

Investigating the Components of Spiritual Health in Cancer Patients According to the Holy Quran

Abstract

Spirituality plays a great deal in the improvement of mental health and life quality. Spiritual therapy refers to the effects of a patient's spiritual beliefs in treating illnesses. These are beliefs that with specific experiences, lead to excellence and responsibility in individuals. Islam, as the final and most complete religion, highly regards spiritual health in human beings, because the human's ultimate goal is to reach perfection and good physical and mental health is the first requirement to reach this goal. The origin of spiritual health in Islamic teachings is said to be the heart and soul; Therefore, to achieve spiritual health, one must seek human instinct. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of spiritual therapy in reducing anxiety, depression, and distress in cancer patients. The components of spiritual health according to the Holy Quran are epistemological or intellectual, emotional and impulsive, practical and efficient components which respectively point to God-centered knowledge of the spiritual man, love for God, God-centered behavior, and finally the complete health of the body and soul, as the result of God-centered knowledge, emotion and behavior.

Keywords: Health, Holy Quran, Spiritual health, Cancer, Disease

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1. Introduction

Many physicians have recognized the importance of faith and spirituality in health and well-being in recent decades, hence, they often find it necessary to pay attention to patients' spiritual needs and issues during treatment (Ghobari Bonab Et al., 2009). It has been said that if faith plays an important role in treatment, and if physicians neglect its importance, decision-making for treatment plans may be undesirable ((Johnson 2018); Lou et al., 2011). Spirituality is an important part of people's lives and can greatly impact their health and well-being (Holt, Roth et al. 2018).

The theory of health based on spirituality was first mentioned by Langwei. Newman (1986) considered illness as an internal shock in which regaining health is linked to spirituality (Cook and Powell 2022); Quoted from Homan, 2001, p. 646). Researchers in the field of health humanities have also mentioned that different religions across the globe have common principles in religious teachings that protect people's health. These principles are rooted in the spiritual aspects of religions. Other research indicates that spirituality has a positive relationship with physical health. People with spiritual health are more capable, strong, and have more control over themselves and their lives, as well as more social support (Cook and Powell 2022).

Well-known Persian scholars have also dealt with spirituality in medicine in ancient medical books (Omidvari, 2008, p. 6). With a history of thousands of years, Persian medicine has a holistic approach to treating patients; that is, an approach based on the connection of body, soul, and the human mind, which is not limited to the treatment of diseases but aims to promote health and life quality (Cook and Powell 2022). A Persian Muslim scientist, Ali Ibn Tabari, recognized the promotion of

physical health with spirituality almost 1200 years ago (Tajbakhsh, 1994). According to Muslim physicians and philosophers such as Ibn Sina and Razi, medicine has always included both physical and spiritual aspects (Asrianti, Baas et al. 2021).

According to Robert Saltzman, spiritual psychotherapy refers to thinking beyond oneself and body, moving beyond the surface, thinking deep into one's personality, and realizing being more than an ordinary human with only physiological needs, including empathy, creativity, honesty, purity, and worship in prioritizing needs, as well as thinking beyond the ordinary way of living life, helping people heal spiritually, and reaching the point of seeing beyond the materialistic world (Peres, Kamei et al. 2018). Muslim scholars have also discussed the role and importance of spirituality. For example, Shahid Motahhari considers spirituality as a natural tendency to immaterial one's surroundings, such as science and knowledge, moral goodness, beauty, praise and worship, and what separates man from other creatures (Nadi, Saeedpoor et al. 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines dimensions of human existence as physical, mental, social, and spiritual with which the fourth dimension (spiritual) has a great role in human growth and development (Ghobari Bonab et al., 2009).

Spirituality refers to the search for meaning and purpose to connect with a sacred source or ultimate reality. Whether spirituality seeks a connection with a sacred source or an ultimate reality, it is associated with a kind of transcendence and responsible morality towards this sacred source or ultimate reality. Spiritual intervention has been considered an effective treatment method in recent years. Religion and spirituality help people understand the meaning and concept of life (Paul Victor

and Treschuk 2020). Hence the reason spirituality is a strong predictor of hope and mental health (Murphy 2023) and an important source of physical health and improvement (Balboni and Balboni 2018).

This topic needs to be addressed in cancer patients (Lotfi Kashani, 2013). Cancer diagnosis leads to feelings of despair and hopelessness, as well as being stuck in a state of uncontrollable and difficult conditions (Michelle & Birklund, 2011), like a large rock rolling in the sea (Fu, Zhu, Liu & Heber, 2008). Psychological complications from cancer diagnosis and its treatments have been reported with 14 to 38% prevalence during the disease period (Bail, Traeger et al. 2018) in 70% of cancer patients (Brandenburg, Maass et al. 2019). Studies confirm that the most common complaint among patients is adjustment disorder associated with anxiety, depression, and distress (Akchi, Okoyama & Akizuki, 2005; Distafano, Ricardi, Capley, Constantini, & Petrilveriki, 2008; Messi, 2004; (Metcalf, Price et al. 2020); Pirl, 2004; (Pitman, Suleman et al. 2018); (Wang, Li et al. 2020)).

