Spirituality in Clinical Practice

The Original Self-Help Book: Al-Balkhi's 9th Century "Sustenance of the Body and Soul"

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Often described as a precocious genius, Abu Zayd al-Balkhi wrote one of the earliest "self-help" books with the intention of giving the average person a guide to better their mental health. Whereas the term "mind-body-soul" is often referred to as a "new-age" concept, a close examination of al-Balkhi's 9th century article "Sustenance of the Body and Soul" makes it clear that it was Islam-inspired beliefs and practices that motivated his holistic conceptualization of wellness. Furthermore, al-Balkhi's book is unique in that he purposely and with foresight wrote it in simple Arabic for the layperson to immediately grasp. Yet, unlike many self-help books available today, al-Balkhi's book is backed by clinical evidence and is replete with therapeutic treatments that are relevant for both physicians and the patients alike. Also unique is al-Balkhi's breakdown of mental illnesses into four categories: depression, phobias, anger, and obsessions that provide simple to understand, yet scientifically accurate diagnostic classifications and were embedded within the cultural context of his time. Al-Balkhi promoted the concept of holistic mind–body–soul wellness nearly a millennium before western psychology caught up and the transhistorical relevance of his findings still rings true today. This review of al-Balkhi life and works doubles as a historical reflection of the Islamic intellectual heritage that contributed to the field we today call psychology, as well as helps correct the erroneous, yet all too common, Eurocentric depiction of the history of psychology by providing substantive evidence for non-Western contributions to the field that can no longer be accidentally neglected nor conveniently denied.

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Often described as a precocious genius, Abu Zayd Ahmad ibn Sahl al-Balkhi, was a 9th century encyclopedic Muslim scholar who wrote one of the earliest "self-help" books on physical and mental well-being in history. Whereas the term "mind-body medicine" is often referred to as a "new-age" concept, a close examination of al-Balkhi's book *Sustenance of the Body and Soul* makes it clear that it was Islam-inspired beliefs and practices that motivated his holistic conceptualization of wellness. In this book review, we present an overview of al-Balkhi's treatise and his unique writing style that allowed his work to be accessible to the lay public centuries before the genre of self-help books became popular. Understanding who al-Balkhi was in the context of his time helps us better appreciate the transhistorical relevance of his work that still rings true over a millennium later. Furthermore, this review of al-Balkhi's life and works doubles as a historical reflection of the Islamic intellectual heritage that contributed to the field we today call psychology, as well as helps correct the erroneous, yet all too common, Eurocentric depiction of the history of psychology by providing substantive evidence of non-Western contributions to the field that can no longer be accidentally neglected nor conveniently denied.

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Abu Zayd al-Balkhi was born in the Year 235 hijri (849 Common Era [CE]) in the small village of Shamisitiyan, in the Persian province of Balkh, now part of Afghanistan (Balkhi et al., 2013). He is described by chroniclers as being reserved, generally silent, and contemplative. He was known for his eloquence and his students described his speech as being "a shower of gems" (Al-Ḥamawī & Iḥsān, p. 275). This matches his description of being introverted yet brilliant, preferring reading and writing to socializing. Al-Balkhi authored over 60 books on various subjects, earning him the title of a polymath of his time (Ibn et al., 2011). Historically, al-Balkhi was more famous for his contributions to the field of geography. In fact, the Balkhian school of terrestrial mapping is named after him. Today, however, his contributions to psychology are more impactful and better showcase his precocious talent.

Al-Balkhi received his early Islamic education at the hands of his father who was a religious studies teacher for primary education. He then traveled to Iraq in search of advanced knowledge and resided there for 8 years before returning home to Khorasan where he spent the remainder of his life. In Iraq, he studied under many prominent scholars, including the famous philosopher Abu Yusuf ibn Yaqub al-Kindi. Early in his life, al-Balkhi mastered many sciences: theology, philosophy, linguistics, geography, political sciences, theoretical medicine, and the science of temperaments. He became a distinguished scholar and was described as one of the three most prominent men of wisdom of his time (Al-Ḥamawī & Iḥsān, 1993).

