

## **Zikr, an Antidote to Mental Stress: A Study from the Islamic Perspective**

Mohammad Abdur Rahman<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

*Excessive worldly attachment and keenness on mundane pursuits are causing tremendous restlessness of mind which disrupts mental serenity resulting in huge stress on the psyche of individuals. Many are getting exhausted in quest of such a means by which they can get rid of such heavy stress. The ramification of mental stress is also diverse. A number of studies were done in order to get over this issue. Different mentors, religious leaders and spiritual guides recommended varied spiritual or religious meditative practices such as Transcendental meditation, Mindfulness, Yoga, etc. to escape such stress. Zikr or remembrance of Allah (Subhanahu Oa Ta Ta) can be one of the most effective practical antidotes to such psychological pressure. Moreover, Zikr is among the rituals, which has been recommended for the tranquility of mind and soul and as the main pleasing performance to Allah (Subhanahu Oa Ta Ta) both in the holy Qur'an and Prophetic traditions. This study aims to examine from an Islamic perspective to what extent Zikr or Remembrance of Allah (Subhanahu Oa Ta Ta) can play an effective role as a means of mental stress recovery. Analytical and descriptive approaches will be used to assess the collected data. The results from this study demonstrate that among other means, the Zikr of Allah (Subhanahu Oa Ta Ta) is the most useful tool for the relief of mental stress. According to the results, Zikr performance has a substantial positive impact on the improvement of heart health. The findings of this study may persuade people to practise Zikr as a powerful means of relieving emotional and psychological stress. Numerous studies have been conducted in the past to determine the benefits of Zikr or remembrance of Allah (Subhanahu Oa Ta Ta). We believe that our research is not the last and that further investigation to be conducted in the future will make the issue clearer and have a substantial impact on mental health recovery.*

**Keywords** Zikr, Remembrance, Mental Stress, Islamic Perspective, Prophetic Traditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Assistant Teacher, Chittagong Government High School, Chattogram, Bangladesh

## **Introduction**

Our physical and spiritual centres are located in the heart. It is essential to maintain our bodily existence. The heart, which is so vital to our physical existence, is also a spiritual treasure and the epicentre of our capacity for spiritual perception. The heart rules over all of the organs, including the mind. The hands start to shake and the heartbeat quickens as a panic episode hits. It is in charge of the work that the human soul does. The spiritual function performed by the heart is higher than its physical function in all respects since it is the human spirit, not the outward appearance that defines who we are as people. The heart, therefore, is equally important for both the body and mind.

This human heart is often burdened with stress, resulting in the psychological feelings of distress and anxiety. Man goes under huge pressure. When the human body responds to this pressure the heart is filled with stress which we also call mental stress. Multifaceted and multidimensional pressure mostly results from worldliness. Again worldliness is the result of extreme attachment to the worldly affluent that is created from lust, greed and desire for its acquirement and procurement, for fulfilling materialistic needs, and thus feelings of tension, worried thoughts, disappointment, etc. are generated within individuals. These stimulators, on the one hand, make men overburdened with stress and on the other hand, individuals became increasingly restless to find ways to getting relieved from this manifold stress. Today, scientists, particularly psychologists, psychiatrists, religious leaders and social workers, face a struggle with this issue. Numerous studies have so far been done in order to get a suitable means of complete relief of this stress but a fitting antidote to such stress seems yet to be discovered. Various methods, including behavioural modification, psychotherapy, behavioural therapy, psychological rehabilitation, and homoeopathy, have all been tried. It might be argued, nonetheless, that no one has entirely been

acknowledged to obtain a complete recovery from promoting symptoms. In this case, outward and inward or spiritual practices of Islam in our daily life may help us, to a great deal, lead a restful and pressure-free life and have a stress-free mind fully contented with utmost divinity.

Specialists like psychiatrists, psychologists, etc. suggest diverse therapies for its cure including practical, natural, historical, cultural or anecdotal remedies. Healthcare providers prescribe different drugs for their treatment along with some follow-ups. Likewise, religious masters and spiritual guides also recommend various contemplative exercises to overcome this stress. These remedial measures though act to a limited degree, a full-pledged curative dose is still in need of search. In that case, among varied thoughtful practices, *Zikr* or remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) is found to be highly recommended by the Islamic texts as the most advantageous means for the relief of such stress. McCraty and his colleagues introduced the term *physiological coherence* to describe “the degree of order, harmony, and stability in the various rhythmic activities within living systems over any given time period” (McCraty and Shaffer 55). People can raise their cardiac coherence levels by using a set of actions and coherence procedures like *zikr*. *zikr* or remembering Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) is the primary way that Muslims express their gratitude to their Lord, Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>), which has a direct impact on people’s emotional, psychological, and physical well-being and can influence the levels of their heart’s coherence. Again the Qur’an affirms tranquility of the heart which is achieved through the remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>). “Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>): for, without doubt, in the remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) do hearts find satisfaction” (Qur’an, 13:28), (Ali). Remembrance components play a vital role in keeping individuals from getting into negative elements that are prone to stress-feeling. Islam’s greatest spiritual potency is its emphasis on remembrance or *zikr*.

In Islam, remembrance is a part of every act of worship. Even the Salat (prayer) spirit, which is the foundational practice of religion, is remembrance (*Zikrullah*). Thus, remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>OaTa'la</sub>) encourages people to move away from materialistic views and toward spirituality, restores optimism in humanity and the human heart becomes contented. Not to speak that a pleased and satisfied mind is completely free from any sort of anxiety and stress.

