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Recasting the Hierarchy of Needs With an Islamic Approach: Explaining the Journey Beyond Self-actualization

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ABSTRACT

The human quest of becoming what one is capable of and even exceeding the limits of this ego-centered existence is one of the concerns in philosophical, psychological, and theological traditions. Among Western approaches of psychology, this quest of becoming is found in Abraham Maslow's theory of self-actualization, which later included the concept of self-transcendence (Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1971). One limitation of Maslowian framework, is that it considers that human development begins with deficiency, lack or incompleteness, and gradually one proceeds towards self-actualization. Islamic tradition takes the human being with a very different ontological and epistemological start. Islamic psychology considers the beginning with *fitrah*—the primeval tendency ingrained in the human nature that motivates the self toward truth, moral consciousness, and recognition of the Divine (Qur'an 30:30). In this approach, development is not just a transition, a mere becoming, rather, it is remembrance, return and restoration of what is already there in the *fitrah*. The becoming is difficult due to the forgetfulness of soul but once attained it is a perfect realignment with an original metaphysical orientation which the soul already possessed. Keeping a comparative theoretical analysis of selfhood, this study explores the growth of the self that starts with *fitrah*, ascending through *nafs* dictating physiological, safety, social, and esteem needs, reaches self-actualization through *Ruh* (spirit), and culminating in self-transcendence manifested through *fana* (annihilation of ego) and *baqa* (subsistence in God). A psycho-spiritual journey carried throughout by *mahabbah* (love of God) and *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the self).



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Introduction

The concern related to how one truly becomes a fully functioning human is not merely academic concern, rather, it is deeply rooted in the very structure of existence. The question is what is this self, from where it has come, from whether it gets fulfillment- from within itself or something beyond it, and is transcendence the expansion of what was already there or Is it the return to something already known? Both Western humanistic perspective and Islamic philosophical-spiritual approach have tried to answer these questions. There is an agreement among them about the human potential of enormous transformation but the beginning is seen from radically different premises, that move through entirely different mechanisms, and ultimately arrive at profoundly different understandings of the self's final destination.

In Western psychology Maslow's (1943, 1954) model of human motivation is the most sophisticated—a five-level hierarchy of needs including physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and finally self-actualization needs. Maslow (1954) described self-actualized individuals as independent, genuine, creative, psychologically unified, and reality accepting. Rogers (1961) elaborated this concept with the fully functioning person—an individual characterized by openness to experience, existential living, and trust in one's own organismic processes. Frankl (1963), presented a change in this trajectory that self-actualization is not attained directly, rather it results due to meaningful living. The self-achieves fulfillment not by entire inward fixation but by movement toward purpose, service, and meaning beyond itself.

Empirical studies of Maslow's hierarchy of needs produced mixed findings, like Wahba and Bridwell (1976) found that results are inconsistent regarding Maslow's rigid rank-ordering of needs. They noted that many studies disproved the hierarchical structure as well as the principle of prepotency, i.e., the lower needs must be fulfilled before higher ones emerge. Likewise, Tay and Diener (2011), analyzed data from 123 countries ($n = 60,865$) and revealed that although Maslow's classification of needs has substantial cross-cultural relevance but they do not operate in the

strict hierarchical manner proposed by Maslow. They found that human beings are capable of pursuing higher forms of meaning, esteem, and fulfillment even in the face of deprivation and instability. These researches do not delimit the importance of Maslow's theoretical framework; however, they show the necessity for a developmental model that has more flexibility, more complicated, and that includes the spiritual dimension.

Maslow in his later work acknowledged the incompleteness of self-actualization as the final stage of human development (Maslow, 1971) and introduced the concept of self-transcendence—a stage beyond personal fulfillment in which the individual moves beyond the ego and identifies with something larger than the self: humanity, nature, the cosmos, or the sacred. Koltko-Rivera (2006) systematic examination of Maslow's work stated that self-transcendence is largely neglected in his writings, contending that the exclusion of this stage from conventional presentations of the hierarchy misrepresents Maslow's mature theoretical stance. Even though Western psychology's understanding of this transpersonal form of transcendence (Grof, 1985) & Wilber, 2000) remains basically anthropocentric and experiential in its understanding, that is, the self, during transcendence remained the center of the journey.

Islamic approach views this tension from a very different ontological beginning. The Qur'an speaks about the creation of every human being upon fitrah, that is, an inborn tendency for goodness, truth, and recognition of Allah: "So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. Adhere to the fitrah of Allah upon which He has created all people" (Qur'an 30:30). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reinforced this principle with extraordinary clarity: "Every child is born on the fitrah; then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian" (Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 1358). This framework shows that the beginning of the self does not take place in deficiency, rather, it starts with an innate orientation. Hence, human growth is not just an accumulation of traits, accomplishments, or psychological strengths but a remembrance, restoration and return. A slow

paced as well as painful reunion with something the soul has forgotten.

An Islamic approach of the self contains multiple interconnected aspects: The *Nafs* (an instigating self or soul) in its developmental states; the *Ruh* (spirit) as the direct divine breath breathed into the human being (Qur'an 15:29); the *Qalb* (heart) as the center of spiritual perception; and the '*Aql* (intellect) as the faculty of moral reasoning and discernment. The work of classical Muslim philosophers deepens our understanding of these elements. Al-Farabi (c. 940 CE), in his book *Mabadi Ara' Ahl al-Madinah al-Fadilah*, postulated that the human intellect is capable of taking a leap from material cognition to the union with the Active Intellect. Ibn Sina (c. 1020 CE), in *Kitab al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, described the soul's transition by rational and spiritual purification toward divine proximity. Ibn Rushd (c. 1180 CE), in the Aristotelian commentaries as well as *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, claimed that the intellect can reach its highest potential not by mere gratification but through contemplation of universal and divine truth.

The Sufi tradition further enhanced and transformed this philosophical design into an actual perceived psychology of the soul. Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE), in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, has offered probably one of the most comprehensive Islamic accounts of psychological and spiritual development. Likewise, Jalal al-Din Rumi (c. 1258 CE), through the *Masnavi-ye Ma'navi*, stated the soul's painful longing for its divine origin and the path toward fana and baqa through the process of love. Ibn Arabi (1229 CE), in *Fusus al-Hikam*, presented the process of becoming the perfect human being—the *insan al-kamil*, that is, the complete reflection of divine attributes in human personality. Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1915, 1918), in *Asrar-e-Khudi* and *Rumuz-e-Bekhudi*, captured the classical Islamic insights into direct dialogue with modern Western philosophy, arguing that genuine self-transcendence presupposes the existence of a fully developed self. In doing so, Iqbal resolved one of the most significant tensions within Maslow's (1954, 1971) framework: one cannot transcend a self that was never fully formed to begin with.