Little more is known about the details of al-Balkhi's personal life. This may be attributed to his introverted personality and explains why he is less famous than his contemporaries as theorized by Balkhi et al. (2013). Another reason may have been that al-Balkhi lived most of his life away from the major centers of political and intellectual activities of the Abbasid empire. Furthermore, he was not fond of fame as evidenced by his career choice. When al-Balkhi completed his education in Iraq and returned to his village in Khorasan, he was offered several positions by the ruler, Ahmed ibn Sahl Hashim al-Marwazi. Al-Balkhi chose the post of writer, *katib*, instead of a minister in the government although the later was more prestigious. This also confirms al-Balkhi's introverted personality; preferring jobs that were less socially demanding and gave him the flexibility to research and write. Al-Balkhi held the same post in Khorasan until the age of 88, thereby effectively avoiding the temptations of jobs with better status and higher salary. Many famous scholars studied under al-Balkhi including Abu Ja'far al-Khazin, Abu Hasan al-'Amri, al-Naysaburi, Abu Muhammad al-Waziri, Ma'an ibn Firoun, and Abu Bakr al-Razi (Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, 2013). Al-Balkhi passed away in the Year 322 hijri (934 CE).

Al-Balkhi's Writings on Mental Health

It is important to note that al-Balkhi was not a practicing physician. He excelled in theoretical medicine as was common among scholars of his era (Balkhi et al., 2005). He authored a unique medical treatise entitled "Sustenance of the Body and Soul" *(Masalih al-Abdan wa al-Anfs)*. This is the only know medical text attributed to al-Balkhi; if he had written others, it is likely they did not survive until the modern age. This treatise is composed of two sections. The first section, *Masalih al-Abdan*, is devoted to physical health maintenance and disease prevention, while the second section, *Masalih al-Anfus*, focuses on mental health. The word "*Abdan*" in Arabic is the plural form of the word "*Badn*" which means "body." Whereas the word "*Anfus*" is the plural form of the word "*Nafs*" and means the self or the soul. The section on mental health is further divided into eight topics. Al-Balkhi's treatise is written using nontechnical Arabic vocabulary to facilitate its usage by the lay person.

To better understand the relevance of al-Balkhi's work, we will provide an overview of the different chapters of his book, focusing on his unique writing style that allowed his work to be accessible to the lay public. Our analysis of al-Balkhi's work is based on his original Arabic book *Masālih al-Abdān Wa-al-Anfus*, which was reproduced by Balkhi et al. (2005) and published by the "Institute of Arabic Manuscripts" (*Ma'had al-Makhtūtāt al-'Arabīyah*) and the Balkhi et al. (2005). The same original Arabic manuscript was also found in the reproduction of al-Balkhi's work by Balk̲ī and Sezgin (1984) under the same title. Two copies of al-Balkhi's original book are located in the Ayasofya Library, Istanbul today. The entirety of al-Balkhi's book is comprised of 361 handwritten pages and consists

of 268 pages devoted to the sustenance of the body and 73 pages to the sustenance of the soul or psyche (Balkhi et al., 2013).

It is also important to note two professors without whom we would not be able to as easily access al-Balkhi's article: Professors Fuat Sezgin and Malik Badri. Al-Balkhi's book was first discovered by the German-Turkish Professor Fuat Sezgin in Istanbul's Ayasofya Library where it lay untouched for many centuries. In some narrations of the story, Professor Sezgin found the book accidentally while searching for something else altogether. In 1984, Professor Sezgin reproduced al-Balkhi's book at the Institute of History of the Arab Islamic Sciences in Germany. This reproduction was brought to Professor Badri's attention in the early 1990s. Professor Badri then published his first book about al-Balkhi in the Arabic language under the same title as al-Balkhi's book at the King Faisal Research Centre in Riyadh. As the Arabic book gained attention and traction, Professor Badri was requested by colleagues and students, including the authors of the current article, to translate the book into the English language. In 2013, Professor Badri completed the translation of the second half of the book which focused on psychosomatic medicine. Seminal papers that showcase the accuracy of al-Balkhi's illness classifications and diagnostic criteria have seen been published in globally recognized scientific and medical journals, such as the current authors' publications on the striking similarities between al-Balkhi's 9th century diagnostic criteria of psychiatric illnesses such as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and phobias and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (*DSM-5;* Awaad & Ali, 2015, 2016).

