

# Personality

Personality is the complex of all the behavioral, temperamental, emotional and mental attributes that characterize an individual.

## 14.1 The conscious and unconscious

The conscious part of our mind consists of all our senses as well as one rational thinking and acts. However, there are some things we do which are more or less automatic, beyond our control, and not the result of our overt planning. Sigmund Freud postulated that this was due to a part of our mind, which was beyond or below our consciousness and called it the unconscious. He postulated that some events arouse such emotions that are too dangerous to accept, and these emotions or thoughts are kept below our consciousness but not entirely forgotten, rather these accumulate in a part of our mind which he called the “unconscious mind” or in short the “unconscious”.

These suppressed ideas or feelings sometimes direct our behaviour more than conscious feelings and thoughts. This may lead one to do or say something quite contrary to one’s usual response; of course this may produce a perplexing situation for oneself and others concerned.

One example is the famous “slip of the tongue”, which is commonly known as the “Freudian slip”. In this a person may be praising someone when by some mistake utters words to the contrary. This is usually considered an indication that while he has positive thoughts about the other person, he also has some negative thoughts which he is afraid to express or rather even to be aware of, and these negative thoughts find automatic expression inspite of the efforts of the person to the contrary.



Psychologists and psychiatrists recommend that one should try to be aware of one's suppressed thoughts as lack of awareness results in a state of perpetual anxiety. They have evolved a method known as "free association" that is used in psychotherapy of Anxiety and Depression. This consists of training the person to say everything that comes to the mind, without reforming the thought in any way. No attempt should be made to give proper form or grammar, or proper logical progression. Even the social propriety of words and sentences should not be an obstacle to speaking the mind. In this way many suppressed thoughts are unknowingly expressed. They are then picked up and emphasized by the therapist. This process, results in self-awareness and then in elimination of the anxiety and depression.

Prevention is of course better than cure. One should feel no guilt in being aware of negative points in any revered human personality, as to err is human. As Muslims we believe that only the prophets are immune to sins, all other humans are liable to commit mistakes inspite of their best intentions, and this is true for close relatives including parents, whose failings we should be aware of but at the same time recognize their contributions and sacrifices for our care.

## **14.2 Emotional And Sexual Development**

### **i) Infancy:**

This period consists of the first two years of life. Having spent nine months inside the mother, the child remains closely attached to the mother for quite some time after birth too. She feeds baby milk from her breast, cleans and clothes him. As important as the feeding, clothing and security, is the love and affection the mother gives him.



Allah has given the mother such love for her child that even though she toils during the whole day to take care of him and often keeps awake at night for him but still she is not angry or upset at this, rather she enjoys this labour of love. If a child is deprived of this love his health would suffer as surely as it would if he was to be deprived of his food and drink.

In this stage he gradually learns eating and drinking, standing, walking and talking, and passes the stressful period of toilet training. It is important to help him in all these efforts through love, affection, persuasion and rewards on the efforts he makes. On the contrary if he is ridiculed or punished his performance will be adversely affected and so will be his confidence and satisfaction in life.

## **ii) Childhood:**

This is the period between the end of infancy to the start of adolescence. In this phase the child turns attention to the world around him and starts exploring the things he encounters, which may sometimes become dangerous for him.

In this age parents start to train him but as stated before they should try to ignore the minor faults and reward the positive actions with verbal praise, physical expression of love and affection and also small physical rewards, which should be given immediately after a positive act for maximum effect.

Schooling also starts at three years of age. It should be realized that children of this age feel anxious on leaving the parents and the home. Therefore, the mother or some adult close to the child should accompany him and stay in the school till the child starts to feel comfortable there. The usual practice of leaving shrieking children in the hands of the school strongman (Chowkidar or P.T. teacher) is traumatic for the child and likely to affect his personality.



In many conservative homes and schools teaching itself is accompanied by punishment, psychological as well as physical. Fear is almost always instilled into the children in order to force them to study. Little attempt is made to make the process of studying interesting and interactive, thus producing boredom. 'Boredom' is the great enemy of education, and even greater is 'fear'. Punishment and ridicule should also be avoided for the training of personal hygiene and social interaction instead encouragement, praise and rewards should be liberally used.

