

Radical Healing, Wholeness and Islam

An introductory narrative on transforming
emotional pain through Journeywork

Dr Muzammal Hussain

MBBS; MA; BSc Psych

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Healing, Illness and Becoming Whole

I have reached the conclusion that authentic healing and authentic religion are not just complementary, but can in essence be said to be one and the same.

At their heart, when stripped of dogma, healing and religion are very alike. My conclusion comes through a range of life-experiences - and particularly through my journey as both an emotional healing therapist and as a Muslim.

I'd like to share some of my discoveries on this journey - discoveries that have been both illuminating and enriching. A useful starting point is simply the word, '*healing*', and what it evokes.

At one level, '*healing*' can mean the eradication of an illness - which is indeed a wonderful outcome for any one suffering from ill health. There is, however, something in the term, '*healing*', that also touches on a quality, deeper than this. This deeper quality is captured by a related word that sounds similar: '*wholeness*'.

The term, '*healing*', when used in a certain way, and the term, '*wholeness*', both go beyond the eradication of symptoms. They evoke the quality of moving from the fragmentation and marginalisation of parts, to the parts coming together. They are about integration, and the individual (or entity) becoming... *more whole*.

Let's now look at where the word 'Whole' might take us...

Therapists and 'Religious Distancing'

The uncanny relationship

If we consider the word, '*Whole*', it seems to have an uncanny relationship with the word, '*Holy*'. This relationship can be a slight inconvenience for those in the healing fields, as the word *Holy* is one that many healing practitioners would actually be quite phobic of!

This is because the word *Holy* has an association with... *er.* religion. And quite a few healing practitioners view religious institutions as carrying much dogma.

I see some validity in this concern, though as someone who sits in both camps - as a healing practitioner and a religious practitioner - I am also aware that dogma can be held on both sides.

But what do we mean?

To move forward constructively, if we are to explore the relationship between healing, or anything for that matter, and religion in particular, then we need to ensure that we understand what we actually referring to.

If we are referring to the essence of a religion, my understanding is that, just like the essence of healing, *both* are about the *restoration of wholeness*. Indeed, the heart of all true religions is surely about wholeness being restored, not only within the individual, but also within wider society.

Hence, why I believe that the two, healing and religion, can in *essence* be said to be one and the same.

Healing Breakthrough and the Birth of Journey Therapy

A tumour the size of a football

The emotional healing work that I practise with clients has also had a dramatic impact on my own life (I'll touch more on this later). It is largely centred on Journey Therapy.

Journey therapy came about through a series of remarkable experiences by a dynamic woman, Brandon Bays, who in the 1990's was diagnosed with a uterine tumour the size of a football. The surgeon told her she would likely die within a matter of days if she did not have urgent surgery to remove the tumour. However, Brandon chose in this instance, to go the non-conventional route.

Healing from within

Brandon's roller-coaster healing journey led her, through the help of friends - and perhaps Divine intervention - to finally releasing the emotional root cause of the tumour.

In short, Brandon was able to consciously access a deep, healing place in her being. From this place, it became possible for her to release stored emotional pain associated with a traumatic memory of abuse. She was then able to finally forgive those concerned. Within days following this, remarkably, her belly began to soften and gradually shrink.

Through an internal scan six-and-a-half weeks after her initial diagnosis, the doctor confirmed Brandon's uterus to be totally clear - her tumour had healed completely. Brandon was overjoyed, and along with other profound experiences that aren't the scope of this piece, this led to the birth of *Journey therapy* - also known as, *The Journey process*, or *Journeywork*.

A client who sees a Journey Therapist may come because they are in emotional pain - perhaps experiencing [anxiety](#), [depression](#), an addiction, work stress, lack of meaning, a relationship breakup, or are going through bereavement, to give a few examples. As a practitioner who also has a background in psychiatry I most commonly see clients in these named groups. However, clients may also come because they are experiencing a physical illness, as Brandon was.

Synergy and the Experience of Travellers

The synergy of the steps

So what happens in Journey sessions that helps to catalyse the restoration of wholeness?

Journeywork sessions are facilitated with the client seated comfortably with eyes closed. A remarkable characteristic is that the process has a collection of key synergistic steps that provide a depth and coherence rarely found in conventional psychological work. Yet, in Journeywork these steps are typically woven together into each and every session.

This collective chemistry holds the client in a powerful, healing matrix that often enables the release of deep-rooted emotional blocks in a very short period of time. This goes to explain why remarkable shifts are often reported following a session or a package of sessions.

Travellers speak

In the words of a client I worked with over video call:

"I have done years of various talk therapies... and felt that this was something radically different. I proceeded to have the full recommended cycle of 3 sessions, and indeed, the process was like no other I've experienced."

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The focus and deep exploration of emotions, without entering the mental story, allows one to enter uncharted territories....a geography where talk therapies rarely arrive."

Journey sessions do take longer than most psychological therapies (i.e. often 2-3 hours - rather than an hour - though it will feel like much less). This gives the necessary time to apply the tools, so that each step the client takes in the session can provide the secure foundation for the next.