Rationale of Study

The justification of the present study evolved

through the five immensely interwoven gaps in the existing literature. Only fixating on Western or Islamic approach would provide an incomplete knowledge of the journey that moves the self above transcendence; as the Western approach focuses more on empirical aspect and Islamic as more theoretical. Integrating the two together will provide a better understanding of the developmental movement from self-actualization to self-transcendence as both traditions highlight essential dimensions of human becoming, the way the self evolves, transforms, and ultimately breaks the shackles and moves beyond itself.

The Problem of Deficiency Versus Innate Orientation

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs begins with an assumption the human being reaches fundamentally incomplete to this world, geared by incomplete physiological, safety, social, and esteem needs which must be gradually fulfilled making higher forms of development possible. Ingrained in this approach is a secular humanistic ontology, that is, the self is considered to begin in deficiency and ascends by satisfaction and accumulation of the unmet needs. But this perspective is unable to fully grasp the persistent human inclination towards the sacred, towards transcendence, towards meanings that exceed material fulfillment and psychological gratification (Frankl, 1963).

Islamic psychology starts with a totally different beginning, grounding human growth in *fitrah*, i.e., an inborn tendency towards truth, moral consciousness, and divine recognition that every human being possesses (Qur'an 30:30; Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 1358). This framework considers the self not devoid of everything, rather, it has an orientation. It does not only acquire meaning overtime, it is born already inclined toward it. As the self has an orientation rather than absence, its development is not mere accumulation, achievement, or fulfillment of needs; it has the tendency towards remembrance, alignment, restoration, and return. This absence of an innate metaphysical orientation represents one of the most fundamental gaps within Western developmental theory.

The Absence of a Continuous Purification Mechanism

In Western psychology we find gap that does not explain a continuously operating mechanism of inner purification which can interconnect different stages of human growth together. Maslow in his later work distinguished between deficiency-needs and being-needs, but that kept theoretically underdeveloped and lacks consistency in subsequent literature (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). The framework does talk about transformation, but it does not provide a sustained account which makes it continuously refined.

Islamic psychology offers precisely such a mechanism through *tazkiyah al-nafs*— the ongoing purification of the self repeatedly commanded throughout the Qur'an (Qur'an 91:9–10; 87:14). Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE), in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, systematized this process into a comprehensive psychological and spiritual method consisting of *tawbah* (repentance), *muhasabah* (self-accounting), *muraqabah* (self-vigilance), and *riyadha* (spiritual discipline and training). Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350 CE), in *Madarij al-Salikin*, further elaborated this developmental process through ascending *maqamat* (spiritual stations) by which the *nafs* undergoes gradual refinement and purification. No major Western developmental framework contains an equivalent mechanism of sustained inward transformation operating across the entirety of human development.

The Absence of Divine Love as Motivational Foundation

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) remains one of the most empirically supported Western theories of intrinsic motivation, identifying autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the three central psychological needs underlying human development. Although the theory possesses substantial cross-cultural empirical support (Ryan & Deci, 2000), its framework remains unable to fully account for the depth, persistence, and existential intensity of human striving when directed toward something absolute, sacred, or divine.

Islamic psychology introduces *Mahabbah*—divine love—as the central motivational force underlying every stage of human development. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated: “None of you truly believes until Allah and His Messenger are more beloved to him than

anything else” (Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 15). Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE) described *mahabbah* as the natural response of the heart upon recognizing divine perfection—a force capable of reorganizing the entire structure of human intention, attachment, and behavior from within. This approach sees love not as peripheral to development, instead an engine for it which Western psychology lacks as it does not provide any structural equivalent to this understanding of divine love as the organizing principle of human becoming.

The Missing Transitional Threshold Between Self- Actualization and Self-Transcendence

Looking at the Western approach, it does not offer any chalked-out process that explains how a self has become fully actualized, it misses out the transitions taken that transcends selfhood altogether. This is one of the most significant structural tensions left unanswered in Maslow's (1954, 1971) framework. Self-transcendence is presented as an extension of self-actualization without keeping it as a distinct transformation demanding a different developmental threshold (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). The movement beyond the self is acknowledged, yet the process through which this movement occurs remains insufficiently explained.

In Islamic perspective this absence is addressed through *tawakkal*, that is a conscious submission and reliance upon Allah, that contains effort but clinging to results is renounced. The Qur'an states: “And whoever relies upon Allah— then He is sufficient for him” (Qur'an 65:3). Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) illustrated this principle with remarkable psychological precision: “If you were to rely upon Allah with true reliance, He would provide for you as He provides for the birds: they go out hungry in the morning and return full in the evening” (Al-Tirmidhi, d. 892 CE, Hadith No. 2344, graded Hasan). *Tawakkal* here works not mean passivity, but as the decisive inward shift through which the self-ceases attempting to possess existence and instead learns surrender.

Divergent and Incomplete Conceptions of Transcendence

The focus of Western psychology on transcendence is largely as expansion, an

enlargement of the ego into wider experiential fields involving peak experiences, unity consciousness, or identification with humanity, nature, or the cosmos (Maslow, 1971; Wilber, 2000; Grof, 1985). It is evident that these conceptions focus on experiential and impersonal aspects, transcendence is seen as a state of consciousness instead of a reorientation of being towards itself. Some evidence of transcendence can be found in Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard's Concept of the Leap of Faith, 2023), concept of "leap of faith" that represents a radical belief of a person helping him/her in transformation but it is mostly absent in the modern psychology due to excessive reliance on empirical and rational sources of information.

Contrary to the Western approach, in Islamic psychology transcendence is understood through the Sufi concepts of *fana* and *baqa*. Ibn Arabi (1229 CE), in *Fusus al-Hikam*, made it clear that *fana* does not mean complete annihilation of a human being; instead, it kills the disillusionment of free, autonomous and self-sufficient existence, and learning to live in the divine subsistence through *baqa*. What vanishes is not the individual being, but the realization that ego has made a false claim of independent being. This highlights a very different ontological understanding of transcendence, the self, of existence, and of ultimate reality.