2. The concept of Health

2.1. Health

The term health refers to a state of well-being. A healthy perception, behavior, and phenomenon are appropriate for specific purposes. Therefore, a healthy body has healthy organs that do their work well such as absorption and excretion with no difficulty. A healthy human being has healthy physical, mental, and cognitive dimensions and is directed towards the path of human excellence, vitality, and well-being. In other words, a healthy person can provide welfare and vitality (Malone and Dadswell 2018). Health and disease are not only dependent on physiological conditions, they also depend on a person's thoughts, emotions, and motivations (Ntoumanis, Ng et al. 2021). A person without a physical illness is usually called healthy. However, a healthy person is also spiritually healthy and socially comfortable. Research has shown that the root of many physical disabilities, is mental and emotional disorders (Kumari and Sangwan 2020). It has also been mentioned in the definition of the term healthy that it is the physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being that people enjoy. Thus, health is not just the absence of a disease, rather, it is multidimensional and is defined in a wide cultural context. Generally speaking, health refers to life quality. The term health is difficult to define and is almost impossible to measure (Babapour et al., 2003, p. 4).

2.2. Spirituality

To understand the concept of spirituality, one must examine its literal meaning as well as its equivalent forms in other languages. The word seems to have been first used in European languages and the Christian context as the term "spirituality". This word roots from the Latin word *spirare* meaning to blow

or to breathe. In the Latin translations of the New Testament, a spiritualist is a person whose life is under the command or influence of the Holy Spirit or God (Wolf, 2007, p. 38). It is noteworthy to say that there is a wide range of definitions for spirituality today; from the highest human relationships to the search for existential meaning to the transcendent dimension of man to personal thoughts and behaviors that express a sense of belonging, to a transcendent dimension of the beyond (Skrzypińska 2021). For example, one scholar refers to spirituality as the attempt of being sensitive to oneself, others, non-human beings, and the beyond, or to step on the path to becoming human (Low and Ayoko 2020). It can be said that spirituality is the extent of one's knowledge and spiritual nature and its manifestation through psyche in behavior and life (Vieten and Lukoff 2022). Imam Khomeini also considers spirituality as a set of attributes and actions that create a strong and intense passion, at the same time logical, in man to lead him to God almighty (Mousavi Khomeini, 1994, p. 7).

Spirituality can be viewed from two aspects; general and universal. Here, spirituality refers to having a purpose in life, experiencing promotion and excellence, social expression, and adherence to defined moral requirements. In addition, from a divine point of view, spirituality includes theology, God-seeking, God-centeredness, and such (Weathers 2018).

2.3. Spiritual health

Almost two decades ago, all European governments signed the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Growth. This statement required that they address people's spiritual needs (individuals, families, and communities) and direct their policies toward political, economic, moral, and spiritual insights for social growth (Omidvari, 2008, p. 6). The term spiritual health was first coined under the title *spiritual well-being*, which emphasizes personal well-being and one's relationship with God. The concept of spiritual well-being consists of two components: religious well-being and existential well-being. Religious well-being refers to the connection between humans and a higher resource, or God, and existential well-being is a psycho-social element, as well as one's sense of who they are, what their purpose is and why, and where they belong. It should be noted that even though these dimensions seem to be distinct, they interact and overlap (Heintzman 2020).

Generally, spiritual health is the sense of acceptance, positive emotions, morality, and a sense of positive interaction with superior holy power, others, and oneself which may be achieved through a dynamic, harmonious, cognitive, emotional, action, and personal process.

Spiritual health has been in discussion for more than sixty years; however, its dimensions remain unknown. Hence, scholars have tried to provide a definition and define components for spirituality based on their worldview. No

consensus has emerged to this day. Perhaps this is because spirituality is related to the existence of various views on the term health as well as the terms spiritual and spirituality (Malone and Dadswell 2018).

3. The importance of health in Islam

The philosophy behind Islamic rules and laws lies in the material and spiritual evolution of human society. According to Islam, the greatest and most divine blessing is health; both body and soul. In addition, a dangerous calamity is a physical illness, and even worse than that is an illness in the soul. Imam Ali (AS) states:

«الْأَوْ أَوْ إِنْ مِنَ الْبَلَاءِ الْفَاقَةَ وَ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الْفَاقَةِ مَرَضُ الْبَدَنِ وَ أَشَدُّ مِنْ مَرَضِ الْبَدَنِ مَرَضُ الْقَلْبِ؛ الْأَوْ إِنْ مِنَ النِّعَمِ سَعَةٌ الْمَالِ، وَ أَفْضَلُ مِنْ سَعَةِ الْمَالِ صِحَّةُ الْبَدَنِ، وَ أَفْضَلُ مِنْ صِحَّةِ الْبَدَنِ تَقْوَى الْقَلْبِ.»