This is further clarified by these words shared by another client:

"I recognised a variety of therapeutic/psychological methods and modalities within the process, but the synthesis of all of these is what makes the process so powerful. The practitioner has time to lead you right down to the deep core of your personal programming and through that tough resistance. So often in therapy, just at the point where a client reaches this level the clock intervenes and of course they are then let off the hook and avoid the really uncomfortable bit of the inner journey which brings about transformation and change."

The letting go in Journey sessions can be remarkably thorough. Here's words from a third client:

"I felt supported to process some difficult emotions that led to some beautiful discoveries. I felt heard, supported, comforted and seen throughout the session and because of this I was able to tap into that peaceful center within and grace myself with self compassion. I felt it was ten years of therapy in one session."

The final part of this client's comments capture the deep and profound releases that can occur through this kind of work. Thus, while an individual session typically takes 2-3 hours, the time-period over which a person might see a Journey practitioner is typically much less compared to most other forms of psychological work: i.e. 1-2 months for Journeywork, compared to several months or years with mainstream psychological therapies.

Now that we have some idea of the power of this work, *let's go into the key steps that comprise a Journey process*. This will help us to later view the process through the lens of Islamic psychology.

Steps within the Journey: What the Soul is Wanting

The key synergistic steps for a person undergoing a Journey process are typically as follows:

- 1) Safely accessing an unresolved memory;
- 2) Immersing into a deep stillness or sense of oneness, (this expanded experience provides a context of safety for the unresolved memory to be processed);
- 3) Emptying out of the pain locked into the accessed memory; and,
- 4) Forgiveness related to those associated with the accessed memory

As can be imagined, when taken together these steps contribute to a thorough therapeutic process - their synergy massively enhanced by the fact that they can all occur in a single session.

To shed further light on the mechanics of Journeywork, let's first jump to the second step: *'Immersing into a deep stillness or sense of oneness'*. (We'll come back to Step 1, *Safely accessing an unresolved memory* a little later).

Let's explore how this second step of immersing into a deep stillness would happen...

Entering into Stillness

While there are many ways to open into the underlying stillness, the primary method used in Journeywork is through opening into emotions that arise in the body.

As we feel an emotion arise in the body, if rather than suppressing it or distracting ourselves from it, we instead are supported to accept and feel into it, something interesting happens: the emotion feels welcome. It's as though it now has permission to move through us. It doesn't stay stuck any more. It doesn't hang out beneath the surface consuming energy and haunting us! It finally feels free.

"If you are irritated by every rub, how will your mirror be polished?"

- Rumi (13C poet, mystic, Islamic scholar)

Each Journey session is different, and is tailored to the individual. Typically, to help a client **feel and embrace** an emotion that is arising, I may ask them if there's an obvious **name** to what they are feeling; and also if they can name **where in the body** they are feeling this. When I gently invite them to open into their felt experience, I would choose my words to enable the individual to progress such that I honour their situation and pace. I might support them to surround their experience with **love and compassion**. If it feels appropriate I might also ask them to use their **breath** in a way that assists them to connect with and ease further into what they are experiencing.

As the welcomed emotion comes up, it moves through the body - and as it moves through, space is then created for whatever is deeper to now emerge.

Thus **a deeper emotion can now arise**, and this can also be approached in a similar way. We connect with and feel into it. It feels welcomed and passes through. And so forth.

While this process can result in strong emotions coming up, and tears may also arise, there's a sense of authentic connection and release as we go through this. With our resistance out of the way, and compassionate acceptance there instead, the brakes are off. We have moved our ego aside, and are undergoing a process that is in fact very natural. **It's as though we're finally entering into what our soul truly needs and wants.**

As we feel and move through successive emotional layers, our experiences eventually become more expansive and joyful. We are gradually drawn deep, into that underlying experience of Stillness, of Oneness, or Unity (Step 3). It's an experience of Bliss.

"The wound is the place where the Light enters you."

- Rumi (13C poet, mystic, Islamic scholar)

Thus, each of our emotional experiences, however challenging, offers a doorway that takes us in the direction of that inner Peace that was there all along. All we need to do is to *surrender our self* to whatever is arising, and the door will surely open.

The Prophet Muhammad and the Feeling of Emotions

Sacred Holding

As a Journey Practitioner of many years, my jaw dropped when a few years ago I read a particular piece from Jamal Rahman's delightful book, *'The Fragrance of Faith: The Enlightened Heart of Islam'*. In that short piece, Rahman describes a process that sounds very similar to one of the elements of a Journey Process!

He describes "an ancient technique" that his grandfather, a scholar and healer, had said was practised by Prophet Muhammad for many years in caves in Mecca. Rahman refers to the practise as *'Sacred Holding'*.

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Below are a few quotes that outline the technique, taken from Rahman's book:

"...Sacred holding is a supremely powerful technique meant to be practiced for a lifetime. When negative feelings come up in you, take time to do this exercise at the earliest opportunity.

