

## «مقاله پژوهشی»

## خودشیفتگی دینی و مؤلفه‌های آن با تکیه بر مبانی روان‌شناختی

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### چکیده

خودشیفتگی یک پدیده فردی و یا گروهی است که در سایه آن فرد و گروه به طور ناسالم عاشق خود شده، خود را برتر از دیگران برآورد می‌کنند. این عارضه در حوزه دین و دینداری نیز رسوخ کرده و به عنوان یکی از آفت‌های دینداری شناخته می‌شود؛ هدف این پژوهش توصیف و تبیین خودشیفتگی دینی و مؤلفه‌های آن است و در آن سعی شده است تا به روش توصیفی - تحلیلی و با تکیه بر مبانی روان‌شناختی خودشیفتگی، به توصیف و تبیین این پدیده بپردازد. یافته‌های پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که هم در فرد دیندار و هم گروه و جریانات دینی رخ نشان داده، باعث می‌شود تویخ‌ها و تکفیرهایی را نسبت به دیگران رقم بزنند. نتایج پژوهش بیانگر آن است که علیرغم مؤلفه‌های متعدد، اساس اعتقادات فرد و جریان خودشیفته دینی بر سه مؤلفه و اصل محوری «خودحقوق‌پنداری، مطلق‌انگاری و انحصارگرایی» متمرکز است که دیگر مؤلفه‌ها را نیز در بر می‌گیرد. در سایه این سه مؤلفه که در روان‌شناسی خودشیفتگی با عناوینی همچون احساس حقانیت و خودبرتری و خودمحوری و انحصارطلبی مورد بحث قرار می‌گیرند، فرد و گروه خودشیفته معتقد است که در مقایسه با افراد یا گروه‌های دیگر، خاص و برتر است، نیکی آن است که خود می‌پندارند و بدی آن است که آن‌ها منکرند، به خود و نیازهای خود توجه خودپسندانه داشته و بر این باور هستند که همه چیز برای خودشان است.

### واژه‌های کلیدی

خودشیفتگی، خودشیفتگی دینی، قرآن و حدیث.

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Narcissism in Religion and Its Components Based on Psychological Foundations

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### ABSTRACT

Narcissism is an individual or group phenomenon in which individuals and groups become unhealthily enamored with them, perceiving themselves as superior to others. This condition has also infiltrated the realm of religion and spirituality, being recognized as one of the ills of religiosity. The present study aims to describe and explain religious narcissism and its components. It employs a descriptive-analytical method with a focus on the psychological foundations of narcissism to elucidate this phenomenon. The results indicate that it manifests in both religious individuals and groups or movements, leading them to issue reprimands and excommunications against others. The results demonstrate that despite its multiple components, the basis of the beliefs of the individual and the narcissistic religious movement centers around three core components: "Self-righteousness, absolutism, and exclusivism," which also encompass other components. Under the shadow of these three components—discussed in the psychology of narcissism under terms such as a sense of righteousness, superiority, self-centeredness, and exclusivity—narcissistic individuals and groups believe that in comparison to others, they are special and superior, that goodness is what they perceive it to be, and that evil is what they deny. They maintain an egocentric focus on themselves and their needs, convinced that everything is meant for them.

### KEYWORDS

Narcissism, Religious Narcissism, Quran, and Hadith.



## Introduction

Religion is a collection of divine ordinances that encompass the welfare and development of humanity in various aspects. In the Holy Quran, the essence of such a religion is defined as submission to God Almighty: "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam" (Āli 'Imrān/19). This religion, which is the true religion, invites creation towards it, and Divine nature guides towards it. It is not only free from any deviation or distortion but is also ultimately enduring:

"So direct your face [i.e., self] toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the fiṭrah of Allāh upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of Allāh. That is the correct religion, but most of the people do not know." (al-Rūm/30)

Thus, religion, in its true meaning, is devoid of any weakness or deficiency. However, certain factors can disrupt adherence to religion, causing individuals to deviate from the path of commitment to the truth. Such factors are recognized as the injuries of religiosity.

