

# How to deal with religious trauma and struggles?

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The theme of my PhD thesis was on cognitive conflict (coined as “religious stress”) experienced by Muslim theology students in their thinking about religion. What I meant by religious conflict covered a bunch of interrelated words including doubt, questioning, confusion, uncertainty, anxiety, even loss of faith. In the end, I assumed that nearly 10% of theology students and over 15% of public people have been experiencing at one point in their life such a set of feelings at a highly intensive level which were creating intellectual discomfort and loss of energy in their lives. The theories of intellectual development showed that this is most acute in the periods when a young man is getting intellectual autonomy

*vis-à-vis the societal norms that was inherited from their parents through sharp reasoning and bitter questioning prompted especially during the university years (Sharon Parks).*

Later on, the term conflict was replaced by “religious struggle” (Julie Exline) which illustrates the condition in which students feel unsettled in their traditional beliefs, do no longer enjoy their beloved beliefs, deeply question the tenets of their faith resulting in disappointments and being betrayed.

In the third wave of studies, another term, “religious trauma syndrome”, came from Christian faith and was worded by Marlene Winell. To her, it refers to a “condition experienced by people who are struggling with leaving an authoritarian, dogmatic religion and coping with the damage of indoctrination”. This intellectual condition is followed by break up with a “controlling” community and lifestyle. From an Islamic perspective, experiencing questioning even doubt for a period of time is not regarded in its very nature as evil, since this is experienced particularly during the transitions from the period of imitative faith (*iman al taqlid*) to rationally legitimated faith (*iman al tahqiq*). In addition, some of the leading historical Muslim figures such as Imam al-Ghazali and

*Mawlana Jalal al-Din Al-Rumi also reported such kind of intellectual struggles which transformed their lives to a stage where wisdom and inner enlightenment is given higher priority than staying pure intellectually oriented. The method of tracing the truth (or Haq) through reasoning or questioning as in the case of young Abraham mentioned in the Quran is shown to be an exemplar for the rest of Muslims. Qur’an also gives an obvious message that pure imitation is refuted and without asking questions in front of new arguments it is possible to stuck in dogmatism.*

Despite these conditions have some positive influence on people’s maturity such as causing less ethnic prejudice, as relevant literature indicates, they have in extreme cases, also negative impacts as these conditions are associated with “frequent self-reflection” or guilt feelings, alcohol consumption, “chronic abuses of harmful religion”, poor psychological well-being and satisfaction with life. In the next issue, I will try to respond on how to handle religious struggle and trauma using psychological and educational methods.

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