- *The first step is to allow yourself to **experience**. Tell yourself that every feeling is valid. Ask yourself, "What feeling is coming up in me?" Name that feeling. Maybe it is anger, sadness, jealousy, or bitterness.*

- *In the second step, ask yourself, "Where do I hold this feeling in my body? Locate the feeling. It definitely has a resting place in your body. We are able to experience a feeling because it registers as a physical sensation somewhere in the body.*

- *In the third and very important step, receive this "holding" in your body with compassion for yourself. Encompass the physical sensations in your body with the embrace of your soul...*

- *In the fourth step, focus gently on the holding in your body and intend to inhale and exhale through that part of you. Allow **divine breath** to caress you there.*

...Slowly, as you persist with this technique, an amazing shift occurs: that which was negative, irksome, and painful, integrates and now transforms into a source of strength and wholeness in you."

A point of connection between two worlds?

Inviting someone to name, feel, accept, embrace emotions with compassion, and use their breath are also all steps we may take as Journey therapists, when working with clients. Together these ingredients can have a profound effect.

To think that the Prophet Mohammad may have practiced a similar exercise in caves in Mecca personally feels both surreal and liberating.

The world seems much smaller as I appreciate the universality of a basic, yet profound practice being illustrated.

Befriending the thinking mind

Practices such as 'Sacred Holding' are extremely valuable and can also be done alone. At the same time, we human beings who like to seek pleasure can also develop elaborate methods preventing us from feeling more painful emotions. These resistance strategies can fortunately be undone bit by bit over time, and the frequent engagement with a practise like 'Sacred Holding' would assist with that.

As Journey therapists, as we facilitate process after process, hundreds of times over the years, we become very familiar with the range of resistance strategies clients use. We also become very experienced at guiding clients to overcome these internal strategies, so their process can be complete.

Typically, the main obstacle is the over-involvement of the 'thinking mind' and its narrative. For instance, the thinking mind might come up with a mental story *about* an emotion that it then pulls the client into. This prevents the person from entering into the *felt* bodily experience, when it is in the body that emotions are actually felt.

The solution, as a therapist, is to support the client to befriend the 'thinking mind' rather than fight it, and to invite it to take a role that assists, rather than distracts from the healing process.

The Soul, Islam, and Emotional Healing

Accessing Spirit

As described earlier, in a Journey session, as a client feels, enters into and moves through successive emotional 'layers', they move into a deep, expansive place, to their core: a place which they may describe using words such as *beauty, pure oneness, bliss, peace, light and boundless love*, to name a few.

Also their complexion tends to change, and their body relaxes deeply. It's a very real experience in that it isn't evoked through attempting to imagine or force a state, but has naturally emerged through simply accepting and surrendering to whatever is in each moment, without using the escape routes (e.g. the thinking mind's story) that are normally entertained.

I propose that this deep, expansive experience is, in Islam, what is called, the *Ruh*, or Spirit.

The *Ruh*, or Spirit, is an aspect of the soul, described as "*a direct access point to God, where the human being can potentially receive divine knowledge, guidance and healing.*" (Rothman and Coyle, 2018).

In an Islamic model of the soul, it's the heart or *qalb*, that has the capacity to 'turn' towards this higher truth, i.e. the *Ruh*. It can either turn towards the *Ruh* where it receives Divine inspiration and nourishment, or it can turn towards the *nafs* (ego or lower self) consequently getting trapped in *dunya* (worldly affairs).

Through connecting with the *Ruh*, we become bathed and nourished by Divine light. We enter a state of acceptance and wisdom, yet with a quality that is alive and responsive, rather than passive and disconnected.

This experience also re-configures our soul towards alignment to the *fitrah*, which is the state of pure goodness that all human beings have been created into - but that we tend to deviate from. (This deviation, or misalignment, can be due to conditioning in life, and the unhealed traumas of differing degrees that we accumulate over time). Realigning to our *fitrah* enables us to unlock our uniqueness and gifts - which are there not only for us to express, but for the world to receive.

Divine Light as a foundation

Even though we've now entered into this very healing experience within a Journey process, there are further steps that can build on this foundational state. Coming out of a process at this point would actually be a pity! After all, we've moved so far, and into a place that is actually a powerful springboard for further deep-seated emotional release and healing.

This experience, as a common component of Journeywork, is one core aspect that distinguishes it from mainstream talking therapies.

So, what else is left? As touched on earlier, a Journey process also involves:

- 1) Connection with an unresolved memory;
- 2) Emptying out of the pain locked into the accessed memory (while still bathed in the experience of essence), and
- 3) Forgiveness to whatever degree is appropriate and possible.

And now you know why a full process can take 2-3 hours!... which due to the experience being one of deep connection and a move to wholeness, seems to go very fast for the client! *"Where did all the time go?"* is a question I hear exceedingly often!

The Missing Piece for Forgiveness

Let forgiveness be real

"But indeed if any show patience and forgive, that would truly be an exercise of courageous will and resolution in the conduct of affairs."

- Qur' an 42:43

A point I'd like to stress is that often in religious communities including amongst Muslims, while there is a strong emphasis on forgiveness, there can also be a tendency to discount the pain someone might still be feeling. Yet my own experience is that if I am still feeling deeply hurt following another person's behaviour, the act of saying, "*I forgive you*", will usually feel like I am just going through the motions to fit into a religio-cultural expectation: i.e. the forgiveness won't *feel* or *be* real.

