

# 'Raising Hope' in Quran and psychology

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This article, through a comparative study, aims at defining and analysing the concept of hope in the Quran versus psychology. The study defines common and differential grounds in the area, and suggests a proper approach for establishing and boosting hope in people based on the Quran's lessons. One of the noticeable results of this study is that many of the techniques for creation and improvement of hope are already present in the Quran, and that there are many shared grounds between findings of civilisations and the Divine teachings. It was found that both psychology and the Quran both view hope as a rewarded patience along with action to achieve one's goal, and both fields concur that knowing one's goal and obstacles can preserve hope in man. Some differences were also found. In contrast to psychology, hope in the Quran is based on the goal behind human creation and in line with its perfection, whose sole basis would be faith in God. Also, in psychology the techniques proposed for hope improvement are individual for the most part, whereas the Quran aims at proposing behavioural approaches in societal scale in addition to individual solutions.

## Introduction

Hope is an optimistic attitude of mind based on an expectation of positive outcomes related to events and circumstances in one's life or the world at large. As a verb, its definitions include: 'expect with confidence' and 'to cherish a desire with anticipation' (Tabatabai 1417:481). These days, positive psychology aims at augmenting people's pleasure and psychic health. Positive psychology is a new approach to psychology that focuses on the understanding and description of happiness and mental well-being (O'Hanlon & Bertolino 2012), and considers the scientific study of human strengths and happiness (Seligman et al. 2009). Head of American Psychology Society, Carl Menninger, in a lecture among psychologists of America, was the first to point at the importance of hope for patients. He encouraged his co-psychologists to take a more serious look at the role of hope in the process of treatment, and to appreciate the power of hope in oneself when treating clients (Bahari 2010:53).

Charles Snyder (a famous American psychologist) was among those who took a deeper look at this matter from a scientific viewpoint after Menninger's lecture. In 1990, he published his 'hope theory', which was widely debated among scholars and specialists.

In addition, there are plenty of theories and surveys that consider spirituality as a potential source (of energy) that can expedite hope enhancement (Faghihe 2011:47–48). The origin of these studies goes back to between 1880 and 1930, and scientific analysis was done in the twentieth century when many psychologist (such as Wilhelm Wundt, William James, Stanley Hall and Carl Jung) came to the conclusion that people need religion in order to promote hope (Abarghouei 2011:40). In his comprehensive studies on people's spiritual needs, Snyder (1944–2006) referred to the twenty-first century as the age of spirituality, and observed that a connection with God is the best way to build hope (West 2000:15). The studies of Chang and Li (2002), and Penrod and Morse (1997) show that those who consider themselves religious have higher hopes than those who do not. Feelings of belonging to a supreme source, hoping to help God in difficult situations, and enjoying social and spiritual protection cause religious people to suffer less (Yang & Mao 2007:999–1010). These days, patients' religious beliefs are also considered a critical source in treating their feeling of hopelessness. Religion makes people hopeful and increases optimism (Motahari 1993:45). Religion is a collection of positive social norms, and obeying these norms lead to acceptance and support by others (Dadfar 2006:15). In vision of the Quran, hope is an important factor for mobility, effort and living, and a barrier to depression and suicide. Quran introduces hope as an important factor in human life (Mansori 2013:21). Many psychologists have expressed their ideas about hope, but since Charles Snyder's hope theory is very comprehensive, this study aims at performing a comparative analysis of his hope theory vs. hope in the Quran to analyse ways to enhance hope in the field of psychology, as well as to cast light on the similarities and differences between these two.

## Hope in the Quran

The concept of hope in Quran can be understood through keywords such as *Raja*, *Amal* and *Tamanna* (Ibn Manzour 1414 BC):

1. *Raja*, which means aspiration - waiting for something that is a loved:  
O MY servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful. (Holy Quran, Surah al-Zumar, Ayat53)
2. *Amal*, which means desire - a wish that presupposes a long wait: 'The enduring good deeds are better to your Lord for reward and better for [one's] hope.' (Holy Quran, Surah al-Khaf, Ayat46), and
3. *Tamanna*, which means request – asking for something, along with proper appreciation of its essence (Holy Quran, Surah Najm, Ayat24).

Of the above-mentioned terms, *raja* (aspiration) is synonymous with a desired, sincere and true wish, and is mentioned in the Quran in two fashions: hope for the afterlife and enjoying God's mercy to which all believers aspire, and hope for rejoining God, which only true believers will experience.

