

## **Islamic Perspective, 15-17 August 1997, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia**

An international seminar on "Counselling and Psychotherapy from an Islamic Perspective" was jointly organised by the Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Malaysia and the International Institute of Islamic Thought Malaysia, and was held from 15 to 17 August 1997 in Kuala Lumpur. The seminar was attended by a large number of scholars from Asia, Africa and Europe. The objective of this seminar was to bring together Muslim psychologists from different countries to deliberate upon the practice of counselling and psychotherapy in Muslim societies.

Inaugurating the seminar, the Rector of the International Islamic University, Dato' Dr. AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman, underscored the importance of the seminar; as counselling and psychotherapy play an important role in the process of change in human beings. He said that contentment and happiness are important but the fundamental question was: how does one attain these. He pointed out that culture and the background of people play a significant role in counselling and psychotherapy. The Dean of the Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, Prof. Dr. Jamal Barzinji and Prof. Dr. Mahfooz Alam Ansari, Head Department of Psychology, also addressed the session.

A total of 34 papers and four keynote addresses were presented in the seminar. Fourteen sessions, including two parallel sessions on the first two days of the seminar, and two special sessions were spread over three days of academic deliberations. One of the special sessions was meant to establish an association of Muslim psychologists and to make arrangements for publication of a research journal, whereas the second special session was devoted to a discussion of the issue of Islamization of Psychology.

A majority of the papers presented tackled the theme of seeking an Islamic approach to psychotherapy. The focus of papers in this area was on three aspects pertaining to counselling and psychotherapy in an Islamic framework, namely: (a) Qur'anic insights into psychotherapy; (b) psychotherapy from an Islamic perspective; and (c) moral and spiritual aspects of counselling and psychotherapy.

In the papers on Qur'anic insights into psychotherapy, the speakers noted that the Qur'ān mentions the symptoms of mental and bodily illnesses, and describes their causes and offers remedies. Concepts like

*Īmān*, *ʿAmal al-Suʿālīh* have been used as the basic behavioural concepts in various verses of the Qurʾān. Moreover, a content analysis of these verses reveals conceptual categories like mental health and family, psycho-social problems, stress and coping, promotion of mental health and community mental health. The papers on Islamic psychotherapy emphasised the need to incorporate Islamic teachings and methods into psychotherapy. The speakers were of the view that counsellors and psychotherapists practising Islamic psychotherapy must be familiar with and well-trained in Islamic sources. The speakers dealing with the moral and spiritual aspects of counselling and psychotherapy regarded the practice of psychotherapy as a "moral undertaking." They highlighted the importance of moral values and spirituality in psychotherapy viewed from an Islamic perspective. They identified moral and spiritual weaknesses such as jealousy, simulation, greed, etc., as the causes of psychological disorders.

Another theme of the papers was that of the models of psychotherapy. In this regard, a counselling model for moral and spiritual development was proposed. This model was based on the writings of a Muslim scholar of the sub-continent, Maulana Ashraf Ali Thānawī, whose writings pertain to the problems presented to him by his "spiritual patients," his analyses of the problems, and the directions given by him for treatment, and for moral and spiritual development.

Another theme touched upon at the conference was that of the problems inherent in the use of Western psychotherapeutic approaches with Muslim clients. Also discussed was the role of Islamic values in psychotherapy and the role of the Muslim psychologist in the training of students and in practising psychotherapy. The speakers repudiated the claim of Western psychotherapists that it is necessary to be value-free in practising psychotherapy. They argued that "value-free" essentially means the exclusion of moral and spiritual values from the practice of psychotherapy. The speakers were of the view that psychopathology, according to the Islamic approach, is an outcome of the conflict of the individual with the moral, social and religious values. It was proposed that the essence of Islamic counselling and psychotherapy lies in reforming tendencies within clients that are inconsistent with socio-religious values.