Kids of this age continuously ask questions. Welcome this opportunity to transmit your knowledge and ideas of morality, including religion. But some problems may occur. At times one is tired or busy in some important work. Sometimes one doesn't actually know the answers. Lastly questions related to sex are also asked.

Don't use the above as excuses rather make all effort to give the child some time to satisfy his thirst for knowledge. First of all at every question, praise the child for it, and if pressed for time, give a brief answer, and if he is not satisfied promise to talk later about the topic and make sure you fulfill the promise without being reminded. Teachers especially, but also parents, feel very embarrassed when they are asked a question the answer to which they do not know. Where as, in reality, this is a golden opportunity to teach the child a few important points.

The child (or even the older student) can be directed to the role of dictionaries and encyclopedias for spelling, meanings, and explanations. Older students can be directed to books, journals and computer websites. Then there may be some things that nobody knows. This should become the start of developing a consciousness and importance of research in every field. Even a child of the first class can be taught to do research. If the topic is "leaves" then he can be asked to collect all the various types of leaves that he encounters and



this in itself forms a research project. Finally we come to those questions that relate to sex. The Quran has a lot of sex education but our children do not learn from it as they read only the Arabic text without the translation. The Hadees and fiqah contain even more detailed guidance on sexual matters, but our children are kept away from that too. This matter is not as difficult as it seems. Our personal complexes make it seem so. We have been raised in an atmosphere where all sexual words were taboo even the mention of passing urine or stools was frowned upon. Moreover, we assume that sexual knowledge will result in illegal and immoral sexual activity.

If a four year old asks why his mother's tummy is so big he will not turn into an adulterer the minute you tell him that another brother or sister is growing inside your mother's body and that it will come out, after a few months, like you did. Tell the child what he asks in plain, true and understandable language and only as much as he has asked. When he feels the need he will ask more and that should be intimated at that time.

Moreover, proper words in your own language for penis, vagina, breasts, urine, and stools etc. must be taught. Later on vocabulary for menstruation and intercourse etc. should also be provided. If the child sees animals on T.V. or otherwise engaging in intercourse, it should be mentioned.

At this age it may be a good idea for the parents to let the children see them naked so that their curiosity about male and female genitals is satisfied and they do not have to resort to devious ways. Of course, this must stop a little before the children reach the adolescent stage, at which time the Islamic rules of male and female association should be explained and also personally observed.

By the age of adolescence the children should know the Islamic rules of interaction between men and women. Girls should know that in the company of males their dress must cover them from head to feet, exposing only the face and



hands except in front of certain close relatives (محرم) i.e. son, father, brother, and husband. Boys should cover the body at least from navel to knees. Also that an unrelated (محرّمه) girl and boy can't be together in a room by themselves however, if there is a group present and all are properly dressed and have some important business then it is permissible. Of course they should be informed that Islam prescribes a hundred stripes to the unmarried for fornication and the death penalty to the married for adultery.

Books on sex (like this one and its Urdu translation) are useful, especially if the parents and teachers are shy. However, please make sure they are written by properly qualified Muslim scholars.

A word of caution about children who are exposed to sex education- Advise them not to discuss sexual matters before outside people as in a conservative society sex knowledge is considered a characteristic of a loose character and immoral person.

### iii) Adolescence:

This is the age of puberty. The genitals enlarge and secondary sexual characteristics become prominent. Girls develop breasts, which gradually enlarge, and menstruation starts. The genitals of boys also enlarge, the penile veins become prominent, and the prostatic fluid oozes out of the penis, especially at times of sexual excitement. Nocturnal ejaculation also starts, as does the act of masturbation. These are considered severe debilitating illnesses by Hakeems, as well as the public in general and this affects the youngsters. They also worry that their genitals may be abnormal and there is no one to reassure them on that accord. Due to this boys often develop depression, becoming worried, forsaking usual activities including studies. Of course, this doesn't happen if they have been given proper sex education, or taken to a doctor for proper evaluation and reassurance.



Helping kids choose a career is important at this stage, when one reaches the eighth class one should decide between the various courses available in the Matric or O’level classes. In the Matric one has to choose either, science, arts or commerce. That choice should depend on the profession one wants to enter in college. The profession or career should not be dictated by the whims and fancies of the elders, rather parents, teachers and the student should join their heads and make the choice depending on the abilities and inclinations of the youngster. As some body has well stated “If one chooses a profession that one likes he will not have to work a day in his life.”

