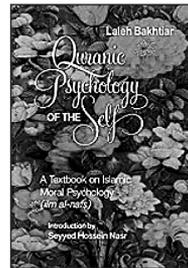# Quranic Psychology of the Self: A Textbook on Islamic Moral Psychology

By Laleh Bakhtiar, Introduction by Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Chicago, IL: Library of Islam, Kazi Publications, 2019

Reviewed by Samuel Bendeck Sotillos

'*We shall show them Our signs upon the horizons and within themselves, until it be manifest unto them that it is the truth.*'
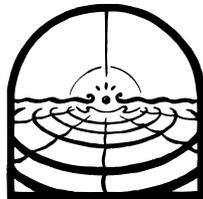
Qurān 41:53

In this pioneering work, Laleh Bakhtiar (1938-2020) aims after many decades of painstaking research and writing on the Islamic tradition to articulate the essence of Islamic psychology or what she has termed 'Quranic Psychology.' For Muslims around the world it is through the revealed and sacred book of the Holy Quran that one finds the source of all knowledge. While there is still much stigma and misunderstanding about mental illness in the present day, Muslims will be pleased to learn that there is a culturally informed way of addressing mental health concerns and needs in accord with the principles of Islam. Islamic psychology is not about introducing religious terms or ideas into the preexisting edifice of modern Western psychology, but rather conforming to the Islamic tradition itself, utilizing its own ontological and epistemic principles in understanding the human psyche and its connection to the Divine.

The dominant paradigms for studying consciousness or the mind and behavior are largely reliant on modern Western psychology and its ways of knowing which marginalize or exclude other modes of knowing. The notion that only modern Western psychology and its science offers a valid or true form of knowledge is not only flawed or shortsighted, but hegemonic and totalitarian, having its roots in the European Enlightenment or the so-called Age of Reason. Bakhtiar informs us that this psychology or 'science of the soul' differs from contemporary psychology since 'Quranic Psychology is a sacred science because it begins and ends with God' (p. xvii) and, she adds, 'Quranic Psychology is a science that differs significantly from modern psychology, but, at the same time, meets the same criteria for a science.' (p. xvii)

Within each of the world's religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism or the religion of the First Peoples and their shamanic traditions—there exists a corresponding sacred and integral psychology. As each religion converges in a transcendent unity of the Absolute, it also possesses its own psychology or 'science of the soul' that unifies in this transcendent unity but varies in its application according to differences in human beings. This perennial psychology is rooted in a sacred science, metaphysics, and spiritual principles that are connected to the heart of the world's religions and their mystical dimensions.

Bakhtiar points out the all-inclusiveness of this 'science of the soul,' noting that 'Quranic Psychology, known as the science of the soul (*'ilm al-nafs*), draws upon many of the sciences that developed from the Quran including, among others, the sciences of metaphysics, medicine, cosmology, theology, ethics, natural philosophy and other branches of philosophy.' (p. xviii) The human psyche is described in the following manner: 'Our soul is that by which we develop consciousness, feel, think, know and will and by which our body is animated, as our body is the instrument governed by our soul.' (p. xvii) She adds 'Our consciousness symbolizes our human reality.' (p. 349) Bakhtiar presents the distinct degrees and modes of the human being: 'Quranic Psychology is the science of the self or *nafs* … [the] 'self' consists of body, soul and spirit.' (p. xvii) In Islamic psychology there are four degrees of the human psyche as articulated in the Holy Quran, ascending from the animal soul (*an-nafs al-ḥaywāniyah*), the passional soul (*an-nafs al-ammārah* or 'soul which incites' to evil), the discerning or intelligent soul (*an-nafs al-lawwāmah* or 'soul which

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