Today, one of the most important topics in religious studies is the pathology of religiosity, which seeks to discover and explain the factors that cast shadows over the essence of true religion and spirituality, hindering the attainment of truth and happiness. Religiosity, like any other phenomenon, has its effects, but it also carries certain harms. The pathology of religiosity is essentially the study of these harms. What is considered in the pathology of religiosity and religious behavior is the type of attitude, belief, and approach of the individual and society towards religion and religious concepts. Innovations, distortions, alienation, exaggerations, superstitions, rigidity, syncretism, and dogmatism are among the

harms that can overshadow the foundation of religion and deviate it from its true path. Thus, it can be said that the harms of irreligion are far fewer and less dangerous than the harms of religiosity.

One of the most significant harms of religiosity that this research will address is narcissism, which is relevant both on an individual level and a collective level. As far as the individual is concerned, it is recognized as individual narcissism, which most people typically feel to some extent in themselves. In contrast to individual narcissism, collective narcissism arises, which, in its acute form, casts its shadow over the lives of religious communities as a form of social harm. The reason that collective narcissism is discussed subsequent to individual narcissism is that individual narcissism can fundamentally lead to collective narcissism—that is, the inflated self-image of the individual can be generalized to the group to which they belong. In this case, instead of the individual narcissist, what becomes significant is a collective narcissist that considers itself superior to others and rival groups. For example, the mentality of the Jews and Christians regarding their superiority over others, as mentioned in the Holy Quran: "The Jews and the Christians say: We are the children of God and His beloved ones." (al-Mā'idah/18) embodies the concept of collective narcissism.

With this introduction, it is evident that the existence of narcissism as one of the harms of religiosity can preoccupy both the religious individual and the religious community, which this research aims to elucidate in terms of its nature and components.

## 1. Background

Narcissism, as a clinical construct, was first extensively introduced by Sigmund Freud. However, he attributes the initial use of the term to Paul Nacke (1851-1913) in one of his works, although he later retracted this view and recognized Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) as the first person to employ the term.

Havelock Ellis also complements Freud's view by stating that he and Paul Nacke together were the originators of this term. This type of disorder was included in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 and received serious attention as one of the types of mental disorders. Erich Fromm, in his book "The Heart of Man and His Orientation toward Good and Evil," considers the existence of narcissism in a spiritual sense to be dangerous for the individual's survival. According to Fromm's perspective, which relates to the neutralization of narcissism in the Catholic Church, a factor that can help limit the intensity of the self-righteous component is the belief in human humility stemming from the belief in the existence of God: [The belief in human humility] originates from the belief in the Lord and the rejection of idols. The implicit concept of the existence of God is that no human can become God, nor can any individual be absolutely knowledgeable or powerful. Thus, it sets certain limits on self-worship, which arises from human narcissism (Fromm, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 94). Dr. Ahmad Ali Noorbala, in his book "Cultural Narcissism and Ethnic Failure," alongside discussing the psychological and clinical aspects of narcissism, presents hadith viewpoints on this topic in the chapter "Religious Evidence Regarding Narcissism," with sections titled

"The Prophetic View on Narcissism" and "The Alawi View on Narcissism." (Noorbala, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 20-29)

In the article "The Semantic Domain of Arrogance and Superiority and Their Related Terms in the Quran and Hadith," written by Rahman Ashriyyeh and Homa Taherpour, narcissism is divided into individual and ethnic-religious types and is discussed based on Quranic and hadith evidence (Ashriyyeh and Taherpour, 2016 AD/1395 SH).

## 2. Research Methodology

This research is qualitative and conducted using a content analysis method, falling under the category of comparative studies aimed at elucidating religious narcissism based on the psychological foundations of narcissistic personality. The authors refer to the foundations of narcissism and its characteristics, consult Islamic teachings, and extract data relevant to the topic of religious narcissism for analysis and explanation.

## 3. Findings

The findings of the research, while focusing on the nature of religious narcissism and explaining it, identified multiple components that can be summarized into three general characteristics: "Self-righteousness, absolutism, and exclusivism."

