Family Therapy With Palestinian Arabs: Building on Inherent Habits of Spirituality for Psychological Well-Being

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I received my training as a couple and family therapist in the United States. During that period, I worked with American as well as immigrant families. Some of them were Arabs from the Arab World, and some Palestinians, citizens of Israel or the Palestinian Authority.[1] It was obvious to me that cases of Arab clients[2] reverberate with their original culture, including the religious and spiritual norms they carried. I recognized that special attention has to be paid to the clients' context of religiosity and spirituality, as important components of their cultural background and daily life.

[1] The terminology that describes Palestinians reflects one's political attitude about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Other names are used include Israeli-Arabs, Arab-Israelis, minorities in Israel, Non-Jewish citizens, among others. This chapter will use the terms, "Palestinian citizens of Israel," or "Arabs," according to the context (for further reading on this issues, see Rabinowitz & Abu-Baker, 2005). Since daily life in Israel is highly influenced by Jewish laws, religious and other aspects of the lives of Muslims, Christians and Druze citizens are highly influenced by politics.

[2] Arabs live in the Middle East and North Africa in 22 countries, or what is also called the "Arab World" – all share the same culture, language and history. Palestinians are Arabs; some of them (1.2 million) live as citizens in Israel; 3.5 million live in the Palestinian Authority and the rest (about 10 million) live in other Arab countries or in the Diaspora. Most Arabs are Muslims. Christians make up about 10–15% of the Middle Eastern population and about 9% of Palestinians in Israel while Druze areapproximately about 1% in the Middle East and about 8% in Israel.

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Islam as the Compass of Arab Culture

Arabs adopted Islam when it was established in the year 622. Since then, Islam has influenced Arabic culture and language and saved it. The Quran, the holy book and the constitution of Muslims, is written in Arabic, and all prayers should be conducted in Arabic for all Muslims in the world.[3] The Quran saved classical Arabic as an ancient Semitic language. Islam forms and organizes the believers' thinking and how they experience life.

Arab Muslim, Christian, and Druze communities of the Middle East frequently turn to spirituality in times of stress and loss, integrating it harmoniously within daily life. Spiritual practice may be marked by symbols such as dress code, tools, or special language, engaging family and community support in times of need. Spiritual rituals are designed to help people confront and digest stressful events, learn from them and find new meanings. Their main goal is to gain a sense of collaboration in managing the stressful event with the supernatural power[4] *Allah*/God, that, it is believed, caused it in the first place. Spirituality thus empowers people who feel helpless and powerless.

This chapter emphasizes the contributions of religiosity and spirituality to psychological well-being for Palestinians. It shares examples of using spiritual intuitions of national/political or personal tension, uncertainty, danger, sadness, fear, and loss. It introduces the idea of combining internal motivation of the client with an external locus of control (religious belief). This chapter suggests implications for therapy and social mental health for the benefit of students, practitioners, and other professionals who are interested in the influence of religion, culture, and politics on daily life of Palestinians or in the Arab World.

The next section introduces a case study that will be analyzed and used in several sections throughout the chapter.

Case Example

Nuha was a 25-year-old single Palestinian woman, a citizen of Israel. She adopted Western dress code and secular lifestyle, had obtained an academic degree, and worked in her family business. Nuha used to pray the five daily obligatory prayers Muslims should maintain and was fasting once a year the whole month of Ramadan. She sought therapy for feeling depressed. In the session, Nuha hesitantly revealed that 3 months prior to starting therapy, she was possessed by an "evil soul" *roh sherera*. She suffered from constant abdominal aches, sequential tantrums, uncontrolled crying, and loss of weight. Over the course of 2 months, she was hospitalized twice for her severe abdominal aches. Doctors were not able to diagnose the reason

[3] About 2.2 bilion

[4] Allah is the Arabic name of God. Muslims believe that it is the same God of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

for her pain. Her sister, an ultrareligious Muslim who covers her head and face with black veil (*Niqab* or *Borkah*), suggested that Nuha start a treatment based on religion.[5] Nuha moved to her sister's house and got special therapy based on Islamic principles led by two Muslim clergy *sheikhs*. The ritual included reciting special verses from the Quran three hundred times each, twice a day, while also maintaining the five-time regular prayers and listening to the Quran for the rest of the day. This therapy plan was kept as a secret from Nuha's parents and other nonreligious siblings. Nuha explained the need for secrecy as "People think that this kind of therapy using religion is primitive and not useful. Since I don't veil and don't dress up as a religious Muslim woman, people don't believe that I'm spiritual and very religious. Even I was afraid that you will misunderstand me and misjudge me."