In this paper, we attempt to investigate “*Zikr* (Remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>OaTa'la</sub>)) from the view of the Holy Qur’an and Prophetic narrations. The Holy Qur’an is the primary research source for all divine, religious, and humanistic themes because it is the divine revelation that provides all constructive counsel. Since the Holy Qur’an is the foundation of all philosophical considerations pertaining to the divine and holy entity, all of its verses are “*Zikr*”.

This study aims to (1) find how Islamic practical and spiritual values and spiritual appreciation can be a means of transforming stressful life into tranquility, (2) investigate how the holy Qur’an and Hadith (Prophetic traditions) strongly spoke of *zikr* as a tool for acquiring mental serenity and tranquility, and (3) identify ‘Remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>OaTa'la</sub>)’ or *zikr* a comprehensive recovery approach to address mental stress problems.

The study comprises an introduction, a review of the relevant literature, objectives, research questions, a methodology, findings and results, discussions, recommendations, limitations and a conclusion.

### Literature review

***Zikr, Zikrullah or Remembrance of Allah* (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>OaTa'la</sub>):** There is no doubt that Allah’s (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>OaTa'la</sub>) beautiful *Zikr* bestows unending bounties and has a majestic luminosity. In numerous verses of the Holy Qur’an, the value of *zikr* is strongly underlined. The amount of Hadith on this topic is obviously far too enormous; it is comparable to the numerous, massive Hadith books like Bukhari,

Muslim, Abu Dawood, etc. Numerous Hadiths on the topic of *zikr* can be found in each of these books.

Literally, *Zikr*, also spelt *Dhikr*, stands for remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) in mind. Recollect the Holy entity of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) in the heart. The word “remembrance,” which has Arabic roots, is etymologically defined as “to safeguard anything by mentioning or remembering.” It also implies “glory and praise,” which refers to the Qur’an as well as religion, prayer, and praise. The term *zikr* (Remembrance) derives from the word ‘zakara’, ‘yazkuru’, or ‘zikran’. There are several different meanings for this term such as remembering, mentioning, paying attention, telling, guarding, taking lessons, knowing and understanding. And terminologically, “*Dhikr* is to pronounce with the tongue (Zuhri et al. 45). Even though this concept later evolved into “remembering,” recalling something frequently causes the tongue to call it by its common name. Similarly, speaking aloud might help the heart remember more of what is said. The term “*zikr*” appears 280 times in the Qur’an; initially, the U’lama called for it to serve as the Arabic antonym for the word “forget,” but it has since taken on numerous meanings such as “remembering,” as remembering something will compel the tongue to always and repeatedly mention what was said.

Yet, *zikr* does not necessarily mean only oral recitation of some conventional words or sentences like *SubhanAllah*, *Alhamdulillah* and *Allahu Akbar*, etc. rather, it is a set of physical actions too. It encompasses a variety of functions of the tongue and heart. It entails being mindful of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>), which involves considering Him and bringing Him up constantly all time and across all spheres of life. In a broader aspect, *zikr* implies any performance by which the divine essence of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) is imagined with the soul or recalled in the heart.

The Qur'an used the word *zikh* both for the sacred scriptures revealed before the Qur'an and the Qur'an itself (Qur'an, 15:9). The entire Qur'an is *zikh* with which Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sup>OaTa'la</sup>) is remembered.

*Zikh* also was used for recitation, understanding and Quranic admonition (Qur'an, 54:17). This is because by the recitation of the Qur'an Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sup>OaTa'la</sup>)'s remembrance is made and Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sup>OaTa'la</sup>)'s omnipresence is imagined.

One of the meanings of *zikh* is *Salah* (prayer, Jum'a Prayer) (Qur'an, 62:9). For verily through the performance of *Salah* Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sup>OaTa'la</sup>) is solemnly remembered. Thus, *zikh* though has been used in various meanings, it is essentially a practice of "remembering" God by chanting his name repeatedly as Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sup>OaTa'la</sup>) says, "Then do ye remember Me; I will remember you. Be grateful to Me and reject not faith" (Qur'an, 2:152). The *zikh* developed into a formula from a simple recitation of the Qur'an and other sacred texts among ascetics and mystics such as '*La'ilaha illa Allah*', (There is no god but Allah), '*Allahu Akbar*', (Allah is the Greatest'), '*al-hamdu lillah*', (Praise be to Allah), '*astaghfirullah*', (I ask Allah's forgiveness), etc. that is repeated aloud or softly, along with a specific stance and breathing pattern.

**Mental stress:** Mental stress is a form of stress that occurs because of how events in one's external or internal environment are perceived (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is almost inevitable that everyone runs into daily stress. Deadlines need to be met, more duties need to be completed than initially appear possible, and limitless outside pressure always presents unexpected challenges. In today's society, mental stress is a major concern because it is either directly or indirectly linked to around 50% of work-related illnesses. Despite having psychological roots, stress has an impact on a number of physiological functions in the body. Current statistics suggest that as much as "One-third of the American population is on antidepressants" (Seaward 38).

In the year 2021, WHO reports that mental or neurological illnesses will have an impact on one in four persons worldwide in the course of their life. On the other hand, “depression affects 264 million people in the world, while around half of all mental health conditions start by age 14, with suicide the second leading cause of death in young people aged 15 to 29” (UN leads call to protect most vulnerable from mental health crisis during and after COVID-19).

An estimated 25% people suffer from mental health disorders worldwide. Almost 7 million suffer from anxiety and depression in Bangladesh”, and “the levels of depression, anxiety, and stress have been reported to be as high as 54.3%, 64.8%, and 59.0%, respectively (Arusha and Biswas 1).

