

# Personality from the perspective of the Holy Quran: A qualitative research

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## ABSTRACT

It is necessary to integrate our knowledge of psychological issues with our knowledge and findings of what God has presented to us in the Holy Quran. The focus of this study is to explain and accurately understand the concept of personality from the perspective of one of the most solid Islamic documents, i.e. the Holy Quran. The present qualitative research analyzes the content of Quranic verses. Then, the content analysis process was carried out using the Graneheim and Lundman method. Seventeen verses related to the human personality were extracted, and including the similar verses, a total of 155 verses from 9 Surahs, were content analyzed. Three themes of "action", "guidance" and "path", emerged from the Holy Quran in the present study, which are the key dimensions of the personality. The discovery and identification of the structure of basic concepts such as personality, which has a great impact on the actions and behaviors of humans and, on the other hand, greatly depends on religious culture and beliefs, requires fundamental research and theorizing using religious texts. The present study, presenting the content analysis of Quranic verses regarding one of the fundamental concepts in humanities, is an example for clarifying this research approach on the Islamic religious texts.

**Keywords:** Personality, qualitative research, Holy Quran.

## Introduction

The Holy Quran that is the holy book of Muslims, is an enlightening light <sup>[1]</sup> that shines and illuminates. In the light of the Quran, everything is seen like health subjects; all mistakes and doubts are eliminated and the facts become clear. The meaning of the real health and the related issues in Islam, depend on a holistic approach to health <sup>[2]</sup>.

Personality is an important issue in health that sensitizes human mind and creates the need for more information about it every day <sup>[3]</sup>. Personality consists of traits or tendencies that lead to

individual differences in behavior, behavioral stability over time, and the continuity of behavior in various situations <sup>[4]</sup>. According to Cloninger, a well-known theorist in this field, personality is a dynamic organization of psychophysiological systems within an individual that determines a kind of unique adaptation to the environment <sup>[5]</sup>.

In addition to the definitions and theories presented for personality, the conceptual framework that helps identify phenomena and concepts, and provides a complete picture of concepts <sup>[6]</sup> is not perfect for personality; one of the reasons for which is the inadequacy of the usual methods of study <sup>[7]</sup>.

A close evaluation of the Holy Quran will lead us to develop theoretical perspectives on each of our theoretical concepts <sup>[8]</sup>. It is necessary to integrate our knowledge of psychological issues with our knowledge and findings of what God has presented to us in the Holy Quran. Such knowledge will not depend on different cultures and situations. That the theories, definitions and conceptual frameworks of personality are no exception <sup>[9]</sup>.

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Islamic ideas about personality had been created before the development of scientific methods <sup>[10]</sup>, meanwhile, no theories are available that are both accepted by the international associations regarding conventional scientific methodology and developed based on Islamic resources. This important issue requires the explanation and precise understanding of this concept in Islamic sources through scientific research methods, including qualitative studies. Among the qualitative studies, the appropriate option is the content analysis <sup>[11, 12]</sup> that has the highest consistency in researching various issues in the context of Islamic resources. Qualitative studies using the Holy Quran will present the identification and disclosure of phenomena and psychological concepts with a different look <sup>[13]</sup>. The focus of this study is to explain and accurately understand the concept of personality from the perspective of one of the most solid Islamic documents, i.e. the Holy Quran, which, by means of a qualitative analytical method, will also provide a framework for the concept <sup>[14]</sup>.

## Methods

The present qualitative content analysis analyzes the content of Quranic verses. Multiple searches, reviews, and discussions with experts in the Quranic sciences showed that the best word in the Quran that matches "personality" is "Shakelah" (شَاكِلَه) /ʃakɛlæ/. The word "Shakelah" has once appeared in the Holy Quran in the Surah of Al-Isra', verse 84. In order to find verses related to the aforementioned word, the Quranic word of Shakelah was searched in the book "Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras" <sup>[15]</sup>. This renowned book approved by the Quranic scholars presents the meaning of each word in its context, its word family, its relation with other words in that family and its roots. A network of related verses was thus formed. Subsequently, verses similar to this verse network were extracted from the book of Thematic research method in The Holy Quran <sup>[16]</sup>, which has organized the themes of verses based on Sajawandi's Al-Woqoof and conducted a comprehensive research on written documents in different centuries and different Islamic regions. Then the Persian translation of the verses was obtained from the translation by Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi <sup>[17]</sup>.

