APA PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE

CULTURALLY INFORMED TRAUMA AND GRIEF RECOVERY TOOLKIT

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Shifa: A Guide of Contemporary and Traditional Healing Practices for Muslim Americans

أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

"Truly in the remembrance of Allah does the heart find rest." QUR'AN 13:28

Throughout history, Muslim Americans have experienced collective trauma (see here) through discrimination, bullying, racial profiling, Islamophobia, and challenges in accessing culturally sensitive health care. Due to the war on terror, many Muslim Americans have been impacted due to displacement from our home countries, which has led to difficulties in assimilating to American culture while remaining steadfast in our cultural and religious traditions. Many Muslim cultural and religious traditions across the globe have been lost and transformed, altering the lives of millions and creating a widening gap between generations.

Muslims believe that all aspects of grieving, suffering, death, joy, and happiness are derived from Allah. As a result, there is a strong element of acceptance of Allah's will and a belief that faith in Allah is what serves as a source of comfort that aids in the healing process. Although there is an element of acceptance, Islam normalizes mourning and expressing grief. Thus, Muslims are encouraged to turn to Allah in times of distress or grief through prayer and other forms of religious practices as a way of finding solace in times of grief and distress.

Traditional healing practices for Muslim Americans can be categorized into 2 main domains of religious and cultural practices. Religious healing is seen as the most impactful and restorative, with special emphasis added to prayer, dhikr, and recitation of the Qur'an. Allah has mentioned in several places in the Qur'an that the Qur'an has been sent as a healer of the heart. It is important to create space and time to read it mindfully. There are many verses within the Qur'an that provide guidance on how to manage anxiety, depression, and grief. In fact, many western constructs of healing, such as mindfulness, are part of the Qur'an and prayer as important ways of healing, shifa, and self-care. Therefore, embracing prayer and recitation of the Qur'an is a crucial element of healing for advancing our emotional well-being.

In addition to religious practices, Muslim Americans use various cultural practices that have been passed down from generations to prioritize healing and wellbeing. The usage of folk medicine including herbs, plants, dietary practices, and incense are traditional cultural healing practices from the 7th century by Islamic scholars and physicians. Examples of herbal medicines and dietary practices include black cumin seeds, turmeric, anise, honey, ginger, and garlic, which are all mentioned in prophetic traditions (ahadith) and within the Qur'an. The Qur'an and ahadith also mention a great number of plants and fruits used in traditional healing, such as figs, olives, and pomegranates. Other therapeutic healing practices used for thousands of years in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region are fasting and Al-hejamah, most notably known as cupping. All in all, the use of traditional cultural healing practices

stemming from religious texts have served as a crucial source of health and healing for Muslims across the globe.

More recently, there has been a concentrated effort to prioritize and normalize mental health treatment in addition to the usage of religious and cultural healing practices. Due to widespread conservative cultural beliefs regarding mental health and suicidality, many Muslim Americans have been discouraged from seeking mental health treatment, and instead, merely encouraged to pray. However, a balance of traditional and contemporary practices of shifa, including mental health treatment, is important, and can lead to continued hope, healing, and emotional wellbeing for the collective community of Muslim Americans (see here for tips on choosing a therapist). For more information on interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse, *see* here. To learn about collective trauma, *see* this. To learn more about how to heal and thrive, *go to* here.