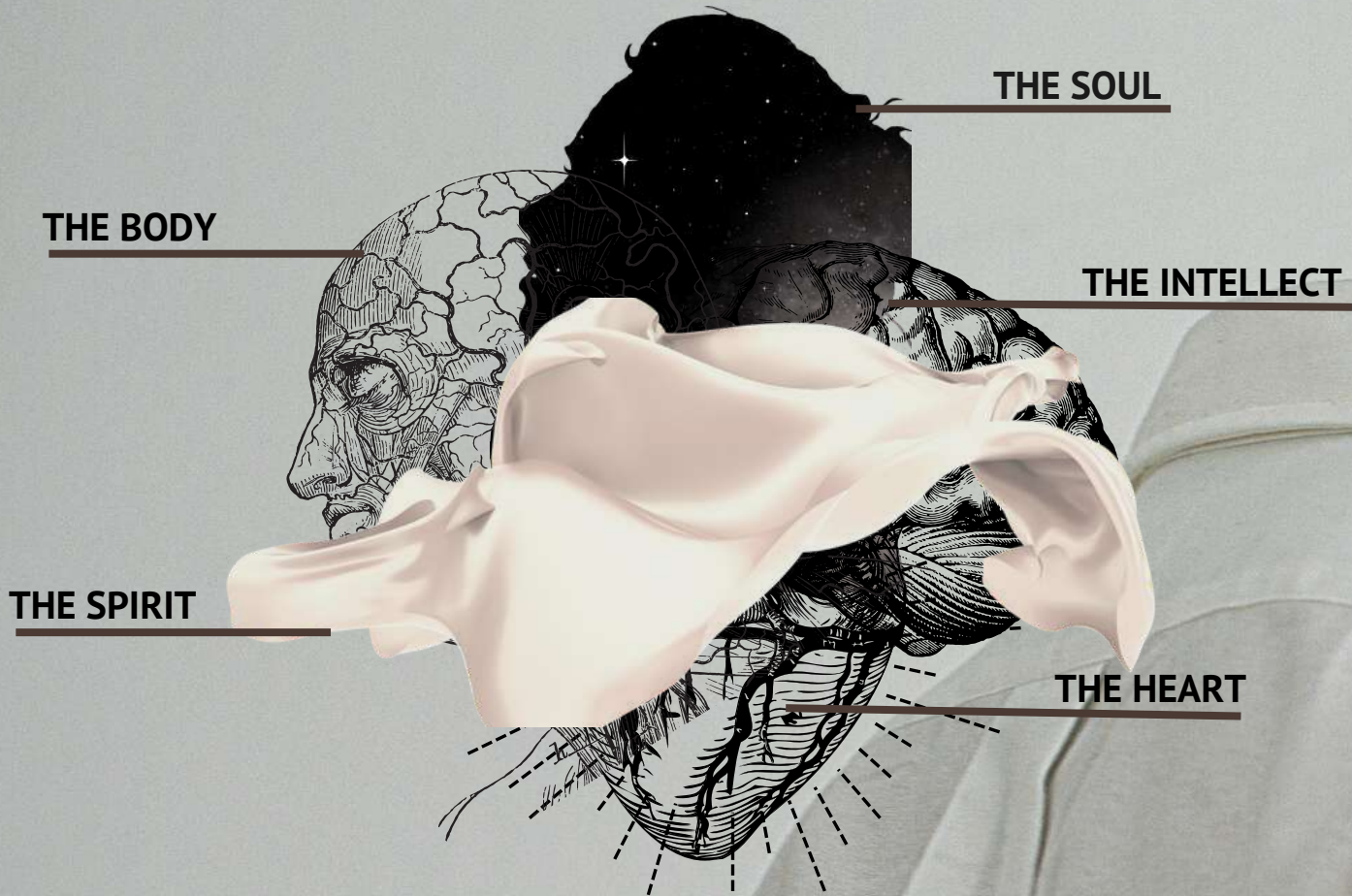


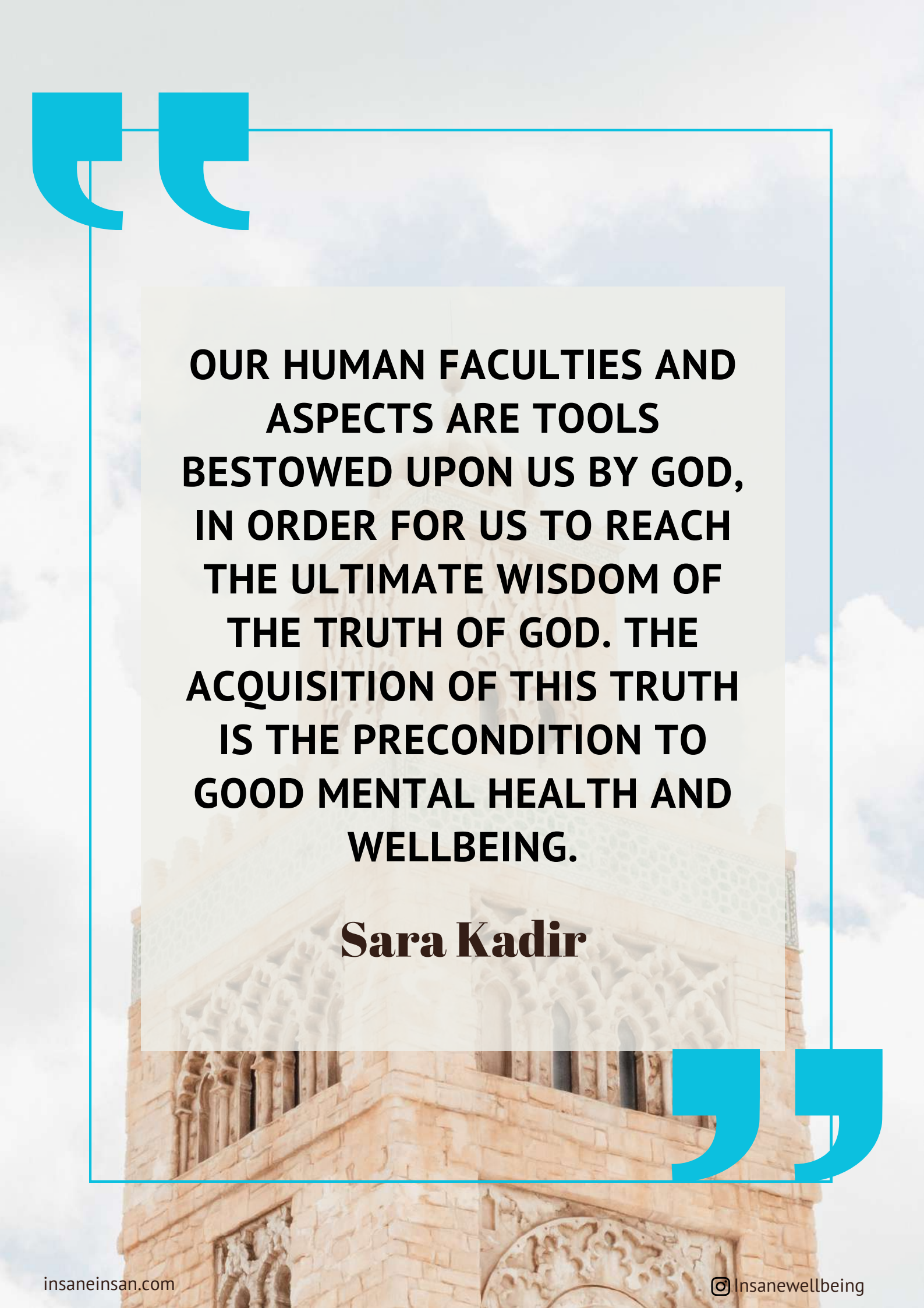
IMAM AL-GHAZALI'S

FIVE ASPECTS OF MAN, IN THE WELLBEING CONTEXT



insane
ISLAMIC WELLBEING

By Dr Sara Kadir



**OUR HUMAN FACULTIES AND
ASPECTS ARE TOOLS
BESTOWED UPON US BY GOD,
IN ORDER FOR US TO REACH
THE ULTIMATE WISDOM OF
THE TRUTH OF GOD. THE
ACQUISITION OF THIS TRUTH
IS THE PRECONDITION TO
GOOD MENTAL HEALTH AND
WELLBEING.**

Sara Kadir



INTRODUCTION

What has the aspect of Man (the heart, soul, intellect, mind and spirit) got to do with wellness?

In order for any wellness system to have any real affect on you and your life, you must first know who you are and what you are composed of. Its a bit like saying what's knowledge of anatomy got to do with a surgeon being able to do his job well?....only everything!

Today, almost all of the guides on wellness approach the human from a biological, physical and chemical perspective, a secular perspective. They do not include the spiritual, and they certainly do not include God. In this narrative the human being is reduced to a biological entity, devoid of divine meaning.

The absence of God from wellbeing is a big problem for us Muslims, as God is at the centre of our lives, or at the very least, we think that He *should* be. The omission of God from wellness means that, for us believers, a lot of the systems seem irrelevant to our lived experiences. Which means we have very few places to turn to for meaningful help when we are struggling.

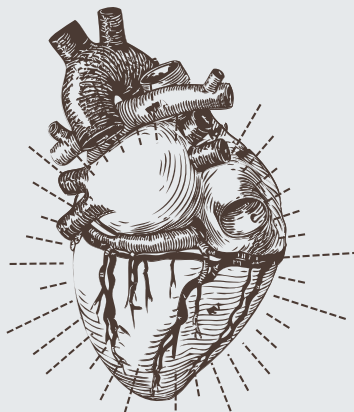
This guide hopes to empower you with Islamic wellness knowledge, to make those tough days a little more easier on you. This guide will take you through the five aspects of Man according to Imam Al-Ghazali's 'Al Ahya' or 'The revival' and explain each aspect from a wellbeing perspective so that you can better understand why you suffer and subsequently how you can find relief from suffering.

