THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PREACHING:
THE POWER OF DIARIES

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Abstract

Recent discoveries in neuroscience shows that individuals have an impulsive system and a reflective system. These two systems are protected by powerful psychological defense mechanisms. In particular, confirmation bias, cognitive and the way people remember and forget information can prevent learning new things about Islam. To be effective, Muslim preachers must overcome these defense mechanisms so that new knowledge about Islam can be internalised. To achieve this goal, this author experimented with students at the International Islamic University Malaysia. Since 2010, over 1,100 students have listened to Islamic videos on a weekly basis throughout the semester and kept a diary documenting their reflections. Both qualitative and quantitative data are presented. The analysis suggest that keeping diary is a useful way to overcome defense mechanisms. This author conclude that preachers can think about shifting their role from providing content about Islam to providing a process for helping Muslims discover new things about Islam.

Key words: Psychology, Islamic perspective, Preaching, Diaries

Background to This Study

In 2010, this author published a study entitled "The Psychology of Preaching: A Literature Review [1]". Since then, this author has continued to refine his understanding of the literature. Furthermore, this author has now data that shows interesting possibilities. Preaching can be understood narrowly or broadly.

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[1] Fontaine, R. "The Psychology of Preaching: A Literature Review". Proceeding of the International Conference on Leadership and Management in Islamic Education, 26th – 28th December, 2010, UTM, Johor Bahru.

- Narrowly, preaching is giving religious advice. A typical example would be a Muslim preacher delivering the Friday sermon in a mosque.
- Broadly, preaching is giving any beneficial advice. For example, a Muslim parent might help his son daily with his English homework.

In his literature review in 2010, this author found very little information about the psychology of effective preaching. According to some Muslim management writers, preaching is part and parcel of being a Muslim manager[2]. Fontaine and Ahmad argue that managers need not be preachers *per se*, but they can create a corporate culture in which Muslim employees are encouraged to understand more about Islam and live up its principles[3]. Thus, this author wanted to better understand how to create such a corporate culture.

The notion of preaching is very vague. However, many Muslims assume that preaching is about talking about Islam. However, there is a big difference between talking and communicating[4]. Typically,

- Talking is often a one way from of communication. When people talk a lot, it is often difficult for them to get feedback from their audience. It is therefore difficult to know whether or not the message has been received properly.
- Communicating is more generic. To be effective, establishing a two way communication is necessary. Typically, feedback is sought that the person sending the message can assess whether the message has been understood.

Communicating can include talking. But sometimes, to communicate effectively, talking is the worst thing to do.

Another key concern in communication is whether the person

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[2]Ahmad, K. and R. Fontaine. *Management from an Islamic Perspective* (2nd edition). Singapore: Pearson, 2011, p.38.
[3]Fontaine, R and K. Ahmad. *Strategic Management from an Islamic Perspective*. Singapore: John Wiley, 2013.
[4]Daft, R.L. *New Era of Management* (10th edition). Boston, MA: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2012, p. 496.

sending the message is "talking down" to the receiver (i.e. there is unequal social relationship) or "talking to" the receiver (i.e. there is an equal social relationship). Talking down to people often leads to passive listening whereas talking to people makes active listening easier[5].

It is generally recognised that preachers must frame a message in a manner that is suitable for the age and the interests of his or her audience. This was the main focus of Fontaine's research in 2010. Fontaine argued that Muslim preachers could use Erikson's Psychosocial Stages model to frame their message (see table 1). Erikson said that every person goes through different stages in life and each stage is characterised by a dominant concern. Fontaine argued that preachers should frame their message based on the dominant concern of each age group.

Table 1: Erikson's Psychosocial Stages

Age	Stages	Basic strengths
Birth to 1 year	Trust versus mistrust	Hope
1 to 3 years	Autonomy versus shame and doubt	Will
3 to 5 years	Initiative versus guilt	Purpose
6 to 12 years	Industry versus inferiority	Competence
Adolescence	Identity versus role confusion	Fidelity
Young adult	Intimacy versus isolation	Love
Middle adult	Generativity versus stagnation	Care
Late adult	Integrity versus despair	Wisdom

Source: Fontaine (2010)

Fontaine doesn't claim that Erikson's theory is the only one that preachers can use but it can be useful to help preachers frame an effective message.

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[5]Daft, R.L. *New Era of Management* (10th edition). Boston, MA: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2012, pp. 503-55.

