this kind of sadness is also divided into two categories which are physical and psychological. As for the physical, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī claimed that those who easily get sad with no reason might have excessive black bile in his four types of humours in the body.⁶ Excessiveness of black bile in one's body may affect the melancholy temperament.⁷

While for psychological treatment, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī suggested the gloomy person to get involved in activities that will emotionally give warmth such as attending a gentle encouraging talk or listening to music and songs.⁸ Thus, before the sadness and depression could be treated, one must identify which type of sadness one experiences. The treatments are bound to bring about a quick feeling of comfort or even happiness and pleasure regardless of the causes of the sadness. It is also essential to avoid sadness and depression that can lead to an unhealthy soul. The main

¹ Fatimah Abdullah, "Virtues and Character Development in Islamic Ethics and Positive Psychology." p.73.

² Deuraseh and Talib, "Mental Health in Islamic Medical Tradition."

³ Badri, *Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's Sustainance of The Soul: The Cognitive Behaviour Therapy of A Ninth Century Physician*. p. 54.

⁴ Al-Balkhī, *Masālih Al-Abdān Wa Al-Anfus*. p. 268.

⁵ Deuraseh and Talib, "Mental Health in Islamic Medical Tradition."

⁶ Badri, *Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's Sustainance of The Soul: The Cognitive Behaviour Therapy of A Ninth Century Physician*.p. 55.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁸ Deuraseh and Talib, "Mental Health in Islamic Medical Tradition."

focus of the prevention measures and treatments is on self-control that can help the sufferer to bring about positive experiences in life.¹

Ward off Obsessiveness of Inner Speech of the Soul

In the last chapter of his manuscript, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī explained the mental manoeuvres (self-correcting actions) to avoid whispers of the heart and the obsessive inner speech of the soul.² Obsessive inner speech is one of the signs that one needs the help of the psychological healing of the soul. Occasional or frequent anxiety, anger, and sadness are human being's nature that no one can avoid experiencing. However, the repetitive inner speech of the soul is not common. This monologue cannot be considered as common and something that can be neglected as it may harm one's mind and body.³ Abū Zayd al-Balkhī was trying to explain how far the obsessive inner speech can harm oneself. Negative experience may cause repetitive whispering and one can have an inherited predisposition or it may appear as an unexpected symptom.⁴

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī believed that there is no specific treatment for this type of disorder as it is different from previous psychological symptoms mentioned above. However, he suggested on how to overcome or at least reduce the pain of suffering, which is by avoiding being alone since loneliness would naturally stimulate aimless and negative thoughts that leads to harmful self-talk.⁵ In other words, one who suffers from this psychological symptom should socialize with other people and busy himself with activities. Another suggestion is to busy oneself with positive thinking, good memories, and reflections.⁶ The occupied soul will have no chance to think negatively. In short, this emotional approach requires one to struggle to avoid whispers of the heart and the obsessive inner speech of the soul through self-correcting actions. This action is indeed directly related to the role and development of self-control.

¹ Fatimah Abdullah, "Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkhī."p. 88.

² Badri, *Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's Sustainance of The Soul: The Cognitive Behaviour Therapy of A Ninth Century Physician*. p.57

³ Ibid., p. 57.

⁴ Ibid., p. 58.

⁵ Al-Balkhī, *Maṣāliḥ Al-Abdān Wa Al-Anfus*. p. 271.

⁶Ibid., p. 272.

The Development of Self Control

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's second part of his manuscript *Masālih al-Abdān wa al-Anfus* (Sustenance of Bodies and Souls), discussed in depth sustenance of soul and how one should struggle to regain the health of the soul or maintain his soul's health. His idea of sustenance of the soul is significant because during the process, self-control is required, and it develops gradually over time. His analysis was very much based on deep and careful observation on the situations faced by man across time.¹ Studies has approved that there is a significant positive correlation between high self-control and the goal of harmonious and happy life.² To achieve the goal, it is simply a matter of controlling one's inner-self and behaviours. Therefore, Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's thought on sustenance of the soul can be applied and implemented to solve today's problems and to improve the healthy lifestyle of the present generation.

