

Psychological Needs and the Rise of Early Islamic Social and Theological Movements

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Abstract

The widespread acceptance of the Prophetic (PBUH) reading of humanity and truth reflects a deep and collective existential need—one that aligned with the psychological and spiritual dispositions of the masses during the emergence of the Islamic theological system. Had this Prophetic outlook not resonated with the essential character traits and demands of the people of that era, it would not have been met with such enthusiastic reception and public endorsement. Although certain traditional and theological interpretations of religion regard such an outlook as beyond the scope of analytical discourse—attributing the realization of Islam solely to Divine will—these interpretations are founded on a cosmology in which the world is entirely influenced by the Divine, rather than one in which the Divine responds to the conditions of the world. As such, they dismiss any contextual or analytic assessments as irrelevant. However, adopting a realist perspective reveals that if the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had initiated his mission based on an unnecessary premise, the message would have appeared meaningless to his audience. This study, using a critical-analytical method and library-based research tools, examines the cognitive, spiritual, ethical, and justice-oriented dimensions of the human being. The findings indicate that the primary concerns of the people during the time of revelation were centered on social justice, followed by spirituality and the quest for meaning in life. Although aspects such as ethics and knowledge were also among the aspirations of that era, it was fundamentally external pressure (the demand for justice) and internal pressure (the pursuit of spirituality) that led to widespread distress, ultimately triggering sociotheological movements and uprisings.

Keywords: Prophetic Era, Psychological Dispositions, Spirituality, Quest for Justice, Theological Movements, Social Uprisings

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1. Introduction

The balance between supply and demand is a fundamental principle of all forms of interaction. While commonly applied in economic contexts, this principle is equally valid in epistemological and spiritual domains. Oversupply in the absence of demand leads to rejection, just as failure to supply during times of demand results in disorientation and confusion. This principle must also be acknowledged in theological discussions. The emergence of certain religions can be understood as a result of the convergence between existential demand and revelatory supply—since the occurrence of an effect without sufficient cause is philosophically untenable. This suggests that the advent of Islam in the 6th century CE was not merely incidental, but rather the outcome of synchronicity between a mature, intelligent, and ethically sound messenger, and a society primed for transformation.

When humanity reaches a state of desperation, it seeks paths of liberation. If such paths are inaccessible, cries for deliverance arise—prompting righteous individuals, whether individually or collectively, to respond. The inner and collective needs of the Arabs in the age of revelation stirred the spiritual realm into motion. In response to this plea, God sought a morally upright and determined figure—and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emerged. Thus began the process of divine offer and mass mobilization.

The Prophet's character—his nonconformity, structural critique, synthesis of compassion and intellect, self-awareness, and pursuit of meaning and justice, all embedded in a life of sincerity and effort—convinced both people and God that he was the trustworthy superhuman upon whom the burden of truth could be placed.

This understanding arises from a realist, this-worldly approach to theology. In contrast, many Islamic institutions, scholars, and sects interpret the entirety of prophetic mission—including its goals, processes, and motivations—as purely celestial and metaphysical. They argue that prophecy was predetermined, with a preselected messenger in a divinely appointed time and place, seeing any attribution of contextual influence to Divine will as a form of theological deficiency. Ironically, many who take this view still affirm the principle of *divine grace (lutf)*—acknowledging that God's actions are guided by mercy and purpose. Yet, when it comes to the *timing and conditions* of prophetic mission, they deny any temporal rationale, attributing everything solely to God's will, often invoking the verse: "Allah knows best where to place His message." (*al-An'ām 6:124*) In doing so, they overlook the broader questions regarding why such placement occurred at that specific time and place, evading deeper inquiry by claiming that any Divine decision would always be questioned regardless of its context. This reflects an overly fideistic approach to theological claims.

However, understanding the language and disposition of people during the Prophetic era requires going beyond discussions of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation). Those discussions revolve around immediate causes, while the present analysis focuses on underlying reasons—psychological and existential needs with broad generalizability, which laid the groundwork for both social and theological movements. This approach transcends the usual political, historical, and geographical analyses, delving into the deeper human and personality layers. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer a fundamental question:

How did the psychological and existential needs of the people in the Prophetic era contribute to the emergence of social and theological movements, and what role did these needs play in creating conditions for widespread public acceptance of Islam?

2. Literature Review

The analysis of the psychological needs of the people during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) has long been a subject of interest in numerous studies focused on the culture and society of that period. For example, Will Durant's *The Story of Civilization* addresses the psychological and social dynamics of pre-Islamic Arab society. Similarly, Islamic scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr and George Makdisi have explored the epistemological and ethical needs of early Islamic communities. These studies demonstrate that pre-Islamic Arab society faced profound intellectual and social deficiencies, and the emergence of the Prophet (PBUH) was a response to these urgent needs.

Moreover, scholars like Khurshid Ahmad and W. Montgomery Watt have examined the socio-political landscape of the Arabian Peninsula prior to the advent of Islam. In *Islam and Arab Culture*, Siddiqui emphasizes the role of tribal structures in either fostering cohesion or contributing to social fragmentation, arguing that Arab society was in dire need of foundational transformation. Watt, in *Muhammad at Medina*, analyzes the socio-political conditions of the Hijaz and their influence on the acceptance of the Islamic message.

Other researchers, such as Ignaz Goldziher and Julius Wellhausen, have examined religious and theological movements following the emergence of Islam. In *Islamic Studies*, Goldziher highlights the transformative impact of Islamic teachings on social and cultural paradigms, while Wellhausen, in *Muhammad at Medina*, portrays religious and social movements as direct responses to the spiritual needs of the people.

From a social-psychological perspective, the personality of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as both a divine and social leader has been explored in works like *Muhammad: A Prophet for Our Time* by Karen Armstrong and *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman* by John Esposito. These texts emphasize how the Prophet's character traits and the psychological needs of his contemporaries significantly influenced the development of sociotheological movements.