I was aware of Nuha's concerns. Most people in my society do not accept both this and lifestyle, specifically when the dress code of Muslim women does not fit the lifestyle she declares. Also therapists, mainly those who were trained in Israeli or Western institutions, relate to therapy practices reliant on religious beliefs as "naïve" or "primitive" or "influenced by placebo effect"(Arieli & Aychen, 1994; Endrawes, O'Brien, & Wilkes, 2007; Sengers, 2003).

Therapy with Nuha proceeded with total acceptance of integrating my therapeutic work and the spiritual/religious therapy. I showed interest in the procedures she was still practicing in accordance with the therapy plan of the two *Sheikhs*. I suggested to incorporate relaxation and directed imagery tools while citing verses from the Quran or while praying five times a day. As a family therapist, learning more about the practices of therapy using Islam helped me be acquainted with Nuha's family dynamics including power relations, secrecy, issues in consensus, and fanatic ideas. I related to the "evil soul" as terminology Nuha used to express her experience. A few months later, Nuha was able to flourish and carry out her life plans without any physical pain or psychological stress.

What made Nuha hide the special spiritual/religious therapy from her family and hesitate to share that experience with me as her therapist?

In order to introduce the comprehensive answer to this simple question, one should enlarge the focus to see the influence of larger systems on Nuha's life. The policy of the Israeli regime relates to religious Muslims as a resistant movement who maintain ideology against Israel. Members of the Islamic Movement in Israel relate to secular Muslims as "non-believers." Nuha's religious sister belonged to the Islamic Movement. Her norms, dress code, lifestyle—including her relation with her husband—all were influenced by their special version of interpreting Islam. Nuha wanted to blend her western lifestyle with her Islamic/spiritual ideology. Had she declared that she was a devoted Muslim, she would face suspicion from two directions: (a) the Israeli authorities for her Muslim religious belief system and (b) by her society for her Western lifestyle. In order to protect herself, she practiced her spiritual and religious life secretly, losing the community support aspect of common worship and spirituality. Nuha lived in a type of double bind: "You are damned if you are religious and if you are not!".

[5] For further reading on this issue see Hussain (2011).

Thinking, Language, and Locus of Control as Constructed Belief System

It is uncommon to be "purely" secular in the Islamic Arab world. According to Shouby (1951), language reflects a way of thinking and social relations. An Arab person, Muslim, Christian, or Druze, uses the name of God countless times a day as a part of their thinking system. When a religious Muslim prays five times daily, then he or she mentions the name of God at least a hundred times. In addition, the name of God should be mentioned in ordinary daily life acts such as before preparing dough or food, before eating, when entering an empty room or dark place, as an opening to all prayers, as a protection from Satan before sexual intercourse, preceding a speech, and before closing a business deal. All these religious practices penetrate daily life and are highly adopted among religious and secular Arabs from all religions in the construction of their traditions.

Additionally, the presence of God exists intensively in Arabic language due to codex of social politeness. A person should wish the partner in the conversation pleasant wishes that ask God to make a decision for the benefit of that person. According to religious belief, a Muslim should not plan any step in life without asking God to support that plan. *In shaa'Allah,* translated literally as "if God permits," is used by Arabs as "yes I want" in order to let God's decision lead theirs. This notion is influenced by the belief that people's lives are controlled by God's decisions.

I became aware of the depth of the presence of God in Arabic language during my studies in the USA. I was amazed to discover how many times during a short conversation an Arab pronounces the name of God. It starts with the greeting question "how are you;" its answer should include the sentence "Praise God" *alhamdu li Allah.* The full answer could be "I'm feeling very good, Praise God" or "I'm feeling very sick, Praise God." When during the conversation, the speakers have a decision, they should include the sentence *bi ithin Allah* "if God allows" or *in shaa Alla* "if God permits." Between these opening and closing sentences lives a culture that relies on God as the responsible guide, comforter, and master of a person's life. If a person answers to the first question "how do you feel" by "great, everything is fine, I'm doing very well," Muslims believe that soon God will put that person in a suffering experience so he or she would learn that they are not masters of their lives, rather the guardians. If a person decides regarding a plan without adding the sentence *in shaa'Allah* if God permits, then unexpected obstacles will prevent that plan from being achieved. This language reflects a culture that is influenced by Islam as a faith that teaches that the locus is external and it is held in the hands of God.

When Nuha became disturbed, she was in a crossroad in her life where she felt that her plans were exploding in her face one after the other. When her physical pain exacerbated, and her sister had diagnosed her by having "evil soul" in her body, she explained all events as "a message" from God. Among other issues she had discussed in therapy with me, she wanted to find a flow path where she could be guilt-free while combining her own form of religiosity, spirituality, and secular lifestyle.