New Insights into the Brain

Prior to the 1990s, psychologists had little idea of what happened inside the brain when people did things. But since the 1990s, new imaging technology allowed neuroscientists to better understand why, how and when people act. With this new imaging technology, scientists were able to identify which parts of the brain was triggered when different types of actions were performed. They conclude that, "*the human nervous system is best characterized as a hybrid system that has both hierarchical, deliberative control system and quasi-independent decentralized control system[6]*". In "The Two Horses of Behaviour: Reflection and Impulse", Strack and his colleagues describe the human nervous system as "*the joint product of two mental systems*[7]". One system is impulsive and the other is reflective. The impulsive system is permanently active. It is fast and effortless but there are "substantial rigidity". The impulsive system uses heuristics to process vast amounts of information. These heuristics often lead to illogical decisions. With the impulsive system, people are unconscious of the decisions they make. The reflective system depends on available cognitive capacity. Its purpose is the generation and transformation of knowledge. It is slow and it requires effort. Most people are conscious when making decisions using the reflective system. The reflective system though can override the impulsive system.

An example will illustrate. If a person is driving on the highway and there is little traffic, the impulsive system is in control. Driving is automatic and effortless. Very often people are thinking of other things while listening at the radio. However, if the traffic builds up, the reflective system takes control. The driver forgets other things, switches off the radio and starts to concentrate on the traffic. To be effective throughout the day, individuals are constantly switching from one system to the other.

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[6]Morsella, E. "The Mechanisms of Human Action: Introduction and Background." In Morsella, Bargh and Gollwitzer's *Oxford Handbook of Human Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 10

[7]Strack, F., Deutsch, R. and R. Krieglmeyer. "The Two Horses of Behaviour: Reflection and Impulsive". In Morsella, Bargh and Gollwitzer's *Oxford Handbook of Human Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 109.

Kahneman[8] calls the Reflective-Impulsive Model "system 1 and system 2". System 1 is the impulsive system and system 2 is the reflective system. Kahneman explored the limitations of system 1, namely cognitive biases and heuristics. In his work, Kahneman describes a whole range of heuristics and cognitive biases. A complete discussion would be outside of the scope of this study. One heuristic stands out though as being very detrimental to the efforts of preachers: the confirmation bias.

The confirmation bias was documented in 1979 by Lord, Ross and Leper[9]. They did an experiment with Stanford University students. Half the students were in favour the death penalty and half were opposed to the death penalty. The experimenters then gave students with information for and against the death penalty. The experimenters initially assumed that students would soften their position when exposed to diverse opinions. Instead two things happened,

a) The students simply ignored the information that contradicted with their beliefs,

b) The students relied on the information that confirmed with their beliefs to reinforce their beliefs

At the end of the experiment, the psychologists involved concluded that not only did the students not change their opinion but the students were more polarized than before.

In the context of preaching Islam, consider the scenario shown in table 2. Imagine that a preacher is explaining to somebody that the majority of Muslim scholars say that smoking is forbidden but only a small minority say that smoking is permissible. The preacher might think that he sent a clear message: smoking is forbidden in Islam. However, a Muslim smoker will probably ignore the first part of the information (i.e. some scholars say that smoking is forbidden) and simply remember the second part (i.e. some scholars say that smoking is allowed).

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[8]Kahneman, D. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. London: Penguin Books, 2011.

[9]Lord, C.G.; Ross, L. and M. R. Lepper. "Biased assimilation and attitude polarization: The effects of prior theories on subsequently considered evidence". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37 (11): 2098–2109, 1979.

Table 2: Confirmation Bias in Action

Preacher says …	Process	Listener hears ….
"The majority of scholars say that smoking is forbidden in Islam. Only a minority of scholars have said that smoking is allowed. They made this statement because at the time, the evidence linking smoking to cancer was not known."	Confirmation Bias	Smoking is allowed in Islam

Source: The Author

It is crucial to understand that confirmation bias is not an attitude problem. The listener is not deliberately ignoring Islamic principles. It is simply system 1 at work. The trick is to get around confirmation biases by understanding the way defense mechanisms work. With that understanding, preachers can find a different and more effective way to send the same message.

Defense Mechanisms

Individuals are protected by powerful psychological defense mechanisms. These psychological defense mechanisms are neither good nor bad. They are often necessary to people's psychological well-being. Sometimes though, they prevent individuals from learning new things. This author will focus on cognitive dissonance and the way memories are reconstructed.

Tavris and Aronson[10] define cognitive dissonance as,

"the hardwired psychological mechanism that creates self-justification and protects our certainties, self-esteem and tribal affiliation. It is a state of tension that occurs when a person holds two cognitions (ideas, attitudes, beliefs, opinions) that are psychologically inconsistent."

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[10]Tavris, C and E. Aronson. *Mistakes were made (but not by me).* Orlando, FL: Harcourt Books, 2007.