Self-injury, alcoholism, drug abuse, and suicide are just a few of the more prevalent ways that people today deal with stress. Psychological practices like deep meditation, mindfulness, etc. are some lucrative therapies recommended for stress reduction.

Modern theories see stress as a danger to homeostasis, with reactions being somewhat distinct based, among other things, on the precise challenge and the organism’s perception of and seeming ability to deal with the stressor. Stress is a state of pressure, either emotionally or physically. Any circumstance or thinking that gives you cause for frustration, anger, or anxiety can trigger it. However, Stress, from a spiritual perspective, “is a perceived disconnection from our divine source” (Seaward 66).

**Mental Stress vs. meditation:** A pioneering TM (Transcendental Meditation) practitioner Dr. Herbert Benson did a number of academic studies at Harvard University to investigate the efficacy of meditation. The research showed that “regular meditation tends to lower the resting heart rate and the resting blood pressure, boost immune function, improve sleep quality, and improve several other physiological functions associated with

relaxation” (Seaward 189). Meditation, of course, works in reducing stress but not to the extent of satisfaction. “Meditation is nothing more than clearing the mind of thoughts and feelings that are taking up space and crowding out more important things that really need attention” (Seaward 189). Distancing from irrelevant chitchat and things that do not necessitate more attention is the main theme of meditation. It also associates with breathing functions. It makes one feel relatively light but contentment is another thing that requires something different.

**Mental Stress vs. Mindfulness:** Mindfulness is a unique type of meditative exercise that involves actively participating in each moment as it occurs while fully aware of your present experience.

Mindfulness, in the opinion of American professor emeritus of medicine and mindfulness specialist Jon Kabat-Zinn, is paying attention in a certain way—on purpose, in the present moment. Mindfulness liberates us from past and future memories and fantasies by bringing the reality of the present moment clearly into focus. One of the early Buddhist commentaries states that mental clarity is the presence of the mind and attentiveness to the present.

Mindfulness meditation can help individuals to begin enjoying life in the present. “It (mindfulness meditation) helps you to slow down and relax; to smell the flowers and enjoy each moment as it comes. As you practice mindfulness, layers of negative thoughts and emotions disappear and you begin to sense a feeling of freedom, peace and joy” (Espirito 17). Through mindfulness when you meditate, you are also working toward achieving a mental state wherein your mind is calm and under control rather than racing with thoughts.

Mindfulness is a skill that enables people to become more aware of their bodily and emotional state without becoming dragged down in self-criticism and self-judgment. “Mindfulness done well allows one to regain control over destructive feelings and even to capture positive memories that can be savoured at a

later date” (Espirito 21). In Mindfulness, one tries to escape the negativity or block out unpleasant thoughts that he experienced in the past and which might influence his future, by focusing only on the present moment and current experiences. It can bring a feeling of joy and freedom for the time being, or one may feel relaxed through the practice of mindfulness. But complete satisfaction and permanent happiness of mind is an utterly different thing that cannot be achieved only by *zikr* or remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sup>ŌaTa’la</sup>) which the holy Qur’an guarantees.

In other words, mindfulness is an attempt to stay free from stress at present by being forgetful of negative thoughts of the past and their probable ill consequences in future. On the other hand, *zikr* is such a divine means that makes the state of a stress-free mind eternal.

**Stress and Spirituality:** Stress and spirituality are equal partners in the dance of life when viewed from the perspective of balance. On December 31, 1999, in an interview during the televised millennium celebration Reverend Billy Graham’s cautionary expression was:

I am afraid that people are losing their faith in God and replacing it with a faith in technology that will solve all our problems. They are being led down the wrong path. There must be a change in the human heart (Seaward 69).

Transforming from a motive of fear to love and from a restless to a stress-free heart—these changes are what Graham described as a spiritual awakening (or remembering). Today, there are some expressions that are popularly used: (1) *Spiritual Hunger*, which refers to a search or hunger for truth that cannot be satisfied by one particular traditional religious practice, and (2) *Spiritual Bankruptcy*, a concept which connotes a sense of moral decay, possibly brought on by an emptiness that cannot be satisfied by an abundance of material possessions. (3) *Spiritual Dormancy* which refers to those who, for a variety of reasons, choose not to value

the significance of the spiritual component of health and well-being. These terms, therefore, make the sense that the particular types of a blend of both religious and spiritual practices other than mundane rehabilitations are really required for complete mental rest and gratification. The following statement reveals how immense impact spirituality has on the stress recovery process. Brian Luke states, "We may be wired for stress, but, according to Andrew Newberg, M.D., we are also wired for spirituality (Seaward 26).

Newberg explains, in his book *Why God Won't Go Away*, facts gleaned from brain-imaging data gathered from nuns of the Franciscan order and Tibetan Buddhists who practise thoughtful prayer and meditation, respectively. A SPECT (single photon emission computed tomography) equipment demonstrates how blood flow to the prefrontal cortex interacts with neuronal activity, indicating how humans reports a transcendent or mystical experience. According to Newberg's findings, the filter of conscious thinking is unplugged when the brain is deprived usual sensory information, and as a result, space and time are realized differently. "Neurotheology," the study of the neurobiology of spirituality, is a new field of study that has emerged from the clinical hunt for the cerebral "G" spot in the brain. Any form of meditation that fosters the relaxation response appears to heighten these euphoric feelings. Emerging thought leaders in this field of study have unanimously agreed that each person has the brain circuitry necessary to have a mystical experience.