Islamic sources such as *Sīrat Ibn Hishām* and *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* offer detailed accounts of the traits of the people of that era and the behavioral transformations brought about by Islam. Ibn Khaldun, in his *Muqaddimah*, discusses the role of social and psychological needs in the formation of states and civilizations, noting the critical spiritual crisis in pre-Islamic Arab society. A recurring theme in these sources is the behavioral shift among the people in response to Islam and their deep yearning for a new spiritual order.

In more recent studies, Fazeli's 2005 article "The Qur'an's Encounter with the Cultures of the Era of Revelation" addresses the Qur'an's interaction with contemporary cultures and traditions, yet it does not focus on the personalized and generalizable needs of the people during the Prophetic era that might have triggered widespread transformation. In his 2011 article *Revelation and the Culture of the Era of Revelation*, Ebrahim Kalantari adopts a transcendental perspective, arguing for the complete detachment of revelation from contemporary culture and treating prophetic revelation solely as an abstract and elevated phenomenon, thus ignoring linguistic and sociobiological contexts.

Reza Rouhani's 2021 article *Exploring Linguistic Aspects of Qur'anic Revelation* presents a traditionalist viewpoint, defending the linguistic theory of revelation as a valid framework for responding to modern theological questions, provided it is approached through correct interpretation.

Despite this wealth of literature, a critical review reveals that no comprehensive study has yet provided a unified and systematic analysis of the simultaneous psychological and social needs of the people during the Prophetic era and their impact on religious and social movements. The present research aims to address this gap by analyzing these needs in an integrated and applicable manner, with an emphasis on their generalizability.

3. Theoretical Framework

In any scholarly study, the theoretical framework serves as a foundational structure for articulating the conceptual and practical bases of the research. Therefore, to approach the topic rigorously, clarify the theoretical foundations, conduct a thorough analysis, and evaluate the findings, it is necessary to first define and explain the key concepts related to the study.

3.1. Epistemological and Spiritual Needs of the People During the Prophetic Era

Epistemological needs constitute one of the most fundamental human necessities, representing the quest for a better understanding of the surrounding world. These include questions regarding the origin of life, the purpose of existence, the laws of nature, and life after death. Spiritual needs, on the other hand, refer to the human yearning to connect with the sacred and transcend the material world. These encompass the pursuit of inner peace, the search for meaning, and a relationship with the Divine or a reality beyond physical existence.

During the Prophetic era, such needs were both profound and pervasive among the people. Many were seeking answers to existential and metaphysical questions, such as the need to worship one true God, the search for knowledge and spirituality, the pursuit of brotherhood and social equality, and an understanding of humanity's ultimate purpose both in this world and the hereafter.

The Prophetic period was a defining epoch in Islamic history. Given the widespread socio-cultural instability of the time, the demand for psychological and spiritual security was more pronounced than ever. Additionally, the heterogeneous and fragmented tribal society—lacking an organized urban system—further underscored the necessity for both superficial and fundamental changes during the Prophetic era.

A failure to properly comprehend collective and individual needs, as well as the neglect of spiritual and psychological concerns in personal and social matters, were among the defining issues of that period (Jan-Ahmadi, 2006). Thus, the groundwork was laid for a movement that would both address and transcend these deficiencies through a holistic and revelatory approach.

3.2. Personality Prerequisites

Individual behavior is shaped not only by internal personality traits but also profoundly influenced by social, cultural, and environmental factors. In essence, human actions develop within the context of social interactions and the reciprocal influences between the individual and their surroundings. This means that the social environment plays a critical role in shaping attitudes, beliefs, and identities (Myers, 2024). From this perspective, personality prerequisites refer to the individual and collective characteristics that emerge through interaction with specific social, cultural, religious, and historical contexts. These traits include needs, beliefs, motivations, and behaviors that evolve under the influence of environmental and cultural changes.

Myers, particularly in the field of social psychology, explains how environmental and structural factors can deeply impact a person's identity, behavior, and personality. These influences are especially pronounced during times of social crisis or religious transformations, leading to profound shifts in individual personality traits. In other words, personality prerequisites reflect the interplay between social conditions and psychological structures, and during periods such as the emergence of new religions or major societal changes, these traits tend to manifest more intensely (Myers, 2024).

During the emergence of Islam, the personality traits of the Arabian people were heavily shaped by tribal structures and the traditional beliefs of the pre-Islamic (Jāhili) society. The absence of a comprehensive moral and spiritual system led to psychological and social crises, prompting individuals to search for a new sense of spirituality and social justice. The message of Islam, emphasizing concepts such as monotheism (tawḥīd), prophethood (nubuwwa), the afterlife (ma'ād), and moral values like divine justice and individual freedom, responded directly to these needs.

According to Will Durant, the advent of Islam was not only a religious revolution but also a reaction to the deep-rooted crises of the time, fundamentally transforming the personality characteristics of its people. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), by introducing teachings grounded in unity, justice, and morality, helped foster a new identity for the people of Arabia—one that profoundly altered their behaviors and attitudes both individually and collectively. The Islamic movement served as a direct response to the psychological and social needs of Arabian society, creating significant shifts in the values and personality frameworks of the pre-Islamic community (Durant, 2022).

3.3. Social Movements

A social movement is generally defined as a collective and coordinated effort by a group of people to bring about change or preserve the status quo within a society. Such movements typically arise in response to prevailing social, economic, political, or cultural needs or dissatisfactions. Social movements are thus expressions of human reactions to perceived inequalities, injustices, or the absence of fundamental rights. In many cases, these grievances stem from structural disparities or social discrimination, giving rise to a desire for reform. Additionally, the lack of political representation or disruptions in individual freedoms can also be catalysts for the formation of social movements. In such movements, individuals not only seek to alter current conditions but also endeavor to build a new and more equitable social order (Sabouri, 2006).