The "hardwired psychological mechanism" means it is a system 1 process. Cognitive dissonance works at the individual level ("protects our certainties and self-esteem") and at the group level ("tribal affiliation"). To get rid of this dissonance, people have two choices. They can change their thought, emotion or behaviour about something. This requires a certain amount of effort. They can maintain the status-quo by making excuses and forgetting certain facts. This requires very little effort.

Research shows that cognitive dissonance is a gradual process. We adjust our views in small incremental and barely perceptible stages. Tavris and Aronson use the Milgram experiments to explain this process. After the Second World War, most Americans were shocked by the millions of people murdered in German concentration camps. People felt a need to explain what had happened and why it had happened. The typical explanation was that "German Are Different" and that they are more likely to obey authority than Americans. Social psychologist Stanley Milgram devised an experiment in 1963 to prove this. The original idea was to collect data in the United States and then collect data in Germany. The assumption was that American volunteers would more readily disobey people in authority compared to Germans. The experiment was set up in the following manner:

- Volunteers were told that they were helping out in a study of memory and learning.
- A technician in uniform encouraged volunteers to continue with the experiment.
- A subject (an actor paid by the psychologist doing the experiment) who would pretend to get electrocuted.

The volunteers were told that a participant would be given material to learn. Every time they get it wrong, they would be given a small 15 volt electrical shock. For volunteers to understand what a 15 volts shock felt like, they were given a small shock. They could barely feel it so they agreed. Volunteers were then told that if the participant still didn't learn the material, the voltage would be increased to 30 volts and then to 45 volts and so on. After the experiment was over, about 65% of volunteers gave life-threatening shocks of 450 volts.

The fact that two-thirds of American volunteers gave the maximum electrical shock meant that the "German Are Different" hypothesis was rejected. Since the experiment was reported, there has been a big debate as to how to interpret these results. Tavris and Aronson say that this experiment shows the gradual nature of cognitive dissonance. If Milgram had asked volunteers to electrocute their fellow human beings, they would have refused immediately. But Milgram started with harmless little shocks and then worked upwards in small, gradual, barely perceptible increases. Every detail of the experiment was carefully thought out. The volunteers were paid but the pay was so little that the only way to motivate themselves was to rely on intrinsic motivation ("I am doing this to advance the science of learning"). Having persuaded themselves that this was their real motivation, it made it more difficult for them to abandon the experiment. If they had gotten a higher pay, their motivation would have been extrinsic ("I am doing this for the money") and abandoning the experiment would have been easier.

Tavris and Aronson conclude that cognitive dissonance is fuelled by self- justification and self-justification is the gradual slide from morality into immorality. This gradual slide is helped by the way memory works.

The Nature of Our Memory

Many people assume that the role of a memory is to store information. We sometimes think of their memory as a place in our minds where information is accurately stored and retrieved. Nothing is further from the truth. Since the 1930s, numerous studies have shown that memories are not accurate[11]. Coon explains that "*as new memories are formed, older memories are often updated, changed, lost or revised.*" The memory is like somebody in your head telling you a story. Every time the story is re-told, things are changed. The more we rehearse a memory, the easier we remember it and the more we distort it. We are often unaware of distorting our memories. Psychologists suspect that these distortions are a mean for people to

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[11]Coon, D. *Introduction to Psychology: Gateways to Mind and Behaviour*, 2000, p.315.

forget painful experiences[12]. Tavris and Aronson argue cognitive dissonance and distorting memories are two sides of the same coin. They explain that:

- We cannot remember complex information. We remember selected events and reconstruct the rest.
- To protect our identities, we reconstruct our memories to avoid cognitive dissonance. We do this by creating stories, narratives that make us feel good about ourselves.
- Facts are interpreted to ensure that the story is consistent.
- Facts that contradict this narrative are forgotten.
- If it helps to avoid dissonance, things that did not happen to us will be remembered as facts

The link between inaccurate memories and cognitive dissonance is well documented. Tavris and Aronson quote an experimented conducted in 1962 by Daniel Offer and his colleagues. They interviewed 73 fourteen-year-old boys. They re-interviewed these people thirty-four years later. The ability of these people to remember accurately what happened in their youth was "*no better than chance*." They quote William Maxwell who said, "*What we… refer to confidently as memory …is really a form of storytelling that goes on continually in the mind and often changes with the telling*."

For example, Gardner [13] notes that after major disasters, psychologists routinely ask volunteers to write down how they heard about the event, who they were with and so forth. Years later, these volunteers are asked to write down what they remember and the original record is compared to the memory. Gardner notes found that they "*routinely fail to match*". Amazingly, when volunteers are shown their original description, they insist that their current memory is accurate and the original account is flawed. This, of course, makes absolutely no sense but demonstrates the power of the mind's defense mechanisms. Since discovering the limitations of people's memories, this author has used diaries with his students to develop a variety of

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[12]Khan, W. J. *The A-B-Cs of Human Experience: An Integrative Model.* Belmond, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1999, p.141.