**Zikr and Mental stress:** Sarwari & Abdul Wahab conducted a study on 20 participants from 10 different countries through the application of a mixed method research design, which included the use of HRV-biofeedback technology and some interviews, in order to assess the likely correlation between *zikr* and heart coherence, intrapersonal communication of Muslim university students from different nationalities. The findings confirm that

*Zikr* performance had significant positive effects on the increase of heart coherence among the participants, and heart coherence is among the main factors that affect the process of intrapersonal communication within the human body (Sarwari and Abdul Wahab 110).

Brian Luke further states that, the simple fact is that there are countless methods for dealing with stress that honour the timeless knowledge of a strong, vivacious spirit. While some tactics are more focused on taking action, others expressly address mindsets. Some methods concentrate on the mind, while others are concerned with the body, the spirit of the individual, or the emotions. Each method focuses on the aspects of harmony, self-renewal, and balance in life. *Zikr* or remembrance, together with other spiritual activities including remembrance, prayers, supplication and recitation of the Qur'an, that are followed on a regular basis can have a tremendously progressive impact, particularly in the treatment and recovery of mental stress.

This remedial treatment utilizes a spiritual approach using remembrance, prayer, guidance and recitation of the Qur'an, fardhu 'ain, fasting, other circumcision practices, meditation and prayer with teachers (Hadzrullathfi Syed Omar and Mohamad 1073).

This therapeutic approach is founded on the Qur'an and Hadith by integrating the teachings of Sufism. The message of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sup>Wa</sup> <sup>Ta</sup> <sup>Ala</sup>) in two respective verses serves as more confirmation of this, (Qur'an, 17:82) and (Qur'an, 10:57). According to the researchers, Islamic "psycho spiritual therapy" refers to a type of psychological and spiritual care that is founded on Islamic teachings and practices and does not contravene Shari'ah rules. "The concept of "therapy" relies on healing, while "psycho" means psychosis. Psychotherapy means "mental healing". While psycho religion in this discussion is intended as a "religious healing", one of the study of the approach is through prayer and *dhikr* as one people method

(way) to get in touch directly with the *khaliq*” (Afrinaldi et al. 203). The aim is to activate one’s own personality, soul, and spirit. The therapy is in accordance with the original character of human creation since it is a treatment given by God Who is the Creator of all beings including people.

**Methodology:** Balanced data and information from primary sources, such as the Qur’an and Prophetic Traditions have been collected and studied. To comprehend the issues of stress and its recovery recommended in Islam, mainly secondary sources, such as books and journals, magazines, research papers, etc. have been consulted and evaluated using both Analytical and Descriptive methods.

Common patterns have been used in this study. Especially, related information using e-libraries, blogs and websites/internet has been collected and analyzed.

**Research Question:** This paper tries to find out the answers to the following questions.

1. Why do the Islamic texts place such a high value on spiritual practices for mental rehabilitation?
2. How does *zikr* or Remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> **Oa’Ta’la**) play an outstanding role as a powerful therapy in healing mental stress?

**Research Goal / Aim:**

To investigate *zikr*’s potential as a tool for recovering from mental stress.

**Discussion:** Millions of people are affected by various types of stress disorders. Dealing with such severe stress can be difficult, and we need to find the best treatment to get rid of its debilitating symptoms. Among the traditional treatments including medical rehabilitation, counselling, meditative and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy and spiritual psychotherapy, the *zikr* Approach advocated by Sufi mentors and endorsed by the sources of the

Qur'an and Sunnah is a perfect one for curing the spiritual and psychological condition of the human being apart from the conviction that only Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa'la</sub>) is capable of providing the finest solutions to human issues. This approach essentially emphasizes prevention over treatment, which can be accomplished if a servant truly grasps the idea of devotion and submission to Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa'la</sub>) the Almighty. This healing approach actually bases a real diagnosis of an afflicted more on their spiritual than physiologic makeup. For those who practise it, this therapy is thought to be a stronghold and a means of spiritual upliftment. One is shielded from all types of suspicion and evil so long as one pledges himself to Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa'la</sub>), with His permission.

In the eyes of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa'la</sub>), *zikr* is one of the cleanest, finest and best practices of His servant. Additionally, as meditation can relieve the human heart and soul, remembrance is essential to the path of approaching Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa'la</sub>) and receiving His pleasure. Therefore, just as the Prophet Muhammad (<sup>Peace Be</sup> <sub>Upon Him.</sub>) stated in the following hadith, subjective cleansing and heart purification should be given the same emphasis and importance, “Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body, if it becomes good (reformed), the whole body becomes good, but if it gets spoilt, the whole body gets spoilt, and that is the heart” (Bukhārī, 1997, 83). Therefore, remembrance is the training of purifying the heart, the uncovering of the spiritual veil, reinforcing of faith and piety, abolishing hypocrisy, eradicating passion, suppressing of demonic interference, and so forth. As per Allah's (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa'la</sub>) words, It implies, “(that is) those who believe and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah: for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction” (Qur'an, 13: 28). Once the heart has been cleansed, purified through the remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa'la</sub>) the Almighty, it can attain the essence of peace, tranquility, and contentment, and its ailments can easily be eradicated. Because, “mentioning (Allah's name orally) then

accompanied by reminding Allah (in heart) will bring one to peace and tranquility of the soul, and will make all anxiety of the heart disappear” (Zuhri et al. 59). As a result, the practice of remembrance (*Zikr*) is particularly useful in the therapy of mental stress. Keeping your heart and spiritual mind at peace will help you forget about your stress and stop restlessness.