Nuha's need was familiar to me as I myself grew up in a family and community that were totally secular and had moved gradually to diverse kinds of religiosity and fanaticism.

I had to create a plan where Nuha had to be self-motivated to cure her complaints, and synchronize that with other belief system in where she believed that God's plan was to help her cure. So her belief in her inner motivation should support her belief in the external locus of control in her life. One may think that the two belief systems are contradictory, or encouraging her to adopt helplessness. Often times Western trained therapists try to teach Muslim Arabs to learn to be self-motivated and self-responsible and shift to internal locus of control (Ghorbani, Watson, & Khan, 2007; Yousef, 2000). This one-sided intervention can at best only be partly successful, because a full adaptation to it means that a person would believe that he or she could plan and fulfill all their wishes without God's help, thought that is considered as sinful—a notion that could cause serious psychological and social problems.

I will share the process of socialization to Islamic lifestyle in my own family of origin as a psychosocial and political narrative of a family that shares the same cultural background as Nuha's.

Heritage and Religious Socialization

In Arab societies, people inherit their ascribed religion, then some of them chose it as their lifestyle and their identity through the education and socialization process they go through (Peek, 2005). School curriculum in most of the Arab and Muslim countries teaches Islam lessons as a philosophy and as a daily practice. The Arab media have some specialized channels for teaching Islam and the lifestyle of Prophet Muhammad. The education system and socialization process cooperate to raise Muslims to adopt Islam as their constitution and way of being. Not all Arab Muslims adopt the five obliged pillars of Islam or practice the daily obliged prayers or choose the Islamic dress code. However, the components of their individual, family, and social norms are rooted deeply in the Quran and *Sunnah.* For example, people who believe in the Quran and *Sunnah* without practicing any of the worship may consider themselves as "traditional believers." Some other people fast the month of Ramadan or pray on Fridays in the mosque as a family or community tradition more than as a religious practice. When Muslims are devoted in practicing all obliged pillars of Islam on a daily basis, including dress code, they would be considered as religious Muslims. It is expected that at different stages in their lives, Muslims choose the degree of their commitment to their religiosity and spirituality. Muslims are not allowed to convert to other religions or to be atheist (Ghorbani et al., 2007).

I was born to a Muslim traditional family. In the early years of 1960s, as a young couple, my parents, like other Palestinian people their age, maintained a combination of modern and traditional lifestyle, and similar attitude toward religion. My parents' dress code was Western—an influence of the British Mandate on Palestine,

as was their educational plan to provide equal chances for their female and male children. According to the traditions, my mother and all her six children had to obey the father as the male and the elder. We used to fast the whole month of Ramadan. None of us were committed to the five-time daily prayers. Instead, my father used to pray in the mosque the Muslim prayers for the high holy days. Similar to my parents at that period, most other Palestinians in my small town related to themselves as traditional—not "religious." A small community of few families who belonged to a Sufi order lived in a courtyard adjacent to their own mosque and maintained their daily prayers and weekly ceremonies. Their female elders covered their head with white long chiffon shawls while all others adopted western dress code. They were a visible religious community in my small town.

When I was born, the Palestinian society in Israel was still suffering from the post-trauma of the 1948 *Nakba*, when Palestinians lost their homeland; properties and coherent families were torn between Arab countries, where they lived as refugees. New regime, new language, new dominant religion, and new lifestyle were imposed on Palestinians who remained inside the borders of what became the state of Israel.

The private Catholic school Terra Sancta was very close to our house. My parents, as many other Muslim families in the old city of Acre, decided to send their children to gain good education and concrete discipline in the Catholic school. Religion as school discipline was not among their concerns.

Annexed to the school stood a small monastery with a small church that was established in the year 1217. Catholic priests from Europe lived in it and served Christians in the holy land—Terra Sancta. When I went to school, priests from Italy and Scotland lived in the monastery, led the mass on Sundays, and directed the school. In comparison to our home that, at that time, did not include any Islamic symbol or accessory, the monastery and church were decorated with rich icons and statues for Jesus, Mary, and other saints; the priests themselves, in their brown long gowns, were a kind of living Christian symbols.

Islam does not allow drawing portraits of God or Prophet Muhammad due to a cultural concern that aims not to compromise the unity and transcendence of God (Esposito, 1988). The ban became absolute and was extended to any representation in art of the human form for fear that such statues or paintings might lead to idol worship.