[13]Gardner, D. *Risk: The Science and Politics of Fear*. London: Virgin Books, 2009, p.62

soft-skills[14]. This author's research suggests that using diaries is one of the few effective ways to neutralise the problem of people forgetting to avoid cognitive dissonance.

A Hierarchy of Goals

To complete our understanding that neuroscience offers us, it is important to re-think the way we think about goals. Neuroscientists have concluded that individuals have multiple goals and that these goals can sometimes contradict one another[15]. People are generally unaware that they have multiple goals because the mind can only be conscious of one goal at any one time. Depending on the context, the priority of goals changes and conscious goals are forgotten while unconscious goals are activated. Throughout the day, there is a constant switching between conscious and unconscious goals. For example, a Muslim smoker has two goals:

1. To become a better Muslim
2. To avoid emotional pain

This Muslim smoker listens to the sermon during the Friday prayer (see table 3). The topic of the sermon is the evil of smoking.

Table 3: Switching Between Conscious and Unconscious Goals

Situation	Conscious Goal	Unconscious Goal	System in Charge
Before Friday sermon	Avoid emotional pain	Be a better Muslim	System 1
During Friday sermon	Be a better Muslim	Avoid emotional pain	System 2
After Friday sermon	Avoid emotional pain	Be a better Muslim	System 1

Source: The Author

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[14]Fontaine, R. *Leadership and Management Skills*, Gombak: IIUM Press, in press.
[15]Carver, C.S. and M.F. Scheier "Action, Affect, and Two-Mode Models of Functioning". In Morsella, Bargh and Gollwitzer's *Oxford Handbook of Human Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Most Muslim smokers know that smoking is forbidden in Islam. To avoid cognitive dissonance, a Muslim smoker must reconcile and rationalise the inconstancy between what he know is true and his behaviour. Such rationalisation is possible when system 1 is in control. However, when the Friday sermon starts, this Muslim smoker enters a state in which his goal to be a good Muslim takes precedence. During the Friday sermon, he may feel guilty for being a smoker and he experiences cognitive dissonance. After the sermon though, to get rid of his state of cognitive dissonance, system 1 takes over and he again starts to rationalise his smoking habit. To help him rationalise his behaviour, he quickly forgets the Friday sermon.

Clearly, individuals can overcome their defense mechanisms. If not, people would never learn. Neuroscientists have shown that system 2 (our reflective system) can override system 1 (our impulsive system) but some cognitive effort is involved and the good communicator has to trigger that reflection. For example, if a preacher simply tells a smoker what not to do (e.g. "don't smoke, it is a sin"), the way the message is presented doesn't encourage reflection. If a preacher encourages self-reflection (e.g. "can you list the advantages and disadvantages of smoking?"), it is more likely to have a positive impact.

Putting it All Together

Figure 1 attempts to combine all of these theories together.

Figure 1: Hitting the Right Target
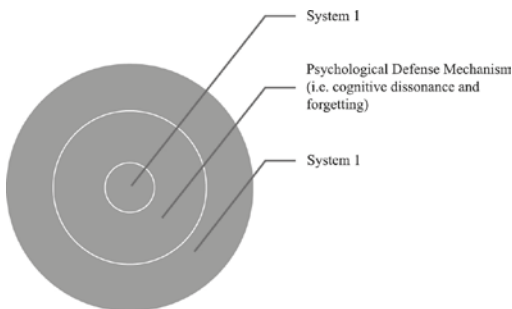
Source: The Author

Figure 1 is not an accurate representation of how the mind works. It is however useful when preparing a communication plan. The aim of a preacher is to direct the message to system 1. If you can hit system 1, the information will be internalised. If you simply hit system 2, the message will be heard and probably ignored. One effective way to hit system 1 is to see communication as a process rather than an event[16]. According to Stephen Madigan[17], there are two separate stages:

1. Building trust
2. Problem solving

The two stages are very distinct. Preachers cannot start problem solving if there is no trust. Rather than planning for one big event, it is more effective to plan a series of small events over several weeks. This makes it easier to have two way communication that is often lacking. For example, the Muslim smoker is unlikely to stop smoking by simply hearing the message one time. It might be necessary to send the same message using a variety of ways (e.g. conversation, encourage the smoker to keep a diary, watch videos on YouTube together). The message will grow and grow until the smoker internalises the message and stops smoking. One analogy is to think of the mind's defense mechanism as a wall. To breach the wall, the one communicating has to make small breaches here and there by stimulating self-reflection.

Research Question

In the light of the above, the following research question is proposed: Is the diary a tool that enables preachers to overcome people's defense mechanisms?