*Scientific Journal of PPI-UKM* mentions, according to Kusaeri’s citation, Carter and Rasyidi also did study on immigrant Muslim women in the United States. They created a theoretical framework for psychotherapy aimed towards Muslim women with mental illnesses. These methods mix the Western components of style therapy with Islamic teachings and values (prayer, recitation of Al Qur’an, and bearing Sahadah). The power of remembrance for the therapy of mental treatment, which is being endured by many patients, is amply demonstrated by this hypothesis. In the meantime, a study by Kamal and Loewenthal explores how Hindus and Muslims in the UK feel about the occurrence of ‘suicide’. According to their findings, “Muslims generally tend to be stronger morally of considering in addressing suicide (i. e, ‘My religion forbids suicide’) than Hindus” (Afrinaldi et al. 204). The forbidding from suicide, according to Kamal and Loewenthal, is ingrained in the new Muslim generation’s thoughts from an early age. This unequivocally demonstrates to us in our hearts the necessity of the idea of religion in the development of ‘*Ilahiah*’ capacity of human beings, which is frequently referred to as the ‘*Fitrah*’. The opinions of five British women from various religious backgrounds (Muslim, Hindu, white Christian white, black Christian and Jewish) are investigated by Loewenthal and Cinnirella. The study looked at the effectiveness of various treatments for people with mental illness and depression. From all the different types of intervention, prayer is found to be regarded by all religions as being the most effective method for assisting the recovery from mental illness and depression. Furthermore,

Loewenthal and Cinnirella documented the variations in the beliefs of each religion. “Most women Muslim regard that prayer as an effective means of curing depression patients” (Afrinaldi et al. 204)

The above study details confirm that varied religious practices in different faith systems act effectively upon the psyche of the adherents of respective faiths in healing mental stress. And particularly the Muslims’ religious rituals like Salat, regular recitation of the Qur’an, Sahadah (oral testimony of the oneness of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa’la</sub>)), etc. have a stronger impact on the psychology of the Muslims in coping with stress than that of other beliefs. Unquestionably, Salat, reciting the Qur’an, Sahadah, etc. were termed Zikr in the Qur’an and the Prophetic literature.

Besides the verses we mentioned earlier, other verses also characterize Salat as means of *zikr* (Qur’an, 20: 4). The Qur’an itself is *zikr* (Qur’an, 68:51) and (Qur’an, 15:9).

### **Temptation of Satan (Devil) to Worldliness and Preventing from *Zikr* must be checked for Mental Wellbeing**

The desire for more and more gains is the most dominant element amongst other stimulators of worldliness. This type of materialistic contemplation alienates the devotee from his Lord which Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa’la</sub>) warned of (Qur’an, 63:9). This worldliness creates mental restlessness snatching the contentment with what better thing one has. He feels that despite having everything and despite all the attainments, there still exists the discontentment of the unachieved and unfulfilled. Satan is the only one who induces such thoughts. In paradise, there were all arrangements of comforts and luxuries for Adam (A.). Despite this Satan persuaded him to disobey Allah’s command, he became restless and finally, approached the forbidden tree (Qur’an, 2: 35). Elsewhere, another verse (Qur’an, 2: 268) resonates the same. And thus Satan keeps Allah’s servant away from His Zikr that brings about mental tranquility, which Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa’la</sub>) affirms in the verse (Qur’an, 5:

91). This very enemy plays diverse tricks to turn the heart away from the remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>Oa'Ta'la</sub>) so that tranquility in mind disappears, according to the verse (Qur'an, 43:36). The more one's heart turns away from remembering Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>Oa'Ta'la</sub>), the more Satan will devour that person's heart. There is no other way to safeguard oneself from this devil than by the remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>Oa'Ta'la</sub>). The devilish provocation can therefore be averted only through the *Zikrullah* or the remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>Oa'Ta'la</sub>) for filling one's heart with relaxation.

### **Business and Trade are Something that Keeps Ordinary People away from the Remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>Oa'Ta'la</sub>)**

Business and trade are other elements of worldliness that may make people stay away from Allah's remembrance. The role of business and commerce in the flourishing of world civilization is undeniable. Honest trading is also supported by the Qur'an and prophetic direction. The holy Prophet (<sup>Peace Be</sup><sub>Upon Him</sub>) gave the honest, truthful traders high esteem. He (<sup>Peace Be</sup><sub>Upon Him</sub>) says, "The trustworthy, honest Muslim merchant will be with the martyrs on the Day of Resurrection" (Ibn Majah 225). Honest competition is expected in this case. However, unhealthy competition in trade and business and excessive involvement in them make individuals overburdened and overstressed and consequently keep them away from the remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>Oa'Ta'la</sub>). Only Allah-fearing persons who always remember the presence of Him in their minds can escape this temptation. Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>Oa'Ta'la</sub>) reassures this reality in the verse (Qur'an, 24:37).

### **Nafs, its Varieties, and the Role of the Remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup><sub>Oa'Ta'la</sub>) in Overcoming its Negative Aspects**

According to the Islamic Texts and their exegeses, mental makeup is divided into three categories: *Nafs-e- ammarah* (Qur'an, 12:53), *Nafs-e-lawwamah* (Qur'an, 75:2) and *Nafs-e-mutmainnah* (Qur'an, 89:27). The Arabic term '*Ammarah*' refers to ruling, commanding, frequent commanding, etc. It means the type of mind

that has commanding authority over us. It commands us what to do. According to its desire, wish and appetite, it simply commands us what to do and we listen and follow its dictates accordingly. We cannot help listening to its commands. Because it has sovereignty over us and we are subjugated by it. So the person who is vulnerable to this type of *nafs* responds to its desire and appetite, and does whatever he likes- even if it is sinful- blatantly, remorselessly. When one keeps responding to its lust and desire, at one stage he cannot keep pace with them and gets exhausted halfway through. And thus he becomes restless.