Methodology

The present study relied on a qualitative approach encompassing comparative theoretical research design. The present study aimed at deeper conceptual analysis, interpretive synthesis, and philosophical comparison of Western psychological thought and Islamic approach; two distinct perspectives that has different foundations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sources are approached as a coherent system of knowledge formed through their own metaphysical assumptions, epistemological structures, and understandings of the human self. The analysis is based on foundational texts, interpretive commentaries, and secondary scholarly literature in order to examine how each tradition conceptualizes human development, selfhood, and transcendence. The study follows a hermeneutic orientation, concerned less with measuring variables and more with interpreting

meanings, structures, and underlying philosophical tensions.

Sources of Data

Primary Western sources include Maslow's *Motivation and Personality* (1954), *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1968), and *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (1971); Rogers' *On Becoming a Person* (1961); Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (1963); Grof's *Beyond the Brain* (1985); and Wilber's *A Theory of Everything* (2000). Secondary empirical literature includes Wahba and Bridwell (1976), Tay and Diener (2011), Deci and Ryan (1985), Ryan and Deci (2000), and Koltko-Rivera (2006), particularly where these studies provide cross-cultural or empirical grounding for theories of motivation, meaning, and transcendence.

Primary Islamic sources include selected Qur'anic verses, hadith literature, and the classical works of Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Rumi, Ibn Arabi, and Allama Muhammad Iqbal. These texts were selected because they collectively represent some of the most influential philosophical, theological, spiritual, and psychological articulations of the human self within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Analytical Framework

The analysis evolves by three interconnected interpretive layers, first through conceptual deconstruction, in which the core constructs of each tradition are identified, clarified, and understood independently before any comparison is attempted. The second layer is thematic mapping, where concepts across both traditions are placed in dialogue at the levels of meaning, function, and developmental structure. The third layer is interpretive synthesis, through which points of convergence, divergence, and philosophical tension are critically examined without collapsing one framework into the other or forcing artificial equivalence between them.

Islamic thought is fundamentally grounded in revelation (*wahy*), prophetic guidance, and spiritual metaphysics, whereas Western psychology largely emerges from empirical observation, phenomenological inquiry, and secular existential reasoning. Because of this, the study adopts a dialogical epistemology one that

allows both systems to illuminate one another while preserving the integrity and distinctiveness of each tradition (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The aim is not reduction, but meaningful intellectual engagement.

Discussion

In this section a comprehensive pathway of psycho-spiritual development is explained via two complementary approaches of Islamic and Western perspective. It establishes a route that begins internally by our inborn essence, moves through sequential stages need fulfillment as well as cognitive maturation, and finally culminating in self- transcendence.

The Foundation: Fitrah and Our Natural Inner Direction

Islamic psychology gives a principle absent from Western psychology that an individual at the time of birth is neither a blank slate nor a being pulled only by deficiencies, rather, every human being enters the world with a pre-existing orientation. The Qur'an declares: "So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. Adhere to the fitrah of Allah upon which He has created all people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know" (Qur'an 30:30). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) articulated this as a universal truth: "Every child is born on the fitrah; then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian, or a Magian" (Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 1358). This inclination toward truth and the Divine is the innate human state; straying from it is an acquired behavior rather than an inherent one.

Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE), in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, characterized fitrah as the primordial condition of the *qalb* (heart)—untainted, transparent, and naturally predisposed to mirror divine radiance, akin to a looking glass before it is obscured by grime. Consequently, the entirety of *tazkiyah al-nafs* is not centered on constructing a new entity but on rehabilitating what was originally present. Al-Farabi (c. 940 CE), in *Mabadi Ara' Ahl al-Madinah al-Fadilah*, contended that the human mind possesses an inherent potential for logical and ethical comprehension awaiting realization—a philosophical articulation of fitrah using Neoplatonic concepts (Al-Farabi, c. 940 CE). Ibn

Sina (c. 1020 CE) similarly asserted in *Kitab al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat* that the soul naturally gravitates toward its spiritual source—a pull that compels it, even if sub- consciously, toward the transcendent.

This intrinsic orientation is missing in Maslow's hierarchy of motives (1954). His theory begins with what an individual lack, whereas, Islamic ideology begins with the soul's inherent tendency. This is a significant distinction as it determines the course of all subsequent development. Markus and Kitayama (1991) have indicated that Cross-cultural inquiries present different conception of the self across societies. This shows that Western psychology's individualistic, deficiency- centered stance of self should not be applied universally overlooking the considerable constraints.

The Islamic concept of fitrah entails it as not a passive or simplistic tendency, rather, it possesses an internal polarity, including both *khair* (virtue orientation) and *shar* (tendency towards moral deviation). The holy Qur'an stated it in a verse: "And He inspired it [the soul] with its wickedness and its righteousness" (Qur'an 91:8).

At the absolute center of this innate state, however, is the primordial acknowledgment of divine oneness (*tawhid*). Prior to physical embodiment, every human soul explicitly affirmed the ultimate authority of Allah: "Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes, we have testified" (Qur'an 7:172). This foundational covenant is structurally woven into the fitrah itself.

To effectively integrate Islamic thought with Maslow's model, a vital nuance must be highlighted: at birth, a child's intellect (*'aql*) is completely undeveloped. The cognitive machinery required to consciously translate the fitrah's spiritual orientation into action is not yet functional. Consequently, while the fitrah quietly acts as an underlying compass toward growth, the infant is initially driven by basic deficiency needs, such as the requirement for food, warmth, physical safety, and maternal attachment.

This initial focus on deficiency needs is driven by the *nafs* in its lowest, instinctual state (*al-nafs al-ammaraah bi al-su'*). During this early phase, the *nafs* operates entirely on a deficit basis, pushing the child to secure what it physically lacks. Maslow (1954) accurately observed that these

physiological and security requirements dominate human behavior when cognitive and spiritual facilities are still dormant.

Physical Needs: The Body as a Gift from God

Maslow's (1954) model encompasses the physiological needs like food, water, shelter, sleep, and warmth as the primary layer of human motivation. Deficiency of these basic survival needs hampers the development of all higher motivations. This assumption is well-documented by empirical findings (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976; Tay & Diener, 2011), especially in Tay and Diener (2011) work across 123 countries which showed that fulfilling of basic needs were closely connected with positive and negative emotional states. This confirmed that physical foundations are universally important, even if the step-by-step sequence Maslow presented does not always hold true.

However, Western psychology overlooks the role of *fitrah* during this initial stage. It fails to see that even while satisfying these survival needs, a human being is not merely an animal fulfilling biological instincts, but an entity anchored by an innate orientation toward truth and the Divine. The internal drive to fulfill these physiological deficits comes from the *nafs al- ammarah bi al-su'*—the soul in its lowest, impulse-driven state—which seeks immediate gratification and physical survival. Islam refers to three different types of *Nafs* (*Ammara*, *lawamma*, *mutmainna*; explained in detail after a few passages) depending on whether one fulfills the bodily needs according to the dictates of God or badly indulge in it.