It was through Journeywork that I more fully realised the importance of connecting with, and releasing, stored pain or trauma, *prior to* moving to forgiveness. Once I have fully emptied out the pain, I feel light - there is then nothing left to hold onto. Forgiveness becomes the next natural step - and importantly, now *does feel* real. The missing piece is having the appropriate tools to release pain that is stored, which is where approaches such as Journeywork have such a crucial role to play.

However, if already there genuinely is no pain, and the only step left is to forgive, then moving to forgiveness, in this instance, would of course be appropriate. But only *if* the pain has been released, when much of the time, for many of us, it has yet to be - even if we may want to believe and show otherwise.

Who needs forgiving?

I should add, that sometimes it is we, who need forgiving. This can be a powerful realisation, and indeed a wonderful opportunity. It may take the form of being forgiven by another person, by another element in the natural world, or by oneself - perhaps an older version of oneself needing to forgive a younger version. Or we may need to ask for forgiveness from God.

Any combination of these realisations can emerge through a Journey process as a result of having connected with *Ruh*, and emptied out stored pain. We have, after all, entered into a state of open intuitive awareness, being pulled along a journey of wholeness. The beauty of this journey towards wholeness is that it draws to the surface whatever is necessary for healing to be complete.

Let's now continue exploring the Journey Process through an Islamic lens. We've already looked at the process of feeling into successive emotional layers, through which we can immerse into Essence/Spirit/*Ruh*, through which we are bathed in Divine Light.

Let's talk more about Step 1, accessing an unresolved memory, a step that we skipped over earlier.

Painful Memories, and the Role of Ruh

The barrier is the doorway

"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it."

- Rumi (13C poet, mystic, Islamic scholar)

In Journeywork an unresolved memory will have typically arisen for the client somewhere within the process already described. This memory will have been acknowledged by the therapist, and is revisited more fully when a safe context has opened up in the process.

There is no more appropriate a safe context for a person to revisit a potentially painful memory than when they have entered into the aspect of soul that is the spirit, or *Ruh*: our access point to the Divine. This beautiful, expanded experience is directly entered into through opening into successive, deeper emotional layers (as described earlier). It provides the infinite space, compassion and safety for the memory to be revisited, and the possibility for radical healing to naturally unfold.

The beauty of this immersion into Spirit or *Ruh* is that Divine intelligence naturally flows into the process. Divine intelligence wants to heal, wants to make whole, and the attribute of the Divine, *Al Hadi* (The Guide) enables what is needed in the process to happen.

Love (*Al Wadud*) plays its role in holding it all together. This isn't a false love that could otherwise be about running away from pain, or pretending it's not there. If the light of Truth, the Real (*Al Haqq*) is indeed shining through, then there is an authentic honesty and a presence that 'knows' what needs to happen in the process for true healing to be complete.

Emptying out: The melting of pain

Thus, in the session, the client (with their eyes closed) would be supported to express the pain that is stored through words, in whatever language it needs to be expressed. Stuck emotions can then be completely emptied out of the body and heart, whether they have been stuck there for a few days, weeks, years, or even decades.

Because the client is bathed in the safe presence of Divine love, *and* has directly connected with their pain, this makes the steps much smoother and easier - words tend to naturally flow out. It can be like the pain melts and pours out of the system, as though healing was always waiting to happen - it just needed gentle, loving permission.

As a therapist, I find this a beautiful process to facilitate, and I experience going down deep with my clients as I support them - which means I too am accessing *Ruh* or Spirit along with my clients!

After a session, the client will typically feel much lighter, like a heavy weight has lifted off their chest. Some may feel like they have cracked open and can feel incredibly free.

A person may also feel fragile for a short period e.g. the rest of the day, so my general advice is to be kind to yourself. Clients will be advised not to engage in anything stressful immediately after, so that they can honour the work we have done together.

Typically, this integration process can take a few hours to a day, occasionally a little longer. It's a time when rest and self-nurturing are encouraged, so the healing can be as complete as possible.

My Personal Experience with Journeywork

"...and that it is He alone who causes [you] to laugh and to weep"

- Qur'an 53:43

The unconventional medic

I was initially drawn to Journeywork in 2001, four years after graduating as a doctor. I was practising as a psychiatrist at a hospital just outside London, and was already engaged with regular inner work. I was, for instance meditating daily, but I was also feeling keen to directly engage with the emotional realm.

I then heard that a woman who had healed from a life-threatening tumour without drugs or surgery, was going to speak in Piccadilly, London. The talk was titled something like, 'Emotions: Gateway to the Soul'. For both personal and professional reasons, I keenly attended. The talk was moving, and the approach also made a lot of sense - that by opening to and fully feeling, rather than fighting emotions, we can go deep within, and eventually enter into a vast expansive healing experience through which painful memories can be resolved and forgiveness reached.

One step leads to the next

The woman who spoke was Brandon Bays, and her talk was my first encounter with The Journey. It affected me considerably. Within a few days of her talk, I decided to book onto the introductory upcoming training. Days later, I decided to attend a more advanced retreat and also to train to become an accredited therapist.