As a child, it was difficult for my imagination to create a picture of Prophet Mohammad, while the statues and pictures of Jesus around me helped me to empathize with his short yet full life.

Multiple Narratives in Religions and in Family Therapy

In my private Catholic school, Christian students had a mandatory religion class while Muslims had a free time. In third grade, I asked for a special permission to attend the class in order to hear stories about prophets' lives. I was totally

hypnotized with each story that described relations between individuals, emotions, mind, family, community, and God. At that age, I was not able to differentiate between myth and reality. Oftentimes I left the class full with tears for sympathizing with a person or more in each story. My experience in that class acted as a winch that drew me to become interested both in relationships and in the spiritual world.

When I was in fifth grade, we started having classes about Islam. The curriculum of teaching Islam as a subject at elementary school focused on the philosophy of Islam, learning by heart verses of the Quran, studying obligatory prayers, and gaining knowledge about faith and rituals of worship.

Stories about Prophet Mohammad and his family were very sad. His life included loss, orphanhood, and detachment from several parental figures. I had to imagine Prophet Mohammad and his family and friends in different periods of his life and create a portrait of him that suited his persona. The goal of teaching his story was to follow his life path and adopt his ideas, wisdom, and ways he practiced life and Islam. That is the *Sunnah'*.

In sixth grade, I started to pray five times a day and tried to veil—without success. It was under the influence of the fear I accumulated from the description of the "doom's day" and the "judgment's day" I learned in the classes. During that period, I was busy thinking about the type of relation that has to develop between me, a small girl, and God, the Mighty. Beside the fear, I knew that the development of this relation was taking the wrong way. I do not remember how long this period had lasted: days, weeks, or months. My family had not supported nor rejected my acts. However, in my surroundings at that time, a young person who became religious was judged as "backward."

In ninth grade, and for the following 4 years, I learned Judaism, mainly *Torah, Mishnah, Talmud*, and "*Perkee Avot*" as part of the Israeli curriculum for Palestinian schools. In those classes, faith, language, narratives, history, and politics influenced the interpretations of the text and oftentimes caused heated discussions regarding the national subtext. Now that I had already studied three religions, I experienced constant comparisons between religious narratives. Four years in high school were a type of preparation for my later training in family therapy when I learned to listen to multiple versions of the same story and to accept the presence of multiple realities for couples and families as for religions and nations.

The next section introduces two ideas: (a) adopting religion and spirituality as a way to deal with loss and trauma and (b) conducting worship practices as an opportunity to experience "open access" with God that allows undeviating monologues directed to him. These two ideas help people in distress to feel helped and guided. The section also offers examples of the connection between major life events with various practices of religiosity and spirituality for secular, traditional, and religious Muslims.

Trauma, Loss, and Spirituality

Prayers and Religious Monologues as a Therapy

My parents became devoted Muslims after the death of my sister, their first-born, at the age of 25 years. The day she went into deep coma for 10 days before her death, she let the people who surrounded her bed know that female deceased relatives whom she mentioned by their names were visiting her for the last week and had promised to accompany her in her last journey. She had described their white shining dresses and the light of their aura. Few tears dropped from her eyes, not having energy for more. My sister, who never related to herself as a religious person, asked us to read loudly verses of the Quran, since that was a therapy for her headaches. No one asked questions. I believe that we related to her at that moment as the "esoteric knower"—this person who was moving back and forth between this life and the afterlife. I believe that we did not have the terminology to form proper questions for that type of rare conversation.

In the ninth day of diving deep in coma, a day before my sister's death, my father had a dream where my sister asked him to pray for her and to become closer to God himself. My father was sure that what he had experienced was not a dream rather a real talk between him and his daughter, who was between the two forms of life. Since that day, religion, spirituality, and traumas have influenced my psychological development and my family's, in various ways. The death of my sister transformed our relationship with her from what we were used to, to a new relationship with what we experienced as "her spirit." Embracing religion and spirituality became (a) the only possible source of remedy to the injured souls caused by the trauma of death and (b) the way to continue having a relation with her in her new form as "a spirit."

Oftentimes a trauma causes individuals or families to "become religious" or to "hold for their Islam." The loss of beloved ones, and thinking about their spirits, makes people engage in spirituality, some during the mourning period and others for the rest of their lives.