## 4. Narcissism

Narcissism is a pervasive pattern of self-inflation that encompasses an individual's attitude and determines their behavior on one hand, while on the other hand, it includes self-perception as well as perception of others; in other words, it showcases oneself as superior while viewing others as inferior and contemptible. Thus, it is said that "The most

important feature of narcissistic personality disorder is the painful feeling of self-importance." (Rosenhan and Seligman, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 2, 352) This prominent trait in individuals affected also influences the definition of the disorder, with the common denominator of most definitions being self-inflation:

"A pervasive pattern of self-inflation (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy." (American Psychiatric Association, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 708)

"Individuals with narcissistic personality disorder are characterized by a profound sense of personal importance, feelings of self-inflation, and a sense of being unique." (Sadock, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 2, 394)

"They not only see themselves as superior to others, but they also regard others with contempt for being inferior." (Theodore Millon, 2000: 331)

Karen Horney (1885-1952) describes the true meaning of narcissism as a sense of self-inflation, stating:

"Psychological self-inflation, like economic self-inflation, means attributing to an object a value greater than its actual worth; self-inflation means praising oneself for qualities one does not possess or expecting others to love and admire them for qualities that one either does not have at all or to the extent that one thinks they do." (Horney, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 66)

As Horney points out, emphasis is laid on the absence of values related to the narcissist; meaning that the narcissistic individual attributes values to themselves that they essentially lack or possess only to a minimal extent but exaggerates in the process of attributing them to themselves. Therefore, she does not consider the valuing of traits that one genuinely possesses as narcissism: "In my opinion, if an individual values their traits or

wishes others to value them, it should not be considered narcissism." (ibid.)

With these definitions and descriptions, it becomes clear that what is meant by narcissism is indeed akin to pride, or better put, pride has a meaningful association with narcissism. Pride is when a person sees themselves as great in their own eyes. In ethical texts, it is mentioned that "Pride is self-inflation due to a perceived perfection in oneself, whether that perfection is real or not, and whether there is any perfection in reality or not." (Narāqī, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 1, 438)

"In the concept of self-importance, it is not stipulated that someone sees themselves as superior to others based on the perfection and blessings they possess. From this point, the meaning of pride is distinguished from arrogance; for arrogance is when a person perceives superiority and preference in the attribute of perfection relative to others. In other words, the difference between 'pride' and 'arrogance' is that a person with arrogance considers themselves above others and elevates their status." (Narāqī, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 1, 438) Therefore, when someone is referred to with the term pride and is described as admirable, it implies that they consider themselves important and superior in and of themselves, independently of others, without any comparison being made; whereas the self-inflation resulting from arrogance (self-aggrandizing) is the result of comparing oneself to others. It can be said that pride is a precursor and a foundation for arrogance; it calls to arrogance. A person may be fascinated by their beautiful voice and become conceited about it; up to this point, it is pride and self-importance. However, if this beautiful voice leads them to view others with contempt, it has resulted in arrogance. Thus, we can say that the subject and the object of arrogance and pride can be the

same, such as physical beauty,<sup>1</sup> lineage,<sup>2</sup> knowledge,<sup>3</sup> etc.; pride arises from each of these in itself and without comparison to others. However, if, amidst their self-importance, they consider themselves superior to others, it is termed arrogance.

From an Islamic perspective, having narcissism implies having a particular affinity and attachment to oneself, opinions, desires, and individual needs, which has progressed to the level of self-worship and leads to transgression against the personality and rights of others (Faghihi et al., 2016 AD/1395 SH: 120-141).

The "Self" referred to in narcissism is a fabricated imaginative self-image rather than a true image. In the narcissistic personality, the element of imagination plays a special role; through imagination, they create value for themselves and attribute lofty qualities and characteristics to themselves. A narcissistic person, after imagining and creating special characteristics for themselves, sees others as obligated to accept them and act accordingly. However, a person who values and respects themselves genuinely has true self-esteem and does not compel others to accept or behave in any specific way, seeing no necessity in this regard.

## 5. Psychological Foundations and Components

As previously stated, according to the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), narcissism is a disorder characterized by "A pervasive pattern of self-inflation (in fantasy or behavior), need for

admiration, and lack of empathy that begins in early adulthood and is present in various contexts, and is identified by five or more of the following criteria: a grandiose sense of self-inflation; preoccupation with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love; belief in being special and unique; need for excessive admiration; sense of entitlement; exploitation in interpersonal relationships; lack of empathy; envy of others or belief that others are envious of them; and arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes. "(American Psychiatric Association, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 708)

All of these characteristics are based on an excessive focus and emphasis on a mental image that the narcissistic individual has constructed of themselves, which they use to replace their original self-image and live with; all of them indicate a kind of imbalance in the personality of the affected individual. This imbalance and disproportion exist between the real self and the imagined self, between the self and the image of the self. However, some also believe that "The notion that the existence of five of these nine criteria defines the diagnosis of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is a simplistic view. These criteria can only assist in identifying one type among the varieties of pathologic narcissism, but the multifaceted nature of narcissism [which is akin to a hydra with multiple heads] does not allow it to be diagnosed based on simple definitions, solely according to the presence of a specific number of symptoms listed in a checklist." (Gabbard, 2020 AD/1400 AH: 28)

According to this viewpoint, a question may arise: does it mean that if someone has fewer than five of the characteristics from the nine criteria, they are not considered narcissistic? In other words, possesses four of these

1. Āfatul Jamāli al-Khuyalā'u (Ibn Bābawayh, 1942 AD/1362 AH: 2, 416).