Beneath this instinctual drive, however, the *fitrah* remains quietly active, guiding the child toward long-term development even before the intellect is mature enough to consciously understand it. The Islamic tradition fully validates physical requirements but integrates them into an ethical and metaphysical matrix. The physical body is treated as an *amanah* (a sacred trust) loaned to each person by Allah. The Qur'an commands: "O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth that is lawful and good" (Qur'an 2:168). This responsibility is emphasized by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who stated: "Indeed your body has a right over you" (Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 5199). In *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE) analyzed

the ethics of eating, sleeping, and physical health, arguing that looking after the body is not about indulging physical desires, but about responsibly maintaining a vessel provided by God. The spiritual value of physical health was also highlighted by the Prophet (peace be upon him): "The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, while there is good in both" (Muslim, d. 875 CE, Hadith No. 2664).

Safety and Security: Tawakkal as the Deepest Inner Security

In Maslow's hierarchy (1954) safety and security needs are kept at the second place. It is defined as the need for protection from harm, stability, order, and the relief from fear. Bowlby's (1969) contribution attachment research along with subsequent findings on emotional bonding has endorsed that a secure base is needed for environmental exploration and psychological growth (Ainsworth et al., 1978). This is an addition of developmental path which lacks depth how security needs work in Maslow's approach.

In Maslow's model, the safety needs are also deficit-driven that originates from the *nafs* operating in an anxious, self-preserving mode. At this stage, the *nafs* craves predictability and control because it views the external world as volatile and dangerous.

The Qur'an addresses this human vulnerability directly, continuously acknowledging the realities of fear, stress, and anxiety, and consistently offering divine reassurance alongside the practice of *shukr* (gratitude) as a psychological remedy for panic. Allah states: "So remember Me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me" (Qur'an 2:152). In another reassuring passage, He declares: "Verily, with hardship comes ease" (Qur'an 94:6). The fact that safety needs have the power to overwhelm and paralyze the human psyche explains why the Qur'an speaks to them with such explicit, repeated guarantees. These are deep-seated deficiency needs, and Islam meets them by pointing to a source of ultimate security.

Islamic jurisprudence manages safety at a communal level through the *maqasid al-shari'ah* (objectives of Islamic law), which Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE) identified as five fundamental safeguards: the preservation of life (*hifz al-nafs*),

faith (*hifz al-din*), reason (*hifz al-'aql*), progeny (*hifz al-nasl*), and assets (*hifz al-mal*). Yet, from the perspective of Islamic philosophy, true internal safety is not achieved through external stability, but through the internal state of *tawakkal*: absolute reliance and psychological trust in Allah. The Qur'an says: "And whoever relies upon Allah — then He is sufficient for him. Indeed, Allah will accomplish His purpose" (Qur'an 65:3). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) illustrated the psychological essence of this reliance: "If you were to rely upon Allah with true reliance, He would provide for you as He provides for the birds" (Al-Tirmidhi, d. 892 CE, Hadith No. 2344, graded Hasan). In *Madarij al-Salikin*, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350 CE) stresses that *tawakkal* is not passive fatalism, but an active spiritual practice: the individual applies maximum practical effort while completely surrendering the ultimate results to Allah. Ibn Sina (c. 1020 CE) said in *Kitab al-Isharat* that the soul experiences anxiety due to its attachment and finding security in temporary and changing things. The solution is not in working to fix external variables—that is beyond one's control—rather it is in anchoring the soul's reliance in Allah, whose existence and protection are absolute and independent. Keeping these deficit needs in mind, Islam offers a spiritual pathway managed by the *nafs* providing a more comprehensive spiritual path which help rise above the anxieties created by worldly objects.

Love and Belonging: Mahabbah as the Motivating Force at Every Level

Maslow (1954) positioned the need for love and belonging at the third level of his hierarchy. In modern research, Ryan and Deci (2000) identified relatedness as one of the three core psychological needs within Self-Determination Theory, a position supported by cross-cultural studies showing that social connection is a primary indicator of mental health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Empirical reviews by Baumeister and Leary (1995) confirm that the desire for interpersonal connection is a foundational human drive that fundamentally shapes thought patterns, emotional responses, and behavior.

Islamic philosophy acknowledges the emotional necessity of human bonding but, on a social level, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)

established mutual love as the defining characteristic of a healthy community: "You will not enter paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another" (Muslim, d. 875 CE, Hadith No. 54). While these relational drives are initially part of the deficiency domain managed by the *nafs*, *mahabbah* serves as the mechanism that guides the individual through these attachments toward the higher levels of esteem and self-actualization. Islamic philosophy validates the significance of human affection but anchors it in a more essential concept: *Mahabbah*, the love for Allah, which acts as the primary engine for genuine human development is not merely one of many needs but the central force governing all authentic human growth. The Qur'an presents this divine love as the basis for the relationship between Creator and creation: "Say, if you love Allah, then follow me, so that Allah will love you and forgive your sins" (Qur'an 3:31). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) placed this spiritual affection above all worldly ties, stating: "None of you truly believes until Allah and His Messenger are more beloved to him than anything else" (Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 15).

Although being aware of this drive the Western perspective lacks the vertical concept that lies at the core of the Islamic perspective of connection: *mahabbah*, the divine love. *Mahabbah* is the force that redirects this deficit upward: love for Allah and His Messenger becomes the primary filter through which all human interactions receive their ultimate meaning. This is the missing piece in Western models of belongingness, which interpret connection purely as a horizontal, social phenomenon. Islamic thought, by contrast, views it as simultaneously vertical—anchored in the love of God and radiating outward into human relationships.

Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE) dedicated the entire 36th book of *Ihya Ulum al-Din*—entitled *Kitab al-Mahabbah waal-Shawq wa al-Uns wa al-Rida*—to *mahabbah* as the pinnacle of cardiac development. He contended that *mahabbah* is the heart's instinctive reaction to perceiving divine grace and excellence through purification. Rumi (c. 1258 CE) centers *mahabbah* in the fabric of reality—the *Masnavi* begins with the flute's (*ney*) lament for its place of origin—the soul's yearning for the divine root from which it was detached

(Rumi, c. 1258 CE, Book I, vv. 1-18). Iqbal (1915), in *Asrar-e-Khudi*, spoke of *ishq*—intense love—as a power transcending even logic, the fuel that powers *Khudi* (self-growth) and eventually converts it into *Bekhudi* (self-transcendence).

