

## What does Islamic Counselling offer clients?

Counselling is meant to offer a space for individuals to be able to talk and make sense of their experiences, emotions, thoughts and living realities, to help them to get to know themselves better and to make better choices in their lives. All counselling approaches will aim to do this, regardless of different theoretical models. But what is it that Islamic Counselling offers as a speciality that is not the primary focus in other approaches?

From its theoretical perspective, Islamic Counselling is based on the Islamic science of the Self, which sees the human self on a “journey of growth or self-unfoldment”, meaning that the Self passes through progressive stages in which each human being evolves toward their highest potential and excellence or, as it is known in Islam, *Ihsan*. Islamic Counselling offers a psychological and spiritual perspective for the individual’s reflections by allowing reconnection and integration with his or her existential realities as well as the transcendent realities beyond the Self. The counsellor’s interventions, which aim to facilitate growth and development for the client, rest upon a platform of focused intention and attunement. The aim is for the client to discover his or her own choices or path to take, to reflect on who they choose to be, explored in the respectful, safe, presence and company of the counsellor.

The recognition of our shared humanity in the counselling space is held by profound respect towards the pathways that have taken shape in the client’s life. Therefore, although in name it is a therapy aimed at Muslims, the reality is that it is a therapy that utilises the richness of Islamic resources in relation to the understanding of the Self and humanity that can be applied as a therapeutic approach for anyone, whether they belong to the Islamic faith or not, or even if they do not adhere to any faith at all. This is because the emphasis is on psychological and spiritual development combined. Islamic Counselling meets its clients at a level of their core beliefs to look at the essence of what makes us all human (if that is what the client wants) and so it is of significant benefit in working with crisis.

So, what does Islamic Counselling offer?

- ❖ A space to deeply listen to those realities (religious-spiritual oriented, non-religious-spiritual oriented, spiritual-existential oriented or purely existential oriented) of the client.
- ❖ A space in which the recognition of the adherence to a specific religion and way of life can be a present enabling factor in the client’s development. As Islamic Counsellors, we are trained to be able to work with any Muslims regardless of their sectarian adherence, considering the diversity and differences that exist among Muslims.
- ❖ A space in which the recognition of cultural diversity is present. Due to its cultural context, Islamic counselling as a model recognises the implicit and explicit realities of being ‘other’ and the related prejudices experienced by clients. As Islamic Counsellors we are trained to work within the context of the client’s cultural experiences and perspectives. This is very important for Muslims in their definition of their Self in relation to each other and in their definition of their Self in relation to their wider experiences in a wider plural community. A Muslim from Pakistan may approach religion and culture very differently to someone from Morocco, whilst sharing the same core beliefs. Either may or may not experience sexism or racism. An Islamic Counsellor can work with issues that are very specific to the lived realities of being, including the variations found within the diverse Muslim community.

Considering this, and in the context of the aim of the Lateef Project in North Kensington to work with the bereaved and survivors after the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower, we offer a unique perspective

for people to try and make sense of their experience in the aftermath of the fire, which also takes into account, with great sensitivity and respect, the meaning or meanings that are drawn from the client's background, religious and cultural understanding.