(Majlisi, 2012, vol. 1, p. 578) “Poverty is a calamity, physical disease is worse and sickness in the heart and soul is by far the worst. Wealth is a blessing, health is better, and piety of the heart is the greatest”.

Imam Sadegh (AS) says:

«لَا يَسْتَعْنَى أَهْلُ كُلِّ بَلَدٍ عَنْ ثَلَاثَةِ تَفَرُّعٍ إِلَيْهِ فِي أَمْرِ دُنْيَا وَ آخِرَتِهِمْ، فَانْ عَدِمُوا ذَلِكَ كَانُوا هَمَجًا: فَفِيهِ عَالَمٌ وَرِعٌ، وَ أَمِيرٌ خَيْرٌ مَطَاعٌ، وَ طَبِيبٌ بَصِيرٌ ثَقَّةٌ»

(Majlisi, 2012, vol. 78, p. 235). All people need three things in this world and the hereafter: if people neglect these needs, their affairs will not see through: First, the need for a wise and pious leader; Second, a benevolent and powerful ruler; third, a wise and trustworthy physician.

According to this hadith, Imam Sadegh (AS) considers all of the above necessary for the reformation of worldly and otherworldly affairs. Their necessity can be recognized with a little caution and thought. The *Faghih* is responsible for religious, spiritual, and moral guidance, the ruler or governor is responsible for security in the community, and practitioners are responsible for health. Each has its specific conditions.

A *Faghih* should be knowledgeable and pious, a ruler should be benevolent and powerful, and a practitioner should be insightful, professional, and trustworthy. With these qualities, a society's happiness in the world and the hereafter is ensured. The desired result will not be achieved without these qualifications.

Religion and medicine have long been intertwined concerning illness and death. In most societies, pre-modern healers were also religious figures. Experimental studies consistently name religion as an essential attribute for health and well-being (Peres, Kamei et al. 2018). Researchers in the field of health humanities have also concluded that religions around the world share common principles in religious affairs. These principles are rooted in spirituality (Abbasian et al., 2010, p. 94).

Spiritual health is the heart of the Quran and Hadith. That is, not the physical heart, but the soul, personality, or the like. The

heart's position in spiritual health is very similar to the mind in the field of psychology since the brain and nerves are the origins of psychological affairs. Therefore, just as the body becomes ill, so does the heart and mind, and just as physical illness must be treated, so must the mind. Therefore, the root of spiritual health is the heart and soul, or in psychological terms, an individual's personality. The Quran points to the heart getting sick, healing, and being addressed. It can be said that all desirable or undesirable traits and states that are attributed in the Quran to the word heart, and its plural form hearts, are related to some or all aspects of personality; that is, the psychological totality of human beings (Abolghasemi, 2012, p. 51, quoting Salarifar et al., 2010, p. 78).

In the Holy Quran God Almighty says:

«وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا خَسَارًا»

“We send down (stage by stage) in the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe: to the unjust it causes nothing but loss after loss” (Surah Isra': 82)

It also says:

«الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَطْمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ»

“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” (Surah Raa'd: 28)

Therefore, the Quran is itself a healer because it cures the mental illnesses of its followers. It is also mercy because it gives health, correctness, and perseverance to the hearts of its followers so they can acquire utilitarian morality and lead a great life.

4. Components of spiritual health according to the Holy Quran

The Holy Quran emphasizes human physical, mental and spiritual health, especially for religious people, and recommends that they try and maintain their health (all aspects) with its instructions and advice. According to Quranic interpretations, spiritual health includes epistemological and intellectual, emotional and impulsive, and practical and efficient components (Marzband & Zakavi, 2012). These components will be explained in more detail in the following section.