Scholars have described social movements as organized and coherent groups with shared principles, values, and goals. These groups typically aim to effect significant changes or resist transformations within social institutions or the existing order. Social movements serve as mechanisms of social and political transformation, relying on collective and coordinated actions to achieve structural reform or resistance. Some scholars classify social movements as a moderate form of action situated between bureaucratic behavior and revolutionary conduct. While they are more structured and organized than spontaneous bureaucratic behavior, they lack the intensity and urgency of radical revolutions. In other words, social movements are characterized by high levels of organization and coordination, but they usually aim for gradual and fundamental reforms within social institutions, rather than abrupt, radical change (Jalaeipour, 2000).

During the Prophetic era, social movements emerged as responses to the prevailing needs and the drive for transformation grounded in Islamic teachings. One of the most prominent examples of such a movement was the Hijrah (migration) of Muslims from Mecca to Medina, which led to the establishment of the first Islamic community. The Hijrah, as a social movement, represented a collective effort by Muslims to create a new society based on Islamic values. In leaving Mecca for Medina, Muslims sought not only safety and religious freedom but also aimed to form a community founded on principles such as equality, cooperation, and compassion. This event resulted in the foundation of a new social structure—distinct from the Jāhili society that preceded it (Durant, 2022)

3.4. Theological Movements

Theological movements refer to transformations in religious and doctrinal domains that arise from the emergence of a new religion or changes in existing religious teachings. During the Prophetic era, the advent of Islam as a new religion—with its unique set of divine teachings and theological system—brought about fundamental shifts in the religious beliefs and convictions of the

Arab people. Islam's core message, which revolved around concepts such as monotheism (tawḥīd), prophethood (nubuwwa), the afterlife (ma'ād), divine justice, and human freedom, gradually replaced pre-Islamic beliefs and certain contemporary religious doctrines (Ṭabarī, n.d.).

In fact, Islam not only sought to reform theological concepts but also introduced a new social and political system grounded in religious principles. These theological transformations laid the foundation for widespread religious movements, in which concepts like monotheism and prophethood became central pillars that captured the attention of many Arabs (Armstrong, 2006). These movements brought about profound changes not only at the individual level but also at the collective level, influencing the social and political dynamics of Arab society (Ibn Khaldūn, 1980).

Given these developments, it can be argued that the theological movements of the Prophetic era were directly connected to the personality needs and social exigencies of the time. External pressures such as oppression and socio-economic inequality, combined with internal drives like the search for spirituality and justice, created a fertile ground for the acceptance of new Islamic teachings (Durant, 2022). These teachings, centered on monotheism, prophethood, the afterlife, divine justice, and individual freedom, responded directly to these pressing needs.

Thus, Islamic theological movements not only reflected a shift in religious doctrine but also emerged as responses to the social and intellectual crises of the time. They played a significant role in transforming the sociopolitical structure of Arab society. These movements should be understood in relation to previous discussions of personality and social needs, as they were, in essence, the natural result of internal and external pressures that manifested in the form of a religious and social revolution.

3.5. Social and Religious Theories

Social theories focus on the study and analysis of interactions among individuals, groups, and social structures. They explore how these structures are formed, maintained, and transformed. Among the prominent thinkers in this field is Charles Tilly, who views phenomena such as revolutions, social movements, and political actions as various forms of collective behavior aimed at enacting or preventing change in society. According to Tilly, such movements are responses to deep-seated social and political dissatisfaction, and leadership plays a crucial role in either facilitating or hindering their progression. He emphasizes that social movements are driven by shared motivations and the mobilization of social and political resources, with their dynamics shaped by the interactions among leaders, participants, and social contexts (Tilly, 2004).

On the other hand, religious theories focus on the role of religion in transforming individual and collective belief systems. Max Weber, in his

analysis of Protestant ethics and capitalism, illustrates how religious beliefs can profoundly influence economic and social structures. He argues that values such as hard work and discipline—rooted in Protestant ethics—helped pave the way for the development of modern capitalism (Weber, 1992 [1371 AH]). Similarly, the theories of Émile Durkheim and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel are pivotal in analyzing religion's social functions. Durkheim considers religion as a force for maintaining social cohesion by creating shared values and reinforcing social solidarity (Durkheim, 1995). In contrast, Hegel emphasizes the role of religion in shaping individual and social identity, viewing it as a vehicle for the realization of consciousness and spirit (Hegel, 1977).

Together, these theories underscore that religion and social movements are deeply intertwined with the political, cultural, and social conditions of their time and play a crucial role in the formation and transformation of societies.

In analyzing the events of the Prophetic era, these theoretical frameworks can be applied to examine the influence of Islamic teachings on social and theological developments. The teachings of Islam, by transforming social structures and fostering collective identity, played a vital role in the formation of the early Islamic community. Under the leadership of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Muslims, in response to the unstable socio-political conditions of Mecca, moved toward establishing a new society in Medina. These movements illustrate the complex interplay of social interactions and leadership that were instrumental in shaping the Islamic movement.

From a historical perspective, Arabian society on the eve of the advent of Islam was approaching a state of social and cultural crisis. Rigid tribal structures, ongoing conflicts, and the absence of a comprehensive moral and spiritual system were among the key challenges confronting this society. In particular, social values were in decline, and widespread class divisions and tribal warfare further exacerbated the crisis. The socio-economic structure, largely based on trade and rudimentary subsistence, was destabilized by intertribal competition and a lack of natural resources (Armstrong, 2006). One of the fundamental historical and theological questions is why Islam emerged at that specific time and place. This question encompasses two main dimensions: first, the spatial and temporal conditions experienced by the Arabian Peninsula in the pre-Islamic era; and second, the intellectual, social, and spiritual needs of the society at that time that justified the emergence of a new religion.

In response to this fundamental question, some scholars have focused primarily on political dimensions. One explanation for the emergence of Islam at that juncture—interpreted through the divine wisdom of God's providence—is the political context of the period. The Arabian Peninsula was composed of various tribes with no centralized political authority. Each tribe operated

independently, a system that could be likened to a form of tribal feudalism. As a result, political power was fragmented and lacked a unified leadership. This decentralization meant that a major obstacle commonly present in other societies—namely, a central authority such as an emperor or king capable of suppressing popular movements—was absent in Arabia. Historically, dominant empires maintained surveillance over their territories through centralized power structures, thwarting emerging movements. However, Arabia was devoid of such oversight, allowing Islam to spread with minimal initial interference. The only significant political power in the region was the Quraysh tribe, which itself was fragmented into various clans, only some of which opposed the Prophet Muhammad (Juwad Ali, 1391 AH, vol. 4: 48).

