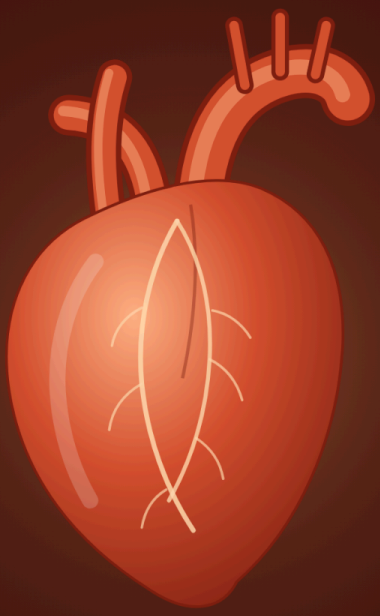

أَلَا بِذِكْرِ ٱللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ ٱلْقُلُوبُ

The Psychology of Anxiety in Islam

Helping Hearts Find Rest

SAKEENA PRESS

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ANXIETY IN ISLAM

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INTRODUCTION

An Anxious Age, a Merciful Path

Something heavy sits on the chest of our generation. We carry phones that never stop ringing, news that never stops breaking, and minds that never stop racing. We lie awake at night replaying conversations. We wake up tired. We worry about money, health, marriage, children, and futures that have not even arrived yet. If you picked up this book, you probably know this weight well.

Let us begin with the truth that this entire book stands on. Feeling anxious does not mean your faith is weak.

Read that sentence again, slowly, because many sincere believers have been wounded by the opposite idea. They were told that a true believer never worries, that fear is a sign of poor tawakkul, that sadness means a distance from Allah. So on top of their anxiety they carried a second burden, guilt about the anxiety itself. This is not what Islam teaches.

Allah created the human being and described him honestly:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ فِى كَبَدٍ

We have certainly created man into hardship.

SURAH AL-BALAD 90:4

Struggle is written into the design of this life. Fear, sadness, and worry are part of being human. The prophets themselves, the most beloved of all people to Allah, felt fear and grief, and the Qur'an records their feelings without shame. What Islam offers is not a life with no storms. It offers an anchor inside the storm.

ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَتَطۡمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُم بِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِۗ أَلَا بِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ تَطۡمَئِنُّ ٱلۡقُلُوبُ

Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of Allāh. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allāh hearts are assured."

SURAH AR-RA'D 13:28

Notice what this verse says and what it does not say. It does not say that believers have no restless moments. It says that hearts find rest through the remembrance of Allah. Rest is something the heart finds, again and again, by returning to its Lord. The believer and the anxious person are often the same person. Faith is not the absence of the storm. Faith is the lighthouse that keeps us from being lost in it.

What this book is

This book is a gentle, practical companion for the anxious heart, built on the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah. In the chapters ahead we will look at what anxiety is and what Islam says it is not. We will sit with the prophets in their moments of fear and learn how revelation met those feelings. Then we will walk through the treasures our religion gives the worried heart, one by one: dhikr, tawakkul, salah, du'a, care of the body,

seeking help from others, making peace with qadar, and holding on to hope.

Every verse quoted in this book is given in Arabic with its English meaning, and every hadith is cited from its source. Nothing here is built on feelings alone. The medicine is taken from the pharmacy of revelation.

What this book is not

This book is not a medical manual, and it does not replace professional care. Anxiety can sometimes grow into a condition that needs a qualified doctor or therapist, just as a fever can grow into an illness that needs one. Seeking that help is fully Islamic, and chapter eight is devoted to this. If your anxiety is severe, persistent, or frightening to you, please speak to a professional. Take this book along as a companion, not as a substitute.

May Allah make these pages a means of calm for your heart, and may He gather us all under the shade of His mercy on the Day when hearts are laid bare.

CHAPTER ONE

What Anxiety Is, and What It Is Not

Anxiety is the mind preparing for a danger that has not happened yet. Fear responds to a lion in front of you. Anxiety responds to a lion that might appear tomorrow, or next year, or never. The heart beats faster, the chest tightens, thoughts spin in circles, and the body behaves as if the feared thing were already here.

In small doses this response is a gift from Allah. It makes us study before an exam, look both ways before crossing, and prepare for winter before it comes. The Qur'an praises prudence and planning. The problem begins when the alarm bell will not switch off, when the mind rehearses disaster all day, and when worry starts to steal sleep, appetite, worship, and joy.

If that is where you are, the first thing to know is that you are not alone and you are not broken. You are a human being, living the test that Allah promised every one of us:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُم بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ ٱلْخَوْفِ وَٱلْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْوَٰلِ وَٱلْأَنفُسِ وَٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ ۗ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ

And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient,

SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:155

ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَصَٰبَتْهُم مُّصِيبَةٌ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّآ إِلَيْهِ رَٰجِعُونَ

Who, when disaster strikes them, say, "Indeed we belong to Allāh, and indeed to Him we will return."

SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:156

أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَٰتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ ۖ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُهْتَدُونَ

Those are the ones upon whom are blessings from their Lord and mercy. And it is those who are the [rightly] guided.

SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:157

Look carefully at these verses. Allah states plainly that we will be tested with fear itself. Fear is listed alongside hunger and loss, as a trial that comes to believers, not as a verdict against them. And the reward for those who endure it is extraordinary: blessings from their Lord, mercy, and the title of the rightly guided. The verse does not shame the one who feels fear. It honours the one who keeps walking through it.