The wording of the research question suggests that the diary is not the only tool that can be used and other tools might be more effective than the diary

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[16]Fontaine, R. *Leadership and Management Skills*, Gombak: IIUM Press, in press.
[17]Madigan, S. *Narrative Therapy (Theories of Psychotherap*y). Washington DC: American Psychological Association. 2010.

The Story of Aiman

This section has two purposes. First, to share a personal experience that shaped this author's research design. Second, it will help explain the data analysis that will be presented shortly. This experience is briefly presented in Ahmad and Fontaine[18]. A longer version is found in Fontaine and Ahmad[19].

Aiman (not the student's real name) was this author's mentee. He was having academic difficulty and things started out as normal counselling.   Over a period of several months, a trusting relationship developed. It became clear that Aiman had a variety of problems and they were all interrelated. Aiman entered a black period were everything seemed to go from bad to worse. By this stage, Aiman was either severely depressed or very angry. Despite this author's advice, he refused to seek professional counselling.

At the time, this author was interesting in understanding the marketing effectiveness of Islamic websites. This author hired Aiman as a research assistant. He was asked to look to a variety of websites and provide comments. Looking at these Islamic websites triggered a series of conversations about Islam. It became clear that Aiman had a number of misunderstandings about Islam. In particular, when he was at primary school, he remembered that his religious teacher said that people who don't pray will go to hell and people who pray will also go to hell. As such, he didn't see the benefit of praying and therefore didn't pray regularly. We discussed this point and several points. Several months later, Aiman started to pray. Overall, he got less angry and he got out of his depression. After hovering dangerously around 2.00 for several semesters, he got his academic act together in the final semester.

This author has thought about Aiman's experience. Here are some reflections,

- Aiman's problems were interrelated so that it was necessary to solve his spiritual problems before he could solve his academic problems.

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18 Ahmad, K. and R. Fontaine. *Management from an Islamic Perspective* (2nd edition). Singapore: Pearson, 2011.

19 Fontaine, R and K. Ahmad. *Strategic Management from an Islamic Perspective*. Singapore: John Wiley, 2013.

- Nobody knew what questions were important to Aiman. There is an assumption that learning about Islam is simply acquiring information and that everybody needs the same information. Over the years, he had heard many Islamic talks. But all this information about Islam was useless. His questions about the prayers blocked all other issues. He could only progress spiritually when his biggest question had been successfully addressed.
- Aiman's rediscovery of Islam was a process that took several months. Watching one video alone had little impact. Regularly watching a number of videos however allowed Aiman to change his perception of Islam, despite having powerful defense mechanisms.

Intrigued by Aiman's experience, this author did an experiments with management students at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). They were asked to watch one Islamic video of their choice every week throughout the semester. These videos were typically found on YouTube although some students choose to listen to audio files linked to various Islamic websites. On a weekly basis, students were asked to keep a diary in which they summarised the videos and shared their reflections. At the end of the semester, students were asked to submit their reflections on the videos and the overall process. The assignment was designed so that:

a) They could focus on the topics that mattered to them (i.e. the main lesson from the Aiman experience).
b) The process of keeping a weekly diary helps them overcome their defense mechanisms.
c) The focus was not on finding the right or wrong answers to a question (a typical academic exercise that focuses on system 2) but on describing which videos they liked or didn't like (an exercise that stimulates system 1).

The first reports were enthusiastic so this author continued with subsequent groups. Since 2010, an estimated 1,100 students have completed this Islamic video assignment. On average, 75% of students say that they benefit from the experience. Many of the students' report personal problems. For example, some students talk

about their struggle when one of their loved ones passed away. Watching Islamic videos helped them put things into perspective. Many students write about finding their purpose in life. Other students get excited because their understanding of the Qur'an improves dramatically over the semester. A typical conclusion would start,

> *"To be honest, I thought this assignment would be boring. But I always had questions about Islam. So I started watching these videos and it started to become very interesting."*

One of the key learning point is that only students know what they are interested in and how long they need to explore a subject. In 2011, one female Muslim student from India spent the whole semester listening to talks about wearing the *hijab*. Somewhat surprised, this author discussed this matter with her. She explained that in India, wearing a *hijab* is a very difficult decision due to the social environment. In other words, it is not simply a question of listening to information (system 2). Her semester-long effort was to first breach her defense mechanisms and then reach system 1. For another female student, watching two videos might have been enough. She needed to watch 10 videos. Her conclusion to the assignment was very short. She wrote, "*Now that I understand, I can accept the need wear the hijab.*"