Al-Balkhi's Sustenance of the Soul

In his introduction, al-Balkhi begins with the bold statement that humans are more likely to experience psychological disorders throughout their lifetime than they are to have a physical illness. He also asserts that psychological symptoms and disorders affect people differently; the degree of the psychological disorder depends on a person's mood, psychological makeup, gender, and age. Interestingly, he criticizes physicians of his time for limiting themselves to treating the body while neglecting the psychological needs of their patients (Balkhi et al., 2005).

Furthermore, he argues that his book is unique and claims that no one before him has written about psychological matters in as clear, simplified, and systematic a manner as he has. Al-Balkhi qualifies his claim by clarifying that previous writings on psychological illnesses were haphazardly scattered in the books of medicine and philosophy. This made it difficult for anyone, especially a layperson, who wanted to seek help and treatment for their psychological symptoms to access and understand these writings.

In purposefully distinguishing himself from other scholars of his time, al-Balkhi makes a concerted effort to bring mental health topics into the same volume as physical health. He elaborates on the strong relationship between the body and the psyche. Stating, for example, that when a person experiences a physical illness, their psyche is consequently affected. Likewise, when a person is struggling with psychological stress, they may develop physical illnesses. From the very outset, al-Balkhi's book reads like it belongs in the mind–body wellness section of a modern library, though the phrase "mind-body medicine" would not be coined until the turn of the last century (Shealy, 2011).

The section dedicated to mental well-being in al-Balkhi's treatise covers a wide array of mental health topics ranging from the importance of taking care of one's psychological health to signs and symptoms of mental health disorders and their suggested treatments. Al-Balkhi starts this section by first laying down the foundation of understanding the soul and draws upon these throughout the article. He defines a healthy soul (*sihat al-nafs*) as being in a state of balance and not overwhelmed by anger (*al-faza'*), depression (*al-jaza'*), or any other distressing psychological symptom. He then explains that for a person to maintain this state of balance and promote psychological well-being they would need to address the external and internal factors that influence the health of the soul. This is achieved by protecting the soul from the external influences, such as environmental factors, that disturb its balance and elicit emotions such as anger, panic, fear, or sadness. Al-Balkhi posits that in order to accomplish this, one must understand their surrounding environment and the challenging nature of life. He goes on to state that life is full of pleasant and unpleasant events; therefore, it is almost impossible for someone to live without experiencing some degree of pain,

harm, or sadness. Al-Balkhi suggests that the more a person trains his soul on how to overcome small distressful situations, the more they become capable of facing larger life challenges. He calls this technique "*riyadat al-anfus*" which approximately translates to "soul training" and describes it as being similar to training the body "*riyadat al-abdan*."

Al-Balkhi asserts that one should also protect their soul internally by managing negative thoughts that could give rise to being overwhelmed by the above-mentioned emotions. To do so, al-Balkhi stresses the importance of knowing one's soul and acknowledging its strengths and weaknesses. In a simplified manner, al-Balkhi points out that some people have strong endurance and can tolerate life's calamities without experiencing severe stress while others cannot. Therefore, it is important for people to plan their life according to their psychological capabilities. By outlining attainable goals for themselves, setting realistic expectations, and avoiding unnecessary risks, a person can protect their soul from pain, worry, and distress. Al-Balkhi delivers a clear message to the reader that maintaining one's psychological health and their soul's tranquility is more important than seeking risky and unattainable goals.

After al-Balkhi's lengthy discussion on promoting the health of the soul, he guides his readers through another level of complexity as he offers solutions on how to regain a state of psychological well-being when one loses their state of balance.

For every disorder mentioned in his book, al-Balkhi advises his readers about the importance of seeking therapy. He organizes therapy into "external" and "internal" categories. He identifies "external" therapy as seeking help from physicians, specialized counselors, people of wisdom, family, and friends. Al-Balkhi argues that this type of therapy is crucial to help a person explore the reality of their thoughts and beliefs. He further explains that when a person struggles with a psychological disorder, their psyche can become distorted. Thus, the need for advice and counseling from someone external to them arises. This message reoccurs multiple times in al-Balkhi's treatise and sets the foundations of encouraging the lay public to not only seek out help for their psychological ailments, but specifically points them in the direction of a trained person, that is, a professional in the field, who

can aid them. This is remarkable considering how reminiscent this push to seek out professional psychological care is to modern mental health campaigns and programs today.