2. Āfatul Ḥasabi al-Iftikhāru wal 'Ujbu (Kulaynī, 2008 AD/1429 AH: 4, 19).

3. Āfatul 'Ilmi al-Khuyalā' (Majlisī, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 10, 188).

characteristics insufficient for labeling someone as narcissistic.

In response to this question, we refer to the perspective of Joseph Burgo. Burgo asserts that to understand such narcissists whom we know [individuals possessing fewer than five characteristics], it is necessary to look beyond the rigid definition of the DSM; (Burgo, 2019 AD/1399 SH: 25) with the explanation that: "Narcissism is an aspect of human psychology that has a universal scope and is found along a continuum of possible states. Although the APA offers nine potential criteria for Narcissistic Personality Disorder—suggesting that these criteria are separate characteristics as clear and distinct as signs of anemia like fatigue and shortness of breath—these nine characteristics fundamentally overlap and are interconnected. From a psychological perspective in which symptoms have meaning, these nine criteria essentially summarize into two criteria: "A grandiose sense of self-importance and lack of empathy for others;" the other characteristics are byproducts that arise naturally from these two. A person with a grandiose sense of self is likely to believe they are extraordinary, belong to a class of superior elites, and are destined to be a significant and important person; they feel entitled to be treated exceptionally, appear arrogant and proud, and expect others to admire and praise them. A person lacking empathy finds it easier to exploit others for personal gain or simply feels envious of others because they possess something they desire." (Burgo, 2019 AD/1399 SH: 25-26)

According to Burgo, the main characteristics of Narcissistic Personality Disorder are a grandiose sense of self-importance and a lack of empathy, which encompass other characteristics; therefore, simply possessing these two traits is sufficient to label a person as narcissistic, as these two traits can also lead to

the emergence of other characteristics. With this reasoning, a narcissistic person does not necessarily possess all nine specified criteria or five of them; this means that not only is it sufficient to possess these two criteria to be labeled as narcissistic, but any of the criteria and components can also indicate a form of pathological narcissism.

According to the above mentioned, it emerges that narcissism is an excessive focus on oneself, and a narcissist is someone who has an imbalanced special focus on themselves, while others have no significance in their eyes. This imbalanced approach reflects a type of personality disorder within them. However, it should be noted that self-esteem and a sense of self-worth and dignified self-respect are different from narcissism; "Narcissism lacks any real value backing." (Narymani, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 19)

Rather, it reflects a degree of personality destruction and its characteristics, which, beneath the appearance of self-inflation and fragile self-esteem, coexist with feelings of inferiority and self-deprecation. As expressed in the saying: "Every arrogant person is insignificant" (Tamīmī Āmidī, 1989 AD/1410 AH: 506); because they do not find a genuine belief within themselves about superiority over others. In fact, this unrealistic sense of self-inflation is an attempt to compensate for their own deficiencies and weaknesses; whereas true self-superiority is not only different from narcissism but "A sense of self-worth is one of the indicators of mental health. A sense of self-worth diminishes the significance of carnal desires in the eyes of individuals." (Shojaei, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 2, 123)

## 6. Religious Narcissism

When the discussion of narcissism and its relationship with religion and faith arises, it

refers to studying an individual or religious movement afflicted by the vice of narcissism. "The meaning of narcissism in religion is that individuals unwarrantedly regard themselves as holding a specific religious position, and their religious behaviors reflect that they believe they are the only guided group, and everyone else must adhere to their doctrine." (Morovati et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 1-14) This type of narcissism will have consequences, among the most significant of which are the "Takfīr" (excommunication) of ideological and doctrinal opponents, meaning conflict with others in a religious dimension. "For anyone who regards themselves as the standard of faith and religious knowledge, anyone they see opposing them is deemed to be non-religious and must be excommunicated." (Ayazi, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 130) In the Holy Quran, this kind of narcissism, or in other words, faith characterized by prejudice and narcissism, is condemned and rebuked:

"O! You who have believed, when you go forth [to fight] in the cause of Allāh, investigate; and do not say to one who gives you [a greeting of] peace, "You are not a believer."(al-Nisā'/94)

And such a religious individual is described as one of the worst of the community of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). "The worst of my nation are those who are enamored with their own religion, display hypocrisy in their deeds, and engage in conflict with others using their arguments." (Zamakhsharī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 3, 30)

It seems that what is referred to as religious narcissism is related to certain and dogmatic beliefs. In this type of religiosity, an individual sees themselves as the possessor of truth and considers their own self and beliefs as the standard for judgment in religious matters,

believing that anyone opposing them is outside of truth. A clear example of this type of thinking in the Holy Quran is Pharaoh, who, addressing the sorcerers who believed in the truth of Prophet Moses, showcases his narcissism in the form of self-deification and negation of others:

"Pharaoh said: Did you believe in him before I gave you permission?" (al-A'rāf/123)

Another clear example of this dogmatic mentality that has emerged from the currents of Islamic religion is the *Khawārij*. Whether we consider the *Khawārij* a religious and doctrinal movement or a movement arising from tribalism and nationalist sentiments, in either case, what has overshadowed their thoughts and behaviors, directing them toward a specific path, are their narcissistic self-perception. "The *Khawārij* regarded themselves as superior and better than anyone else, and their rigor in worship led them to such a level of narcissism that they considered their ugliest and most unjust actions to be the most beautiful and honorable:

"Say, [O! Muḥammad], Shall we [believers] inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? [They are] those whose effort is lost in worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work." (al-Kahf/103-104)

When someone recited these verses to Imam Ali (AS), he said: "The people of *Ḥarūrā'* (the *Khawārij*) are among them." (Delshad Tehrani, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 75-76)

*Dhul Thudīyyah* is one of the well-known figures of the *Khawārij* who even during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) considered himself superior and better than the Muslims and openly expressed this (Ibn Ḥajar 'Asqalānī, 1993 AD/1414 AH: 2, 341).



## 7. Components of Religious Narcissism

The term "Components of Religiosity" here refers to elements connected to narcissism, leading to it. What are discussed in this section are the essential components of a committed religious life, each of which represents a form of narcissism in the realm of religiosity, recognized as harm to the path of a faithful life.

### 7.1 Self-Righteousness

Self-righteousness is a prominent characteristic of narcissism and self-inflation, encompassing the belief that one possesses the truth while others are in falsehood. This applies both to individuals and groups. "Self-righteous narcissists are commonly found in many segments of society, especially among adherents of established religions and sects. Many people deeply cherish their beliefs, but the self-righteous individual insists on flaunting their asceticism and faith, as if that asceticism and faith elevate them above others." (Bargo, 2020 AD/1399 SH: 166)

A person who sees themselves as superior to all shies away from accepting the truth, considering them the standard of truth instead. They do not regard the honor of others as equal to their own dignity, nor do they see anyone else's blood as valuable as their own:

"But arrogance is to ignore the truth and to look past it, while regarding others as inferior to one, not seeing anyone's honor as equal to one's own nor their blood as valuable as one's own." (Tūsī, 1995 AD/1414 AH: 538)

Such individuals, seeing themselves as the absolute truth and indeed the essence of truth itself, create a dichotomy between truth and falsehood, deeming any belief outside their own as false and labeling its adherents as deviant. They believe that truth ends where their beliefs and convictions begin. The religious narcissist has an inflated image of themselves in relation

to truth, as if truth has been singularly embodied and concretely belongs to them; hence, they equate their own beliefs and interpretations with the essence of religion. This biased perspective obstructs them from accepting views contrary to their own and from tolerating any criticism, as they do not see themselves as a mixture of truth and falsehood, but as the absolute truth itself.