According to Islamic philosophy the human consists of five; the heart, the soul, the intellect, the spirit and the body.

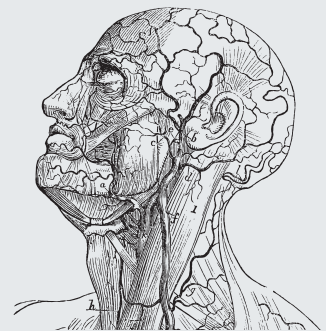
Al-Ghazali regards the soul, the heart, the intellect and the spirit to have two meanings each, with the second meaning of each to mean 'a subtle substance within man' that 'knows and perceives God', which is at the essence of all the aspects. Therefore, although the aspects are seen as separate, they can also be regarded as one.



THE SPIRIT



THE HEART



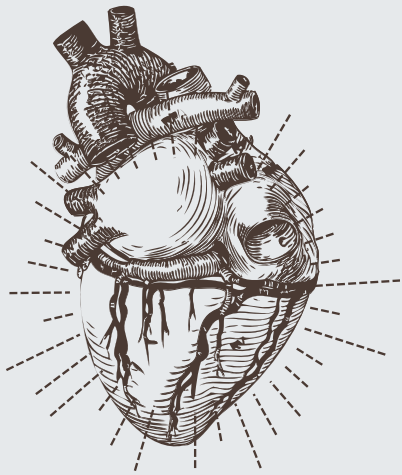
THE BODY



THE INTELLECT



THE SOUL



The heart

al-qalib

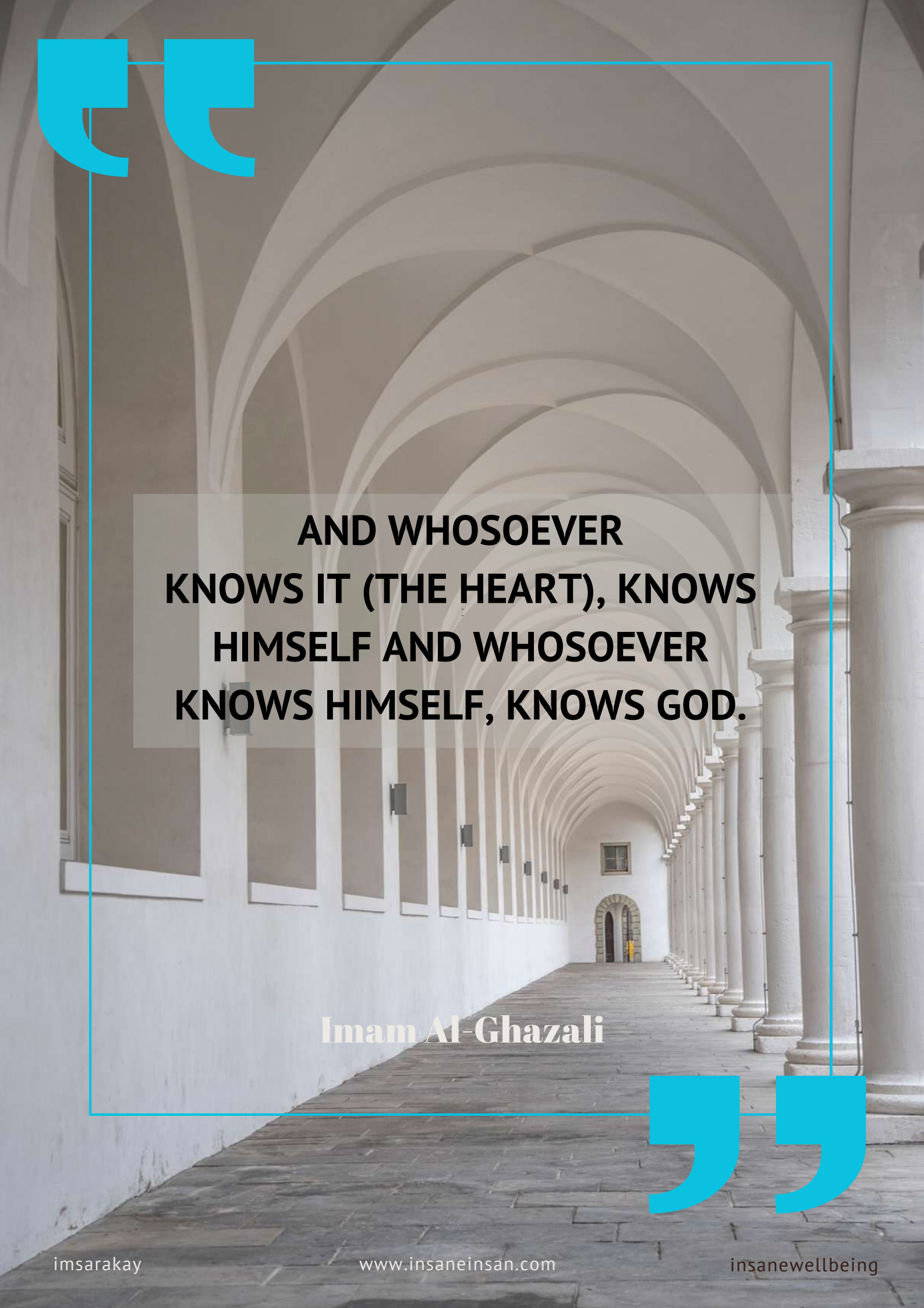
According to Al-Ghazali, the heart is the 'throne of knowledge', acting as a bridge between the seen and the unseen world. The heart is where the truth of knowledge of God, and consequently the truth of all things, is received and understood.