In the early stage, this author was not thinking about publishing this data. However, in 2012, this author became a co-supervisor to a postgraduate student who was looking at spiritual intelligence. With two groups of students, we decided to see whether watching Islamic videos throughout the semester improved their level of spiritual intelligence. The definitions of "spiritual" and "spiritual intelligence" is that spirituality is "the ability to find a purpose in life" while spiritual intelligence is "the ability to use spiritual resources to solve problems". Using a valid questionnaire[20], we assessed the spiritual intelligence of this author's students at the

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[20] King, D. B. "Rethinking claims of spiritual intelligence: A definition, model, and measure". Unpublished Master's Thesis, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, 2008.

beginning of the semester. Students then watched Islamic videos throughout the semester and made their weekly synopses. At the end of the semester, they were assessed a second time. The data is shown in table 2 and table 3. This data has been reported elsewhere[21].

Table 2: First survey (96 respondents)

No	Question	1st round	2nd round	Sign.
Q1	I have often questioned or pondered the nature of reality.	3.48	3.71	0.089
Q2	I have spent time contemplating the purpose or reason for my existence.	3.9	3.95	n.s.
Q3	I am able to deeply contemplate what happens after death.	3.7	3.84	n.s.
Q4	I recognize aspects of myself that are deeper than my physical body.	3.8	3.83	n.s.
Q5	I am able to enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.	3.69	3.69	n.s.
Q6	It is difficult for me to sense anything other than the physical and material.	2.45	2.54	n.s.
Q7	My ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me adapt to stressful situations.	3.77	4.13	0.025
Q8	I can control when I enter higher states of consciousness or awareness	3.59	3.72	n.s.

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[21] Fontaine R. "Developing Spiritual Intelligence: Some Empirical Evidence". Proceeding of ICMIP 2, 20th and 21st August 2014, Malaysia.

Q9	I accept the theories about such things as life, death, reality, and existence.	4.47	4.5	n.s.
Q10	I am aware of a deeper connection between myself and other people.	4.11	4.11	n.s.
Q11	I am able to define a purpose or reason for my life.	4.21	4.2	n.s.
Q12	I am able to move freely between levels of consciousness or awareness.	3.61	3.67	n.s.
Q13	I frequently contemplate the meaning of events in my life.	3.81	3.85	n.s.
Q14	I define myself by my deeper, non-physical self.	3.54	3.79	0.04
Q15	When I experience a failure, I am still able to find meaning in it.	4.29	4.28	n.s.
Q16	I often see issues and choices more clearly while in higher states of consciousness/awareness.	4.06	3.84	0.06
Q17	I have often contemplated the relationship between human beings and the rest of the universe.	3.79	3.84	n.s.
Q18	I am highly aware of the nonmaterial aspects of life.	3.75	4.04	0.022
Q19	I am able to make decisions according to my purpose in life.	4.06	4.15	n.s.
Q20	I recognize qualities in people which are more meaningful than their body, personality, or emotions	4.04	4.1	n.s.

Q21	I have deeply contemplated whether or not there is some greater power.	3.75	3.91	n.s.
Q22	Recognizing the nonmaterial aspects of life helps me feel centered.	3.58	3.86	0.032.
Q23	I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.	4.18	4.19	n.s.
Q24	I have developed my own techniques for entering higher states of consciousness or awareness.	3.8	3.81	n.s.

Source: This Author

Table 3: Second survey (103 respondents)

	Questions	1st round	2nd round	Sign.
Q1	I have often questioned or pondered the nature of reality.	3.51	3.81	0.001
Q2	I recognize aspects of myself that are deeper than my physical body.	3.63	4.00	0.001
Q3	I have spent time contemplating the purpose or reason for my existence.	3.51	3.80	0.001
Q4	I am able to enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.	3.50	3.74	0.001
Q5	I am able to deeply contemplate what happens after death.	3.30	3.59	0.001
Q6	It is difficult for me to sense anything other than the physical and material.	2.70	2.78	0.001
Q7	My ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me	3.83	4.00	0.001

	adapt to stressful situations.			
Q8	I can control when I enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.	3.46	3.66	0.001
Q9	I accept the theories about such things as life, death, reality, and existence.	4.29	4.54	0.001
Q10	I am aware of a deeper connection between myself and other people.	3.79	4.00	0.001
Q11	I am able to define a purpose or reason for my life.	3.79	4.13	0.001
Q12	I am able to move freely between levels of consciousness or awareness.	3.22	4.02	0.001
Q13	I frequently contemplate the meaning of events in my life.	3.55	3.85	0.001
Q14	I define myself by my deeper, non-physical self.	3.40	3.76	0.001
Q15	When I experience a failure, I am still able to find meaning in it.	3.89	4.10	0.001
Q16	I often see issues and choices more clearly while in higher states of consciousness/awareness.	3.70	3.95	0.001
Q17	I have often contemplated the relationship between human beings and the rest of the universe.	3.45	3.78	0.001
Q18	I am highly aware of the nonmaterial aspects of life.	3.67	3.89	0.001
Q19	I am able to make decisions according to my purpose in life.	3.61	3.97	0.001
Q20	I recognize qualities in people which are more meaningful than their body, personality, or emotions	3.85	4.19	0.001