According to Erich Fromm (1900-1980), who discussed the neutralization of narcissism in the Catholic Church, a factor that can help limit the intensity of self-righteousness is the belief in human humility stemming from belief in the existence of God: "[The belief in human humility] originates from the belief in a creator and the rejection of idols. The implicit concept of God's existence is that no human can become God, and no one can be all-knowing and all-powerful. Thus, it establishes certain boundaries for idolizing oneself, which arises from human narcissism." (Fromm, 1999 AD/1380 SH: 94)

The belief that no one besides the Almighty God is all-knowing and capable, and that the absolute truth belongs to Him, with only a small portion of it (truth) granted to humans: "And you were not given of knowledge except a little" (al-Isrā'/85) causes the foundations of narcissism and self-righteousness to become shaky and collapses their pillars; for this belief brings them closer to realism, which has been noted as the opposite of narcissism (cf. Mehraban, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 201).

In the narrations of the Imams (AS), one of the characteristics of narcissistic individuals is their lack of realism and inability to correctly understand themselves, their capacities, and abilities: "I am amazed at the arrogant, the boastful, who was once a drop of semen and will one day be a decomposed corpse" (Barqī, 1951 AD/1371 AH: 1, 242); "I am astonished

by the arrogant person who boasts about themselves while being created from a drop of semen and will ultimately become a putrid carcass."

What often causes a narcissistic person to distance themselves from realism, and for unreality to be identified as one of their cognitive characteristics, is the foundation of self-concept and the fantasies built upon it. This means that the unstable self-concept and the self-aggrandizing fantasies of the narcissistic individual lead them to construct an imaginary image of themselves, thus distancing them from recognizing the reality of their existence and that of others. A realistic perspective would entail experiencing the wounds of narcissism, which puts their imagined superiority and grandiosity at risk of being shattered. For this reason, even when they see and understand the truth clearly, they may resist it and refuse to accept it: "And when Our clear signs came to them, they said: This is clear magic." (al-Naml/13)

In this regard, the reason for standing against the truth and denying it is also attributed to the injustice and self-superiority of the narcissistic individual: "And they denied it while their selves were certain of it, out of injustice and arrogance." (al-Naml/14). The Holy Quran depicts such individuals, who due to their lack of realism and false and imaginary self-concept consider their invalid actions to be true and good, as the most detrimental of people: "Say: Shall we inform you of the most losing of deeds? Those whose efforts have been wasted in this world and they think that they are doing well." (al-Kahf/103-104)

## 7.2 Absolutism

This component, as another aspect of religious narcissism, is based on two pillars: "Believing

oneself to be immune from error and misjudgment in thought and behavior, and not believing in the potential for growth and perfection in others." (Mehrizi, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 203) Therefore, what this entails is a lack of respect for the beliefs and thoughts of others; because someone who considers themselves to be in possession of the truth sees no obligation to respect the beliefs of others and regards them as worthless and in error:

"The Jews say, "The Christians have nothing [true] to stand on," and the Christians say, "The Jews have nothing to stand on," although they [both] recite the Scripture." (al-Baqarah/113)

"The Jewish and Christian nations, who denied each other's religions, did so out of bias and self-admiration; because there is no doubt that the religion of Moses was true in its time, and while the religion of Jesus was also true in its time, it was a complement to the religion of Moses." (Najafi Khomeini, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 1, 254) In this way, the absolutist considers themselves the possessor of every right and virtue, and consequently believes they are self-sufficient and do not need to seek truth and reality from others. Malekiyan describes this trait as follows: "The absolutist believes that we not only can reach the truth, but that when we reach the truth, we will also become aware of it; for this reason, an absolutist is unwilling to abandon their belief and insists, I am making this decision [the Arabic word for decision means to become deaf]—I decide, meaning I make myself deaf to any new words because I have reached the truth." (Malekiyan, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 141).

In the Holy Quran, one of the prominent examples of this mindset and resistance to hearing the truth and any other speech outside of their own mental preconceptions is the people of Noah: "And whenever I called them

to seek Your forgiveness, they put their fingers in their ears, covered themselves with their garments, persisted, and were arrogant in their arrogance." (Nūh/7) "They were deaf and blind to the truth and the new message that Prophet Noah brought."

Moreover, the Holy Quran describes this trait of narcissistic individuals in religion, who are biased towards their own path and tradition, stating that they "Have closed the doors of their minds to any other speech and do not allow any new light to shine upon them, any breeze to blow upon their souls, or any truth to be revealed to them," (Makarem Shirazi, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 14, 259) as follows:

"So they broke their affair among themselves into sects, each faction rejoicing in what they had." (al-Mu'minūn/53)

A prominent example of this characteristic can be found in the history of the *Khawārij* and the ideologies that arose from them. Although the *Khawārij* initially appeared as a political faction, they later took on a religious hue, proposing specific religious beliefs and zealously and egotistically defending them. According to Motahhari, "Narrow-mindedness, thinking within very low horizons, confining Islam and being a Muslim to the boundaries of their limited thoughts, the belief that everyone else misunderstands or does not understand at all, and those others are on the wrong path and are hell-bound" (Motahhari, n.d.: 139) are characteristics that reveal the self-centered outlook of the *Khawārij*.