The Arabic term '*Lawwamah*' means incriminating, self-reproaching, self-condemning. So, this is the type of *nafs* that might occasionally cause a person to commit sin, and, at the same time, it incriminates and reproaches itself for it, and then it feels guilty. Eventually, this guilty feeling is meant to grow so strong that the person gives up those sins. Therefore, the clear mark of this is simply that the person who has such a *nafs* that as soon as he sins, he feels guilty, shy, embarrassed and regretted. He wished he could undo it. He wished he had never done it. He may even make the decision right then and there to never do that again. So he is always at war with their *nafs*. Sometimes people commit sin, while other times they are able to refrain from sin.

The Arabic expression '*Mutmainnah*' literally means contented, satisfied, happy, etc. Technically, it makes two senses.

a) The First one is that the person having this type of *nafs* is contented with nothing but the *hukm* or order of Allah (Subhanahu Oa'Ta'la). This individual has been disciplined, trained and shaped in such a way that the only thing that brings it joy and happiness, that gives it relief, that makes it *mutma'in* or contented, is what Allah (Subhanahu Oa'Ta'la) is pleased with, or what Allah (Subhanahu Oa'Ta'la) is satisfied with. Therefore, the satisfaction of his heart lies in what Allah (Subhanahu Oa'Ta'la) is pleased and joyful with.

b) Second sense is that it has reached a state of serenity, peace, contentment and tranquility. And obviously, the serenity here is that it ensures *aman* (safety). *itminan* (relief) from doing sin, from desiring sin, desiring something unlawful or even undue desires. It desires only what is due, just and fair. The sign of a person having this type of *nafs* is that not only does he not sin, but also he no longer desires sin. He no longer longs for anything that Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) has deemed undesirable; instead, he only ever desires what Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) sees as desirable.

Sufi psychology also agrees with similar types of *nafs*. In particular, renowned Islamic Sufi philosopher Imam Abu Hamid Mohammad al-Gazali spoke of these three types of *nafs* and of similar characteristics.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), a renowned psychologist recognized in humans the three psychological traits. “The three parts of the mind in his (Freud) model; he (Freud) named the ego, the id and the superego” (Rennison 38). These are also three mental components in his concept. The mind we are all born with, described by Freud as the ‘id’ which is a roiling mass of solely selfish cravings and impulses that attempt to gratify those desires totally and right away. The reasoning portion of the mind—the section that responds to the external setting and allows a person to embrace the “reality principle” and adjust to reality—is named as the ‘ego’. The id gives rise to the ego, which eventually gains dominance over it. The ‘super-ego’ gives each of us our conscience. Our feeling of evil and good frequently demands that we behave in ways that are acceptable to society as a whole rather than to ourselves.

The viewpoints of Ghazali and Freud on the *nafs* are remarkably similar if we compare them. Freud classified psyche into three categories and called them the id, ego, and super ego. It can be denoted that the id referred to *al-nafs al-ammara*, whereas the ego and superego referred to *al-nafs al-lawwama*.

From the above discourse, it is evident that in the first two stages the *nafs* or heart remains restless. This restlessness has reasons too. They are, firstly, lust, greed, desires, appetites for worldliness, being prone to sinfulness and falling into sins and vices, etc. Secondly, repentance, self-condemnation for that desire; for that sinfulness. These two cause mind to get stressed. It's like being content with everything but still feeling like you lack something. At these stages the restless heart keenly seeks restfulness; the stressed mind eagerly waits for complete relief and serenity. At the third or final stage, it becomes contented and stress-free when it gets back to Godliness, i.e. *Zikrullah* or the remembrance of Allah (Subhanahu  $\text{O}a\text{Ta}'la$ ), which the verse (Qur'an, 13: 28) confirms.

### **The Impact of *Zikr* as Prayer and other Practices, as detailed in Islamic texts, on Relieving Stress**

The most important and main two sources of Islamic Shariah are the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith or Prophetic literature. These two texts are affluent with the verses and hadiths that strongly recommend *zikr* or Remembrance of Allah (Subhanahu  $\text{O}a\text{Ta}'la$ ) for the highest benefits in reducing mental strain and achieving tranquility.

The sickness of insatiability known as lust and desire takes complete control over the heart which causes it to lose its refined nature and become unresponsive. *Zikr* or the remembrance of Allah (Subhanahu  $\text{O}a\text{Ta}'la$ ) helps hearts find their calm base by expelling devilish components and negative tendencies like lust and greed from it, and once they have achieved that peace via *zikr*, faith becomes firmly rooted in it, elevating the heart to the highest degree of contentment. And then there comes a time when the heart spontaneously opens up from the inside.

Excessive attachment to worldliness distances our hearts from Godliness. The conversation between Hazrat Abu Bakr (R.) and Hanzala (R.), which had been reported in the hadith, clearly demonstrates how the heart distant from the remembrance of Allah

(<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sup>ŌaTa'la</sup>) constantly takes a turn to worldliness while *zikr* helps it turn back to Godliness again.