Al-Ghazali compares the heart to a mirror that reflects the images of the unseen world. The mirror is stained by bad actions which form a layer on its surface, obstructing the mirror from reflecting the images of the unseen world.

Al-Ghazali argues, bad actions and words taint the heart with a black stain, which increases proportionately to the number of bad actions committed. The more the heart is stained in this way, the 'sicker' it becomes.

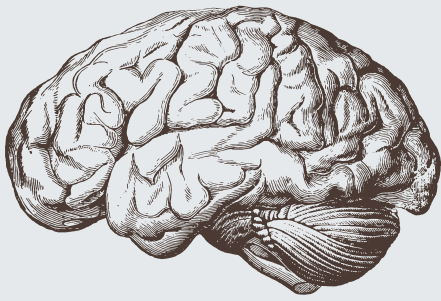
A tainted heart causes a human to suffer, as it makes one distant from God and therefore unable to feel connected to God, the remedy for which is good actions and the remembrance of God.

Here, we note the connection between faith and good action to positive wellbeing, in the Islamic faith. The greater faith and good action, the cleaner the heart, the closer one is to God and so the more positive the wellbeing.



**AND WHOSOEVER
KNOWS IT (THE HEART), KNOWS
HIMSELF AND WHOSOEVER
KNOWS HIMSELF, KNOWS GOD.**

Imam Al-Ghazali



The Intellect

al-aql

In Islam the use of the intellect or the 'aql' is a core way of attaining knowledge of God. This knowledge is regarded as key to attaining positive wellbeing.

The first word revealed to our Prophet (pbuh) was 'read', demonstrating the importance of knowledge within the Islamic faith.

According to Al-Ghazali only ignorance or arrogance prevents belief in God. Al-Ghazali explains that it is only arrogance that prevents belief when knowledge is present.

The Quran constantly urges its reader to use their mind/reason to draw closer to God. For example:

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

They are those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth 'and pray', "Our Lord! You have not created 'all of' this without purpose. Glory be to You! So protect us from the suffering of the Fire."

(Qur'an 3:191)

Within the well-being context the understanding is; the more one knows God i.e. His names and attributes, the closer one feels to God. This proximity leads to feelings of peace and wellbeing.



According to Al-Ghazali there are four main sources of knowledge:




The more one knows of these areas, the more feelings of peace and wellbeing they will feel.

According to Al-Ghazali, faith is therefore a mark of intelligence. In that an intelligent individual will work to acquire knowledge and use that knowledge to ensure that:

- a) One does not easily succumb to his/her desires
- b) Worships God and
- c) Performs good actions

The above ultimately leading to happiness in both this world and the afterlife.

Here, we see the role of faith in wellbeing within the Islamic perspective. Where the more a person uses their intellect/mind to contemplate God and creation, the easier it is for a person to have faith in God and find peace- in both this world and the next.



**THE PURPOSE OF A HUMAN
(LIFE) IS THE ACQUISITION OF
KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM, AND
THE MOST HONOURABLE OF
KNOWLEDGE IS THAT OF GOD,
HIS ATTRIBUTES AND ACTIONS,
FOR WITH IT A PERSON
BECOMES WHOLESOME AND IN
A PERSON'S FEELINGS OF
WHOLESOMENESS THEREIN LIES
HAPPINESS.**

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Imam Al-Ghazali





The Soul

al-nafs

According to Islamic teaching the soul (also referred to as 'ego') can exist in three states, that of: the 'Commanding Soul' (*al nafs al-ammara*), the 'Self-Reproaching Soul' (*al nafs al-lawama*) and the 'Tranquil Soul' or the 'Soul at Peace' (*al nafs al-mutmaena*).

According to Al-Ghazali, the soul if left to its own accord, remains in the 'commanding' state, in this state the soul commands the individual to do wrong and it is in this state that the human gives into the 'lowest' of desires, that of anger '*ghadab*' and lust '*shahwa*', leading to worldly attachment.