4.1. Epistemological and intellectual components

Epistemological and intellectual components refer to having special thoughts or knowledge about God, man, creation, and their interrelationships. Among the most important epistemological and intellectual components are faith in God and the Day of Judgment, as well as in God Almighty's infinite wisdom. God Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

«لَا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَوْ كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ أَوْ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ أَوْ إِخْوَانَهُمْ أَوْ عَشِيرَتَهُمْ أُولَئِكَ كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُمْ

بِرُوحٍ مِّنْهُ وَيُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ أُولَئِكَ حِزْبُ اللَّهِ أَلَا إِنَّ حِزْبَ اللَّهِ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ»

“Thou wilt not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day, loving those who resist Allah and His Messenger, even though they were their fathers or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred. For such He has written Faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself” (Surah Al-Mujadilah: 22);

In another verse God says:

«جَزَاءُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٌ تَجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ»

“Their reward with their Lord will be Gardens of Eternity, under which rivers flow, to stay there forever and ever. Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. This is only for those in awe of their Lord” (Surah Al-Bayyinah: 8);

Regarding the remembrance of death, the Holy Quran states:

«يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ فَاَمَّا مَنْ أُوْتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَحَاسِبُ حِسَابًا يَسِيرًا»

“O humanity! Indeed, you are laboring restlessly towards your Lord, and will ‘eventually’ meet the consequences. As for those who are given their record in their right hand, they will have an easy reckoning” (Surah Al-Inshiqaq: 6-8)

Another component of intellect is the belief in God’s infinite wisdom and surrendering to fate. The Quran has also stated in this regard that:

«يَنْزِلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ بِالرُّوحِ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ عَلَىٰ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ أَنْ أَنْذِرُوا أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاتَّقُونِ»

“He sends down the angels with revelation by His command to whoever He wills of His servants, stating: “Warn humanity that there is no god worthy of worship except Me, so be mindful of Me alone” (Surah Al-Nahl: 2)

4.2. Emotional and impulsive components

Emotional components refer to one of the most important states of spirituality; that is loving God:

«وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ»

“They love them as they [should] love Allāh” (Surah Al-Baqara: 165);

We can refer to verses from Surah Al-Hamad regarding praising God:

«الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ»

“All praise is for Allah—Lord of all worlds, the Most Compassionate, Most Merciful” (Surah Al-Fatihah: 2-3);

One other emotional component of spiritual health according to the Holy Quran is surrendering to fate and God’s judgment:

«فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يَحْكُمُونَكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيَسْأَلُوكَ تَسْلِيمًا»

“But no! By your Lord, they will never be ‘true’ believers until they accept you ‘O Prophet’ as the judge in their disputes, and find no resistance within themselves against your decision and submit wholeheartedly” (Surah Al-Nisa: 65)

According to this verse, if a spiritually healthy person believes in God’s wisdom in epistemological and intellectual components, they should also believe in God’s judgment.

4.3. Practical components

As a result of having intellect and knowledge as well as love for God, one aligns their behaviors and actions in accordance with their thoughts and emotions; that is, the basis of his life becomes God-centered. These actions and behaviors are called practical components. Such practical components have been repeated many times in the Holy Quran, such as praying to God, praising God, and other related deeds to the remembrance of God (such as repentance, gratitude for blessings, etc.), God Almighty says:

«يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا»

“O believers! Always remember Allah often” (Surah Al-Ahzab: 41);

Elsewhere it is stated:

«وَسَبِّحْهُ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا»

“and glorify Him morning and evening” (Surah Al-Ahzab: 42); Also:

«الَّذِينَ يَقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ»

“Those who establish prayer, pay alms-tax, and have sure faith in the Hereafter” (Surah Al-Luqman: 4);

4.4. Efficient components

According to revelatory teachings, adherence to religious beliefs and behaviors leads to physical, mental, and social health. For example, healthy behaviors recommended in religion promote physical health. This case also includes efficient components. One of the components of spiritual health in the Holy Quran is creating inner peace and removing despair and grief. The Holy Quran says:

«هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ السَّكِينَةَ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِيمَانًا مَعَ إِيمَانِهِمْ وَلِلَّهِ جُنُودُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا»

“There will certainly be no fear for the close servants of Allah, nor will they grieve” (Surah Al-Yunus: 62);

Accordingly, in an analysis of spiritual health, one can consider spiritual thought, spiritual emotions, spiritual practices, and spiritual efficiency as the four main components of spiritual health (Abbasi et al., 2012, p. 27).

5. Conclusion

The results of this study can be summarized as follows:

1. Spiritual health is not merely a means to treat physical and mental illnesses, but with a broader perspective, it seeks to improve aspects on an individual and social level.
2. Establishing a healthy, spiritual, and God-centered society depends on individuals with spiritual health.
3. Religion is an essential tool for promoting health; The ultimate goal of religion is to reach perfection, peace, and health.
4. Islam, as the final and most complete religion, highly regards spiritual health since the ultimate goal of humanity is to reach perfection and health is a prelude to this aim.
5. The main origin of spiritual health in Islamic teachings is the soul. To achieve spiritual health, one must refer to human instinct.
6. The components of spiritual health according to the Holy Quran include epistemological or intellectual, emotional or impulsive, and practical and efficient components. These components respectively point to God-centered knowledge of the spiritual man, love for God, God-centered behavior, and finally the complete health of the body and soul, as the result of God-centered knowledge, emotion and behavior.

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