Abstract

The purpose of this study is to trace and analyze the history of non-physical disabilities throughout the Classical Sunni Islamic period. For the intents of this study, non-physical disabilities relate to mental, intellectual, emotional and communicative impairments which are not part of the sensory nervous system. With the exception of some specific syndromes, non-physical disabilities are not usually physically apparent. (It should be emphasized that we have not included chronic illnesses, such as heart disease). This study attempts to review the massive amounts of evidence provided throughout Sunni Islamic Literature, from the beginning of Islam until the philosophical works of Avicenna, which discuss the existence of people with non-physical disabilities. The works of Avicenna provide a turning point in the theological attitude towards disabilities in Islam, including non-physical disabilities.

The heart of the research is in the processing of data which comes from original sources written at the time of the research period, and which relate to non-physical disabilities. Upon analyses of the data, a historical picture emerges, rich in detail and based on tendencies, descriptions and attitudes: of people with non-physical disabilities; of their loved ones; and of the society around them. These appear repeatedly in all genres of Islamic literature throughout this period. The research is non-comparative however, its purpose is to examine whether the western history of disabilities, the only one of its kind written on the aspect of disabilities to date, also represents the Middle East.

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The first chapter, the preface, briefly surveys the history of disability in the West, from ancient times to date. In addition, the conclusions of linguistic research are discussed. The words *majnun* and m*a'tuh* represent non-physical disabilities in classic Arabic, from the time period of the study. Additionally, the preface defines the boundaries and research questions to be explored in the study.

The contents of the second chapter are based on texts from the *quran*, the *tafsir* and the *hadith*. The aim of the section is to research the Qur'and attitude towards non-physical disabilities, as well as the attitude of the prophet towards these disabilities. The postulation is that the start of the Islamic outlook begins with Allah's words and the actions of Muhammad. Indeed, this section contains a first approach towards the word *majnun* in the *quran*, in the sense that the *majnun* is a person managed by *jinn* which is hiding within him. Using this approach, the Quraysh people claimed that the source of Muhammad's message was in the *jinn* and not Allah. This was their way of belittling the value of the Islamic revelations and attempting to influence the population not to follow Muhammad. In *tafsir* and in *hadith* the classical use of the word *majnun* is recognized. In other words, this person is not in his right mind and insanity controls him. In this context, characteristics defining the difference between the *majnun* and the *ma'tuh* emerge, as well as descriptions of society's relation to them.

In the third chapter, the Islamic theological outlook towards non-physical disabilities is explained. First, theologians define that the terms *majnun* or *ma'tuh* relate to one who is not in his right mind, both from the classical definition of the term and also from the aspect of heresy. According to them, it is not possible for a person to be in his right mind and not believe in the uniqueness of God. Therefore, every heretic is considered a *majnun*. In addition, theologians present a clear stand that human logic cannot understand Allah's progression in the world. Indeed, there are circumstances which seem to be in conflict with the idea of Godly justice. These do not conform with Allah's attributes, nor with his reputation. Some theologians attempt to provide reassuring explanations for skeptical believers. Justification such as testing the believers' faith in Allah and recognition of the limitations in human intelligence are central during the period researched here. The definition alone of evil, pain and suffering in the world and its connection to disabilities in Avicenna's writings was enough to expand the

theological debate in further directions. In order to remove any doubt, theologians provided logic-based arguments which philosophically examine the Divine Order. In addition, they provided mystical arguments according to which suffering purifies the soul of the believer and in this way provides an element of good for him.

Furthermore, the theological debate deals with practical instruction for people with disabilities. Through this guidance, values and outlooks are presented which, if assumed as a way of living, can help ease coping with the disabilities regularly.

The fourth chapter surveys the effects of non-physical disabilities on the believer, in the eyes of Islamic law. First, non-physical disabilities are defined from the perspective of Islamic law: responsibility for the consequences of their actions, and commitment and intention when performing actions. In light of this, the rights and requirements of the person with non-physical disabilities are examined in this chapter. This, through surveying all of the commandments which were discussed in texts from the time of the study, in connection with *majnun* and *ma'tuh*. The commandments are divided into three categories: *Arkan al-Islam*, commandments which pertain to interpersonal relationships, and commandments which pertain to the personal status of the individual. As a rule, the *majnun* and the *ma'tuh* are exempt from the obligation to fulfill commandments. The commandments which they fulfill are of no value, because intention is required in order to fulfill the commandment. Throughout the entire debate, Islamic Law maintains a social perspective. On the one hand, the *majnun* and the *ma'tuh* are condemned; on the other hand, Islamic law considers how not to harm their loved ones and surroundings. Within the debates of Islamic law the discussion is respectful and precise, recognizing the value of people with non-physical disabilities and focusing on making religious law accessible to them.