As well as working with clients, especially over video call, Journeywork has become a core component of my own inner transformation toolbox, complementing body prayer (*salat*), fasting (*sawm*) Remembrance/chanting (*zhikr*) and so forth. I am grateful for having it in my life, and continue to exchange processes with fellow therapists while also practising aspects of it solo.

Sharing a personal process experience: From numbness to grief

I could share many personal experiences with Journeywork, but will focus on one in particular and touch on others in a general way.

Within the process I went through that I will mostly focus on, this is what happened: I was moving through various emotional layers that I felt in my body as is typical of a process. I soon, however, came across the experience of something very solid - something hard and stuck inside - it's hardness felt 'stone-like' and I could feel it in my right abdominal region. The emotion I felt there was a feeling of 'cold numbness'. I wasn't sure I was going to be able to 'go into it', it felt that solid.

With the support of my fellow therapist, however, I moved into this solid cold numbness in my abdomen. It happened slowly, and required me to intentionally remain open, even though a part of me wanted to close down and resist. As I stayed open and accepting, using my breath to help, I was gradually pulled deeper and deeper. Eventually I passed through it. When I got to the other side, I tuned in to what emotion was coming up, and was gently pulled deeper still.

I was taken into a huge ocean of grief.

I allowed myself to open into this grief, which then started to erupt through my body and gush out as I was pulled deeper still into it. Tears flowed freely, as though a plug had been pulled from deep within. It felt such a relief.

Each process is different and in this one, as the grief subsided, I could still feel that hard experience in the right side of my abdomen. It was a little softer, however, but still there.

Again, I was supported to move into it, and again, when I came out the other side, further grief poured out. This process, of moving into the hard experience, coming out the other side followed by a deep outpouring of grief, happened perhaps seven times - it's hard to remember exactly.

The old story crumbles

By the end of this process, as well as having got through what seemed like dozens of tissues(!), I felt like my soul had been renewed. It felt as though an old, outdated internal story I was carrying of myself and the world had started to crumble. It isn't easy to let go of something we have held onto for such a long time. The grief I experienced was born out of my letting go of this long-held story - one that I had experientially and finally realised was no longer needed.

I knew then that the world would not feel the same when I opened my eyes at the end of the process. I was right!

When I opened my eyes, I sensed the world to be softer, and more alive.

I felt lighter, more at ease and connected in myself. A significant shift took place that has been reinforced and magnified through follow-up processes. Consequently, my relationships with friends and family members have also shifted significantly. They have been more authentic and real. Simultaneously, I have felt more deeply integrated and intimately connected to my inner core as I go about my day-to-day life.

Pain, appreciation and growth

Through the processes I have personally experienced over the years, I have had a chance to work on a range of painful memories especially related to key people in my life. These processes have allowed me to express pain I had stored and held on to for years. I have felt lighter with each process as I let go.

As well as letting go of pain, I have also appreciated the goodness in these relationships. It's given me a sense of the perspective of the other person, being able to see *their* limitations and lack of access to internal resources that prevented them from making more wholesome choices at the time - just as I may have been unable to in my own way.

I should add that none of this changes the fact that an injustice or abuse may have taken place. It does however mean that I don't need to continue to hold onto and personally suffer as a result of the past. I can be free of it, and can choose to also take any necessary practical steps, if they are needed. Indeed any action I now take is much more likely to come from a place of compassion, rather than hatred, or desire for revenge.

Through emptying pain I had been holding on to, and truly recognising the other person's barriers and limitations, I naturally also move to a place of acceptance. I feel lighter, can understand better why something took place, and move in the direction of authentic forgiveness.

Typically I also realise certain truths and gain insights about myself and the world. I have not only let go, I am also learning lessons. I am growing as a human being - becoming more integrated, more 'whole'.

Clients

With clients I have worked with, my experience has been deeply fulfilling. Working with people at a soul level is a joy. It has taught me that essentially, we all have the same fundamental needs, and that we need to take care of each other.

Sometimes, a client may make a remarkable shift after one or two sessions. In other cases it may take longer or the work may need complementing with other approaches. In each instance, however, the person undergoing it needs to be willing. Willing to face what is there, knowing that they will be supported, and that ultimately, the only way out, is through.

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One client I saw, for instance, Sara, was experiencing extreme anxiety. It had been going on for months following an intensely stressful sequence of events. She had been put on benzodiazepines by her GP, it was that severe.

During Sara's process, she soon felt dread and terror in her body. I gently supported her to give herself permission to actually feel this rather than push it away. She did so and as she fully felt and moved through these emotions, other emotions came up, some unexpected. She uncovered a past unresolved, painful, memory, which I noted. I asked her to then let the memory go and continue to feel the raw emotions she was experiencing.

Eventually, as she continued to experience successive emotional 'layers', she began to enter into that peaceful, expanded experience at her core. She was connecting with spirit, or *Ruh*.

Sara was then supported to express and empty out in words, the pain related to the memory that had arisen. She did so speaking out loud to those concerned as though they were there. By speaking out, the emotions she had been holding onto for decades, that were feeding her recent but intense anxiety, were finally being released out of her system.