The soul in the 'commanding' state makes an individual susceptible to psychological distress and negative feeling, as in this state the soul is successful in its command for action that is contrary to the innate essence of being human, which is to obey God.



**The Self-Reproaching
Soul**

al-nafs al-lawama



**The Tranquil
Soul**

al-nafs al-mutmaena



**The Commanding
Soul**

al-nafs al-ammara



The Soul

al-nafs

Furthermore, the second state, that of the 'self-reproaching' is likened to a 'tug of war' occurring within the individual, where there exists an aspiration to do what is morally and ethically 'right', alongside a real wanting to satisfy the ego's desires. The subsequent feelings that arise can lead to feelings of anxiety and guilt.

The 'peaceful state' is the third of the three states a human soul may exist in, and is the only state where one experiences feelings of tranquillity. Of this state the Qur'an proclaims:

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ

O thou soul at peace!

أَرْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً

Return unto thy Lord, content, contenting

فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي

Enter among My servants

وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي

Enter My Garden

(Qur'an 89: 27-30)

In this state the individual does not hold any particular thought, judgement or feeling towards worldly events, there is instead an awareness of the fleeting nature of the world and so a tranquil submission to God's will.



The Soul

al-nafs

Before we go on, here are some important Islamic wellbeing concepts to be aware of in the discussion on the soul:

- Your 'standby' mode is the 'Commanding State'.
- You can go through all states at any given moment.
- You can linger in one state more than another state.
- The aim is to keep yourself at the 'Tranquil State' for as long as possible and away from the 'Commanding State'.
- Your wellbeing in the next life trumps your wellbeing in this life.
- Emotions are NOT necessarily an indication of if you are in a good state of wellbeing or not. We will explore this notion below.



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**BUT I ABSOLVE NOT MY OWN
SOUL. SURELY THE SOUL
COMMANDS TO EVIL, SAVE
WHOM MY LORD MAY SHOW
MERCY. TRULY MY LORD IS
FORGIVING, MERCIFUL.**

Qur'an 12:53



The Commanding Soul

al nafs al ammara

Associated feelings

Happiness

Pride

Satisfaction

Secular Perspective

This is a state of positive wellbeing, as the feelings associated with this state are 'good'. Ethics and morality are not considered ('as long as you don't hurt anyone' is as moral as it gets in this context).

Islamic Perspective

This is the worst state a human can be in. As mentioned in previous posts, the 'Commanding Soul' is one that commands the individual to do wrong and succumb to egoistic temperaments i.e lust, arrogance, anger etc. The resultant associated feelings of obeying the 'Commanding Soul' may make you 'feel good' in some capacity, but it is almost always at the detriment of your wellbeing in the afterlife, and so, is considered a bad state to be in, regardless of how 'good' it makes you feel.