After the death of my sister, my parents related to religion in different ways: My mother adopted Muslim dress code and veiled, became spiritual, prayed the obligatory five prayers, and prayed many voluntary prayers in order to spend more time in the presence of God. She also prayed for the previous years that she was not devoted. After the prayer, my mother used to negotiate and bargain with God regarding the health, life, success, and happiness of her children. Becoming devoted helped my mother to have a direct relation with God, who, she believed, is taking care of her daughter. She used to say to God "you sent her to me and you took your present back. Now, keep the rest of my children and take me before you take any of them." Oftentimes, these crying out monologues *Monajat* ended with uncontrollable tears. This direct speech with God let my mother calm her agony. The prayers functioned both as a spiritual encounter and as therapy for her grief. My mother extended her

religious education through some reading and by watching some specialized TV channels.

My father focused on the sociability of the religiosity. As a man, he prayed in the mosque, a practice that kept him social, and brought him to be a member in the Islamic council in his town. Praying in the mosque, not alone at home, kept my father away from falling down into depression.

My mother used to praise herself that she never asked God "why he decided to take her daughter. Instead she used to say "praise God, '*alhamdu li Allah'* he took my daughter." Muslims who blame God put themselves in an equal position that enables them to criticize—an act that is considered as a sin in Islam. In contrast, people who accept whatever they experience and consider it as a part of a message God sends to them should praise God to show their faith. "Praise God" means that they accept what is taking place in their lives. Often, Muslims are misunderstood for their praise of God in such circumstances (El-Islam, 1982).

Prophet Mohammad related to God as a companion whom he could communicate with indirectly through Gabriel and directly through the mind and the emotions. He was constantly having monologues *Monajat,* that is, silent spiritual talks with God. Prophet Muhammad related to God as the ultimate love. People in distress relate to their experience as a chance to learn to become religious and spiritual and follow the way of Prophet Mohammad (*Sunnah*).

Trauma and Locus of Control

According to Kubler-Ross (1969), a person goes through five stages in the process of grief and remedy: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. When a Muslim shows an immediate acknowledgment of the loss and declares to accept it by declaring, "Praise God, I lost my daughter," this makes stage 5 the first stage. This act taken by grieving people represents total obedience to God. People around the mourning person will remind her or him to show total obedience to God by accepting "His judgment."

It seems that among Arab Muslims, grief is the perfect time to remind people regarding their relationship with God "the owner of all souls and spirits, who sends them as gifts and claims them back." If people decide at time of distress to show anger, Muslims believe that they may experience more loss. Therefore, people are trained and often are helped to show immediate acceptance of loss. Arab culture accepts and even praises persons who stay in depressed mood after a tragic loss or who emerge from the loss totally in religion and spirituality and abstain from all life comforts (Abu-Baker, 2004; Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000).

In psychological terminology, Arabs use God as an external locus of control by internalizing the deep belief system that "everything in our life caused by God." This praxis affects the development of Arabs' sense of responsibility over their plans, lives, and work (Rashid, 1979; Weiner, 1974).

Frazer (1976) understands religiosity as fawning and seeking closeness with supreme power that is believed to direct the course of humanity and nature. In Frazer's view, religiosity is in part practical effort to please, satisfy, and come close.

When my husband became seriously sick, my mother was convinced that an evil eye caused harm to my life. She vowed a 170 cm long candle—as tall as I—to St. George who is also known to Jews as "Eliaho Hanaveh" and to Muslims and Druze as "Alkhader." People in distress, who ask God for help, show their humility by addressing prophets and shrines that belong to other monotheist religions (Badri, 2016). In exchange for his favor in asking him to keep me protected from evil eye, my mother bought a green satin cloth and covered the grave in the prophet's shrine as a gift.

During the same period, my husband's siblings organized a ceremony that is called "*Mauled*" that translates literary as "the birth." In this ceremony, a "*Sheikh*" recites the story of the conception, birth, upbringing, and life of Prophet Mohammad. At the end of the ceremony, all participants appealed to God and Prophet Mohammad, asking to cure the sick person. The ceremony has a spiritual component where people deeply believe that the soul of Prophet Mohammad will be present and listen to the prayers.

During that year, a relative who made the Pilgrimage to Mecca took my husband's shirt in order to pray on it and let it touch the *Qa'ba* and plead for his health.

Each of the above ceremonies was initiated when people knew that science could not help. Persons who were spiritual used religion as a tool to empathize with a person who experienced distress (Utz, 2011). These ceremonies can be organized and performed individually or by a group. When a group is invited, the ceremony has the effect of group therapy while the prayers and the chanting help in charging the atmosphere with spirituality. The ceremonies functioned as a way to declare that the case was severe, and that only a combination of the power of science and the power of spirituality could make change happen. Leading or participating in the ceremonies acted as an element of empowering for hopeless people and, paradoxically, prepared them for the next stage: the loss.