Hope is one of the essential elements of the educational system of the Quran and is considered a comprehensive theory. This theory has two cognitive and behavioural dimensions. In the Quran, God has expressed the concepts of belief, such as monotheism (*Tawhid*) and resurrection (*Ma'ad*), and has proposed other Islamic teachings to be a specific program of belief and behaviour for human beings. Due to these components and their application in life, human spiritual training arises and there is an increase in hope and motivation for mankind, and then, psychologically, they will have a better life.

In general, the concept of hope in the Quran can be explored in two dimensions of belief and behaviour, as described below.

### **Quran-based beliefs to create and inspire hope**

Quran-based beliefs refer to cognitive approaches for increasing hope from the viewpoint of Islam, whose impact can be seen in the augmentation of sincere and true hope. Some of these Quran-based beliefs are as follows:

1. Believing in monotheism and its effect on the creation of hope. Believing in monotheism helps people remember God and his mercy all the time, instead of being puzzled over various factors in life or miserly hoping for them. 'Those who believe, their hearts calm down with invocation of God ...' (Holy Quran, Ra'd: Ayat28).
2. Believing in prophecy and its effect on faith reinforcement. Prophets and divine religions can further promise a prosperous future through hope by granting faith, promoting virtuousity, purification of soul and body, and pious deeds.

Believing in prophets and divine agents gives people a calm assurance that by following these humane models, they can seek true hope: 'Truly there's the best model in The Holy Prophet' (Holy Quran, Ahzâb: Ayat21).

Therefore, it is necessary for one who claims true hope to follow God's agents in order to end up in sincere aspiration: 'If you love God, then follow me; God loves you and will forgive your sins' (Holy Quran, Omrân: Ayat31). Only this way will the hope for the future be a true hope, full of truth, by whose light (that brings abstention from sins that cause penitence) people can feel safe:

3. Believing in the resurrection day and its effect on hope reinforcement. Having faith in the resurrection day reassures people that life is not limited to this world, but continues after death, into another life where they can realise many of their wishes. From the Holy Quran's view too, true prosperity in the afterlife is eternal life (Holy Quran, Qâfer: Ayat39), where there is peace, tranquillity, and absolute security (Holy Quran, An'âm: Ayat127). Therefore, no insufficiency is found there, and though people might have lived a desperate life in this world, reminiscence of God's blessings in the other world fades that out, since a believer hopes for comforts of the other world.

### **Behavioural approaches in the Holy Quran for hope development and reinforcement**

Behavioural approaches refer to practical procedures for developing and reinforcing hope in people; solutions that focus on human behaviour and practices in order to boost sincere and true hope. In Quran tradition, these solutions are categorised into individual and social modes.

#### **Individual solutions**

- Remembering God, or *zekr*. *Zekr* means to pay attention to God with language or heart, or both. It is a particular state of mind where human beings consider God at that time. Prayer is one of the types of *zekr*. From the point of view of Islam, the main cause of all anxieties and mental disorders of human beings these days is because they are forgetting God. Essentially, the human soul is divine and has no rest until it reaches God (Holy Quran, Asra': Ayat65). The connection between the human soul and God originates from and lasts on the basis of remembering God: 'Remember me and I will remember you' (Holy Quran, Baqarah: Ayat152). Thus, in order for us to achieve peace, we need to remember God incessantly: 'By remembering God, hearts find peace' (Holy Quran, Ra'd: Ayat28).
- Fear of God (hope-bringing fear): 'They will not fear – but you will fear if you are true believers' (Holy Quran, Äl-e Omrân: Ayat175). Fear of God prevents people from committing sins and provokes human endeavour in search of virtue and truth. It is a kind of fear that strengthens hope in people.
- Contrition and repentance of sins to God. To repent is a way to free people from hopelessness by knowing that

God accepts sinners: 'He is who accepts penitence from His worshippers and pardons sins' (Holy Quran, Shorā': Ayat25). Therefore, sinners who have indeed become insubordinate to God and lost their hope in life, can regain peace and reinforce hope by repenting: 'He guides towards Him those who repent and believe, and blesses them peace of heart by remembering Him' (Holy Quran, Ra'd: Ayat27–28).

