

## Book Reviews

*Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospiritual Study*, by Malik Badri (tr. from Arabic by Abdul-Wāhid Lu'lua'), Kuala Lumpur: Madīna Books, 2000. ISBN 983-40407-2-5.

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Prof. Malik Badri, who has already written several books and articles on Islam and psychology, has come out with another thought provoking book. This book was published earlier in Arabic under the title *al-Tafakkur min al-Mushāhadah ilā al-Shuhūd*.

The book consists of two strands of thinking. One, Badri reviews the recent developments in cognitive psychology, and the Eastern meditation techniques that have become so popular in the West in recent years. Two, he reviews the teachings of early Muslim scholars on psychological issues. Finally, he tries to integrate the two lines of thinking.

The movement of cognitive psychology has played an important role in reawakening psychologists' interest in the role of consciousness, and done much to counter what Badri calls as the constricted perspective of Behaviorism, which had dehumanized people in order "to mold psychology in a scientific cast" (p. 2). Psychologists have become aware of the relationship between the cognitive and affective factors and the physiological conditions of the individual. At the same time Eastern meditation techniques became popular in the West. Research has shown that concentration on mental image and repetition of some words again and again can lead to relief from stress, anxiety and physical symptoms. Investigations of this phenomenon opened a new era of understanding of the relationship between mind and body.

However, Badri does not equate transcendental meditation (TM) with Islamic meditation. According to him, "Islamic contemplation is based on the progression from meditation on the creation to its Creator"(p. 49). While Islamic contemplation makes use of the

techniques of meditation, and yields benefits that TM yields – it has a higher purpose. According to Badri, Islamic contemplation passes through four stages. The first stage is when the knowledge of the contemplated object comes through direct sensory perception. The second stage starts with a closer look at the perceptual data for its beauty and excellence. The third stage is when the meditator crosses the boundary of the created object and approaches the Creator, overwhelmed by the feeling of awe and submission. Those who reach the final stage of spiritual cognition (*shuhūd*) can no longer look at God's creation, without seeing the precision, beauty and wisdom all over (p. 31).

Apart from Qur'ān and Sunnah, Badri makes full use of the works of several Muslim scholars, including al-Balakhī, Miskawayh, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and al-Ghazālī, particularly the last two. Ibn Qayyim analyses human behavior from the passage of a fleeting thought to action, anticipating some of the ideas expressed by Beck 700 years later. Al-Ghazālī contributed to both theoretical and practical aspects of contemplation.

Are there different degrees of contemplation? Badri tries to answer the question by postulating a number of factors that determine the individual's level of contemplation. The factors include: depth of faith, depth and length of concentration, emotional and mental state of the contemplator, environmental factors, influence of culture, believer's knowledge of the subject of contemplation, good example and influence of companionship, nature and object of contemplation and familiarity of the object of contemplation.

The book is eminently readable. Badri has a style of his own. Like an old teacher, he makes difficult issues simple and easy to understand. However there are sections that are very brief. Chapter five "Contemplation as an Unrestricted Form of Worship" is only three pages, although this is about the highest stage of contemplation and a reader would expect more details about this stage.

This book is a good addition to the developing literature on Islamic Psychology, and is a must reading for any one seriously interested in the subject.