Four keynote addresses were delivered by distinguished scholars in the field of counselling and psychotherapy. In his keynote address, Prof. Dr. Malik Badri highlighted the achievements and discoveries of early Muslim physicians and philosopher-psychologists such as Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī and al-Balkhī in the field of psychotherapy. He pointed

out that Ibn Sīnā explained the learning of adaptive and nonadaptive behaviour on the basis of the principles of associative learning. The keynote address by Prof. Dr. Abou-Ḥatab included a criticism of the behaviouristic model of psychology that has been acclaimed as scientific and objective, but which disregards the entities of the mind and the soul. He indicated that in the positivistic notion of science, religion was regarded as subjective, personal and unmeasurable. He pointed out that the post-positivistic view of science has uncovered the pseudo-objectivity and measurability of science and, as a result, science now stands closer to the notion of religion. The keynote address by Prof. Manzurul Haq focused on the purpose of the creation of man and the root causes of psychological and social problems. He argued that man is trapped in a vicious cycle of his own making, his conditions caused by the contingencies of the materialistic world and exacerbated by his own inadequate solutions to the problems faced by him. Prof. Dr. Azhar Ali Rizvi, in his keynote address, highlighted the shortcomings of Western models of therapy. He was of the view that Western models were biased and incomplete as they focus on either individuation or socialisation. He pointed out that the Christian notion of man and sin is different from the Islamic concepts of these two. He identified faith and spirituality as vital components of psychotherapy which have been neglected in Western models so far. However, there seems to be a growing awareness of the role of religion in maintaining mental health, even among Western professionals.

In the special session on Islamization of psychology, two presenters offered their viewpoints followed by an open discussion. One of the presenters, Prof. Dr. Zafar Afaq Ansari, argued that many problems in psychology can be traced to incorrect assumptions about man. These assumptions range from the Darwinian concept of the animalistic nature of man to the concept of man as an information-processing unit. These views have in common their overlooking of the spiritual aspect of man. According to Dr. Ansari, fascinating as the idea of quantification may appear to be, it may lead to an illusion of knowledge and reality, if the method of quantification is applied indiscriminately. Present-day psychology has become method-oriented rather than problem-oriented, with the result that we are accumulating trivial information in the name of science. The second presenter, Prof. Dr. Mustapha Achoui emphasised the importance of first defining the subject matter and methodology for Islamization of psychology. In this regard, he identified three sources of knowledge, namely: (i) revelation; (ii) reason; and (iii) reality. He said that the basic sources of revealed

knowledge are the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. Qur'ān describes the human being in an objective way and is revealed for the welfare of mankind. When revelation is tested it is endorsed by reason and reality. However, he cautioned that it is not the revelation that is tested but the understanding of it (i.e., a hypothesis), by the researchers and the scholars of different disciplines. According to Dr. Achoui, Islamization of psychology is justified because the researchers' interpretations of research findings are influenced by their attitudes and values.

The special session to establish the association of Muslim Psychologists and a research journal was jointly conducted by Dr. Mustapha Achoui and Dr. Mahfooz Alam Ansari. They briefly introduced the purpose of establishing this association and publishing the journal. In the course of the discussion the delegates reached a consensus over both issues, and decided to form an association, International Association of Muslim Psychologists (IAMP). After the deliberations the delegates elected the office-bearers of the association of Muslim Psychologists. Prof. Malik Badri was elected president of the association, while Prof. Fouad Abou-Hatab and Prof. Nizar Alani were elected Vice President and Secretary General, respectively. It was also decided that the association would publish a journal and a newsletter.

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### **Muhammad Iqbal and the Asian Renaissance: An International Conference. 3-5 June 1997, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia,**

An international conference on Dr. Muhammad Iqbal—poet, philosopher and a man of great wisdom and vision—was held from 3 to 5 June 1997 in Malaysia. This was the first conference in Southeast Asia and the Pacific which brought together some of the world's best experts on Iqbal. This conference was the second in a series of conferences on Asian thinkers organised by the Institute for Policy Research [IKD] as a part of its "Southeast Asia: Beyond 2000 Project." This project aims at drawing upon Asia's rich intellectual and cultural traditions for building a better world characterized by friendship, harmony, peace, trust and progress.

The welcoming address of the conference was given by Dato' Kamarudin Jaffar, chairman, IKD. In his address he said that Iqbal's message is universal and his thought of great importance and relevance