While writing this chapter, I experienced a sudden traumatic occasion. In the first minute, when I was encountered by the bad news, I found myself reciting "Praise God, Thanks God." In retrospect, I learned that during that minute, my mind was counting all the endless ways I could experience trauma, including loss of beloved ones or other kinds of serious damages in to well-being. This was another type of "comparing, bargaining, and concluding." During that speedy calculation, I had concluded that I would accept paying the price of this kind of traumatic event, regardless its harm, since it was still much easier to carry than all other scenarios I had imagined during that speedy minute. My conclusion is that the immediate silent acceptance of Muslims of bad news regarding their painful traumas is grounded in a deep religious and spiritual belief system. Their acceptance that is accompanied with their praise and thanks to God emerges from the bargaining process. In Kubler-Ross stage model, bargaining relates to the idea whether or not the event in question is reversible, while in Muslims' reaction, bargaining relates to a negotiation whereby accepting the current traumatic event has the result that God will save this person

from other traumas or losses. I agree with Esposito (1988) and Kafaji (2011) that belief systems, including religion, influence the ways people experience their mental health.

Spirituality and Belief System: Visits from the World of "Afterlife"

Imam Al-Ghazali (1990) defines four components of the soul: *qalb* (heart), *roh* (spirit), *nafs* (self), and *aql* (intellect). They all compose a spiritual entity that governs and guides human thoughts and behaviors (Hasbullah, 2000). Muslims believe that the relationship between God and the human is very intensive. During sleep, God holds the person's soul. According to God's decision, the person gets up and proceeds with his or her life or not. It is written in the Quran:

> It is Allah who takes away the souls at the time of their death, and those who die not during their sleep. He keeps those (souls) for which He has ordained death and sends the rest for a term appointed. Verily, in this are signs for a people who think deeply. (http://www.noble-quran.com/translation/) (39: 42)

According to the Quran, a soul "*nafs*" keeps a person alive but a spirit "*roh*" is a supreme connection between God and the human being. When a person dies his spirit goes back to God; spirits never die (Mahmood, Sep 2005).

It is believed also that, when a person is very close to death, his or her sight will be transcendent and can see events that occur in other worlds. After hearing my sister on her deathbed, I experienced other close people talking about persons who came to them days or hours before their death and had promised to accompany them in their journey to "afterlife."

My late sister's son, who was 4 years old when his mother passed away, 1 week after her death, started suddenly to giggle joyfully and talk while gazing toward the empty wall. When he was asked to whom he was talking "to my mother, can't you see her?" he answered. He pointed to the place next to the wall where only he was able to see, listen, and develop an ordinary mother–son conversation.

My sister's spirit visited several times after that incident. The family learned that she was visiting during major events such as weddings, severe sickness, birth of a new baby, and so forth. She visited family members in their dreams. The person that saw her in the dream would describe it as a vivid vision with a salute to the person who had the special occasion. During the years, many family members had dreams of my sister. Whenever one had a dream of her, all would listen to the details of what she had to say. Those messages helped us believe that she was still a vibrant part of our family. My mother used to conclude "she came to visit us—she observes our lives, she knows all details about us—as if she is still with us." The last sentence summarizes the functionality of such "visits over dreams": it enabled a type of continuity of family and emotional tightness that calms down the pain of loss.

Adjusting New Learning to One's Own Faith

I attended the first course on transcendental meditation offered to Palestinians in Israel in 1987. I got my mantra, but since I did not understand the meaning of the word, could not feel connected to it. Therefore, I decided to use verses from the Quran instead. This brought me to a deeper insight into the meaning of the verses and uplifted me to a new level in my spirituality. Later in my professional life, I was trained in hypnosis, including self-hypnosis, which I mixed with my Islamic meditation. Throughout those sessions, I used to pose queries concerning ways I will be able to use Western theories in interventions respectful to Arab culture. Thinking about therapeutic interventions became a constant element in my spiritual meditation.

I worked as the only Palestinian Israeli family therapist and the only supervisor in my society for about a decade. When I needed a consultation regarding a case, I either contacted my Western family therapy friends who were culturally sensitive, or I meditated and got ideas that were helpful. I often start my meditation session by the saying "In the name of God" *bism Allah* and ask to send answers to my "alter mind." This process could be described as "self talk" that translates from Arabic as "talk to my spirit *Roh*."

Consultation with God

My request for consultation through my spirit is based on the idea of a special prayer that Prophet Mohammad initiated that is called "The prayer of consultation" and sometimes it is translated as "the guidance seeking prayer" *Salat Alistichara* (www.proz.com/kudoz/arabic).