Q21	I have deeply contemplated whether or not there is some greater power.	3.59	3.67	0.001
Q22	Recognizing the nonmaterial aspects of life helps me feel centered.	3.59	3.87	0.001
Q23	I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.	3.58	3.98	0.001
Q24	I have developed my own techniques for entering higher states of consciousness or awareness.	3.23	3.58	0.001

Source: This Author

The data above shows, generally speaking, this assignment helped students develop their spiritual intelligence. This author argues that this assignment had the desired effect because:

a) Students watched one video a week for several weeks
b) Students were free to watch videos on the Islamic topics that mattered to them (i.e. this was the main lesson of Aiman's story and the experience of the female student who watched videos on wearing the *hijab*)
c) They had to write down their thoughts and reflections. This process of writing is an effective way to breach a person's defense mechanism.

Table 2 showed the results of 1st year students. Table 3 shows the results of 2nd year students. Table 3 shows a more pronounced effect that table 2. When 1st year students were assessed, they were doing this assignment for the first time. When 2nd year students were assessed, most of them were doing it for the second time. Many students said that they enjoyed the assignment more the second time. The first time, they were learning new things about Islam but kept the information for themselves. The second time round, they were sharing their discoveries with friends and relatives[22]. Fontaine also reported some qualitative data in table 4.

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[22] Fontaine R. "Developing Spiritual Intelligence: Some Empirical Evidence". Proceeding of ICMIP 2, 20th and 21st August 2014, Malaysia.

Table 4: Some Qualitative Data

Student	Are you happier after completing the assignment? They wrote.....
o35	Yes. I read the meaning of the Qur'an in Malay but it is only after listening to the *tafsir* that I started to feel that Allah is speaking to humans through the Qur'an
o39	Yes. There are certain things that I always wondered before and now, I feel satisfied as if one of the puzzles is placed at its right place and where it is supposed to be
o40	Yes. I feel so much happier. (I was) a young man who is still searching for his true inner colour.
o41	Yes. I feel much more content than before. The talks gave me insights into things which I had overlooked and it cleared some of the doubts about Islam
o46	No difference (but) it is no doubt that the gaining of greater knowledge has made it easier for me to be a better Muslim. The only difficulty lies in the first step, which is the independent search for knowledge by myself
m64	Yes. I was never really happy with myself before this assignment because of my lack of being a good Muslim. I am not that much happier but I am more aware.
m66	Yes. I (now) realize that lots of things that I used to do were meaningless, such as reciting Qur'an without understanding the meaning of the verses
m67	Yes. I am able to better control my desires
m81	Yes. I have found answers too many questions that I had. I tend to be less involved in entertainment. I really hope that this little change will be continuous
m133	I now recognize the barriers that I face
m142	Yes. I feel happier. There is a lot of new things I've learnt after doing this assignment. I like the most about *tafsir* of the *surah*. I never knew the meaning before and it is quite new knowledge for me

Source: Fontaine (2014)

The most recent batch of students submitted their reports in December 2014. Some of their comments (grammatical mistakes included) are presented below. For example,

"I found it hard to finish this assignment but I got something important from doing it. It happened when I wrote about the topic of being nice to parents. I used to be in a bad relationship with my parents for almost one year. It became worse during eid fitri [a religious holiday]. I did not shake their hands and ask for forgiveness as people should. After I did this assignment, I started to change to be a good son. I tried to be proactive and I got closer to my mom. Now I have a good relationship with them."

"This semester I was having family problems, being the sister, the daughter and eldest among the siblings in my family. I felt very stressful and almost gave up on everything. This assignment came at the right time where all the videos remind me that I am not alone in facing these difficulties."

"Truth be told, I have never done such an assignment. I got the knowledge of many things which I definitely did not know about them before. I cannot measure how much my life has been changed and how it affected my imaan [faith] but what I can truly tell you is that my life has changed."

"At first, I thought that this assignment is not important because I already know about Islam. Then when I started, I realised that there are lots of things about Islam that I didn't know. I now see Islam and my life from a different angle now. It gives me hope and motivates me."

"This was a great assignment. Before this, I was addicted to Facebook. I would check it every 30 minutes! And I would normally be sleeping late and waking up late. When I started this assignment, I downloaded a softcopy of the Qur'an in my phone. I made a plan to read at least one page with the tafsir

[explanation of the Qur'an] before the morning prayers. This morning, I was listening to the Qur'an as if I was hearing it for the first time."