Furthermore, al-Balkhi encourages his readers to learn how to fight against their negative thoughts using "internal therapy" in addition to the aforementioned external help from counselors, physicians, and other support systems. By "internal therapy" al-Balkhi means positive self-talk and incantations a person must engage in to keep an optimistic outlook on life even amid difficulty. He highlights the importance of positive self-affirmations because a person may find themselves in a stressful situation where they cannot immediately find external support. For this reason, al-Balkhi tells his reader that preparing positive and healthy thoughts during times of emotional balance and mental well-being are very important in defending the psyche against future turbulence. Al-Balkhi correlates this "treasure trove" of positive thoughts to having medicines kept on hand in one's home in anticipation of potential future illnesses. Here, too, we find concepts of mental hygiene written by al-Balkhi in the ninth Century that foreshadow those found in popular self-help books today.

Al-Balkhi's precious genius is perhaps best evidenced by his unique classification of psychological disorders. Never before had scholars classified various mental health conditions in this level of depth- and do so accurately, by in large, when compared to modern diagnostic criteria (Awaad & Ali, 2016). The psychological health section of al-Balkhi's book is split into four main categories: anger (*al-ghadab*), sadness and depression (*al-jaza'*), fears and phobias (*al-faza'*), and obsessional disorders (*wasawis al-sadr*). In the last four chapters of his treatise, al-Balkhi talks at length about these four categories, describing their symptoms, factors that contribute to each of these disorders, and various remedies to treat them. His classification system is based on the symptomatology of the disorders; distinguishing it from the commonly relied upon classifications found in other popular medical texts of his era.

Anger (al-ghadab)

Al-Balkhi argues that anger is one of the most frequent psychological symptoms that affects people and perhaps the reason he places it first

in his self-help book. He postulates that it is a person's temperament that may account for why they become easily evoked while others are able to remain patient. However, al-Balkhi also points out that sometimes people become angry because they are surrounded by others who continuously irritate them, yet they do not take the means to protect themselves or better their situation.

According to al-Balkhi, anger management is successful when the person uses both external and internal approaches. As an example of an external approach, al-Balkhi encourages people with anger issues to seek help from wise individuals or people whom they trust can help calm their anger when triggered. Al-Balkhi then explains that one internal approach to anger management could be to prepare aphorisms and positive thoughts ahead of time that can later be used to control one's anger at the time they experience it. Al-Balkhi clarifies that preemptively preparing useful thoughts to help manage one's anger is the more useful method because controlling anger right at its outset is much easier than controlling it after a person feels aggravated. Al-Balkhi shares another helpful piece of advice by reminding the reader that anger has an unhealthy effect on one's body as it can lead to anxiety, fever, body shaking, and may result in several physical illnesses (Balkhi et al., 2005). Al-Balkhi also details other negative consequences of anger, such as poor judgment, wrong decision making, and risking one's good reputation due to anger issues.

Besides listing the negative consequences of anger, al-Balkhi recommends that people consider the positive impacts of anger management. For example, controlling one's anger implies that a person has strength, wisdom, and good morals (*fada'il*). The reader learns that anger management gives them a better chance to reevaluate the situation that sparked their angry and allows them the opportunity to make intelligent decisions. Al-Balkhi also advises the angry person to avoid interacting with those who caused their anger for a period of time until they calm down and restore their psychological balance. In this way, al-Balkhi offers practical solutions that the reader can be easily digest and implement directly in their lives.

Sadness and Depression (al-jaza')

In this section, al-Balkhi explains sadness and depression to the reader and provides them with

practical solutions to combat both conditions. Al-Balkhi uses the term "*huzn*" to describe sadness and "*al-jaza'*" to describe severe overwhelming sadness that equates to our modern-day understanding of depression. He begins by explaining that sadness and depression can be sparked as a result of the loss of something desired, such as the loss of a lover. When a person losses something desired, sadness is typically the initial emotion that "strikes the soul" (Balkhi et al., 2013, p. 49). If this sadness is not addressed, then depression may develop and cause the person to lose energy and motivation.