This explanation implies that God, in His omniscience, chose a geopolitically strategic location for the Prophet's mission. While this view presents no theological dilemma, it becomes problematic if the entirety of Islam's emergence is attributed solely to divine will, disregarding the societal demand for reform. If the people of that era had not perceived the prophetic discourse as addressing their existential needs, Islam would not have gained such widespread acceptance.

Another explanation grounded in political analysis is the absence of foreign domination over the Arabian Peninsula. Unlike Yemen, Iraq, or Syria, which were under the influence of either the Persian or Roman empires, the core of the Arabian Peninsula remained a free zone. According to the writer al-Jahiz, this was due to the region's lack of exploitable resources, making it unattractive to imperial powers (al-Jahiz, 1384 AH, vol. 1: 187). This geopolitical isolation allowed the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to establish a strong, independent system away from imperial scrutiny—one that eventually challenged these great powers on their own soil. Had the empires been aware of this nascent movement, they likely would have quashed it early on.

In addition to the above, the Arab social structure heavily emphasized tribal leadership as a role model. Tribal leaders were often selected not only based on lineage but also on personal virtues such as generosity, bravery, and wisdom. Tribal members typically followed the paths of their leaders, including in their acceptance or rejection of Islam. Consequently, the stance of tribal leaders played a crucial role in shaping communal attitudes toward Islam. This influence, while initially a barrier, ultimately facilitated the spread of Islam once key leaders converted (al-Baladhuri, 1417 AH, vol. 1: 156–197; *Tabaqat al-Kubra*, vol. 3: 248; Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 1403 AD, vol. 13: 255). While these political and structural analyses are valid, they do not fully capture the cultural, spiritual, and social dimensions central to this research. The present study seeks to offer a sociological and analytical evaluation of the psychological and societal demands of that era, which contributed to the widespread acceptance of Islam.

4. Discussion

4.1. Social Psychology and the Theory of Human Needs

Social psychology examines the interactions between individuals and their social environments and how these interactions shape personality, beliefs, and behaviors. One foundational theory in this field is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which divides human needs into five levels: physiological (basic survival needs), safety (security and stability), social (relationships and belonging), esteem (self-worth and respect), and self-actualization (realization of potential) (Maslow, 1996 [1375 AH]).

This framework is particularly useful for analyzing the cognitive and spiritual needs of pre-Islamic society and how these evolved during the Prophet's era. Historical and social analyses by Karen Armstrong suggest that Islam emerged in response to a convergence of social, cultural, and political crises in the Arabian Peninsula. In this context, Islam's message—emphasizing monotheism, social justice, and equality—not only addressed spiritual needs but also offered practical solutions to social fragmentation and tribal conflicts (Armstrong, 2006).

Armstrong argues that Islam's core tenets—monotheism, prophecy, resurrection, and moral values—played a transformative role in reshaping Arabian society. Tawhid (monotheism) replaced polytheism and religious discord, fostering spiritual unity. Prophethood, exemplified by the ethical conduct of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), provided a model of justice and integrity. These teachings addressed people's need for moral clarity and spiritual guidance, while also nurturing a shared sense of identity among Muslims (Armstrong, 2006). Thus, Islamic teachings offered a comprehensive response to societal needs, paving the way for Islam's broad acceptance.

In addition, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory also aligns closely with fundamental human needs. This theory outlines three core psychological needs: competence (feeling effective), relatedness (experiencing meaningful connections), and autonomy (having control over one's decisions) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This model can also be applied to understand the psychological landscape of pre-Islamic Arabia. The moral decay, tribal disputes, and social injustices prevalent at the time underscored the need for unity, fairness, and ethical principles. Islam, through its teachings on monotheism, justice, brotherhood, poverty alleviation, and human dignity, offered a holistic response to these needs.

In sum, the needs of the people during that era can be categorized into several broad areas: the need for spirituality and answers to existential questions; the need for social cohesion and conflict resolution; the need for equitable resource distribution and class justice; and the need for moral guidance to regulate personal and communal behavior. The ethical teachings of the Qur'an and the

Prophet—such as justice, honesty, and human dignity—offered a direct response to both individual and collective needs. These principles not only led to moral reform but also redefined the social structure by affirming the equal status of all individuals in the new Islamic society. As Armstrong states, Islam succeeded by recognizing and fulfilling the essential needs of the people, establishing a sustainable and comprehensive system that overcame the crises of the pre-Islamic era and laid the foundation for Islamic civilization (Armstrong, 2006, p. 62). From this perspective, the expansion and longevity of Islam can be attributed to its ability to address the psychological and social demands of its time.

Psychological Needs

The psychological needs of people during the Prophet's time—including the need for physical and emotional security, respect, love, esteem, and social belonging—were among the most influential factors in shaping individual and collective behavior. Islam effectively addressed these needs through its emphasis on moral, social, and justice-based principles, thereby fostering a sense of security and societal tranquility.

Teachings that sanctified human life and property, prohibited oppression, and promoted social justice played a vital role in enhancing feelings of safety and community solidarity among Muslims. Additionally, pre-Islamic Arabs were in search of profound moral and spiritual answers to life's questions. The idolatrous beliefs and customs of the time failed to satisfy these needs, resulting in spiritual and ethical turmoil. The Qur'an addressed this void by introducing a monotheistic worldview, guiding people toward piety and spiritual consciousness (Rouhani, 2021 [1400 AH]).