## Data Analysis

Each series of similar verses was considered as a unit of analysis, and the content analysis process was carried out using the Graneheim and Lundman method <sup>[18]</sup>. After reading each unit of analysis and understanding it, meaning units were extracted; then the codes were formed which can be called the labels of these meaning units. Then the codes were grouped based on their content similarities and thus categories were formed. In the next step, the themes were formed which underlie the content grouped together in the categories. Finally, the concept of personality was explained based on the structure of the codes, categories, and themes.

## Data Rigor and Trustworthiness

In order to obtain the credibility of the results, the following issues were considered in this study <sup>[19]</sup>: prolonged engagement and immersion; external check, that is, checking the extracted codes by a Quranic scientist; and researcher credibility, which is a record of various activities of the author in the field of qualitative research and education and participation in qualitative research at the national level.

## Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the Research Council of Iran University of Medical Sciences under the code 94-05-185-27267.

## Results

Seventeen verses related to the human personality were extracted, and including the similar verses, a total of 155 verses from 9 Surahs of Al-Lail (The Nigh), At-Takwir (The Enfolding), An-Naba' (The Tiding), Al-Insan (The Human), Al-Muddathir (The Covered One), Al-Muzzammil (The Enwrapped One), Fussilat (Expounded), Al-Isra' (The Night Journey), An-Nisa' (Women), were content analyzed.

Three themes of "action", "guidance" and "path", emerged from the Holy Quran in the present study, which are the key dimensions of the personality, and are described along with their categories. The codes for each category that are the components of this concept are presented in Table 1.

**Action:** Action is the first extracted theme and one of the dimensions of the concept of personality that includes the categories efforts, will and desire. Each of these categories has some codes that are presented in Table 1 in details, and the key verses attributed to each of the categories are as follows, respectively (the translation of verses for manuscript, is by Abdullah Yusuf Ali extracted from: <http://zeker.tebyan.net>): Verily, (the ends) ye strive for are diverse<sup>1</sup> (Al-Quran, 92:4); But ye shall not will except as Allah wills, the Cherisher of the Worlds<sup>2</sup> (Al-Quran, 81:29); But ye will not, except as Allah wills; for Allah is full of Knowledge and Wisdom<sup>3</sup> (Al-Quran, 76:30).

**Guidance:** Guidance is the second extracted theme and another dimension of the concept of personality, which includes the categories of message and guide. The codes for these categories are presented in Table 1, and the key verses associated with each of the categories are as follows, respectively: Verily this is no less than a Message to (all) the Worlds; (With profit) to whoever among you wills to go straight<sup>4</sup> (Al-Quran, 81: 27,28); Verily We take upon Ourselves to guide<sup>5</sup> (Al-Quran, 92:12).

<sup>1</sup> إِنَّ سَعْيَكُمْ لَشَتَّى

<sup>2</sup> وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

<sup>3</sup> وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

**Path:** Path is the third theme and the next concept of personality that includes the categories of the straight path and finding the path. The codes for these categories are shown in Table 1, and the key verses associated with each of the categories are as follows, respectively: Say: "Everyone acts according to his own disposition: But your Lord knows best who it is that is best guided on the Way"<sup>6</sup> (Al-Quran, 17:84); Verily this is an Admonition: therefore, whoso will, let him take a (straight) path to his Lord!<sup>7</sup> (Al-Quran, 73:19).

The concept extracted from human personality based on this content analysis is:

"Human beings act on the basis of their own Shakelah (personality), and thus the Shakelah (personality) is effective in placing human in the straightest path. The will and desire that leads to the diversity of human actions is also the result of God's will, which is based on the provisions of the system of creation. Meanwhile, human beings are guided by helping guides and the message (of Quran) towards the straightest path".