When her process was over, Sara opened her eyes. She looked as though a big weight had been lifted off her shoulders. I followed up with Sara after her session, and I was pleased to hear that her anxiety had reduced to a much lower level - after just that first session.

Despite experiencing such intense emotions - i.e. dread and terror - in her process, Sara had demonstrated what is possible when we have the willingness to surrender to whatever emotions are arising, however painful or strong they are.

Through allowing oneself to open to felt emotions (in a safe and supported space), tremendous transformation and healing also opens up. The pain of finally feeling those emotions fully is far less than continuing to live with the pain of not fully facing them. Sara is one of many examples of someone who chose to finally fully feel and consequently experience greater freedom and relief.

The Nine 'Types': Enter the Enneagram

The map and the work

What would it be like if we had a comprehensive map of our core ego-driven fears, that point to what we fundamentally need to face, to truly grow as a human being?

More importantly, what if there was therapeutic work that offered tools to facilitate the meeting and the *release* of those fears - helping to loosen the grip of the ego (the *nafs*), and opening us that little bit more to the nurturing embrace of Spirit, of *Ruh*?

Firstly, I believe that such a map does exist. It's called the *Enneagram*.

Secondly, some would say that this map appears to have its roots in Islamic spirituality.

Thirdly, this map is deeply valued and actively used in Journeywork.

Fourth and finally, the beauty of its use in Journeywork is that the patterns of our *nafs* discovered through the Enneagram model, can be gradually dissolved through applying the powerful processing inherent in the Journeywork approach.

My own introduction to the Enneagram, in 2001, was not at an Islamic conference or talk, but at a week long, immersive retreat within the wider Journey therapist training.

The reason we immerse ourselves into Enneagram work is that Brandon Bays believes (I feel rightly) that therapists can be much more effective in enabling their clients to grow, when they understand the core ego drives and avoidances that play into a client's life and processes.

Additionally, as we therapists experientially immerse ourselves into this work, we also uncover more of *our own* core emotional avoidances - and crucially, we get to face them! This enhances both our own self-awareness and our ability to empathise with our clients.

That particular training week was thus dedicated to exploring and understanding the core human emotional 'fears' as mapped out by the Enneagram and how they manifested in our own lives.; and perhaps more importantly, fully facing and processing those fears within the depths of our being.

The three in the nine

So, what does the Enneagram model map out? According to the Enneagram model, there are nine basic human types, ('Ennea' in Greek means 'nine'). The model describes the core fears and drives of each one.

It can be helpful to view each of the nine types, or core fixations, as being in one of three categories, such that there are three types in each category i.e. the category of either:

1. a body type
2. an emotional type, or
3. a mind type.

In simple terms, a body type will fall into the trap of identifying with their body, a mind type with their thinking mind, and an emotional type with their emotions. (Whereas ultimately 'we', as in our true 'self', are in essence neither our thoughts, nor our emotions, nor our body. We are something deeper than these aspects of 'self', and that existed before we were born and will continue to exist even after we physically die).

Identification with one of these three aspects - body, emotions, or the mind - comes with it's specific challenges. As a result, each type will have core emotional avoidances specific to its type. This core emotional avoidance goes much deeper than surface level behaviour, which is why we cannot identify our Enneagram type based solely on how we behave.

My Skepticism of 'Types'

Being blown away

Personally I have always been skeptical of any model that 'boxes' us into 'types'. My reaction might be something like, *"That's too simplistic, too superficial, it's not how I work"*, or, *"It misses so much of who I am"*!

However, I was blown away that week, when we experientially explored this particular model.

Firstly the Enneagram model isn't rigid. It acknowledges that we each have *all* nine types in us, and describes how they can inter-relate.

Secondly, when we reached the one that was my core fixation, I felt that an innermost part of me had become known! It was as though I was now sitting there in the room with more than a hundred others totally naked! My inner world and below-the-surface level strategies had been laid bare, and had been described more accurately than I would have been able to describe them - it felt surreal!

Another aspect of the Enneagram that really resonated, was that it recognises all nine types as being able to move into either *healthier* - or more 'spiritualised' - states of 'themselves', as well as into more *unhealthy* states of their type. In other words, there is a vertical dimension, or axis, of growth for each type.

The Enneagram also recognises the key underlying strengths, or gifts, that each type offers. I could see the ones described for my type to be very present in my life, and also saw space for them to emerge more fully.

Additionally, in combination with Journeywork, were tools for each of us to unlock more of that potential, and shift to being more healthy, open-hearted human beings.

The nine in one, and the beauty of diversity

A further beautiful thread during that week was through the paired work we participated in. We experientially identified, felt and spoke from the place of pain felt by the presence of each type within us in our lives. (As I mentioned, while we land primarily on one type, we have *all* nine in us). This enabled me to feel more empathy for those whose *core* fears and avoidance strategies were different from my own.

Just because I wasn't trapped in the same core conditioning as someone else, didn't make me a better person. It just meant that my own core traps and challenges were different. It also illustrated how diverse and beautiful the world is! We are not, nor can we be, all the same!