This author found the following comment particularly insightful.

"To be honest, at the beginning of this assignment, I really didn't want to do this assignment. I just did it because I had to. At the end of the 10th report, it is not too much to say that I really look at everything differently. I enjoy my prayers more and I relate everything back to Allah. I used to prefer being myself but now I appreciate the presence of a companion better. This is not the first time that I watch an Islamic video. But doing it constantly for weeks definitely will result in a change."

Another student wrote,

"This exercise is a great way to train students to be self-educated. Conventional education limits the students' ability to specialised knowledge and forces students to study only to get good grades. This assignment provides the freedom of choice in which students can choose any topic as it is related to tafsir of Qur'an [explanation of the Qur'an]"

Discussion

Generally, tables 2, tables 3 and table 4 indicate that watching Islamic videos once a week and writing a weekly diary is an effective way to develop Islamic values. The following golden rules seem to be:

1. Participants must be given the freedom to watch the topics that they are interested in within reason. For example, this author doesn't allow students to watch videos from speakers that are known to be extremists.
2. Participants must feel psychologically safe. They are not evaluated on the content but they are rewarded for

completing the assignment. Throughout the semester, this author tells them, "*I am responsible for making you think. What you think is not my problem.*"

3. Self-discovery will take place over many weeks. That is the time that it takes to breach the defense mechanisms and then stimulate system 1.

Earlier, this author reviewed Erikson's Psychosocial Stages and argued that these stages can provide clues as to what listeners are going to be interested in. Although this is generally true, this researcher is amazed by the diversity of his students. This author has –on average- two hundred students every semester. Each person is at a different physical, psychological and spiritual developmental stage. No preacher – however good – can "hit" the right spot with such a diverse group of people. However by shifting the perspective from "speaking about Islam" (i.e. providing content) to "helping my students understand Islam" (i.e. providing them with a process), the problem of dealing with a diverse group of people can be overcome.

Lastly, this author would like to return to the story of Aiman. When counselling Aiman, this author started with "conventional counselling". That didn't help. In fact, it made things worse. It was only when this author –somewhat accidently- helped solve Aiman's spiritual problems that his academic and family problems could be solved. Aiman's story was particularly dramatic. Over the last five years though, many students have gone through Aiman-like experiences. A number of students have reported that this assignment helped them deal with anger, depression and addiction.

In short, all the data indicates that using diaries allow individual to overcome their defense mechanisms (e.g. cognitive dissonance and forgetting) in line with this study's research question.

Although the confirmation bias is still lurking in system 1, the fact that students are allowed to "discover" helps them overcome the confirmation bias. It should be noted that this author has searched the literature for effective ways to overcome the confirmation bias but nothing concrete has emerged from that literature search. At this stage, this author assumes that "readiness to learn" is an important factor. Having read over 1,100 reports since 2010, many students seem to have normal lives. However, a few admit struggling with

important personal problem. One student admitted struggling with a drug addiction[23]. However, his first seven videos were not related to his addiction. It was as if watching the first seven videos gave him the courage to watch a video related to drug addiction in Islam. In other words, when he was ready to learn, the confirmation bias stopped working.

Conclusions

This study attempted to do three things.

First, this author wanted to establish a theoretical framework that would help Muslims become better preacher. The recent discoveries by neuroscientists about system 1, psychological defense mechanisms and system 2 are unequivocal. The diary seems to be almost the perfect tool to overcome these defense mechanisms. Clearly, this author takes a broad perspective of preaching. As a lecturer, this author cannot simply ignore the spiritual and emotional pain that many students go through while at university. This assignment is a simple yet effective way to help students deal with the stress of being a Muslim in the 21st century.

Second, this author wanted to stress a point that is often misunderstood. One may assume that people refuse to accept "Islamic advice" because they have an "attitude problem". In fact, neuroscientists highlight that system 1, system 2 and defense mechanisms are "hardwired" into every person. They don't reflect an attitude problem but they simply reflect human physiology. The fact that people don't have one goal but a hierarchy of goals (many of which individuals are not conscious about) and that there is a constant switch between goals is again physiological. The responsibility of preachers is to educate themselves about how the mind work and find tools to overcome psychological defense mechanisms. The diary is one such tool. Other tools are probably available.

Third, this author wanted to make the data presented in table 2, 3 and 4 more widely available. Developing the spiritual intelligence

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[23] Prior to submitting his assignment, this students met this author and we talked about the process of dealing with drug addiction.

of Muslims is in fact quite simple. The two things to remember is that it is a process and it requires self-discovery. Telling people what to do and what they ought to do is generally a waste of time.