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī believed that the soul has the ability to control action, mind, and thoughts and hence it can influence one's conversation, action and thinking process.³ Therefore, his framework of sustenance of the soul is significant in developing human characters and behaviours. Character is the mental and moral qualities distinctive in an individual and if a person behaves appropriately, it shows that he possesses good character and vice-versa.

Refinement of character relies on the ability to control self.⁴ The control of the rival power of the inner self generates personal strength. It is a set of noble character traits. Personal strength generates solid and clear principles of life toward facing one's incredibly challenging environment. A person with personal strength can choose the responses or the correct reactions.⁵ Moreover, the concept of self-control and personal strength is devoid of religious principles.⁶ In short, one who has high self-control tends to have a strong character and act that best suit the principles of their life.

Self-control is the main requirement in human development program as someone equipped with this strong will would have greater ability to

¹ Fatimah Abdullah, "Therapeutic Ethics: Managing Anger Negative Thoughts and Depression According to Al-Balkh." p. 84.

²Marleen Gillebaart, "The Operational Definition of Self-Control," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9, no. JUL (2018): 1–5, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01231>.

³Abū Zayd al-Balkhī's *Sustenance Of The Soul* p. 34.

⁴Fatimah Abdullah, "Virtues and Character Development in Islamic Ethics and Positive Psychology." p. 72.

⁵Ibid., p. 72.

⁶Ary Ginajar Augustine, *The Islamic Guide to Developing Emotional Spiritual Quotient* (Jakarta: Arga Publishing, 2009).

abstain himself from being influenced by any temptation or to do something forbidden and try to pull himself to execute good actions. It is related to the ability to regulate one's thoughts, actions and behaviour in the face of temptations and impulses.¹ Therefore, it is a cognitive process that is necessary for regulating one's behaviour to achieve specific goals.² For instance, a businessman with high self-control tends to have greater willpower to work hard and carry out all the transaction honestly to achieve his goal to get the blessing from Allah the Al-Mighty regardless of the temptations and hardships to make more money.

Conclusion

Abū Zayd al-Balkhī is one of the classical scholars who talked about self-control in the Islamic perspective. His idea is a bit different from other scholars as he associated the development of self-control with the sustenance of a healthy soul. This spiritual aspect of human beings is usually absent in Western theory. Whereas spiritual development is the most influencing factor that impacts the individual's self-control, the healthier the soul is, the higher the level of self-control will be. Thus, taking good care of one's soul is encouraged for Muslims in the venture to develop high moral and ethical values.

We need a good Muslim individual who is practicing good character with a healthy soul and high self-control. He possesses balance growth of total personality; physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. He has positive thoughts and cognition, optimistic, grateful, and responsible to himself and others. He can suppress anger and aggression, tranquilize fear and panic, manage sadness and depression, and ward off obsessiveness of inner speech of the soul.

Therefore, the main impact would be having youth who can abstain themselves from being influenced by any temptation to do something forbidden and try to pull themselves to do good actions. This process is actually to prepare the younger generations to have good characters and play the role of *khalīfah*. They should excel in knowledge, character, and good deeds. At this stage, their role is enjoining good and forbidding

¹ Jamie L. Flexon, Ryan C. Meldrum, and Alex R. Piquero, "Low Self-Control and the Victim–Offender Overlap: A Gendered Analysis," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 31, no. 11 (2016): 2052–2076, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260515572471>.

² Matt DeLisi, "Low Self-Control Is a Brain-Based Disorder," in *The Nurture Versus Biosocial Debate in Criminology: On the Origins of Criminal Behaviour and Criminality*, ed. J.C. Barnes & Brian B. Boutwell Kevin M. Beaver (London: SAGE Publication, 2014), 172–183, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483349114>.

evil. Therefore, they set the example (*qudwah ḥasanah*) of having great character, manners, and conduct. They also have a good mind and heart, strong belief (*taqwā*) that can influence a positive vibe to the others in the community.

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