Islamic teachings, emphasizing values such as honesty, loyalty, and human dignity, laid the foundation for deep moral reform. In a context rife with moral corruption, violence, and injustice, Islam established a new ethical paradigm that contributed to the reconstruction of individual and collective identities. In doing so, Islam fulfilled the psychological and moral needs of the people and created a society founded on universal human values.

4.2. Ethical Orientation

One of the most well-known hadiths concerning the purpose of the Prophet's mission is the *Hadith of Noble Morals* in which the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) states: "I was only sent to perfect noble character" (Ṭūsī, 2009, vol. 11: 358). In this narration, the Prophet explicitly identifies the refinement of virtuous moral character as the ultimate goal of his prophethood. While it may be difficult to rank moral virtues definitively, one can identify hierarchical relationships between them—some virtues may be the foundation for others. Nevertheless, it is implausible to claim that honesty is superior to self-sacrifice, or that covering others' faults is more important than resilience, or that humility surpasses generosity. Each of these virtues independently embodies dignity and human excellence.

Thus, the focus is not necessarily on a fixed moral hierarchy but rather on the intensity, persistence, and sincerity of moral action. The goal is not to prioritize truthfulness over courage, for example, but to establish a profound longing and commitment toward ethical conduct. The Qur'an itself highlights the Prophet's exemplary character, describing him as follows: "Indeed, you are of a great moral character" (Qalam, 68:4). Another verse identifies the Prophet's compassion and gentleness as the reason people were drawn to him: "By the mercy of Allah, you were gentle with them; and had you been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you" (Āl 'Imrān, 3:159).

One of the most significant aspects of social interaction is a sincere and kind-hearted demeanor. In an era dominated by material self-interest and transactional relationships, the emergence of a person who approached others—even those with no political or economic value to him—with utmost humility and respect stood out like the sun. The Prophet (PBUH) shattered the prevailing worldview of his time, a worldview rooted in materialism and devoid of spiritual meaning. His elevated perspective led him to exhibit extraordinary resilience, as demonstrated through his gentle smile, body language, stances, and judgments.

He taught that the true essence of the self is realized in service to others—that benefitting another is ultimately a form of self-enrichment, just as harming another is self-destructive. This perspective fosters emotional resilience in human relationships. Mawlānā Rūmī in his *Mathnawī* tells a story of Prophet Moses (PBUH) interacting kindly with a sheep that had annoyed him, and God revealed in that moment:

“God said to the angels: now he is worthy of prophethood”
(*Mathnawī*, Book II, line 556, 2009).

Such refined and elevated moral interaction reflects a meaning-centered worldview—a perspective that values abstract and transcendent goals. While reason and conscience may independently guide individuals toward moral conduct, ethical behavior grounded in a metaphysical and spiritual belief system exhibits a higher intensity and depth compared to one based purely on materialistic assumptions.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), through a blend of spiritual, rational, innate, and revelatory perspectives, inspired empathy and a sense of security, and drew people toward this moral paradigm. Those who had perceived the world as harsh and predatory found solace and hope in the Prophet's ethical outlook, placing themselves at the threshold of a moral revolution. His purpose-driven ethical call resonated deeply, gaining wide support. In Surah Al-Jumu'ah, the Qur'an outlines key objectives of the prophetic mission, emphasizing knowledge and capability: “He it is Who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom” (Al-Jumu'ah, 62:2). Certainly,

spirituality necessitates a rational foundation—an intellect capable of articulating a comprehensive, consistent, and coherent model of spirituality, rather than one driven by mere emotion or illusion. The realization of such spirituality requires knowledge, yet knowledge alone does not wholly constitute its cause. Instead, it is part of a broader process that involves spiritual intuition, moral development, and a deep-rooted sense of meaning.

Spiritualism

The ultimate goal of all human desires is to attain peace, spirituality, and contentment. While at first glance, one might consider certain intermediate goals as separate from spirituality or might misunderstand the process or manifestation of peace and spirituality, ontologically and fundamentally, humans are always in search of their calm and joyful selves. It is not that a person does not desire peace, but rather that, inherently, they cannot avoid seeking peace. In fact, the core desire and measure of human existence is peace, much as in logic (Muzaffar, 1998: 127), the principle of the negation of contradictions and their resolution is considered an axiom.

As a result, humans cannot bear the weight of weariness, frustration, and confusion. They constantly seek an escape from the prison of sluggishness and fatigue toward a land of contentment and felicity. Spirituality is a characteristic not found in the excess of wealth nor in its deficiency. Just as spirituality does not manifest in abasement, self-deprecation, or loss of self-esteem, it also does not appear in arrogance or autocracy, nor in compulsion or ambiguity. Doubt and complaint also cannot foster spirituality. Rather, it emerges in balance, dignity, clarity, freedom, satisfaction, faith, and self-belief, in alignment with reality and in harmony with one's nature. Any of the obstacles or prohibitions in the way of spirituality—whether caused by internal pressure on individuals, the call of a spiritually advanced and powerful person (such as the Prophet Muhammad PBUH), or a general societal desire—can ignite a spiritual movement.

The people of the Prophet's time, after a period of spiritual stagnation and being influenced by materialistic views on success, social status, and lineage, had lost their sense of self and the world. They could not find their noble and free selves because the dominant materialistic narratives of success, honor, and position had deeply affected them. They felt utterly insignificant, seeing themselves as mere elements without value, purpose, or direction. The meaning of life and the motivation to live had vanished for many in society, and they constantly experienced bitter inner monologues. They were consumed by both external self-criticism (from others) and internal self-condemnation, leaving them feeling hopeless. They saw themselves as incomplete and cast adrift. In this despair, they felt no sense of honor and derived no satisfaction from their social positions. For the majority of people, measures of success were solely financial and social status.

Then, an entirely different human being emerged—one full of security, respect, determination, and self-belief. He was a revolutionary figure, with enormous confidence and unparalleled authority, who valued every person, seeing honor, dignity, and glory in humanity itself, not in status, relationships, or wealth. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) presented a continuous and interconnected view of existence, wherein every individual was seen as a repository of truth and potential. He instilled such strength in every human being, even the weakest among them, that they were revitalized, as if life had been breathed into them. This was when his followers realized that, regardless of economic or social value, they could accept themselves. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught them self-compassion, self-praise, self-encouragement, and self-reflection.