The fifth chapter deals with the character of the *majnun* and the *ma'tuh*, as well as the society surrounding them, from a cultural standpoint. This is based on descriptions in the *adab* literature, in historical sources and in the of travelogues from the period of study. The literature provides a wealth of sources describing the Islamic community in daily life. From these descriptions the standing of the *majnun* and the *ma'tuh* are also noted. A number of characteristics pertaining to the *majnun* and the *ma'tuh* arise from these texts, functioning at various levels. For the first time the metaphysical *majnun* is

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shown, establishing the mystical or spiritual experience he devotes himself to at the price of his sanity. The society around him appreciates and listens to him, and the insanity provides immunity for him against the leadership he opposes. Moreover, his character is shown as one whose intense and unrequited love brought upon his insanity. The force of the love is converted to strong depression which causes him to lose his mind and the will to live without his beloved. Further, the classic *majnun* and *ma'tuh* are presented through repetitive motifs comprising their character, as a person whose difference from the society around him is evident. He seeks freedom from normal limitations, secludes himself from society and has difficulty communicating with people. In addition, the *adab* literature provides a glimpse of the causes which turn him into a *majnun* or *ma'tuh*. Above all is Allah's will with social and natural factors added to it.

Perhaps the most important descriptions in the *adab* literature and the historical sources are of the relationships between the *majnun* or *ma'tuh* and the society in which they live. Firstly, they are a part of society. Even the instances of exclusion are relatively insignificant, and certainly so when compared to exclusion from society as it is described in Western history. The *majnun* and *ma'tuh* are family men, working as much as their condition allows, and they are aware about daily events. Only a small percentage of them are in need of hospitalization or care outside the home. Hospitals are present in texts, and sometimes are noted by name and location. They are situated in central areas and allow family members of patients to maintain steady contact throughout the entire course of treatment.

This study shows that the history of the non-physical disabilities in Classical Sunni Islam is not aligned with the negative descriptions as portrayed in Western history. However, it is possible to see the influence of negative points of view as well, which represent superiority, humiliation and ridicule in Islamic texts. This is seen both in philosophical and religious thought, as well as historical and literary descriptions. Nonetheless, there are no descriptions which treat all the *majanin* as a single group which should be excluded from society or for which a solution must be found. In addition, there is also no inclusive call against their existence; the opposite is true. It is true that those who wish to define the discussion of religious law as patronizing towards the *majnun* and *ma'tuh* can do so. However, the bottom line is that the religious law presents a sympathetic and

thoughtful outlook towards the *majnun* and *ma'tuh*. This, while examining how to relieve them of difficulties on the one hand, and allowing them to be a part of the Islamic community on the other.

Further, in many stories rulers become close to the *majnun* and *ma'tuh* as a sort of exemplary model for believers. In every story, there is a challenge which the *majnun* or *ma'tuh* is faced with, and a person from his surroundings who tries to find a solution for him. It is true that in more than one text the word *majnun* is used as a pejorative term, however this does nothing more than indicate that the *majnun* himself had to face social condemnation.

In my opinion, the theological discussion emphasizing Allah's will is what stands at the core of the positive approach towards the *majnun* and the *ma'tuh* in Islamic society. The Islamic believer is infused with purpose to fulfill the will of his Creator. He receives a clear message in relation to the *majnun* and the *ma'tuh*, and battles the societal perspectives rooted in him ever since the period of the *Jahiliyya*. In my opinion, this is the reason that the name of the devil, who contributes to the negative impression of the *majnun*, is almost never associated with the *majnun* or the *ma'tuh* in the texts from this period.

Upon examining the models of studies on disability it can be found that in relation to the classic *majnun* and *ma'tuh*, the medical model receives central recognition. Even so, I claim that the basis for medical treatment and assistance from society in favor of the *majnun* and the *ma'tuh* is not patronizing but rather based on the model of kindness. The social model is manifested in the context of spiritual insanity. Society perhaps defines him as different from them, but does not place barriers before him. Society respects and accepts him. Here too, the affirmative model is manifested in spiritual insanity. The insanity becomes an advantage towards realization of the goal of the person, which is to remove the physical restrictions, either so that he can become closer to Allah, or for the purpose of ideological opposition of leadership.

The study of disability is a field of academic research that is critical by nature. It is based on the Western history of disabilities and on the results of processes spanning several generations, which have excluded the disabled from society. This study serves

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as testimony that the history of the disabled in classic Islam points to religion as a central factor, both in its influence on core cultural values as well as the ability to steer the moral compass towards including people with disabilities.

- For the Full text in Hebrew Press here
- To the Shalem Fund research database Press here
- To the Shalem Fund research tool database Press here

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