In the wider natural world, there is diversity, and difference is to be celebrated. Through being aligned to its *fitrah* (natural disposition), each element in creation has something beautiful to offer. Each element plays its role, such that together in this inter-connected, inter-dependent world we reflect the principle of Oneness, Unity, or *tawhid*. The journey, therefore, involves doing both our own work and participating in the relational dimension - while knowing that the two, the individual and the relational, also intersect.

One thing I should add in case it may still seem simplistic is that, while the Enneagram does describe nine types, each type can be further divided into sub-types! So the model does have more complexity. However, by understanding just the nine basic types, and our own core fixation, we can help ourselves immensely in our growth and in understanding and relating to our fellow human beings.

Managing the self, or transforming the self?

A word of caution about the Enneagram: many approaches and books that describe it, do so at a superficial level. They frame the Enneagram as a model of 'personality' types, and their approach is more about managing, rather than transforming the ego.

They surf on the horizontal axis of personality rather than sliding upward along the vertical. They focus on behaviours rather than on facing and dissolving core fears and emotional avoidances.

My own personal and professional interest rests more on this latter, transformative approach to working with the Enneagram: utilising it to more fully face and process what we primarily avoid internally.

Used in this way, the defensive barriers around the heart/*qalb* are dismantled, enabling the heart to soften and more freely orient itself towards the *Ruh* (Spirit). We open more fully to Divine light and our soul realigns to the *fitrah*, our birthright, enabling us to live more harmoniously in community and with the wider creation.

The roots of the map: An Islamic origin?

In terms of the roots of the Enneagram, I did mention that some people believe the Enneagram to have arisen out of Islamic spirituality - more specifically that it came through 'ancient Sufis' (Sufis place a strong emphasis on the inner dimension of Islam).

I should add that this view isn't shared by everyone, and different groups do try to lay claim to it! I haven't researched this enough to have a clear position, but because I have experienced this to be such a precise and powerful model for overcoming the false identification with the *nafs*, it seems very likely to me, that it has an intimate relationship with an authentic spiritual tradition.

Although I have personally come across only a handful of Muslims who have some familiarity with the Enneagram model, it is nonetheless given importance in a few Sufi circles. However few of them seem to actually utilise it in an active applied way.

I was quite astounded, however, when in one Sufi circle, it was said that the nine types are actually each mentioned in the *Qur'an*! ... and described in their spiritualised forms in the exact same sequence as the Enneagram model describes them!

Interestingly, the chapter, or *surah*, in which the nine types are supposedly mentioned is the... ninth (*Surah At-Tawbah*)! However it isn't actually obvious when reading that section (9, 112) that it is referring to those nine types, and in my view is actually open to interpretation.

Rumi: More than a Poet

The religious scholar who speaks wisdom to healers

Interestingly, a figure that the founder of the Journey Method, Brandon Bays, sometimes quotes is Rumi, the great poet who lived in the 13th century. I too have quoted Rumi in several places in this piece. (Brandon however tends to focus primarily on spiritual teachers associated with the vedic tradition and also draws significantly on aspects of vedic culture).

While hundreds of thousands of westerners love and have been positively affected through reading Rumi's poetry, few are aware that Rumi was a Muslim.

Rumi was not only a devout Muslim, he was also a scholar within the Islamic tradition. Some people also describe his [Mathnawi](#) as being the *Qur'an* in the Persian tongue, and his poetry in general as being a gentler entry point to the *Qur'an* itself.

The heart of the work

The appropriateness of quoting Rumi in an emotional healing context is because some of Rumi's quotes get right to the heart of this work: the need to fully face the difficult stuff within, if we are to become more whole.

This is particularly relevant to Journeywork, because there are many approaches that tend to bypass this inner facing. They instead entertain a make-believe version of wholeness or spiritual experience - when instead the path is to truly face and transform the inner pain, which is what Journeywork specialises in enabling people to do.

Some of the quotes in this article capture Rumi expressing this aspect of the work. Another wonderful poem of Rumi's that also does this is '*The Guest House*', which I briefly talk about in relation to spirituality and religion [on this short video here](#).

The quoting of Rumi amongst certain healing practitioners further confirms to me the common ground between religion and healing, which is the point I made at the start of this article and have expressed in a variety of ways throughout.

The Individual, and Beyond: Some Concluding Thoughts

The need for outer work

While individual work to connect with Spirit or Essence and transform the self is a crucial dimension in Islam, our lived relationship to our wider context is also central to the faith. There is, after all, a wider natural environment and community in which we exist.

It is true that as we engage in our personal healing, we loosen the grip of the false self, and realign more fully to the *fitrah*. We begin to function in greater harmony with other human beings and also with other aspects of creation. We also become more patient and compassionate, and our presence can affect people in a powerful and profound way.

At the same time, as members of a wider system and community, appropriate outward engagement is also necessary. We have responsibilities to utilise privileges we have, to help towards the restoration of balance and justice in the world we share.

This outer work can actually assist our inner journey, if we participate consciously. This is the beauty of this work: it all inter-relates.

Avoidance and bypassing the outer

While the outer is not the key focus in this article, I feel it necessary to communicate the importance of also working in the outer realm. This is partly because many circles that focus on healing avoid getting involved with issues 'out there'. The culture of Journey practitioners is not entirely immune to this. Within religious circles, this avoidance can also be commonplace, though the possible forms this can take can be more varied.