The idea is that any person who confronts an important decision is able to pray this special prayer and pose a query for the decision in question. The opening of the special prayer starts with the sentences:

> Mighty God, I ask you to inspire me by your power and your knowledge and I ask for your incommensurable grace. Because you are able and I am not, and because you obtain the knowledge and I do not.

The special prayer ends with the sentence, "Let me accept the decision." The difference between my meditation and "the guidance seeking prayer" is that in meditation I am fully awake while in this special prayer a person should immediately go to sleep and wait for the inspiration that arrives in a dream.

The "guidance seeking prayer" is an example of spiritual communication with God through sleeping time—when spirit "*roh*" transcends during sleep time to reach the supreme connection with God. It is believed, that in that encounter, God attaches his message to the person's inquiry.

The last part in the prayer that asks for help in accepting God's message designates the nature of the relationship: The advice should be related to as a working

plan rather than a suggestion. We conclude that when a person asks guidance from God through a spiritual path, he or she should decide beforehand that they fully rely on and accept all God's direction. In psychotherapy terminology, we may say "a person is ready to be in therapy."

The "guidance seeking prayer" *Salat Alistichara* functions consistently with constructionist theory; it allows to put one's self in a position of not knowing, looking up to learn and collect more knowledge, and be curious and ask to be taught what would be helpful.

Relying on God is the cornerstone of the external locus of control that characterizes most Arab Muslim people (Amer & Jalal, 2012; Yousef, 2000). People like Nuha, who were brought up to maintain both Western lifestyle that is reflected in dress code, education, profession, gender roles, individuation and Islamic lifestyle that is reflected in faith, worship, and the practice of rituals, are able to maintain a balance of internal and external locus of control. When Nuha surrendered herself to spiritual/religious therapy, she was promised by her ultrareligious sister that this would be an elevating spiritual experience that would help Nuha become closer to religion and to God. Western psychotherapy cannot offer this promise. When Nuha decided to start therapy with me, she felt already closer to God, protected from "evil soul," and could rely on her internal locus of control.

At graduate school, I became acquainted with Caplan's (1974) theory, "Support Systems and Community Mental Health." The theory advised scanning all "natural helpers" and including them in the therapy plan. Caplan related to clergy as "natural helpers." I questioned myself whether, as a future therapist, I would be able to find Muslim or Druze Sheikhs who would collaborate with me to help clients. I started studying Islam as a resource I would like to draw from it as a therapist. That was when I discovered the depth of the Quran as a psychological text and the common stories between it and the Bible regarding prophets and God messengers. This journey was another spiritual uplifting that helped my clients and me.

In my PhD program, as part of my research training, I chose to observe the social impact of Sunday mass in churches. I picked an Islanders church in Florida, USA, and made my participant observations for about 4 months. This project helped me plan and carry out my thesis research project on Arab families immigrated to the USA (Abu-Baker, 1997). I collected information in an Islamic center including participant observations, focus groups, and individual interviews for 18 months. In both places of worship, Christian and Muslim worshipers, who did not practice their religiosity in their original homeland before their immigration, felt proud to embrace their faith during those devoted hours, then to live their "American Western" life during the rest of the week. I drew common insights from the two projects: (a) the utility of religion and spirituality for reconstructing one's identity as an immigrant, (b) the psychosocial support of worship in a group that enhances spirituality and mental health, and (c) the circular relation between spirituality, social support, and mental health.

In conclusion, intersection of several factors influenced the developmental process of including spirituality within my professional life. (a) Religiosity and spirituality developed in my family of origin subsequent to a major trauma and loss. (b)

Political changes in the Middle East have accelerated the adaptation of Islam as an ideology and lifestyle for the majority of Muslims since the early eighties. (c) My training as a family therapist was influenced by the history of my family and by the resources influencing my professional and spiritual education.

In the next section, a few case examples will be introduced where spirituality and Islamic norms were used as helpful interventions.

Examples of Using Spirituality in Therapy

The state of Israel related to its Palestinian citizens as "the remnants of the enemy" and forced martial laws on them for 19 years. During those years, censorship intervened in the cultural and spiritual lives of Palestinians, trying to disconnect them from their heritage, including language, history, culture, and faith. More profoundly, they dehumanized each and every thing that belonged to Palestinians (Rabinowitz & Abu-Baker, 2005).

The development of the media in the Arab World helped spread the new sociocultural and political phenomena of Islamization. The Islamic movement was established in the Arab world in the 1930s and spread out among Palestinians in Israel during the 1980s. Development of the Internet and satellites in the mid-1990s added to the variety of opportunities to renew Arabs', and among them Palestinians', faith and practice of Islam as a lifestyle.