Al-Balkhi classifies sadness and depression into three main categories: The first type is commonplace sadness (*huzn*) which affects people from time to time when they are faced with unpleasant news or events. The second category includes *depression of known etiology* which is identified today as "reactive depression" (Balkhi et al., 2013, p. 50). This type of depression affects people in response to a specific loss, such as losing someone or something desired. Al-Balkhi gives the example of the loss of money or a loved one. The third category al-Balkhi describes is *depression of unknown etiology*. Al-Balkhi describes this type of depression as a continuous feeling of sadness that is not related to an unpleasant event or situation. According to al-Balkhi, this type of depression causes a person to appear unhappy and present with a loss of energy and motivation. Al-Balkhi claims that the underlying cause for this third type of depression can be traced back to physical changes or illnesses (Balkhi et al., 2013).

According to al-Balkhi, symptoms of the latter two categories of *al-jaza'* depression are fatigue, loss of energy, diminished pleasure, impatience, and anxiety. The person appears miserable and may suffer from madness-like symptoms, such as screaming, pulling one's hair, tearing one's clothes, and slapping one's face. *Al-jaza'* depression may also affect the body and manifest as somatic symptoms. Al-Balkhi postulates that a person who suffers from the physical symptoms of *al-jaza'* depression will likely be difficult to treat.

Al-Balkhi suggests different treatments for each of the aforementioned three categories of depression. For *depression of unknown etiology,* he suggests the patient be treated by "body-based" therapy (*al-ilaj al-jusmani*) as well as "spiritually-integrated psychotherapy" (*al-ilaj al-nafsani*).

Al-Balkhi's body-based therapy is comprised of an appropriate medication and nutritional treatment regimen that "changes, cools or clarifies the blood" (Balkhi et al., 2013, p. 51). He argues that treatment for *depression of unknown etiology* requires both physical and psychological care. However, that medication is more important than psychotherapy in treating this form of depression. Al-Balkhi clarifies that the form of psychotherapy that is useful in this particular type of depression is supportive talk therapy, as is entertaining the patient in order to elicit positive emotions such as joy and happiness.

On the other hand, al-Balkhi postulates that *depression of known etiology* is best treated by spiritually integrated psychotherapy (*al-ilaj al-nafsani*). Al-Balkhi further explains that there are two main approaches to this form of therapy: external and internal. As mentioned earlier, the external approach equates to support from "specialized counselors and wise preachers" whose job is to raise a person's morale (Balkhi et al., 2013, p. 11). Note that al-Balkhi encourages yet distinguishes between both professional and spiritual counseling in aiding a depressed person's recovery.

The internal therapy approach stems from within the "*nafs*" (soul) and requires the depressed person to engage in a series of self-affirming mental exercises to improve their mental state. These mental exercises focus on optimistic thoughts created within the person's soul in order to overcome their sorrowful feelings. The person then mentally recalls these incantations when faced with hardships in order to help console their own sadness. Al-Bakhi advises the depressed person to remember that life is full of pleasant and unpleasant moments. That it is important to make use of every good moment and try to overcome the unpleasant ones. Moreover, that the more a person trains themselves to be patient and courageous in the face of life's challenges, the easier it becomes for them to enjoy their life with all its fortunate and unfortunate events. Al-Balkhi mentions several examples of these self-affirming incantations:

- "Life is full of unpleasant events that affect all people. I must stop thinking about what I lost and enjoy what I have"
- "Maintaining my psychological and physical well-being is more important than what I lost or cannot be attained"

- "The most painful moment is at the peak of loss; things will get better in time"

*Fears and Phobias (*al-faza'*)*

In this section, al-Balkhi lists situations that cause people to become anxious. He explains that one of the most common causes of anxiety is the dreadful expectation of an undesired situation or outcome. He elucidates that the strength of a person's psychological state accounts for the intensity of the anxiety they experience and allows some to handle stressful situations better than others. Al-Balkhi recommends that people train themselves by evoking certain thoughts that help them handle fear and anxiety. He offers his reader the advice that dreading an undesired situation is more painful than actually experiencing it and that most of our fears are not real. He likens these fears to when a person sees fog from a distance and thinks it is an impenetrable, blinding mass. If this person were to just walk through the fog, they would realize that it is a form of air that they do not need to fear. In this way, al-Balkhi introduces the reader, and the world, to the earliest description of exposure therapy known in history (Awaad & Ali, 2016).