Imam Ali (PBUH) in *Nahj al-Balagha* describes the spiritual and personal collapse of the people of the Prophet's time as follows: "In times of trials, they were trampled underfoot by its hooves, crushed by its claws, and were overcome by its fierceness. They wandered lost, confused, and deceived, living in the best of lands but with the worst of neighbors. Their sleep was wakefulness, and their eyes' kohl was tears. In a land where the learned were silenced, and the ignorant were honored" (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1983, vol. 1, p. 20).

Imam Ali (PBUH) depicted the spiritual identity of the people of his time as tumultuous and unstable, reflecting self-doubt, disintegration, and confusion. In such an era, where most people lacked self-acceptance due to material and social evaluations, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) revealed to them their true, elevated nature. As the Prophet stated in another context, the purpose of his mission was to uncover the hidden treasures of the intellect from within human souls (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1983, p. 23). This means that the role of prophethood is essentially one of awakening, reminding, and clearing away the dust. As the Qur'an itself refers to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as a reminder: "We have not sent you except as a reminder for the worlds" (Anbiya, 21:56). Therefore, the prophetic mission was centered on the spiritual and intellectual development of humanity.

4.3. Knowledge/Worship

There exists a necessary correlation between urgency and action, in the absence of obstacles. This means that if a human being becomes immersed in or committed to something, and if external barriers are removed while the necessary conditions are present, action will certainly follow. During the Prophetic era, it was the masses—not the elites—who were seeking something they deeply needed but were unable to realize on their own. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), recognizing this widespread and urgent need, and driven by his noble vision and lofty determination, set out to fulfill it.

The Prophet's balanced sense of self-worth, spiritual quest, and stable identity did not allow him to remain silent in the face of the cultural and societal disorders around him. At times, his concern for the spiritual pain and social injustice affecting people led him into such states of agitation that God, in divine compassion, expressed support for him (Tawbah, 9:128). In truth, the Prophet's character was deeply people-oriented. He could not reconcile his inner conscience and spirituality with indifference toward the suffering of those around him. One could argue that one of the key reasons for his selection as a Prophet was precisely this quality of compassion and responsiveness to people's needs.

His patience with misunderstandings and misbehavior, his ability to contextualize judgment based on individuals' circumstances, his acceptance of justifications, and his gentleness and compromise (Al-Imran 3:159; Tawbah 9:43; 9:61) all speak to a rational, compassionate companionship that endeared him to the people. As Hafez beautifully puts it: "Your beauty, in harmony with your grace, took over the world; Yes, it is through unity that one can conquer the world." (*Hafez, Ghazal 56*)

The Prophet (PBUH) was far more invested in developing his community than in pursuing personal asceticism, amassing knowledge, hoarding wealth, or seeking honored positions. He devoted his ambition, determination, and wisdom to the upliftment and development of humanity. Thus, his mission aligned with the demands and urgencies of his time. Had his movement gone against the stream of public need, it would never have gained the affectionate and earnest acceptance that it did.

It is clear that presenting a solution disconnected from real and present needs will not generate desire or support. Therefore, the Prophet's mission must have been grounded in the public's shared and urgent demands. If only his own spiritual or material needs mattered, he could have secluded himself and fulfilled them without initiating any social movement.

4.4. Worship-Centeredness

Much like knowledge, worship in itself cannot instigate a social movement. That is, humans do not rise up or rebel as a result of devotion alone. People only grow weary of rituals when they fail to experience the spirituality and transcendence those rituals are supposed to bring. In other words, worship that lacks intellectual endorsement and emotional balance leads to boredom and frustration, eventually undermining one's belief system.

This point has been referenced in various Quranic verses and Hadiths (Tawbah 9:54; al-Kulayni, 2008, vol. 3: 345; al-Majlisi, 1983, vol. 34: 123). If worship is not carried out with presence of heart and willing intention, it not only becomes burdensome but may even have counterproductive effects. Therefore, attempts to merely reform ritualistic worship often lead to resistance but not to revolutionary change.

Thus, it is incorrect to assert that the Prophet (PBUH) called people merely to establish or reform a system of worship. Worship—whether directed at idols or the One God—only finds meaning within a broader educational and epistemological framework. Worship in and of itself does not hold intrinsic merit; consequently, it cannot serve as the catalyst for a movement or revolution.

Though the Qur'an states that the purpose of human creation is worship—"And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me" (Dhariyat 51:56)—some interpreters have read *worship* here as *knowledge*, using interpretive readings (*ta'wil*) (Jawadi Amoli, 1994: 345). Even so, this verse does not indicate the *motive* behind prophethood. None of the prophets ever declared that their mission was solely to make people into worshipers. Rather, worship is a *means*—not a *sufficient cause*—for human happiness and flourishing. Worship is necessary for achieving spirituality but is instrumental, not the end goal itself. Hence, worship, being a functional good rather than a personal virtue, cannot by itself become the cause of a movement or revolution.

4.5. Social Needs

Among the key social needs of the Prophetic era were: the need to form a collective identity, the need for a socio-religious leader, the need for self-discovery and realization of individual potential, the need for justice and elimination of discrimination, the need for social cohesion and the resolution of tribal conflicts, and the need for economic justice and the alleviation of poverty.

One of the most pressing concerns of the people at that time was the establishment of social justice. This was because class inequality, abuse of power, and unjust treatment of women and children were serious societal issues in pre-Islamic Arab society. The economic system was rooted in exploitation and profiteering. Aristocratic pride, extravagance, moral decay, social disorder, and behaviors driven by ignorance and foolishness, along with adherence to shameful traditional norms, characterized Arab society before Islam (Jawad Ali, 1993, vol. 1: 39).