- Keeping vigil and late night worshipping. In *Surah Zomar* in the Quran, God terms those who keep vigil as 'hopeful' and refers to late night prayers and worship as key factors in hope reinforcement:

Is the one who stays up all night worshipping God and expecting His Mercy by keeping vigil from depth of their soul, true expectants resort to God and invoke Him hopefully. (Holy Quran, Zomar: Ayat9)

- Emigration in God's path. Migration [*Hijrat*] and crusade are introduced as roots of true hope: 'Those who have faith in God, migrate and crusade for His sake, they are true expectants for God's mercy' (Holy Quran, Baqara: Ayat218).

### Social solutions

- Nourishing or *Infagh*. *Infagh* in the Holy Quran means to donate property or something else to the poor in the way of God. One of the most important effects of nourishing, is removing social tension and depression caused by poverty: 'Take away alms from their property, cleanse and purify them by it' (Holy Quran, Tobeh: Ayat103), and 'Those who give charity for God, and sincerely, make peace in their hearts by His Mercy' (Holy Quran, Baqarah: Ayat265). By contribution, true peace and consistency will dominate people.
- Benevolence. In the Quran's view, a benevolent and righteous person is one with hope for God's favour and who believes in His promises. Therefore, whoever expects Divine Mercy, should be beneficent (Holy Quran, A'rāf: Ayat56).
- Forgiveness and generosity. Forgiveness is a sign of beneficence and promotes hope: 'Forgive them, and God loves benefactors' (Holy Quran, Mā'edeh, Ayat13); and God's mercy that believers long for is closer to righteous people: 'God's Mercy is closer to benefactors' (Holy Quran, A'rāf: Ayat56). Therefore, believers and those who expect God's mercy through concession can realise their hope, which is receiving his mercy and reward, thus the actualisation of true peace.
- Remaining faithful. The Holy Quran counts loyalty as another characteristic of true believers who, in the hope of union with God, inherit Heaven (Holy Quran, Mo'menoon: Ayat8). It is more than clear that those who believe in resurrection and long for that day to come, incessantly bears this in mind and regards it as the sole end in their life.

### Hope theory in psychology

Snyder believes that hope is 'the appreciated potential for creating pathways towards a desirable goal and the impetus

for moving forward in those ways'. Therefore, hope means a positive abiding for reaching one's goals. Positive wait comprises 'agency' (goal-directed determination) and 'pathways' (planning of ways to meet goals) (Snyder 2000:6).

There are three parts to Snyder's hope theory: (1) goal thought (whatever the individual aims at achieving, doing or experiencing), (2) agency thought (a motivational impetus to trigger the individual in the selected pathway to reach the goal), and (3) pathway thought (individual's appreciated power to identify and move towards the goal). These three factors affect each other. Appointing important goals can provide motivation, and this provoked impetus in its own vein may facilitate finding the pathway (Snyder 2000:13).

By having hopeful thoughts, we can learn how to overcome obstacles. Hope therapy has been designed to increase hopeful thinking and to enrich the activities related to pursuing goals. Hope therapy consists of two main phases: hope inculcation and hope enhancement.

### Phase one: Hope inculcation

This phase includes two steps: hope recognition and hope reinforcement.

In the hope recognition step, the therapist asks the patient to tell their life story in order to help the patient find the hope they experienced in their past. This way, the therapist can see how hope was introduced into or waned out of the patient's life.

In the hope reinforcement step, the therapist attempts to model hopeful thoughts and behaviour for the patient, so that agency and pathways could have a bigger role in the treatment.

### Phase two: Hope enhancement

This phase includes two steps: hope enrichment and hope retention.

The therapist tries to enrich hope in the patient by proposing solutions to create goals, pave pathways and increase the individual's agency (Alla'eddini 2009:46). The techniques applied are:

- Technique 1 (solution for creating goals): Provide a structure for clear objectives. This technique helps the patient to analyse different goals in their life and to discuss their satisfaction with each of them by creating a list of current aspects of life that are important (Snyder 2000:27).
- Technique 2 (solution for creating goals): State clear and practical goals. When critical fields are identified, the therapist and the patient must cooperate in the development of clear and practical goals. In order for this technique to be effective, goals should be clear and focused, and also in the form of positive statements (Alla'eddini 2009:46).