In al-Balkhi conceptualization of fears and phobias, he claims that the more life experience and knowledge a person has, the less likely they experience fear. He gives an example of small children who get easily terrified by any loud sound they are not familiar with. Once these children grow up and learn more things, they experience less fears. For this reason, al-Balkhi recommends that people who fear certain things should repeatedly expose themselves to them as a form of noxious stimuli, even if unpleasant at first, until their fears are gone. He backs his suggestion by giving the example of experienced doctors who, after many years of medical practice, become accustomed to seeing wounds, burns and ulcers as compared to physicians who are early in their medical careers. Therefore, experience and prolonged exposure makes seasoned doctors less fearful when they see serious wounds. In this way, al-Balkhi offers the reader, and the world, with the first robust description of gradual exposure therapy as a treatment modality for fears and phobias (Awaad & Ali, 2016).

Obsessional Disorders (wasawes al-sadr)

In this section of his book, al-Balkhi contends that obsessional disorders are one of the most aggressive of all psychological disorders. He classifies obsessional disorders into two main categories depending on their underlying factors. The first category is the hereditary subtype of obsessional disorders that affects a person from birth. The second category is the environmentally induced subtype that affects a person later in life. Al-Balkhi postulates that the second category is more difficult to treat. He further adds that obsessional disorders are often episodic and that their eliciting factors are often unknown. Interestingly, al-Balkhi correctly reports that obsessions are intrusive and annoying to the patient. He then suggests that the affected patient may try to get rid of these thoughts by distracting themselves with other activities; denoting the resistance components that are associated with our modern understanding of OCD.

Al-Balkhi explains to the reader that obsessional thoughts are typically either desired or fearful thoughts. A person can become obsessed with thoughts about something they love or desire. These thoughts can then become overwhelming to the extent that they control a person's mind and prevent them from living a normal life. The other type of obsessional thoughts is dreadful thoughts that cause the person to feel anxious and worried all the time. What is fascinating about this section in al-Balkhi's book is how similar his classification and diagnostic criteria are to the modern-day *DSM-5* criteria of the disorder we today know as OCD. The fact that al-Balkhi was able to correctly determine the constellation of symptoms that make up OCD, yet did so an entire millennium before the European psychologists who are instead credited for this discovery is both fascinating and bewildering (Awaad & Ali, 2015).

Furthermore, it calls for a rewriting of the current Eurocentric narrative on the history of psychology. It is also important to note that al-Balkhi goes on to outline treatments for obsessional disorders that are very similar to today's relied upon standards of care. He splits these treatments into external and internal therapies, similar to his classification of previous psychological disorders. Here, too, al-Balkhi promotes the idea of working with a specialized counselor. External treatment for obsessional disorders requires of a counselor who can point out the obsessions to help the patient get better. Al-Balkhi advises a person afflicted with obsessional disorder to avoid loneliness and increase their social activities. He argues that loneliness triggers obsessional thoughts. Similarly, al-Balkhi recommends keeping busy with beneficial and interesting activities. He explains that people who suffer from obsessional disorders are frequently affected by boredom and lose interest in life. To break free of this, they need to distract themselves with food, music, and other forms of entertainment in order to avoid giving in to their obsessional thoughts. This suggestion is reminiscent of the current relied-upon form of exposure therapy for OCD that helps a patient distract themselves away from obsessive thoughts (Awaad & Ali, 2015).