The Self-Reproaching Soul

al nafs al lawama

Associated feelings

Guilt

Irritation

Anguish

Anxiety

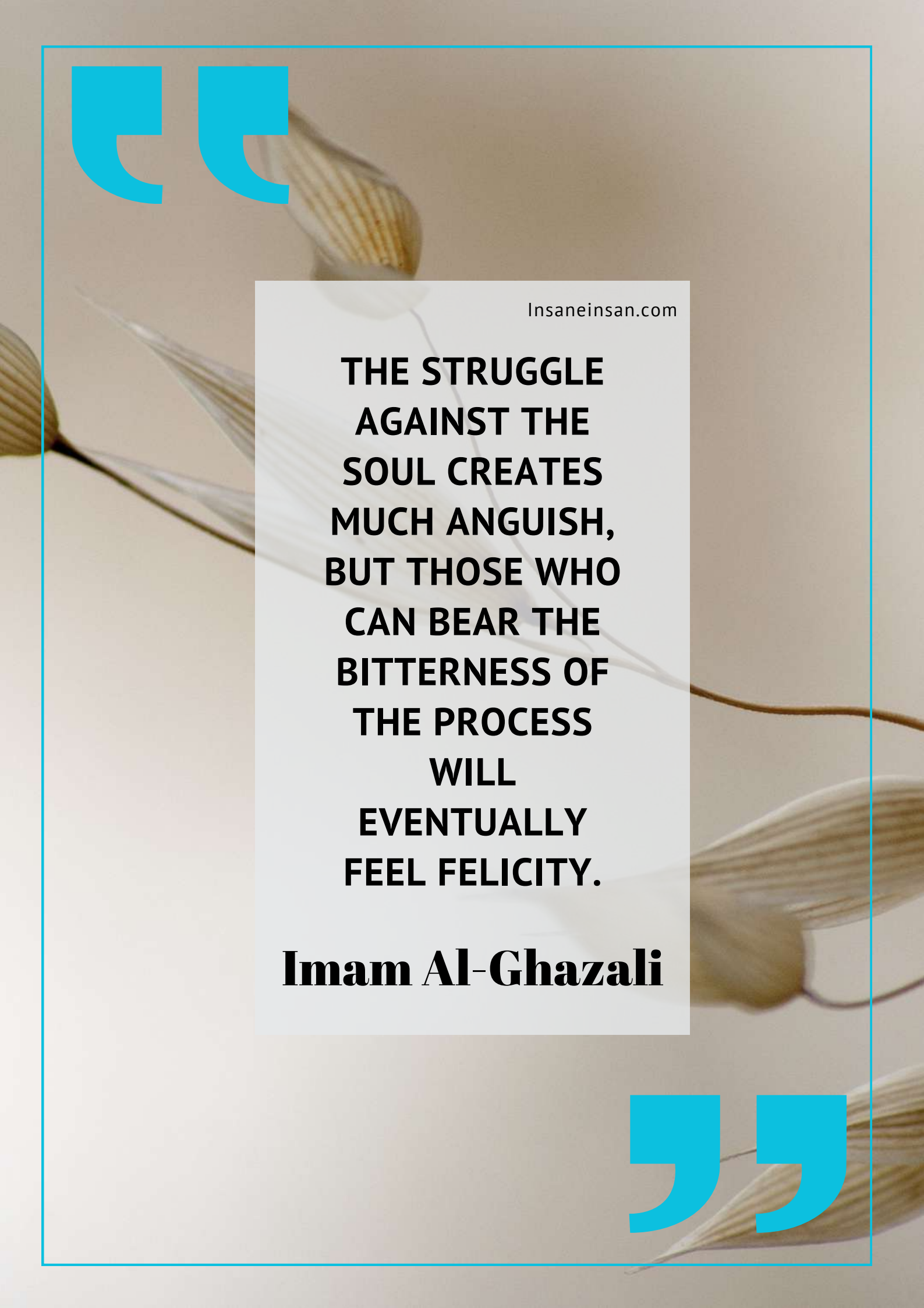
Sadness

Secular Perspective

Associated feelings are 'negative' and an indication of negative wellbeing. Systems aimed at resolving such feelings include 'no-self judgment' and techniques of positive cognitive thinking i.e changing thinking patterns, practicing meditation and repeating affirmations etc.

Islamic Perspective

Associated feelings are 'necessary' for change. This is not the worst state to be in, as the inner turmoil associated with this state is seen as a by-product of the inner struggle between wanting to be mindful of God and obeying the nafs (Jihad al-nafs). Therefore, this is a good state of wellbeing, providing a person seeks God whilst in this state and tries to better themselves (through self-judgement). Resolved through: Changing thinking habits and behaviour, as well as, increased spirituality. Here, faith does not ignore the role of cognition (positivity and meditation), but equally emphasises the role of spirituality. This state is a step away from the 'Tranquil State'.



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**THE STRUGGLE
AGAINST THE
SOUL CREATES
MUCH ANGUISH,
BUT THOSE WHO
CAN BEAR THE
BITTERNESS OF
THE PROCESS
WILL
EVENTUALLY
FEEL FELICITY.**

Imam Al-Ghazali



The Tranquil Soul

al nafs al mutmaena

Associated feelings

Peace

Contentment

Serenity

Calmness

Secular Perspective

A state of positive wellbeing, as the associated feelings induce feelings of 'goodness'.

Islamic Perspective

A state of positive wellbeing. As, from an Islamic perspective, this state can only be realised through close proximity to God. This state is not 'good' because the feelings associated with this state make you feel 'good', as found in the secular perspective, but because the only way of attaining the associated feelings of peace etc is through submission to God. It is the act of submission that makes the state a 'good state'.



The Spirit

al ruh

The spirit, in the Islamic context, is understood as being a power source that connects God and the human. The Spirit is responsible in the aiding of spiritual development, which manifests through the soul.

According to Islamic teaching the spirit is a quality of God that exists inside the human, the Qur'anic verse likens the spirit to the 'breath of God':