- Technique 3 (solution for creating and retaining agency): Search for hope-promoting stories. A special technique for creating hope-promoting stories that could be used to point at will and motivation, is positive imagination (Bahari 2010:118). This approach is like creating a domestic film.
- Technique 4 (solution for creating and retaining agency): Find a ray of hope. At times, people cannot find a hope-promoting story in their life. In this technique, the patient is not asked to consider all positive aspects of a given situation, but just one (Alla'eddini 2009:51).

Lastly, the hope retention step motivates the patient to actively take part in promoting hope in them by recognising target thoughts and hindering thoughts, which is the key to hope retention (Bahari 2010:42).

## Comparison of hope in the Holy Quran and psychology

The theory of hope in psychology is a cognitive-behavioural theory: by cognition and self-introspection, a person will revise their behaviour to get to different goals. Factors of hope in this theory are: goal thought, pathway thought (the power to create a pathway towards wanted goals in spite of barriers), and agency thought (the power to create an incentive to start and continue these pathways) (Alla'eddini 2009:3).

In the Holy Quran, positive hope is also regarded as a comprehensive cognitive-behavioural theory, since through solutions based on faith, God improves an individual's views and beliefs, and reforms the individual's behaviour through behavioural solutions. In the Holy Quran's view, hope has some qualities:

- Goal thought: to be the divine successor and the realisation of God's titles. Other (mundane) goals should serve this critical one.
- Agency thought: motivation or psychological energy needed for following through on goals, faith and the strengthening of the spiritual soul. About those who truly believed in God and did not fear their enemies, the Holy Quran points out: 'Those are the ones who believed in us, and we will heighten guidance' (Holy Quran, Kahf: Ayat13), where the increase in 'guidance' is due to their spirituality.
- Pathway thought: human endeavours in achieving their mundane and divine goals. Assuming virtue and sincerity in doing things that make God and his Prophet (PBUH) happy, and avoiding sins and things that make God and his Prophet (PBUH) sad (Holy Quran, Tobe'h: Ayat71).

## Comparing hope inculcation and enhancement in Holy Quran and psychology

As mentioned earlier, hope therapy in psychology comprises two main phases: hope inculcation and hope enhancement (Alla'eddini 2009:36).

The Holy Quran also aims at inculcating and enhancing hope in people through solutions based on faith and behaviour. God, indeed, inculcates hope through solutions based on faith, and enhances hope through solutions based on behaviour.

### Comparing solutions for hope inculcation

In the first step (hope recognition), in order to help the patient understand hopes they had in the past, the therapist asks the patient to tell their life story. This way, the patient can have a better look at their future (Bahari 2010:112). The Holy Quran has ordered people to always remember God's mercy in their individual lives and the path they have been on up until now: 'O people! Remember God's blessings a lot' (Holy Quran, Fâter: Ayat3). In addition, God Himself has told many stories in order to revive hope in people. For instance, during the battle of Uhud when Muslims lost hope and got depressed after seeing the enemy forces and being affected by evil temptation, God related to them the story of the battle of Badr and His influence in that arena, in order to create hope in their spirits (Holy Quran, Äl-e Omrân: Ayat123–127). He reminded them that hopelessness would never enter the human soul as long as one's hope is meant at one's Creator: 'O Muslims! Never be unsteady in your faith and never be sad, because you can be the best people in the world if you truly believe' (Holy Quran, Äl-e Omrân: Ayat139). Therefore, the best way to find hope would be by remembering God's Mercy and blessings throughout history.

In the second step (hope reinforcement), the therapist tries to model hopeful thinking and behaviour, so that the patient's agency and pathway thinking might improve (Alla'eddini 2009:42). The Holy Quran also, in order to reinforce hope in people, leads them toward believing in prophets and the resurrection day, so as to develop their agency and pathway thinking. In other words, in addition to following God's selected imams and prophets as complete human beings and expectants, the Holy Quran tries to reinforce hope in people through faith in the resurrection day, and also by creating a positive attitude with regard to death. Hope reinforcement strategies in both the Holy Quran and psychology indicate that following a role model can reinforce hope. However, in the Holy Quran, the true role models are prophets and God's selected servants, which possess a much higher status than the role models present in psychology. The real difference is that the Holy Quran sees eternity as the true destination for the worldly life and considers this world as a bridge to the afterlife. For this reason, through improving thoughts for faith in resurrection and features of afterlife, the Quran aims at reinforcing hope in human kind. The Holy Quran considers forgetting or rejecting the resurrection day as the most important cause for hopelessness and despair. For this reason, in the insight of the Quran, believing in resurrection day is of great importance for hope reinforcement, while psychology remains silent about this issue. This is because it has not appointed otherworldly goals, and even mundane goals are solely defined from the viewpoint of materialists.