Al-Balkhi then describes the internal treatment for obsessional disorders as employing helpful thoughts that can counteract obsessional thoughts. He encourages a person who is obsessed with fearful thoughts, such as the fear of war, epidemics, and natural disasters, to look into the veracity of their fears. Likewise, they should evaluate their thoughts and compare them with other people. Al-Balkhi explains that obsessional thoughts may be the result of a biological imbalance in the temperaments or caused by the devil (*shaytan*). He clarifies, however, that regardless of the causes of the obsessions, one should seek treatment for their condition. This urging to seek physical treatments for a mental health condition is groundbreaking, considering that the reliance on supernatural treatments for conditions like obsessional disorders were ubiquitous at al-Balkhi's time both within and outside of the Islamic world (Awaad & Ali, 2015).

Furthermore, al-Balkhi emphasizes the importance of looking into the root cause of the disorder and seeking out proper treatment accordingly. He gives an example of a building that fell because its foundations cracked. Al-Balkhi points out that these cracks must have had one or more underlying causes. Using this easy to visualize illustration, he then likens the human body and psyche to the fallen building and explains that our bodies and minds need continuous maintenance if we are to remain functional and in good shape for many years. He then encourages people to take care of themselves by consuming proper nourishment in order to avoid illnesses.

He subsequently sheds light on the importance of exploring the factors, behaviors and attitudes that have long-term effects on the health of both the soul and body. He explains that people may suffer from great illnesses or wounds yet surprisingly overcome them because they have courageous souls and a strong desire to continue living. Here, al-Balkhi ties in the influence of the soul on the health of the body and makes a strong case for mind–body wellness that a lay person can both grasp and be inspired to implement in their own lives.

Al-Balkhi concludes this section by encouraging a person suffering from obsessive disorder to seek out treatment for their illness and not to get frustrated with their condition. He encourages his reader to search high and low for a treatment to their condition. These treatments could be in the form of a plant, or an extract from an animal, and could be located on earth or in the seas (Balkhi et al., 2005). For this reason, al-Balkhi claims that people who suffer from obsessional disorders must not give up because God inspired physicians to search for treatments and make them available to others. He then references the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: "O servants of Allah, seek treatment. Verily, Allah did not place a disease but that he also placed its treatment or cure" (Al-Tirmidhi, 1983; Balkhi et al., 2013, p. 70). Here we see the evidence of al-Balkhi's theological beliefs playing a direct role in his conceptualization of illness and treatment. Al-Balkhi uses this famous Prophetic saying to encourage his reader to seek out treatments even for their psychological conditions because "God created a treatment for every ailment, and psychological disorders are no exception" (Balkhi et al., 2005). This urging for people to take their mental well-being seriously and seek out treatments for their mental health conditions is revolutionary and, like everything else about al-Balkhi, indicative of transhistorical wisdom imparted well before its time.

Factors That Influenced Al-Balkhi's Work

Al-Balkhi asserts that his book is unique because other writings about mental health were scattered in the books of the physicians and philosophers, whereas his book collects this information all in one volume. However, al-Balkhi did not provide any details about which exact sources he consulted and potentially adapted for his own text. Unfortunately, many of the medical manuscripts from his era are not readily available, making it difficult to track the original sources for the theories found in al-Balkhi's work.

The few demographic facts we know about al-Balkhi indicate he was a student of Abu Yusuf Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi, the famous philosopher and translator of Greek texts. Al-Kindi worked in the House of Wisdom which was responsible for translating of ancient medical manuscripts, including from Greek and Syriac, into Arabic (Balkhi et al., 2005). Al-Kindi was the author of over 20 medical treatises (Jammal, 2008) and a likely candidate for motivating young al-Balkhi to study and write about medicine. The close student–teacher relationship that developed between al-Balkhi and al-Kindi likely accounted for al-Balkhi adopting his teacher's views on depression (Balkhi et al., 2005). It is not clear, however, whether al-Kindi influenced al-Balkhi's views on the other aforementioned disorders: depression, phobias, and obsessions. Al-Balkhi's distinctive views on psychological conditions might have been a result of his introspective personality that allowed him to observe human behaviors and translate his observations into novel classifications (Balkhi et al., 2013). Moreover, al-Balkhi was known for his wisdom and interest in philosophy which might have added some depth to his observations. As previously discussed, scholars who excelled in theoretical medicine likely used deductive reasoning to draw conclusions from their readings and everyday life experiences.