In the field of psychology, Muslim practitioners from the Arab world began publishing their works about using Islam as a religious and spiritual resource in their clinical work (Ahmed, 1992; El-Islam, 1982; Okasha, Saad, Khalil, El Dawla, & Yehia, 1994; Rashid, 1979, Thorson, Powell, Abdel-Khalek, & Beshai, 1997). The umbrella of cross-cultural psychology and cultural sensitivity had legitimized this utilization of religious norms and spirituality in therapy.

Stories that are documented in the Quran are beneficial tools for bibliotherapy and narrative therapy for devoted and secular Muslims. In a case of cyber infidelity of a Muslim woman, the husband, according to Arab traditions, was eager to divorce her. The idea that her male relatives would kill her for causing harm to family reputation made him hesitate with his decision. The husband felt trapped in the nondecision situation. I discussed with him a similar story that happened to Prophet Mohammad, when people suspected that his beloved wife, Aisha, had a romantic relation with another man. I asked the husband to read about that story. The husband hesitated declaring that he was not practicing Islam in his daily life. I suggested that he read it as a story of another man who went through what he was going through with his wife. The next session, the husband said that he totally empathized with the psychological state Prophet Mohammad had experienced. My client was impressed with the way God had asked Mohammed, through a message he sent him as verses of the Quran through Gabriel, to learn that "some suspicion is sin," meaning, "do not misjudge" (The Quran, verse 49:12), when the suspected person would not be guilty. Being connected spiritually with Prophet Mohammad helped the husband to

make up his mind and to work in therapy on the damage that was created in his marital life.

In another case, Ameer, a 46-year-old married Muslim man, who had four children, wanted to leave home and convince a married woman—whom he loved—to leave her husband and children and to live with him. He cheated on his wife all his life, including with her sister and her neighbor. Ameer never felt shame or remorse for his lifelong cheating. One session, I reflected my genuine feelings toward his life. I observed him as being "empty," without any social, religious, or spiritual norms. The following session, Ameer said that that was the first time ever in his life someone talked to him about spirituality. He had felt respected and equal to others when I questioned his spirituality. Later, learning more about spirituality, Ameer had discovered what he described as "a new life." Spirituality for him sounded human, open, nonformal, not dependent on strict acts of worship, rather on thinking, meditating, and relaxing. Ameer started reflecting deeply on his decisions in his life, and then made fundamental changes. His wife said, "You had used some magical words on him. He became a new person that session." From my observation, I did not judge Ameer's behavior, rather, joined him and was able to reflect what he was experiencing. That was a magical and spiritual moment for him.

Arabs and Muslims often feel pain from the gaze of outsiders, mainly, Israeli Jews and Westerners, who judge their spirituality as somehow "primitive." Should people describe Ameer as a person who went "backward" by adopting spirituality in his life? In Nuha's case, fear of this gaze was an element of keeping her religiosity as a secret from her social circle.

Conclusion

Spirituality is an outcome of personal and familial processes that are influenced and shaped by education, history, nationality, politics, class, and gender, and the intersectionality among them. Spirituality is a part of our psychic life and about who we are. Therapy and spirituality are extensions of each other. When psychology has the agenda of talk, spirituality can offer a tool for curing, guiding, and giving meaning for that same talk/experience. Therefore, discussing spirituality in therapy helps to understand clients in a deeper and wider way. Cases described in this chapter show that the combination of utilizing spirituality and using psychological knowledge made positive contribution to healing trauma. With that said, it is important to emphasize that for some people, it is easier, or feels more natural, to do spiritual work rather than psychological work. Both will lead to better well-being in a person's life.

Spirituality and psychology should consider the culture of the client. Sharing the process of the development of religiosity and spirituality in my family of origin helped me conclude that therapists learn from their own life experiences that deepen their understanding of human relations. Psychotherapy and spirituality carry the

ability to change people and to relate to themselves and their culture in a new approach.

As a therapist, I often operate from within systems; I draw from a diverse pile of techniques, try to stay profoundly culturally aware, pay special attention to gender issues, and suggest my interventions from different faces of culturally sensitivity, and I combine spirituality and psychotherapy. I leave my post-modernism very loose to include new interventions. I describe my therapy work as "anthrotherapy." As an anthrotherapist, I respect clients' reliance on God as the cause of their problems and the source of its remedy. I abstain from diagnosing such clients as having external locus of control and refusing to take responsibility over their lives. Instead, I use elements from spirituality and religiosity to encourage clients to find ways to understand God's plans in their lives. Clients are encouraged to adopt proactive attitude in order to show God that they appreciate change he suggests in their lives.

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