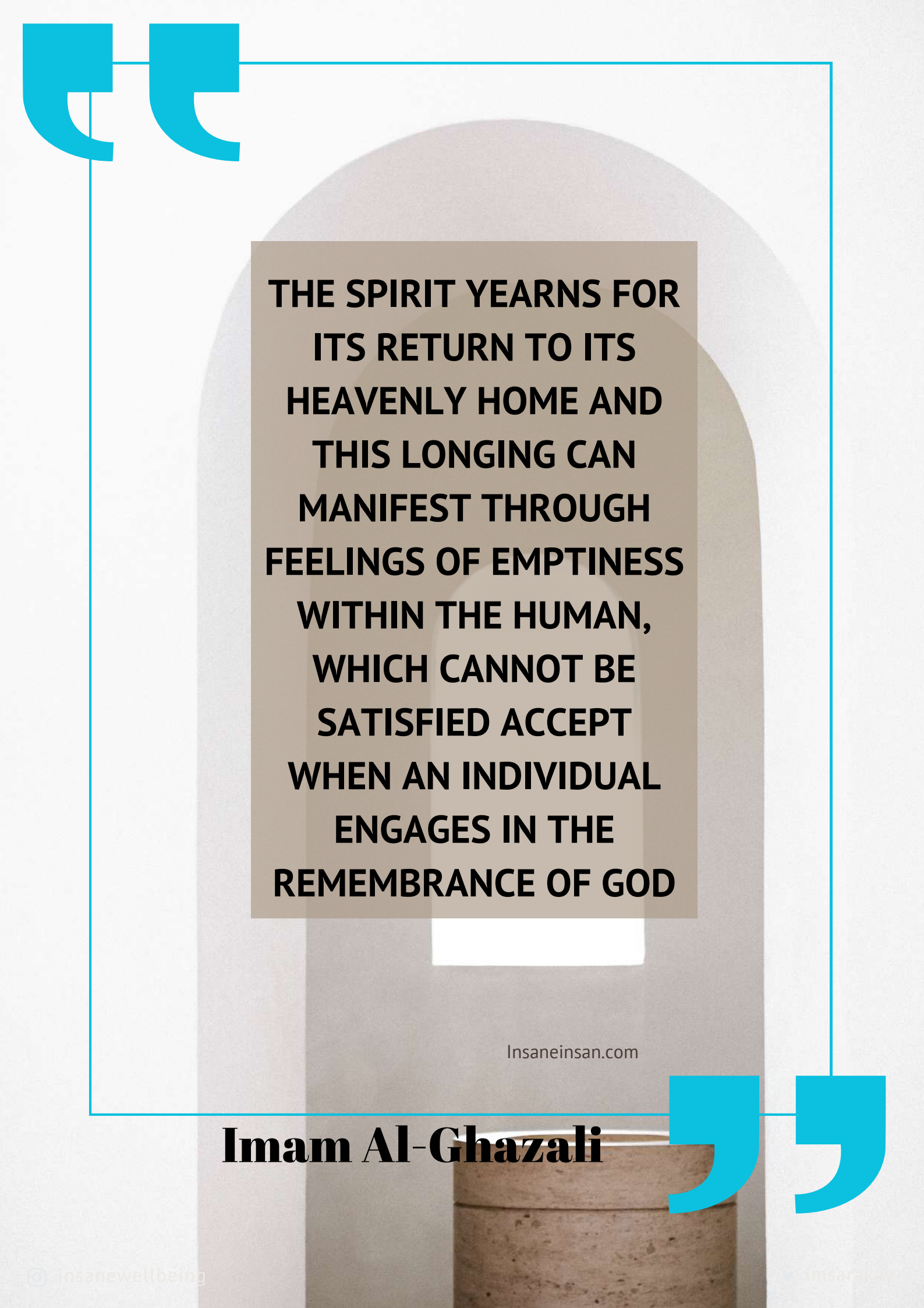
فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ، وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ، سُجِدِينَ

So, when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down before him prostrating.

(Qur'an 15:29)

Within the context of wellbeing, in his works 'The Alchemy of Happiness' Al-Ghazali states that the spirit is said to yearn for its return to its heavenly home. This longing can manifest through feelings of emptiness within the human, which cannot be satisfied except when an individual engages in the remembrance of God. Thus it is believed that the remembrance of God is the only way that individual find peace, in the true sense of the word.

The cultivation of spirituality leads to inner reflection and the adherence to morality, the purpose of which is to increase self-awareness and refine human character and strengthen effective social bonds. Therefore increased spirituality leads to feelings of calmness, serenity, tranquillity, not only for oneself but also for the community one occupies.



**THE SPIRIT YEARNs FOR
ITS RETURN TO ITS
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Imam Al-Ghazali



The Body

al jassad

I will not delve into the body too much, as there is much discourse on the role of the body in wellbeing available to you. However, i will point out that from an Islamic perspective, the body is viewed as an ‘earthly receptacle’ or ‘container’ through which Man can carry out God’s worship. In the context of wellbeing, the wellbeing of the body is linked to the state of the soul, heart and intellect.

Al-Ghazali states, a healthy body is integral for a person’s ability to acquire knowledge and place this knowledge into practice. Al-Ghazali explains, the state of the body is a physical manifestation of the state of the heart and soul, and that the negative state of the body can further compound sickness in the heart or soul in a sort of a feedback mechanism.

An example on the importance of the body in wellbeing, within the Islamic context, can be found in the Quran, where God tells Prophet Job (pbuh) to exert himself physically (by running) as a response to the Prophet’s suffering (verse on the next page).

The importance of the body, within the Islamic context, is further demonstrated through the required movement in prayer (Salah) and the physical exertion required to carry out the hajj/umrah rituals. These are all indications that Islam acknowledges the role of the body in wellbeing.