Interestingly, just as inner work that avoids truly facing the internal pain is a form of spiritual bypassing, I would argue that any approach to 'healing' that exclusively focuses on the inner, and permanently avoids the difficult and messy stuff 'out there', can also be a form of bypassing, though of a different kind.

In the first instance we greatly restrict the potential to transform the self; and in the second we inhibit our capacity to develop authentic, just and wholesome communities. As the two inter-relate, in reality we restrict the potential for both, whichever form of avoidance we fall into, if that avoidance is overly sustained.

In many healing groups, there can also be a middle class element that is part of the picture. Within this middle class healing culture, there can be a belief that one's own comforts are a result of one's own spiritual evolution. I believe this can lead to unhealthy dissociation from those who have less privilege and may lead to a blindness of one's wider responsibility in the world.

The outer and inner as one

Organising together to regenerate the earth, taking actions in solidarity of oppressed groups (centred on creating space for them to lead), and speaking truth to oppressive systems while transforming such power structures are other ways.

Also, helping to mediate conflict, where warranted, is a noble act that supports the nurturing of wholesome communities, something that is also fundamental to our work in this life.

Of course, as we take responsibility in the outer world, developing our awareness and engaging in inner work can help ensure that we are responding from a place of wholeness, rather than reacting from a place of hurt, or desire for revenge. Even against 'enemies', the central principle must be to value all life, while working for justice and to restore wholeness.

The desires of the ego need to be worked with and transformed so they do not get in the way of the healing that ultimately we all want. This is Islam.

Radical Healing, Wholeness and Islam

As we engage outwardly, approaches such as Journeywork can be part of a mix that enables action to emerge more from a place of healing and love, than from hurt and ego. The messiness of the outer world, exacerbated by the uncertain times we are in, may trigger our past, lead us to feel tense and give rise to strong, upsetting emotions.

Journeywork-type approaches can provide powerful, practical tools that support us to feel and process these internal tensions and emotions, and to more deeply learn from any outer engagement. I have found it to be a godsend when working within groups and on change-making activities.

Thus, whether someone is experiencing anxiety, depression, an addiction, lack of meaning, relationship breakup, bereavement, or experiencing physical ill-health, Journeywork could make a deeply valuable, even pivotal contribution in restoring inner wholeness. Simultaneously, when taking action in the outer world it can help ensure that action comes from a heart-felt place rather than being motivated by the desire for revenge, or from hatred.

For me, this is a journey of transforming the self, while also taking responsibility in the world. The inner and outer are connected. The restoration of wholeness is the invitation - an invitation that aligns to both the heart of authentic healing approaches and to authentic religion.

This invitation extends to you, and it is for you to choose how you would like to respond to it.

About the Author



Dr Muzammal Hussain (likes to be called Muzammal) has worked as a medical doctor in the area of NHS Psychiatry over more than 12 years. He is also an experienced Accredited Journey Therapist and a Coach at [Restorative Wholeness](#).

Additionally, Muzammal is active in [ecological activism](#) where he weaves together the strands of Islamic ecology, Permaculture and Inclusive leadership. He is especially passionate about the relationship between inner transformation, conscious community building and ecological healing. He lives with his wife in Brighton, East Sussex, in the UK.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Elizabeth Lymer for her dedicated time and attention in carefully reading the first two drafts of this publication, and providing valuable feedback that helped immensely with adding clarity and refinement to almost all aspects of the final version of this book.

I thank my caring friend, Ben Rogaly, who having listened to a writing update on one of our physically distanced woodland walks, offered an insightful idea for the main title that I just had to take up.

I would also like to thank my dear wife, Shumaisa, for her love and encouragement every step of the way, with this piece of work and so many others.

The beautiful cover photo is by Ian Beckley and is from [Pexels](#).

Privacy, Blog and Copies of E-Book

The names of any clients mentioned in this book have been intentionally changed to honour their privacy.

A version of this book is available online as a series of blog posts. This can be accessed via the [following page on Muzammal's website](#). From this link, copies of the E-book can also be obtained.

Disclaimer

If you have a medical illness, you are advised to consult your own medical practitioner. Any approach described in this book is not a replacement to seeking medical advice. While people have reported significant improvements in physical and mental well-being following Journeywork, each of us is unique, and no one can say in advance how any one individual will respond.

Radical Healing, Wholeness and Islam

This book is essential reading for anyone interested in emotional healing and spirituality. It is also relevant to any Muslim looking for a radical healing approach that aligns to an Islamic model of the soul. Equally, it will be illuminating to individuals experiencing emotional distress whether anxiety, depression, loss, uncertainty, relationship tension, feeling a lack of wholeness, or a physical condition, who are looking for deep healing work that includes the spiritual dimension.

Centred on Journey therapy, and written by a medical doctor who is also an experienced therapist, Dr Muzammal Hussain grounds his writing in his own experiences as well as those of his clients while touching on basic concepts of Islamic spirituality.

The result is a compelling and captivating read that will complement some of the more academic contributions in the field of Islamic psychology and emotional healing.

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