An Islamic society is more or less segregated by sex, so it needs as many women as men to cater for it. This means we need women in almost every profession to work with the female population, which includes medical, education, banking, business, industry etc., as well as government offices. However, the professions that require tough and hard work are left to the men, for instance the fighting forces and labourers for making roads and buildings etc.

On the other hand girls have to bear the main responsibilities of having and rearing children, and caring for the home and husband. Therefore, whatever other career they may elect to choose it must be accompanied by education and training in these fields.

For Muslim boys and girls it is important to mark the start of puberty for another important reason and that is the start of compulsory daily prayers and the fasting in Ramadan. For girls the signs are the growing of breasts, hairs in the underarm and genital area and the start of menstruation. For boys the growth of hairs on faces, underarms and pubic area, as well as nocturnal ejaculation.

As the boys and girls grow in age the parents should make it a point to give increasing weight to their opinions in matters relating to their own person i.e. shoes and clothes they wear, places they go and foods they eat.



There is a tendency for adolescents to rebel against parental orders, so restrictions must be kept at the minimum. The golden rule is to apply only the restrictions that Islam applies and let them know that. The idea is to encourage self-reliance and self-confidence, but at the same time to save them from destructive actions. However, the parents must take some risks otherwise development will not occur. As they say “No risk, no gain”. But parents should develop the same kind of relationship with their adolescent kids (as well as older ones) that they have with brothers and sisters or friends. However, occasionally one has to put one’s foot down as parents do not have the luxury of being just friends, because friends do not have the responsibility to discipline.

### **Individual and Society**

Islam has laid down guidelines for both individuals and society. An individual is responsible only for his own actions. On the basis of those actions his status in the after-life is going to be decided. If a person is an atheist or ascribes divine powers to any other than Allah and doesn’t mend his ways before his death, then he is destined to hell. A Muslim on the other hand will be in paradise. He should try to follow Allah’s commandments as explained by the prophet Mohammad<sup>(1)</sup>. However if he slips now and then, he should seek Allah’s forgiveness, which is freely promised. An individual is responsible for his prayers and fasting as well as Zak’at and pilgrimage if he can afford it. But besides these, Islam decrees that all worldly actions that an individual undertakes are also akin to worship, provided he is truthful and honest and does not violate any religious injunctions. Thus one is doing worship when he is working for his living, visiting friends or relatives, playing with his children or even going to bed with his wife. Acquiring knowledge is even more encouraged as the prophet<sup>(1)</sup> says ‘Spending one hour studying is equivalent to one whole night’s worship’.





However, the most important are his efforts to establish a government of honest Muslims, based on the laws (sharia) of the Quran and Hadees. What attempts (جهاد) he makes towards this goal is the greatest virtue (افضل عبادت). These attempts (جهاد) could be in the shape of persuasion, speeches, voting, meetings etc. If a war (قتال) has to be fought for self defense or freeing persecuted people from cruel, brutal rulers it is a part of this attempt (جهاد). However, it must not be for monetary or other gains of the persons or even their country.

If one is martyred (شهيد) during such a war he is promised the highest levels of heaven, and about such person the Quran says “Do not call them dead, because they are living and get sustenance from Allah, although you are not aware.”

The society is ordered to organize a proper, honest government, and chose the leader or Deputy to Allah, (عليه السلام), one who is Allah’s representative on earth. The people or their representatives must do the choosing, and he will have to follow the Quran and Hadees, as well as the advice of a consultative Assembly (شورى).

The Islamic state collects a tax for the poor (زكوة) which is 2.5% of on all jewelry and cash and business goods, as well 5-10% on the agricultural produce, and this is to be spent on the maintenance of the poor people who need help. The Islamic state also organizes health, education and other needed services. Thus the individual Muslim reforms the area under his direct control and through the society and government reforms the other areas of concern. The individual and society gain strength from each other and one cannot function without the active participation of the other.

If an individual encounters problems, he should evaluate them and make proper plans to overcome them, remembering all the time that Allah helps those striving for the right goals.



### 14.4 Mental Health

Parents are most responsible for bringing up kids with good mental health. About 20% of people are affected with mental illnesses and these are caused mainly by genetic, familial and brain chemical abnormalities, but psychological and social factors also play a part.