**AND REMEMBER OUR SERVANT JOB,
WHEN HE CALLED TO HIS LORD,
“INDEED, SATAN HAS TOUCHED ME
WITH HARDSHIP AND TORMENT.**

**"STRIKE THE GROUND WITH YOUR
FEET; THIS IS A COOL BATH AND
DRINK."**

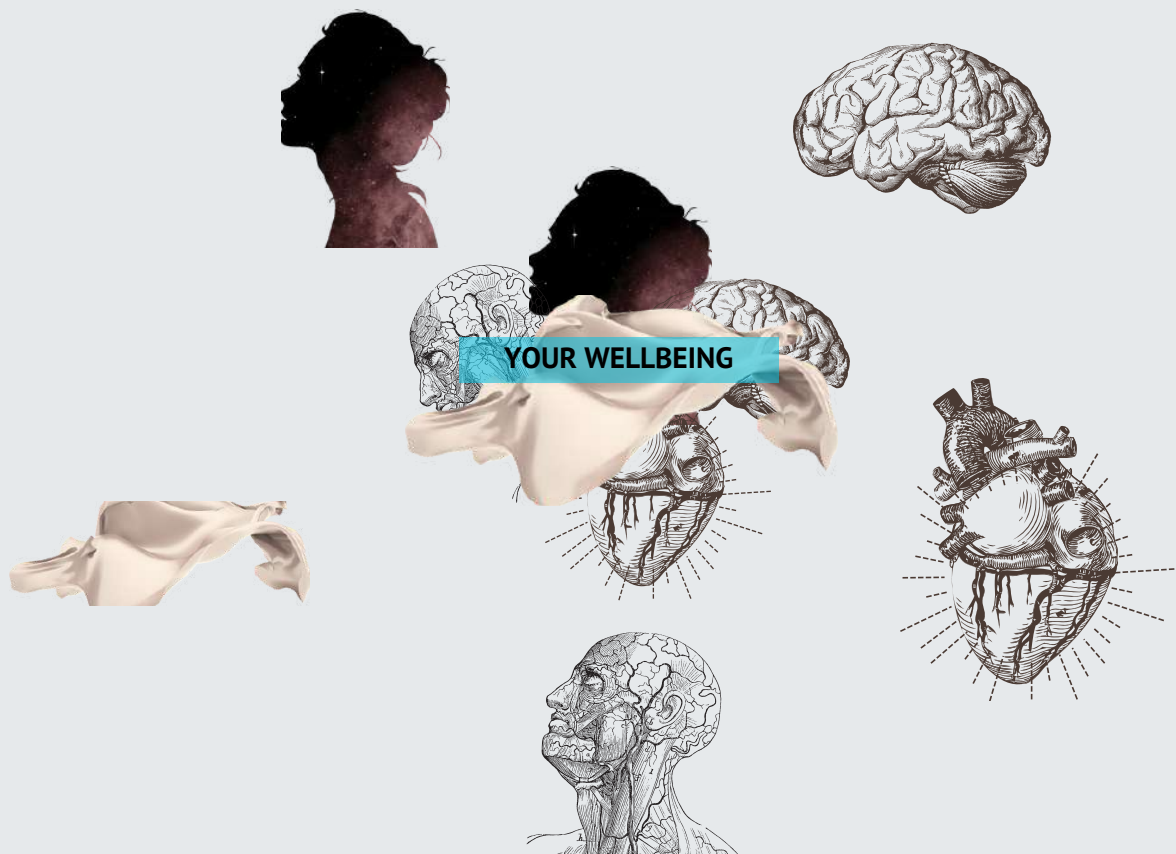
Qur'an 38: 41-42

Summary

The take home message here is that in order for us to find peace we must take into consideration ALL the aspects of the human. The Muslim considers the role of the spirit, heart and the soul, as well as, that of the body and intellect when trying to find peace.

You can see through Al-Ghazali's teachings that knowledge of God is critical for wellbeing. The more we know of God the more faith we will have in Him. This faith makes the cultivation of virtues such as patience and reliance easier. Like, Al-Ghazali states, 'ignorance leads to disbelief' and so greater knowledge leads to greater belief.

Central to all of the aspects is God, in which remembrance of God leads to good action, which wipes away sins and allows the heart to connect with God. It is proximity to God which brings feelings of peace and wellbeing, not only in this life but the hereafter too.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Salaam! I'm Sara and I have a PhD in "Mindfulness and psychological wellbeing from a Qur'anic perspective". Much of my research relied upon the works of Imam Al-Ghazali in his book "The Revival".

I launched 'INsane' after noticing people were genuinely interested in my research. The INsane logo has a double meaning, it can also be read as the Arabic word for human 'insan'. You can find more about the project and me on my podcast, the link for which is on the website.

I am passionate about informing Muslims on wellbeing from an Islamic perspective. I see this as a duty and a privilege.

This guide will be the first of many (insha'Allah). You can download it free from the INsane website.

I pray that the knowledge i share brings you clarity and courage. Because finding peace takes courage.



Feel free to contact me for collaborations, feedback or thoughts on: the insane website or on X @imsarakay

Sara K