Self-Esteem: Karamah and the Islamic Idea of Human Dignity

Maslow (1954) designated self-esteem as the fourth level of human motivation. Rosenberg (1965) developed the foundational psychological scale to measure this trait, and ongoing research has linked self-esteem to emotional resilience, educational achievement, and healthy social networks (Baumeister et al., 2003). Baumeister et al. (2003), however, concluded that high self-esteem does not have a direct connection with academic performance or prevent anti-social tendencies, suggesting that they are not automatically improved or decrease but that the underlying source of self-worth matters far more than its absolute level.

If driven by the *nafs*, Islamic perspective considers the esteem needs still reside within the deficiency domain, as they aspire for validation, status, and competitive social standing. Nonetheless, this is the stage that marks the evolution through the three states of *nafs*. *Al-Nafs al-Ammarah* manifest itself through seeking validation by ego inflation, pride, and dominance over others. *Al-Nafs al-Lawwamah* starts to move toward an honest, internal moral assessment, measuring the self against its own shortcomings. Whereas, *Al-Nafs al-Mutma'innah* surpasses the desire of approval from others, finding honour as an *'abd* (servant) of Allah. This approach changes the person's focus away from a deficit-driven dependence on social validation and leads toward a growth-oriented awareness of dignity facilitated by the *Ruh* and *Qalb*.

Islamic perspective emphasizes human value at the core of its model, considering it as an ontological gift from Allah instead of something earned. The Qur'an declares: "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created" (Qur'an 17:70).

A critical distinction is maintained, however: while basic dignity is innate, true honor in the

sight of the Divine is earned through righteous behavior. As the Qur'an notes: "Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you" (Qur'an 49:13). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) affirmed this structural equality in his final sermon: "An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor a white person over a black person—except by *taqwa* and good action" (Musnad Ahmad, Hadith No. 23489).

In *Zad al-Ma'ad*, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350 CE) explains that a believer's primary self-worth comes from the realization of being a servant (*'abd*) of Allah—a role that combines profound humility with deep dignity. The Prophet (peace be upon him) articulated a spiritual law that reverses Western concepts of self-esteem: "He who is humble for the sake of Allah, Allah will raise him" (Muslim, d. 875 CE, Hadith No. 2588).

Furthermore, Al-Farabi (c. 940 CE) argued in *Mabadi Ara' Ahl al-Madinah al-Fadilah* that real human dignity is fully realized within an ethical community, where individuals develop their cognitive and moral skills for the collective welfare under divine guidance—offering a social and communal model of dignity that contrasts with the individualistic focus of Western esteem theories. The same is elaborated in the work of Ilyas, Niaz and Zeb (2026) that Western perspective views self-esteem as a result of one's self-evaluation based on external achievements, approval from and comparison with others, whereas, Islamic perspective highlights *tazkiyat-al-nafs* through a spiritual process, which shows focus on God centered and transcendental orientation.

Self-Actualization: Being, Ruh, and Fulfilling the Divine Trust

In Western psychology, self-actualization is defined as the realization of an individual's full potential. Maslow (1954) described self-actualized individuals as having an objective perception of reality, a high degree of self-acceptance, autonomy, creative energy, and a continuous appreciation for life. Rogers (1961) used the phrase "fully functioning person" to capture a similar state of emotional openness, presence, and trust in one's inner experience. Frankl (1963) took a different view, arguing that self-actualization is not achieved by direct pursuit,

but as a secondary effect of serving a purpose greater than oneself.

Maslow (1943) work indicated that only about 2% of the population reaches self-actualization, even this figure was not much empirically tested and depended on a limited sample of eminent historical personalities and relatives or acquaintances (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). This shortcoming highlights the need of such models that are diverse, provable and relevant to different demographics and cultural groups. Islamic viewpoint of self-actualization has a different vantage point. A fully functioning individual is not a sum total of personal potential, but also fulfilling his responsibility as an *adb* of God. The divine mandate (*amanah*) given to him/her is followed whole heartedly considering oneself as a servant (*abd*) and a vicegerent of Allah (*khalifah*) on earth (Qur'an 2:30). The self-actualized Muslim is the one who has attained this dual position by correcting the self through acquiring knowledge, and practicing virtue, that is, the peak is reached not by self-promotion but via synchronization with divine decree. Research into eudaimonic well-being and personal growth has consistently associated these traits with mental health and life satisfaction across cultures (Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 1993).

Allama Muhammad Iqbal: Concept of Khudi: Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1915) – highlighted a modern Islamic perspective of self-actualization with introducing the concept of *Khudi* (selfhood) in *Asrar-e-Khudi* that is considered a spiritual strength. Iqbal theorizes acquisition of *Khudi* is not mere acceptance of the self rather it is constructed through effort, control, and affiliation with God. Iqbal (1915), gave three phases through which *Khudi* matures: *ita'at* (conformity to divine law), which builds the self; *dabt-e-nafs* (self-mastery), which refines it; and *niyabat-e-ilahi* (divine vicegerency), where the self becomes a channel for divine intent. "The final aim of the ego is not to see something, but to be something." — Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 1930, p. 196. Significantly, Iqbal (1915) criticized the Sufi concept and viewed *fana* differently. He maintains that transcendence is incomplete without a fully developed self. In some sufi doctrines what appears to be *fana* may indicate a failure to grow. This advocates that self-transcendence requires a thoroughly established

self as one cannot renounce what one does not truly possess.

Ruh and Qalb: The Spiritual Dimensions of Being: The Qur'an treats the *Ruh* (spirit) as a divine enigma: "And they ask you about the soul. Say: The soul is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind has not been given of knowledge except a little" (Qur'an 17:85). The *ruh* is the direct breath of Allah into humanity (Qur'an 15:29)—the aspect most linked to its source. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated: "In the body there is a piece of flesh; if it is sound, the whole body is sound, and if it is corrupt, the whole body is corrupt. It is the heart" (Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 52). Al- Ghazali (c. 1107 CE) focused on the spiritual nature of the *qalb*, describing its ability to perceive divine truths beyond the reach of pure logic once purified. Ibn Sina (c. 1020 CE) differentiated in *Kitab al-Isharat* between systematic logic and the spiritual intuition (*hads*) of a refined heart—a mode of direct understanding surpassing reason alone.