If we add another 5% patients due to Addiction Disorders the total comes to 25%, i.e. every 4<sup>th</sup> person is affected and as a corollary we can say every household has this problem, as one patient upsets the life of the whole family. We can easily reduce Addiction Disorder if we avoid drugs ourselves and also help our kids to do the same. If we bring up our kids to be confident persons, devoid of any serious hang-ups this will help to reduce mental illnesses. Moreover, if we know the initial symptoms of mental illnesses we can start treatment earlier and get better and quicker results.

For prevention it is also important not to give pregnant women medicines without medical advice and get help as soon as psychological problems develop in the child. Avoiding excessive criticism and punishment for education or training will also help to prevent later psychological problems.

#### 14.4 (i) Self-confidence

Self-confidence means that one is aware of one's abilities and shortcomings in a realistic manner and plans one's life keeping those in mind. A person who has self confidence doesn't get upset when there is a difference of opinion, is more aware of the good points of others and thus has good relations with them. He thus has more success in his life endeavors and leads a more satisfied life inside the home and outside.

#### (ii) The Goals of Life

A Muslim considers the life on earth as a test of faith and actions. What rewards he gets in the after-life depends on how much he has tried to follow the commandments of Allah



and His prophet<sup>(1)</sup>. Not that he is not, expected to make any mistakes (sins) but rather he is advised to realize his failing, repent and beg Allah's forgiveness, which is freely promised. A Muslim is supposed to perform the five daily prayers, a month of fasting every year, as well as give 2.5% annually on goods and other wealth (5-10% on agricultural produce), and perform the pilgrimage to Mecca (ﷻ) once in his life, if he can afford it. The visit to Mecca on the fixed days of the year, for the Muslims all over the world, promotes international brotherhood. A Muslim is also expected to collaborate his efforts with others to set up an Islamic system of government as ordained by Allah and the prophet<sup>(1)</sup>.

Finally his worldly activities are also considered worship and virtue if he is honest and truthful in his dealings.

### **(iii) Sources of satisfaction**

Evaluate what are the things that you really enjoy and try to adopt them, and those will provide a life of constant satisfaction.

First try to develop self-confidence by factual evaluation of yourself, your abilities and shortcomings and try to reduce the defects to a minimum. Develop good relations with family members and outside friends. Adopt a career which you like and this will be a great source of satisfaction instead of worry and fatigue. Develop the habit of reading from books, journals or computer websites. This can be purely for pleasure or for information but it keeps a person pleasant company when none other may be available. Adopt a hobby or try your hand at painting, poetry or other such activity.

### **(iv) Conscience**

A Muslim is guided by the code of conduct laid down in the Quran and Hadees. If you have doubts about a course of action it is wise to consult a religious scholar.

Our conscience also dictates that we be polite and honest



with others and follow the law of the land dutifully. Taking or giving bribes is completely forbidden and so we must not indulge in it. Finally we should also avoid actions which would be injurious to others.

**(v) Social Interaction**

It has been aptly stated by some one that “Good Luck is directly proportional to the number of people you know.” Worldly progress is dependent on good social relationships, and Allah also likes a person who is sociable. Happiness is the result of good relations with the family and other friends. Of course nobody is perfect, neither we ourselves, nor our family members and friends, so unless we learn to ignore minor faults and quirks of others we cannot enjoy the wonderful benefits and pleasures of friendship.

It is true that those who receive little or no love from parents tend to be loners but as adults we should analyze our shortcomings and change ourselves. One also needs to express his positive feelings towards others, just keeping them locked up in the heart doesn’t help. On the other hand avoid criticizing people, for the best of friends can be driven away by this behavior.

**14.5 The Balanced Personality**

A person can be called balanced if he is physically and psychologically healthy, self confident, happy and has a big circle of friends. He should also have the following qualities:

- i) Gives more and expects less from others.
- ii) Emotional maturity and constant faithfulness
- iii) Strives for mutual satisfaction and emotional support
- iv) Involved in constructive activities even when alone.
- v) Takes encouragement from his successes and learns from his mistakes
- vi) Lives a relatively calm and relaxed life.

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*(1) May Allah bless with eternal peace*