Justice-Seeking

According to Descartes' *conatus* theory (Deynānī, 2011: 45), along with instinctual drives and innate decrees, human beings naturally strive for progress, success, victory, survival, and the preservation of their essence. They perceive themselves as inherently entitled to rights and superiority in social interactions. However, when their perceived superiority is not actualized, they strongly react to feelings of inferiority. If they possess the power to confront their oppressors, they rise up; otherwise, they merely suffer in silence and become complainers. Naturally, they support any person or movement that seeks to restore their rights.

One of the primary issues during the Prophet's (PBUH) time was the lack of social balance. The coexistence of slavery on one hand, and capitalism and aristocracy on the other, alongside the enormous profits of merchants and the luxurious lifestyles of herders, and the authoritarianism and arrogance of tribal leaders—enjoyed only by a minority of the population—had exhausted the people. They had lost both their personal identity and social dignity. As a result, they were consumed by fatigue, self-blame, and a deep sense of meaninglessness, which led to a widespread pessimism about life. The very idea of pleasure and positive thinking amidst suffering and discrimination seemed impossible, and they became increasingly disheartened and frustrated.

In pre-Islamic Arab society, racial discrimination was rampant. Non-Arabs and individuals with darker skin were utterly deprived of rights. They were exploited as slaves solely for the comfort and benefit of Arab elites (Sharīf Qurashī, 2012: 208).

With the advent of Islam, the aspirations and privileges of the elites were seriously challenged, as many of their advantages lacked any rational or moral justification. One of these unjust privileges was racial discrimination and the enslavement of black individuals. Hence, the Qur'an firmly opposed all racial boasting and privileges:

"O mankind! We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Truly, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware." (Qur'an, 49:13)

Ṭabaṭabā'ī, in interpreting this verse, writes: "If we accept the comprehensive scope of this verse, then the Qur'an has negated all class-based differences that lead to arrogance. No human is superior to another except through piety." (Ṭabaṭabā'ī, 1999, Vol. 10: 34)

The Qur'an references various forms of discrimination, including the preference of sons over daughters in the era of ignorance, economic inequality between the rich and the poor, and the Prophet's (PBUH) caution against distancing himself from the pious and righteous poor. Racial discrimination is also strongly condemned in the Qur'an.

Surah al-Hadīd and other verses explicitly advocate for social justice:

"We sent Our messengers with clear proofs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may uphold justice." (Qur'an, 57:25)

Ṭabarī, in his exegesis of this verse, explains: "The philosophy of sending prophets is for people to treat one another with justice." (Ṭabarī, 1993, Vol. 22: 425).

Ṭabaṭabā'ī elaborates further, saying: "With the messengers, we sent down the religion so that people would observe justice in their dealings." (Ṭabaṭabā'ī, 1999, Vol. 19: 171). He notes that the movement for justice must start with an individual, for people often wait for others to initiate fairness out of fear that others might exploit them. However, prophets rekindled the path of justice by initiating the movement themselves.

Ibn 'Āshūr interprets the use of the preposition "*bi*" in the verse as signifying "association," stating that "the actions of people must be accompanied by justice, and their lives should be structured around it." (Ibn 'Āshūr, 2000, Vol. 27: 375) Similarly, al-Mughniyya writes: "God sent the prophets and gave them the Balance so they could guide people to truth and justice, enabling them to remain firm on the straight path." (Mughniyya, 2003, Vol. 7: 256)

Undoubtedly, justice and equity were among the most pressing demands of the people during the prophetic era. Since the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was a true advocate for justice both in theory and in practice, the people naturally rallied around him, each becoming like a pillar supporting the structure of Islam.

Certainly, a noble individual who seeks to elevate their spiritual and intellectual self does not divert the direction of benefit toward material gain. Therefore, such a person can be expected to uphold justice. However, once outward (interpersonal) justice is established, the human being then seeks inner (intrapersonal) balance. Justice is not the ultimate goal of human aspiration, but rather a necessary foundation for achieving spiritual depth.

In any case, there is no inevitable correlation between justice and spirituality. It is not the case that the presence of justice guarantees the presence of spirituality, or vice versa. Justice facilitates the realization of spirituality, but some individuals may still awaken their spiritual capacities even amid systemic injustice.

Knowledge Enhancement (Ma'rifat-Afzā'ī)

One of the things that seems highly improbable to be an urgent need for the people of the Prophetic era is the domain of knowledge-building and cognitive development. This is because such a pursuit can indeed be desirable but cannot, on its own, spark a revolution, upheaval, or movement. People do not rise up against their biological and primary needs simply to enhance their level of understanding. It is not the case that, for the sake of acquiring knowledge, they would put their lives in jeopardy.

Therefore, it is far-fetched to claim that the human quest for a transcendent interpretation of creation, the Creator, death, the origin and structure of existence, and its ultimate purpose alone could incite a social uprising. While this desire may contribute alongside other motivations to arouse the people, it

is neither a sole cause nor an immediate one. Since the issue of the Arabs at that time was not fundamentally about acquiring knowledge in an abstract or academic sense, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) could not mobilize them using the language of pure knowledge and theory.

Suppose there were a society that had achieved a balance in all aspects of life — educational, social, spiritual — and had realized ideals such as justice, ethics, civilization, development, educational principles, belief in immortality, and many commendable individual and social behaviors, yet still adhered to a polytheistic worldview. Would a prophet be sent to such a society? And if so, would it be effective? Would the existing peace and stability be turned into turmoil just to replace polytheism with monotheism? It seems highly unlikely. Even if a prophet were sent, his mission would be limited to correcting their beliefs, not igniting social upheaval.

Belief in a purposeful creation and Creator is supposed to foster a higher and more balanced way of life. Otherwise, belief in a Creator alone is not inherently valuable. Some may argue that a godless society is incapable of justice or ethics, lacking any blueprint for individual or social balance. Yet the Qur'an clearly links prosperity and salvation to the worship of God (see Baqarah: 189, Ma'idah: 135, Jumu'ah: 10). If we view true God-worship and prosperity as separate — not identical — then worship becomes a *means* to prosperity, not a *goal* in itself.