...Once their conversation was over, they went to the Allah's Prophet (<sup>Peace Be</sup> <sup>Upon Him</sup>) and expressed their worry to him. "By Allah, in whose Hand of Might my life lies, if you were able to preserve the state of mind you have while in my company and remain in a permanent state of Zikr, angels would have held you by the hands, while asleep and when moving about." said Allah's Messenger (<sup>Peace Be</sup> <sup>Upon Him</sup>). Hanzala! sometimes it is like this, and sometimes it is like that," He (<sup>Peace Be</sup> <sup>Upon Him</sup>) repeated three times (Muslim, 'as-Sahih', 12).

Like worldly attachment, sinfulness also causes the heart to lose serenity and become black-stained. It is also mentioned by ibn Majah,

Abu Hurayrah (R.) narrated that, Allah's Messenger (SAW) said: "When the believer commits sin, a black spot appears on his heart. If he repents and gives up that sin and seeks forgiveness, his heart will be polished. But if (the sin) increases, (the black spot) increases. That is the Rân that Allah mentions in His Book: "Nay! But on their hearts is the Rân (covering of sins and evil deeds) which they used to earn (Ibn Majah 360-361).

This is how the Prophet (<sup>Peace Be</sup> <sup>Upon Him</sup>) crystalizes how the heart has a fluctuating tendency from good to bad and vice-versa. One of the fundamental goals of the Sufi Order is to, as much as possible, convert this restlessness into stability through the refreshment offered by *zikr*; to turn the heart towards the Divinity and stabilize it thereafter.

There are a number of Islamic religious practices that Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sup>ŌaTa'la</sup>) has commanded the Muslim Ummah to carry out that have the potential to have a massive impact on a person's life. For instance, the practice of remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sup>ŌaTa'la</sup>) (*Zikr*)

brings peace and tranquility (Qur'an, 13: 28), praying (Salah) has been shown to prevent people from doing evil (Qur'an, 29: 45), and supplication (Du'a) brings oneself closer to Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) (Qur'an, 2: 186). Researchers, as per their findings, were of the opinion that religious rituals including *zikir*, Du'a, and *tilawat* or the recitation of the Qur'an may help raising individual self-awareness. The aforementioned viewpoints are consistent with those of Western scholars like Pargament and Hathaway who asserted that spiritual, cognitive, behavioral, and social components of faith are represented by prayer, private activities, faith in God, and guidance from clergy, which are among the religious resources recognized as frequently employed in times of stress.

Prayer is one of the types and parts of *zikr* through which Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) is remembered highly and impressively. The holy Qur'an termed prayer—be it regular or weekly (Jum'a)—as *zikr*. Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) says, “Surely, there is no other god save me, so serve me alone and establish regular prayer for celebrating (remembrance) My glory” (Qur'an, 20:14).

The above verse confirms that Salat is prayed for the remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>). Again, Salat is urged to be followed by supplementary *zikr* as Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>OaTa'la</sub>) admonishes,

When you attend (congregational) prayers, proclaim Allah's praises (remember), whether you are standing, sitting, or lying on your side. However, when you are safe from harm, arrange regular prayers. (Qur'an, 4:103).

It is to be noted that the Arabic word used in the verse (Arabic Text) is '*Atmanantum*'. It is a derivative of '*Itminan*' which means mental serenity, mental relief that is attained after the danger is gone or stress is over. The typical *zikr* is instructed at all times, before and after Salat, and definite *zikr* is commanded during the performance of Salat after the heart gets at ease and the danger (of the enemy) is over.

Our faith is put to the highest test more than at any other time when we are under stress. When huge panic seized all on the morning of September 11, 2001, after the four hijacked planes crashed on Twin Towers, individuals of all religions from across the world sooner started to organize prayer (inside and outside the mosques, churches and temples) in an effort to ease the minds and emotions of those left behind to reassemble the fragments of the disaster.

Prayer has a strong link with mental relief in times of stress. Life, according to Brian Luke, makes us feel like we are isolated beings. It is a reality that we are all connected to one another in life. The feeling of separation prevails when under stress. Faith is compared as a symbolic ray of sunshine that pierces through clouds of illusion to reveal our connection to God, a relationship that has always existed and always will exist. The realization of this relation occurs during prayer. Even if prayer doesn't always yield the solutions we are looking for, it does offer a level of comfort that is unmatched elsewhere. "So, in times of stress, we pray. We pray to God—whatever we perceive God to be" (Seaward 201).

Expressing his firm conviction on the role of prayer in the mental healing process, Luke goes on to state that the subject of intercessory prayer has attracted a lot of attention outside the bounds of traditional theology around the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The scientific community has thus researched the therapeutic effects and potential of prayer. "Only a few years ago it would have seemed like heresy in the halls of academia, yet prayer is now accepted as a viable topic of investigation" (Seaward 202).

So, prayer being a unique means of the remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> *Ḍaṭa'la*) indisputably has an incredible impact on mental well-being. "Remembrance (or *Zikr*) is also part of the profound gratitude to God for all the gifts and favors He has given us



doing so. “I turn to You, O Allah, for shelter from anxiety and anguish, weakness and idleness, stinginess and cowardice, the load of debt, and being ruled over by men” (Bukhari 1059). Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) also counselled his Ummah to supplicate to Allah (Subhanahu OaTa’la) in times of stress and anxiety so that He causes them to go away.

That is why Allah (Subhanahu OaTa’la) instructed us to remember Him persistently. He (Subhanahu OaTa’la) commands, “O ye who believe! Celebrate the praises of Allah and do this often; and glorify Him morning and evening.” (Qur’an, 33: 41-42).