Self-Transcendence: Fana and Baqa — Letting Go of Ego and Living in God: The journey reaches its peak in self-transcendence. In Islam, this is expressed through *fana* (ego-dissolution) and *baqa* (abiding in God)—states Maslow (1971) touched upon with peak experiences but could not structurally define. Koltko- Rivera (2006) suggests Maslow's later work on transcendence is crucial, as it deviates from his earlier humanistic framework. Research on peak experiences (Privette, 1983) and transcendent states (Maslow, 1971) shows these are among the most profound life events, though Western psychology has lacked a blueprint for their cultivation.

Understanding Fana: What the Dissolving of Ego Actually Means: The Qur'an establishes the basis for *fana*: "Everything will be destroyed except His Face" (Qur'an 28:88) and "Everyone upon the earth will perish, and there will remain the Face of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor" (Qur'an 55:26-27). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) defined ultimate proximity to God in a hadith qudsi: "My servant continues to draw near to Me through voluntary acts of worship until I love him. When I love him, I become the hearing with which he hears, the sight with which he sees..." (Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 6502). This signifies total

alignment with divine will rather than the person's annihilation.

Rumi's Account of Fana: Dying Before Death: Jalal al-Din Rumi (c. 1258 CE) presented a poetic portrayal of fana. His *Masnavi* begins with the cane of flute crying for the reed bed showing the soul's urge for a return to its divine source (Rumi, c. 1258 CE, Book I, vv. 1-18). Rumi documented that fana can be attained through *ishq* (love) which surpasses the ego's defenses which is just an intellectual force. "I died as a mineral and became a plant, I died as a plant and rose to animal, I died as animal and I was man. Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?" — Rumi, *Masnavi*, Book III, vv. 3901-3906 (c. 1258 CE). Rumi's insight is that fana is a progression of transcendences where each "death" reveals a higher existence. It is not the human being that dies, but the ego's false claim of centrality.

Al-Ghazali's Account of Fana: Systematic and Ethically Grounded: Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE) provided a logical picture of fana in *Ihya Ulum al-Din* and *Mishkat al-Anwar*. He considered it as the last station for the chaser that is attained only practicing *tazkiyah nafs* (a self-purification process). He cautiously differentiates fana from pantheism; fana is a psychological condition of complete divine cognizance and not literal fusion with the Creator. The human remains a creation, but the illusion of independence vanishes.

Ibn Arabi's Account of Fana: Al-Insan al-Kamil and the Perfect Human Being: Ibn Arabi (1229 CE), in *Fusus al-Hikam*, explores fana and baqa through the *al-insan al-kamil* (the Perfect Human). He argues that one who achieves this state becomes a mirror of divine qualities—the junction of the eternal and the temporal. Ibn Sina (c. 1020 CE) foresaw this, describing the highest stage of the *'Arif* as one who is "absent from himself and present with the Truth."

Baqa: Living in God — The True Culmination: Fana is the prelude to baqa. The Qur'an alludes to baqa in its description of the *nafs al-mutma'innah* (Qur'an 89:27-30). Al-Ghazali describes baqa as a state where a person's will harmonize with divine will because of love and refinement.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) described this intimate state as becoming the "hearing with which he hears" (Al-Bukhari, d. 870

CE, Hadith No. 6502).

Iqbal's Bekhudi: Self-Forgetfulness as the Philosophical Resolution: In *Rumuz-e-Bekhudi*, Allama Iqbal (1918) synthesizes fana and baqa via Bekhudi (self-transcendence). Bekhudi does not erase the self-built in Khudi but elevates it. The self transcends egoism through service and love, merging into divine and collective dimensions. Iqbal resolves the paradox: first the self must be strengthened (Khudi), and then it can be meaningfully transcended (fana).

Fana-Baqa Versus Western Transpersonal Psychology: Maslow (1971) claimed transcendence through peak experiences, Wilber (2000) found it in gamut of consciousness, and Grof (1985) via conditions away from the boundaries of ego. Although very important these potentially are different from fana and baqa in three ways: fana and baqa is a permanent change in being instead of transitory state that is attained through a lifelong, moral process of *tazkiyah* under the commands of Shari'ah; and its aim is getting aligned with a personal God (Allah) instead of an impersonal cosmos.

Self-Progression Through the Three Stages of the Nafs: A Psychology of Inner Development

The concept of self-actualization is approached very differently in Islamic psychology. A fully functioning individual is more than a mere show of maximized personal talents, instead its someone who has fulfilled their spiritual mandate (*amanah*) by acting as both a servant (*'abd*) of Allah and a custodian (*khalifah*) on the earth (Qur'an 2:30). Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE) maintained that this completion is inseparable from *tazkiyah al-nafs*—an endless process of moral perfection and spiritual mastery that pulls the individual closer to God.

Al-Nafs al-Ammarah bi al-Su' (the Soul Commanding to Evil): The Qur'an references this state through Prophet Yusuf (peace be upon him): "And I do not acquit myself. Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except those upon which my Lord has mercy" (Qur'an 12:53). This represents the ego dominated by whims, hostility, and instinct—focused on immediate gratification and oblivious to Allah. Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE), in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, portrays this as the soul captive to its urges, requiring rigorous spiritual

conditioning (*riyadha*) for change. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) cautioned: "The most beloved thing I fear for my nation after me is the opening of the pleasures of the world and its adornments" (Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 4015).

Al-Nafs al-Lawwamah (the Self-Reproaching Soul): The Qur'an highlights this stage with a divine vow: "And I swear by the self-reproaching soul" (Qur'an 75:2). This marks the phase of ethical awareness. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d.1350 CE), in *Madarij al-Salikin*, calls this the station of *muhasabah* (self-audit), where the conscience serves as a dynamic internal moral compass. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stated: "The wise person is he who takes account of himself and works for what comes after death" (Al-Tirmidhi, d. 892 CE, Hadith No. 2459). In Maslow's terminology, this stage coincides with the emergence of "being-needs" alongside "deficiency-needs."

Al-Nafs al-Mutma'innah (the Tranquil Soul): The Qur'an describes this peak state with profound imagery: "O reassured soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing to Him, and enter among My righteous servants and enter My Paradise" (Qur'an 89:27-30). This is the self that has attained internal serenity by aligning with the divine will a state maintained through consistent *tazkiyah al-nafs*. The Qur'an provides the basis: "Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest" (Qur'an 13:28). This condition surpasses Maslow's self-actualization because it involves not just emotional equilibrium but deep alignment with metaphysical reality.