Anxiety is not a sin

A feeling that arrives without your permission is not a sin. Sin lies in what we choose, not in what washes over us. The scholars distinguish between the thoughts and feelings that pass through the heart and the actions and beliefs we deliberately hold. The anxious flutter in your chest before a difficult meeting is not written against you. What matters is what you do next: whether you turn to Allah or turn away from Him, whether you treat people well or badly inside your worry, whether you keep praying or abandon prayer.

And anxiety is not a punishment either. The righteous are tested more, not less. The Prophet ﷺ said that the people most severely tried are the prophets, then the next best and the next best (Jami at-Tirmidhi 2398, graded hasan sahih). When anxiety knocks on your door, it does not announce that Allah is angry with you. Often it is the very door through which a servant draws nearer to his Lord than he has ever been.

Anxiety is not weak faith

This point deserves its own section because so much quiet damage has been done here. A believer with anxiety is not a believer with a defect in iman. Some of the most devoted worshippers in history knew long nights of fear and grief. Faith and feelings live on different floors of the heart. Faith is conviction and direction, where you turn when the storm hits. Feelings are weather, and weather passes.

In fact, your anxiety may be evidence of how much you care about doing right, providing for your family, and meeting Allah with a clean record. The energy is noble. It only needs to be guided, and that guidance is exactly what the rest of this book is about.

Body, mind, and soul

Islam sees the human being as a whole. You have a body that gets tired, a mind that forms habits of thought, and a soul that longs for its Maker. Anxiety can enter through any of these doors. Too little sleep can make the bravest heart tremble. A habit of imagining the worst can be learned over years and must be patiently unlearned. And a soul starved of remembrance grows restless, for it was created to know Allah.

Because the doors are many, the treatment is also layered. We will use spiritual medicine, the greatest of it, and we will also speak about sleep, movement, and the rightful place of doctors and therapists. The Shariah never asked us to choose between du'a and medicine. It taught us to gather every lawful means and to rely upon Allah above them all.

One more promise before we move on. Whatever weight you carry, it has already been measured by the Most Merciful, and He does not burden any soul beyond what it can bear:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ ٱللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۚ لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا ٱكْتَسَبَتْ ۗ
رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَآ إِن نَّسِينَآ أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا ۚ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَآ إِصْرًا كَمَا
حَمَلْتَهُۥ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِنَا ۚ رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِۦ ۖ
وَٱعْفُ عَنَّا وَٱغْفِرْ لَنَا وَٱرْحَمْنَآ ۚ أَنتَ مَوْلَىٰنَا فَٱنصُرْنَا عَلَى ٱلْقَوْمِ
ٱلْكَٰفِرِينَ

Allāh does not charge a soul except [with that within] its capacity. It will have [the consequence of] what [good] it has gained, and it will bear [the consequence of] what [evil] it has earned. "Our Lord, do not impose blame upon us if we have forgotten or erred. Our Lord, and lay not upon us a burden like that which You laid upon those before us. Our Lord, and burden us not with that which we have no ability to bear. And pardon us; and forgive us; and have mercy upon us. You are our protector, so give us victory over the disbelieving people."

SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:286

A GENTLE PRACTICE

Tonight, before you sleep, name your worry honestly before Allah. Say to Him in your own language: O Allah, this is what sits on my chest. You know it better than I do. I hand it to You. Then recite Ayat al-Kursi and sleep on your right side, as the Sunnah teaches. You may notice nothing the first night. Keep going. You are building a road between your worry and your Lord, and roads are built one stone at a time.

CHAPTER TWO

The Prophets Felt It Too

If anxiety were a flaw in faith, the prophets would have been the last people on earth to feel it. Yet the Qur'an, with its complete honesty, shows us prophet after prophet in moments of fear, grief, and overwhelming pressure. Allah chose to preserve these moments in His Book forever. That alone should tell us something: He wanted the anxious believer, in every century, to find family here.

Musa, peace be upon him

Musa was commanded to walk into the palace of the most powerful tyrant on earth and speak the truth to his face. His response was not a display of effortless confidence. It was a trembling, honest du'a:

قَالَ رَبِّ ٱشۡرَحۡ لِي صَدۡرِي ٢٥ وَيَسِّرۡ لِيٓ أَمۡرِي ٢٦ وَٱحۡلُلۡ عُقۡدَةٗ مِّن لِّسَانِي ٢٧ يَفۡقَهُواْ قَوۡلِي ٢٨

[Moses] said, "My Lord, expand [i.e., relax] for me my breast [with assurance] And ease for me my task And untie the knot from my tongue That they may understand my speech.

SURAH TA-HA 20:25–28

My chest is tight. My tongue is tied. Loosen the knot. Is this not exactly the language of anxiety? The tight chest, the fear of speaking, the knot inside. Musa did not pretend the feeling was not there, and Allah did not rebuke him for it. He answered him, strengthened him with his brother Harun, and sent him forward. The feeling was real, and the mission still happened. That is the prophetic pattern: fear is felt, named before Allah, and then walked through with His help.

Yaqub, peace be upon him

Yaqub lost his beloved son Yusuf, and then lost a second son. He was a prophet whose heart broke so deeply that he wept until his eyes turned white with grief. Listen to how he carried it:

قَالَ إِنَّمَآ أَشۡكُواْ بَثِّي وَحُزۡنِيٓ إِلَى ٱللَّهِ وَأَعۡلَمُ مِنَ ٱللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعۡلَمُونَ

He said, "I only complain of my suffering and my grief to Allāh, and I know from Allāh that which you do not know.

SURAH YUSUF 12:86