Al-Balkhi and His Influence on His Contemporaries

Unfortunately, it is not easy to clearly quantify the impact of al-Balkhi's theories on psychological disorders on the scholars that followed him. This may be due to limitations of access by other scholars to his works or lack of access of modern-day researchers to the entire body of psychological writings from the Islamic heritage. For example, it is postulated that several medical manuscripts are stored in museums all over the world and not publicly available (Nagamia, 2010). Others were lost; we only know of their titles (Shanks & Al-Kalai, 1984). However, we still have access to the most famous of the medical treatises written by al-Balkhi's

contemporaries or within the three centuries that followed: al-Razi's "*al-Hawi*," Ibn Sina's "*Kitāb al-anūn fī al-ṭibb*" (Canon of Medicine), at-Tabari's "*Firduas al-hikmah*" (The Paradise of Wisdom), and Najab Uddin's "*al-asbab wa al-a'lamat*" (The Symptoms and Causes). What is apparent thus far is the contrast between that different writing styles and theories utilized by these authors compared to those of al-Balkhi.

Therefore, we can conclude that either al-Balkhi's theories did not reach his contemporaries or, if they did, they likely did not have a major impact on their works. However, it is reasonable to attribute this finding to the fact that during al-Balkhi's era, his fame was mainly in the field of geography, rather than in medicine. Despite his revolutionary approach, al-Balkhi's medical treatise did not lead to major breakthroughs in the medical practice of his time and hence did not receive enough attention in an era when manuscripts could only gain widespread use if scholars invested the time in copying them by hand and propagating them in this manner. Nevertheless, al-Balkhi's innovative work can easily be recognized now, more than a millennium later, as groundbreaking for its time and highly relevant to the modern fields of psychology and psychiatry.

Conclusion

In analyzing al-Balkhi's work, "Sustenance of the Body and Soul," it is clear that his clinical acuity and analytical brilliance helped him differentiate between the different types of depression—normal, reactive, and endogenous—and to give a detailed exposition on using talk therapy in the treatment of psychological disorders. He was one of the earliest to consider obsessional disorders and phobias as stand-alone diagnostic entities and not lump them in the broad umbrella of "melancholia" as they were described in most famous medical treatises written by al-Balkhi's contemporaries or within the three centuries that followed (Awaad & Ali, 2015). Al-Balkhi was also one of the earliest to correctly classify psychological and physical symptoms of obsessional disorders (Awaad & Ali, 2015) and phobias (Awaad & Ali, 2016) and describe a specific management plan for each. Furthermore, he was able to differentiate between psychoses and neuroses at a time when these disorders were typically grouped into one category. Al-Balkhi

rightly asserts in his book that no scholar before him had written a medical book of its kind.

Furthermore, the fact that his 9th century classification of disorders such as OCD and specific phobias match those used in the *DSM-5* over a millennium later, truly point to al-Balkhi's precocious genius. Many diagnostic features from al-Balkhi's book resemble our modern description of OCD today (Awaad & Ali, 2015). Al-Balkhi also valued psychotherapy as an approach to treating many psychological disorders, especially depression. Al-Balkhi's proposed management techniques rely on viewing the relationship of thoughts and beliefs to behaviors and echoes contemporary psychotherapy practices, in particular that of cognitive behavioral therapy, that were developed nearly 11 centuries after his death (Balkhi et al., 2013).

Al-Balkhi's recommendations on mental well-being indicate a great degree of wisdom and that he was a man of considerable insight. To add to the list of his talents was al-Balkhi's ability to take complex concepts and simplify them for the lay public. His thinking process is easy to follow and flows smoothly, his thoughts build upon one another until he reaches a convincing conclusion. It is conceivable that his writing style was easily appreciated by lay people and physicians alike. Furthermore, his commitment to making medical and psychological information available to all people is remarkable. In this way, al-Balkhi is one of the first scholars in history to present the lay reader with a self-help book to empower them to better their physical, mental and spiritual health. This trademark earns him a special status among the scholars of psychology. Likewise, it helps earn the Islamic civilization that produced the likes of al-Balkhi its rightful status among the major contributors the field we today call psychology.

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