Tazkiyah al-Nafs: The Purification Process That Makes Self-Actualization Possible

The Qur'an identifies self-purification as the ultimate gauge of success or failure: "He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it" (Qur'an 91:9-10). It further notes: "Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves" (Qur'an 13:11).

Purification is the core process of human development, not an auxiliary feature. Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE) structured *tazkiyah* in *Ihya Ulum al-Din* into four interactive phases: (1) *tawbah*—honest contrition: "Allah spreads out His Hand

during the night to accept the repentance of those who sinned during the day" (Muslim, d. 875 CE, Hadith No. 2759); (2) *muhasabah*—regular self-evaluation (Al-Tirmidhi, d. 892 CE, Hadith No.2459); (3) *muraqabah*—constant awareness of the Divine, defined as *ihsan*: "That you worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, then know that He sees you" (Muslim, d. 875 CE, Hadith No. 8); and (4) *riyadha*—methodical spiritual training based on the Prophetic tenet: "Indeed deeds are by intentions, and for every person is what he intended" (Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 1). Rumi (c. 1258 CE) in the *Masnavi* likened *tazkiyah* to cleansing the heart's mirror—wiping away the corrosion of the ego and worldliness to reveal the soul's inherent light. Ibn Arabi (1229 CE), in his book *Fusus al-Hikam*, portrayed the purified soul/person as *insan al-kamil* (perfect human), the one who mirrors the reflection of the divine attributes after completing the process of self-refinement and transcendence.

The Qur'an identifies internal purification as the ultimate metric of human success or failure, stating: "He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it" (Qur'an 91:9-10). It underscores this internal focus in another verse: "Indeed, Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves" (Qur'an 13:11).

Within this framework, purification is the primary mechanism of human development rather than an elective practice. In *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, Al-Ghazali (c. 1107 CE) organized *tazkiyah* into four interlocking practices:

Tawbah (Sincere Repentance): Returning to a state of alignment. This is grounded in the tradition: "Allah spreads out His Hand during the night to accept the repentance of those who sinned during the day" (Muslim, d. 875 CE, Hadith No. 2759).

Muhasabah (Consistent Self-Audit): Systematic internal reflection (Al-Tirmidhi, d. 892 CE, Hadith No. 2459). **Muraqabah (Mindful Awareness of God):** This corresponds directly to the definition of *ihsan*: "That you worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, then know that He sees you" (Muslim, d. 875 CE, Hadith No. 8).

Riyadha (Disciplined Spiritual Training):

Grounded in the foundational rule: "Indeed deeds are by intentions, and for every person is what he intended" (Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 1).

In the Masnavi, Rumi (c. 1258 CE) compared tazkiyah to polishing a rusted mirror—clearing away the distractions of the ego to allow the soul's natural light to shine through. Ibn Arabi (1229 CE) expanded on this in Fusus al-Hikam, describing the fully purified individual as the insan al-kamil (the Perfect Human Being), who serves as a clear mirror reflecting divine attributes after completing the journey of self-refinement and transcendence.

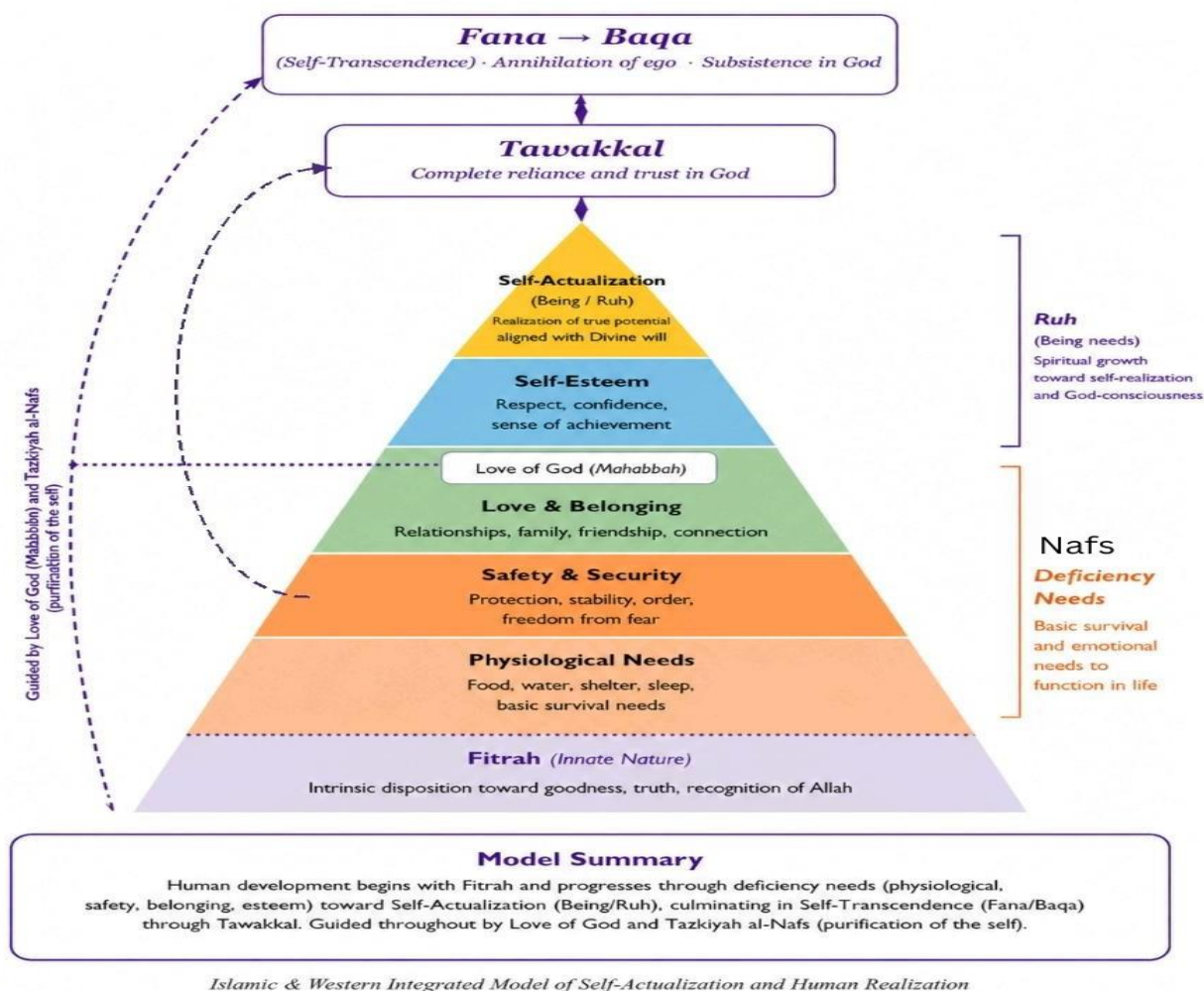
Where the Two Traditions Agree and Where They Differ

Both traditions agree that humans are capable of growth and that life is a transformative process.