The Quran recommends basic behaviours, such as belief in monotheism, prophecy and resurrection, because other Islamic teachings are dependent on these principles. If one believes in monotheism, prophecy and resurrection, hope is strengthened because the realities of present and future, and the role of God, is understood. The Quran also recommends behaviours to raise hope in the community, which will lead to the strengthening of hope in society. The most important suggestions of *individual* behaviour in the Quran are remembrance of God, predawn prayer, prayer and recitation of the Quran; and the most important suggestions of *social* behaviour in the Quran are *infagh* [spending money in Allah's cause], beneficence, chastity, forgiving the offender, loyalty, and so on. Therefore, in the culture of the Quran, the issue of hope and its strengthening in various ways has been emphasised and encouraged.

### Comparing solutions for hope enhancement

In the first step (hope enrichment), the therapist tries to enrich hope in their patient by providing solutions to create goals, develop pathways and increase agency in the individual (Bahari 2010:115). The Holy Quran too, in order to enrich hope in human beings, has provided behavioural solutions on both an individual and social level. However, psychological solutions could be compared with different aspects in the Quran:

- Solutions that the theory of hope has offered for increasing and enriching hope are of a quality that the patient him/herself (or at least with the help of the therapist) should create them (goal, agency and pathway). This is while the Quran solutions, unlike psychological ones, are assigned by God long before, since God has made clear the goal behind human life by discussing the reason for creation (in the first place): 'I have not created human and jinni but to worship (me)' (Holy Quran, Zäriyat: Ayat56), and has also shown pathways to reach that: 'Whoever expects union with God should be virtuous and take no partner for God in their prayers' (Holy Quran, Kahf: Ayat110). Also, the Quran has appointed the necessary motivation for realising these solutions in order to protect human kind (Holy Quran, Nesä': Ayat56–57). People must evaluate their mundane goals through pathways appointed by God, i.e. righteous deeds along with sincerity in expecting God's Mercy, and according to the essential reason behind their creation. Therefore, the Holy Quran's solutions for enriching hope is way more comprehensive than psychology's. And in addition to pathway development, the Quran assigns the main agency and goal, and emphasises them.
- Solutions provided in the theory of hope in psychology usually comprise individual aspects, while in the Holy Quran, in addition to individual solutions, God has also offered behavioural solutions in a social scope so that people can help the society in developing hope in their community, as well as building hope inside themselves. Islam calls society a large family in which every individual has duties towards others. As previously stated, the most important social behaviour in the Quran are *infagh* [spending money in Allah's cause], beneficence, chastity,

forgiving the offender and loyalty, and adherence to them increases the hope in society.

In the second step (hope retention), the patient is motivated to be the one to improve their level of hope, as well as retain it, by recognising goal thoughts and obstacle thoughts (Bahari 2010:128). In the Quran also, to retain hope in people, God has asked them to identify their main goal in life (Holy Quran, Mo'menoon: Ayat115). By identifying obtrusive and destructive thoughts, one can fight against wishes that keep him from his major goal: 'Do not follow your wishes, because they distract you from God's path' (Holy Quran, Säd: Ayat26).

## Conclusion

According to this study, the findings of psychologists in the field are much like Quran teachings.

Some of the similarities found are:

- Hope means expecting to reach some goal with effort and work.
- Hope therapy comprises two phases: hope inculcation and hope enhancement.
- Remembering hope-enhancing stories and focusing on past accomplishments increases hope in people.
- Identifying goals and obstacles can help retain hope.

The differences that were found are:

- The concept of hope in the view of the Quran is based on the divine worldview and has a value orientation, while in psychology it is based on an individual worldview.
- The Holy Quran focuses on all aspects of human beings (material and spiritual) regarding the issue of hope, but psychologists only focus on the material aspect of mankind.
- The theory of hope in the Quran, unlike in psychology, is based on the reason behind human creation and their completion, and its basis is believing in praiseworthy God.
- The role models that are in the Quran (prophets and God's selected servants) possess a much higher status compared with those in psychology.
- Solutions presented in the theory of hope in psychology for hope enhancement are more oriented towards an individual approach, while the Holy Quran offers behavioural solutions in a societal scope in addition to individual solutions.

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