## Discussion

The Holy Quran is full of behavioral instructions for the promotion of health<sup>[20]</sup>. There is no issue in Quran that is in contrast to human health<sup>[21]</sup>. A review of the literature and recent studies in Iran on health-related Quranic topics has revealed that most of these studies have been conducted on repetitive topics, often with quantitative approaches. Therefore, it is strongly suggested that the strategy of health-related Quranic studies be reassessed<sup>[22]</sup>.

Our study is based on a psychological subject with a completely different and innovative approach. The examined subject is a concept that many psychologists and humanities scholars still think of<sup>[23]</sup>, Because its problems are for life<sup>[24]</sup>. The selected methodology approach is also an approach that depicts this concept in a structural way from the perspective of the Holy Quran.

What is presented in this research as the concept of personality is a set of efforts, will and desire of the people that can be guided and is effective in placing them in the straight path. The concept of personality presented in this study, which corresponds to the word "Shakelah" in Quran, is an integrated system of human behaviors that fully coincides with theories by personality theorists such as Allport, Block, Mayer and Pervin throughout the history of theorization in this field<sup>[7]</sup>.

The first extracted theme, action, consists of the categories of effort, will and desire, and as the main component of the personality in this study, and corresponds with several theories in this field that indicate the formation of personality in human behavior<sup>[25]</sup>. It is in line with the results of Okhovvat on the semantics of Shakelah<sup>[3]</sup>, which considers Shakelah as the control of the self over action, determining the scope of action and facilitating action.

The theme of guidance by the Great God that was the second extracted theme and another component of the personality in this study, is influenced by the Islamic belief, thus was only consistent with the results of the study of Okhovvat<sup>[3]</sup>, who considers Shakelah a necessity for guidance.

The third theme, which aimed at finding the straight path that human is guided to in life and the influence of personality in this choice, cannot be consistent with the findings from empirical studies, given the divine and unity ideology that governs this study. However, confirming the structure of this concept, one can point out that one of the fundamental questions asked by psychologists regarding personality is "What is our goal in life?"<sup>[6]</sup> which is answered by this extracted theme.

The way religious beliefs affect the views of individuals about human (Anthropology) is not studied, however, any religion has ideas that influence the interpretation of individuals from the behavior and conduct of humans, which is the focus of the discussion on the subject of personality<sup>[10]</sup>. Therefore, considering the subject as well as the new approach of the present study, there is not much research to compare the results of this study with.

Because cultural backgrounds, researcher's experiences, and many other factors influence the results of such analysis<sup>[26]</sup>, it is recommended that research be conducted with a qualitative methodology, and content analysis approaches by other scholars and on other well-known Islamic texts such as hadiths so that a comprehensive and consensual concept of personality can be achieved in Islam by comparing their results.

## Conclusion

The discovery and identification of the structure of basic concepts such as personality, which has a great impact on the actions and behaviors of humans and, on the other hand, greatly depends on religious culture and beliefs, requires fundamental research and theorizing using religious texts. The present study, presenting the content analysis of Quranic verses regarding one of the fundamental concepts in humanities, is an example for clarifying this research approach on the Islamic religious texts.

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**Table 1: The extracted codes, categories, and themes related to the human personality in the Holy Quran**

Theme	Category	Code
Action	Efforts	The variety of efforts
		The need to ask for a guiding help from God
	Will	The will of men depending on the will of God
Human freedom in doing things		
Desire	Shakelah	The action of every human being according to his Shakelah
		Returning to the God subject to wanting

	The will of man subject to the will of God (providence = legality) The pride and disdain of man from blessings Human beings' disappointment in evil things
	The message of Quran on condition of seeking the straight path
Message	The God's warning for all Some people turn away from the message
Guidance	Quran: warning Guidance by God
	God warning about the divine punishment Warning subject to the will of God
Guide	The guidance and healing of the Quran for believers Healing and mercy of the Quran for believers Quran increases the loss of the wicked
Path	Straight The path of some people, more guided Acting on the guidance of God leads to the straight path The ease of path of some people (almsgivers, pious people, and those who approve the divine rewards) Salvation for pious people
	Finding A warning if asked for, a path to God Entering the mercy of God by His will A distinguishing warning in determining the path of humans Identifying people with a more guiding path with God

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