Ultimately, all forms of knowledge-building serve well-being and human flourishing; they hold no intrinsic value unless they translate into action. As emphasized in multiple narrations (e.g., Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 1377: 456), knowledge that does not transform behavior is essentially fruitless.

4.6. Factors Influencing the Spread and Acceptance of the Divine Message

The Language of the People

In any interaction between a speaker and their audience, the primary and most essential need is the use of a medium that can clearly convey truths with minimal distortion or loss. That medium is none other than the language and vocabulary system of the era and region where the revelation occurs.

Language is not only a communication tool but also a prominent manifestation of a society's culture — reflecting its traditions, beliefs, worldview, and intellectual trends. The structure and rules of a language shape and constrain how ideas can be expressed and received.

One of the Qur'an's beautiful but often underexplored verses is verse 4 of Surah Ibrahim:

"And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people so that he might clearly convey [the message] to them." (Ibrahim: 4)

Here, "language" refers not just to spoken words but also to the collective mindset and the cultural, ethical, and educational framework of the people. Every prophet spoke in the "language of their people" — meaning, they framed their guidance and message using the intellectual and cultural landscape of their time. Without the ability to understand their society's issues and its linguistic nuances, prophets would have been unable to establish meaningful understanding or inspire action.

Languages can evolve alongside social transformations. When major changes become ingrained in a society, they reshape the general mindset. If a messenger is unaware of the people's evolving "language," his message will likely fall flat. Hence, prophets engaged deeply with their communities, mingling with the people to generate ideas that resonated. They were not mystics focused solely on spiritual intuition, philosophers absorbed in abstract reasoning, or saints lost in retreat — they responded to real human needs with comprehensive systems and models.

Allama Tabataba'i interpreted this verse primarily in terms of vocabulary, asserting that prophets were from among the people, speaking their native language (Tabataba'i, 1378, Vol. 12: 19).

Understanding language involves two key perspectives:

- The speaker's context, which reveals their intent and the scope of their speech.
- The listener's context, since the speaker tailors their message to the audience's knowledge and assumptions. The listener, in turn, interprets it through the lens of their own expectations and beliefs.

Language reflects social identity, scientific outlook, culture, and geography. Every group, shaped by its unique attributes, speaks a distinct language that sets it apart from others. People naturally reveal elements of their identity — education, profession, rural or urban background — through their speech. Sociolinguistics has long studied how social class, education, occupation, age, and gender affect language use (Yule, 2020: 280).

Therefore, when the Qur'an states that messengers spoke the language of their people, it refers to a language that encompasses the social, cultural, scientific, and psychological identity of that era — not just words, but the whole communicative ecosystem. This is because the key to human connection is mutual intelligibility, not an exclusive, prophet-only language that leaves others incapable of understanding the message. Without shared language, divine communication would lose all meaning.

In many places, the Qur'an uses familiar vocabulary and imagery drawn from the everyday experience of pre-Islamic Arabs, assuming cultural awareness without explanation. This shows how deeply the Qur'an engaged with the intellectual and cultural climate of its first audience. Even metaphors were chosen based on elements commonly understood in that society (see: Al-Atraqji, Al-Tashbihāt al-Qur'āniyyah wa al-Bī'ah al-'Arabiyyah).

Yet some argue that many Qur'anic verses were revealed without a specific triggering event or context (Fazeli, 2005: 42). This view requires closer examination, as it's implausible to claim that the Prophet's message had no relevance to his immediate audience. If the audience did not sense a need in the communication, they would not have continued to engage with it.

To Muslims, the Qur'an is the singular divine revelation — the unaltered Word of God, safeguarded from distortion since its inception. Based on this belief, any claim that human culture, customs, or worldviews influenced its content is outright rejected (Kalantari, 2011: 44).

However, the choice of Arabic and the alignment of Qur'anic content with the intellectual and cultural structures of the time were undeniably key in spreading the divine message and ensuring its acceptance. This linguistic resonance allowed the Qur'an to address people's cognitive needs and gradually serve as a foundation for social movements (Rouhani, 2021).

Conclusion

Given that human beings possess various dimensions, facets, and aspects, identifying the core need of humanity is a profoundly challenging task. The foundational and central need—the force that gives life meaning, energizes existence, and ignites motivation and joy—when absent, leads to a sense of emptiness, skepticism, and despair. Therefore, understanding this core and enduring essence of human nature plays a fundamental role in communication, interaction, and the guidance of humanity.

This study aimed to explore the inner dynamics and existential requirements of the human being in order to identify the most essential cycle of need. It then examined how this connects to the mission and guidance offered by prophets, particularly the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). In other words, it addressed the crucial question: What was the primary concern or issue among the people of the Prophet's time that led to the acceptance of his message and its evolution into a movement and revolution?

The shared understanding that prophets must have with their people first and foremost requires linguistic and contextual insight. If the prophets misread the collective consciousness and conditions of their communities, they cannot establish a shared, generalizable will, and naturally, their divine mission would be met with public indifference.

Through exploring various human dimensions—such as the pursuit of comfort, knowledge, devotion, morality, and justice—this study ultimately concluded that spiritual longing is the most recurring and significant motivator. It posits that the ultimate goal of human life is communion with meaning itself. Prophets offered not only a vision but a defined system for reaching this meaning, and through their personal embodiment and rational spirituality, they maximized public confidence in its attainability for everyone.

By living and demonstrating a life of meaning through their actions, expressions, interactions, and thoughts, prophets confirmed that spirituality is inherent to human nature and that every individual has the full capacity to achieve it. If a person adopts the prophetic lifestyle and mindset, a spiritual self will inevitably emerge—one that connects to the source of tranquility and inner expansion.

Although justice and morality are essential human desires, they are in fact pathways to spirituality rather than ultimate ends in themselves. Prophets rose with their whole being to fulfill humanity's spiritual quest. Without presenting a clear and attainable image of spiritual maturity, no prophetic movement or revolution would have ever occurred.

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