Both acknowledge that the highest human state involves moving beyond self-interest (Frankl, 1963; Maslow, 1971). There is a shared quality between Maslow's peak experiences and the station of ihsan as states of expanded awareness.

Frankl's (1963) belief that the self is found by moving toward meaning aligns with the Prophetic statement: "The most beloved of people to Allah is the one who is most beneficial to people" (Al-Tabarani, d. 971 CE). However, the differences are basic: Western psychology is human-centered, while Islamic thought is God-centered. Western transcendence is often temporary and experiential; Islamic transcendence through fana-baqa is permanent and transformative. Western models also lack the specific mechanisms of tazkiyah al-nafs, mahabbah, and tawakkal.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Maslow's hierarchy of needs with an integrated Islamic approach



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At the base of the model is *fitrah*, being born with the capability of finding the single Deity as the creator and sustainer of the world. A person enters the world with both the body and *Ruh*. As the child is having limited cognitive capabilities, initially it starts the journey in the world with bodily needs as depicted by deficiency needs in Maslow's model. The child cannot differentiate between right and wrong at this point, the *nafs* is dominant here. Mostly individuals get trapped in the fulfillment of deficiency needs (*nafs ammara*, *nafs lawamma*) throughout their lives; the same being found by Maslow. The dotted line between *fitrah* and physiological needs show the capability of a person that the innate nature will emerge. As the child grows further safety needs emerge. Islam does not deny either of the needs, rather Quran has repeatedly ensured humans of their *rizq* and death which cannot be altered. The greatest security a Muslim feel is reliance on Allah which can turn into *tawakkal* and frees the shekels of doubt and insecurity. Likewise, the love of God is one of the important missing elements in the belonging needs of Maslow which is responsible of the progress of self. The deficiency needs correspond to the Islamic concept of *Nafs* whereas the self-esteem and self-actualization (Being needs) relate to the concept of *Ruh* that comes from above and yearns for its connection with the supreme deity help the process of transcendence. The inner *fitrah*, fueled by the love and reliance of Allah culminates in *Fana* (losing one's ego) and *Baqa* (living in the attributes of God) reaching the status of tranquil soul (*nafs e mutmainna*). The limitation of Maslow's theory that it cannot explain the exceptionals who do not fit in this hierarchy (like prophets and saints) is explained here that the love of God and complete reliance on Him (*Tawwakal*) can alter the sequence of the hierarchy. The more profound and firm is the love and reliance on God, the less important becomes the needs at the base of the hierarchy and one can even move beyond self-actualization to self-transcendence. The story of Abraham (A.S) shows us the peak of reliance and love of God by leaving his family in the deserted city of Makkah, realizing that the two living beings have all physiological, safety and belongingness need intact. Without the provision of any such thing in physical existence which can fulfill their basic needs, he left them their unattended by believing (*tawakkal*) in God to

make all provisions available to them. With the two spiritual needs, love of Allah and reliance on Him, his wife accepted the decision, and the world now witnesses the present state of Makkah.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study tried to capture the concept in detail but still it leaves room for limitations that needs acknowledgement to draw accurate scope and conclusions of the study within proper academic context.

The basic shortcoming of the study is its dependence on theoretical, conceptual analysis, textual interpretation, and comparative synthesis rather than empirical investigation. Consequently, the conclusions remain interpretive and philosophical rather than statistically generalizable (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Another important limitation is due to the use of translated text as the Islamic intellectual material utilized in this study was originally in Arabic and Persian which might not be conveyed in the same manner spiritually, philosophically, and poetically. Such as *fitrah*, *qalb*, *mahabbah*, *tawakkal*, *tazkiyah al-nafs*, *fana*, and *baqa* which English approximations often capture only partially.

Additionally, Western psychological constructs such as self-esteem, attachment, well-being, and self-actualization have undergone decades of psychometric refinement and experimental validation. In contrast, although increasing scholarly attention has been directed toward areas such as Islamic spirituality, religious coping, and trust in Allah (Alosman & Mohamad Hamidi, 2025), many Islamic psychological concepts remain underdeveloped within contemporary empirical research paradigms like *fitrah*, *mahabbah*, *fana*, *baqa*, and *tazkiyah al-nafs*.

Conclusion

This study has focused on development of selfhood in the human beings including striving for meaning, attaining and surrendering selfhood, beginning from the first quest of consciousness to the final possibility of transcendence. Utilizing a comparative approach, the study incorporated Western humanistic psychology and Islamic intellectual thought, not limiting to how human beings grow, rather what they are ultimately

growing towards.

Starting from the Islamic conception of *fitrah* (Qur'an 30:30; Al-Bukhari, d. 870 CE, Hadith No. 1358), the study mapped the human journey through material and psychological needs proposed by Maslow and finally self-transcendence through *fana* and *baqa*. Throughout the journey the process is continued through *mahabbah* (the love of Allah). The gap in Maslow's (Maslow, 1954; Tay & Diener, 2011) theory as it identifies transcendence, but it cannot sufficiently explain its origin, mechanism, or permanence. Islamic psychology fills these gaps by a spiritual nature of human beings as the longing for transcendence exists because the soul originates from a divine source and remains inwardly drawn toward return (Qur'an 15:29). The mechanism enabling transformation is *tazkiyah al-nafs*—the disciplined purification of the self through remembrance, repentance,

worship, self-accounting, and ethical struggle (Qur'an 91:9–10). The passage from ego-centered existence into transcendence occurs through *tawakkal*: surrendering attachment to outcomes and placing reliance entirely upon Allah (Qur'an 65:3). And the sustaining energy behind this entire developmental process is *mahabbah*—love so profound that, in the writings of Rumi and Al-Ghazali, it becomes the very language through which existence itself is understood.

Ultimately, Islamic developmental psychology culminates in the Qur'anic image of the *nafs al-mutma'innah*: “O reassured soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing to Him.” (Qur'an 89:27–28)

The human being begins with *fitrah*, passes through struggle, purification, discipline, love, and surrender, and ultimately arrives at *baqa*—abiding in nearness to Allah after the illusion of isolated ego has dissolved.

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