A person who remembers Allah (Subhanahu OaTa’la) is promised to be remembered by Allah (Subhanahu OaTa’la) Himself. Allah (Subhanahu OaTa’la) assures in the verse (Qur’an, 2:152). When a person feels that Allah (Subhanahu OaTa’la) by Himself cares for all his affairs he gets mentally free from all stress, agonies, and tension. Even when encountering enemies, Allah (Subhanahu OaTa’la) instructed the warrior to remember Him excessively (Qur’an, 8: 45). This is due to the fact that via the *zikr* of Allah (Subhanahu OaTa’la), the heart remains fearless, firm, and peaceful, which is vitally needed for a fighter to win a battle.

*Zikr* with a purified heart brings grand success to human beings. Allah (Subhanahu OaTa’la) declares, “But those will prosper who purify themselves. And glorify the name of their Guardian-Lord, and (lift their hearts) in prayer” (Qur’an, 87:14-15). A significant number of hadiths also speak of the virtues of *zikr* in relieving mental stress. An individual feels the presence of Allah (Subhanahu OaTa’la) as long as he is absorbed in *zikr*. When a stressful heart feels the divine presence of Allah (Subhanahu OaTa’la), all sorts of strain disappear. The heart rests in peace. Again, during the moment of *zikr* ‘*Sakeenah*’ or peace and serenity descend with which a stressed person enjoys divine relief.

On the narration of Abu Hurayrah (R.) and Abu Sa’yed (R.), Both provided evidence of hearing Rasulullah (Peace Be Upon Him) say that, “the congregation engaged in remembrance of Allah the Highest is encircled by the angels on all sides, Allah’s favour and ‘*Sakeenah*’

(peace and tranquility) descend upon them, and Allah the Almighty speaks about them, in way of compliments, to His angels” (Muslim 261).

*Zikr* not only brings restfulness to mind but also removes the barrier-like elements that prevent restfulness from coming into the heart.

**Summary:** The overall discourse in this study reaches the following summary

- A believer finds peace in the *zikr* of Allah (SWT), and no worldly occurrence can disturb him.
- Human beings when feeling stressed and facing danger or anger should engage in the remembrance of Allah (SWT) so that their hearts might be at ease
- *Zikr* is a kind of worship and one of the sources of comfort.
- *Zikr* as praying and supplication to God reduces confusion and relieves mental stress.
- *Zikr* strengthens faith.
- *Zikr* establishes a connection between the servant and his Lord, Allah (SWT), fosters hope and reliance on Him (SWT), and brings satisfaction in mind thereby.
- Negligence, which stands between wisdom and heart, is removed by the *zikr*.
- In Islamic and *m'arifat* (acquiring Allah's acquaintance) literature, *zikr* is the guiding principle behind all forms of prayer.

**Research Outcome and implication:** Overindulgence and preference for worldliness and materialistic hunts along with the repeated response to other diverse pressure are causing serious strain on the individuals' psyche. As a result, they are losing psychological order, mental rest and contentment. This stress is affecting seriously not only psychological function but also the

physiologic processes of persons. Finding a way to get rid of this problem is a major concern these days.

In this research study, we examined how *zikr*, the remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa'la</sub>), one of the most popular Islamic spiritual practices, affects individuals' psyches that are experiencing huge stress, restlessness, and discontentment. Our findings indicate that this sort of spiritual practice of *zikr* has a strong direct impact on stress recovery. Our result is in line with a number of other results that have already been published about the impact of spiritual practices or religious convictions on people's stress levels in society. There are, however, evidences, too, that show spirituality and religious beliefs having minimal impact on stress, anxiety, or depression. Based on the aforementioned fact, Islam has placed much emphasis on the repetition of *zikr* or Allah's remembrance. Point to be noted that religious beliefs are distinct from employing *zikr* as a form of spiritual intervention. Religious convictions result in wholehearted *zikr*, which, from the perspective of Islam, is accompanied by complete faith in Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa'la</sub>) and, as a result, leads to long-lasting, sustainable tranquility and relief. People with no religious beliefs, however, may have little or no success when adopting spiritual therapy.

This article can thus offer insights into the idea of *zikr* or remembrance of Allah (<sup>Subhanahu</sup> <sub>ŌaTa'la</sub>) for the treatment and cure for the psychologically stressed people from an Islamic perspective through spiritual techniques to lowering mental stress while raising community awareness and enhancing knowledge. Additionally, government and private agencies, as well as different Islamic volunteer groups, can take the initiative to put such divine and spiritual treatment approaches into practice within their respective purviews and contexts, providing a soothing shelter for those who are mentally distressed by a variety of stresses and enabling them to live lovely, healthy and better lives.

**Conclusion:** In brief, we firmly believe that the potency of spirituality in the daily existence of a Muslim individual is the remembrance (*Zikr*) of Allah (Subhanahu). This study finds that *zikr* can aid individuals in overcoming their issues with mental stress. Moreover, it can assist in solving other social issues too. Although each traditional, medical rehabilitation, and meditation centre has a different approach to recovery, many in most parts of the world are experimenting with a similar approach that is based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah. There are stress rehabilitation centres that have stepped into this Islamic Psych spiritual Therapy Approach, either totally or partially, and have a significant positive and sustainable impact on the psychological progress of these ailing individuals. However, further intensive study and procedure modification are required to be made continuously and more incorporated for harvesting far better results. To sum up, remembrance (*Zikrullah*) is the finest technique to recover from long-term stress challenges and may also transform people who once experienced social symptoms into people who can contribute to society and the nation. It is an effort to motivate the community, especially the individuals, to keep up their good efforts and avoid mischief.

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