Their perspective on religious propositions was binary, viewing issues in absolute terms. The best example of this mindset can be seen in their view of disbelief (*Kufr*), faith (*Imān*), and the idea of *Takfīr* (declaring someone a disbeliever). "They said that whoever commits a major sin is a disbeliever, an apostate, and

outside the faith, and must be killed." (Valavi, 1988 AD/1367 SH: 1, 42)

Their absolutism regarding this issue reached the point where some of them claimed that even the child of a disbeliever (one who has committed a major sin) is also a disbeliever and must be killed! (ibid.)

Imam Ali (AS) addressed this absolutist viewpoint of the *Khawārij* concerning disbelief and faith, arguing against it:

"So if you believe that I have made a mistake and have gone astray, then why do you consider the whole community of Muhammad (PBUH) to be led astray by my mistake and hold them accountable for my error? And why do you declare them disbelievers for my mistakes? You wield your swords blindly, mingling the guilty and innocent, treating them all as one; while you certainly know that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) stoned the married adulterer, prayed for him afterward, and passed on his inheritance to his family and killed the murderer, returning his inheritance to his family, cut off the hand of the thief, and whipped the unmarried adulterer, then gave them their share from the spoils of war and allowed them to marry Muslim women; thus, he punished them for their sins and imposed divine limits upon them, yet did not eliminate their Islamic share or remove their names from among the Muslims." (Thus, they did not become disbelievers due to major sins) (Nahj al-Balāghah: Sermon 127).

### 7.3 Exclusivism

Many of the religious debates and conflicts throughout history can be traced back to exclusivism. Conflicts between Shia and Sunni, *Uṣūlī* and *Akhhbārī*, and jurist and philosopher fall into this category. The essence of exclusivism is based on the denial of the other and "Its presupposition is the claim of attaining

a faultless and error-free truth." (Mehrizi, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 178)

John Hick, in interpreting this component of religious narcissism—as one of the preconceived beliefs of Christianity—states that:

"Human salvation/liberation is exclusively linked to a specific religious tradition, to the extent that it becomes part of their religious beliefs and faith discussions, asserting that salvation is confined to this particular group, while the rest of humanity is either left out of the equation or explicitly excluded from the realm of salvation. Perhaps the most emotionally charged and impactful expression of such a belief can be seen in the dogmatic Catholic assertion that says: Outside the church's jurisdiction, there is no salvation. Alongside this is the 19th-century Protestant missionary movement that stated: Outside of Christianity, no salvation is conceivable." (Hick, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 64-65)

One of the prominent manifestations of this aspect of religious narcissism, mentioned in the Holy Quran, pertains to the People of the Book; here, each group considers its own religion superior and more valid than others, believing that guidance is exclusively for those who take refuge under the belief in it:

"And they said: Be Jews or Christians, then you will be guided." (al-Baqarah/135)

What stands out in committed religiosity is the notion of *ijtihad*, and indeed, risky *Ijtihads*; because it seeks to interpret religion according to its own perceptions and understanding, defining and incorporating truth within the bounds of its beliefs:

"And the Jews and Christians said: We are the sons of Allah and His beloved. Say: Then why does He punish you for your sins? Rather, you are humans amongst those He has created; He forgives whom He wills and punishes whom

He wills. And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them, and to Him is the return." (al-Mā'idah/18)

"Their intention with this expression [Sons of Allah and His beloved] is that we, the Jews and Christians, are so beloved and near to God that we are like sons who are beloved to their fathers; thus, we have the status of princes in relation to the Almighty God, having a separate rank from the rank of the common people, distinguished by our closeness to the sovereign. This status necessitates that they be treated differently than the subjects. It is as if princes are not subject to the laws and rules applied to the people, such that if an ordinary person commits an offense, they face a certain punishment, except for princes. Similarly, where everyone must adhere to certain actions, princes, due to their connection to the royal throne, cannot be insulted or punished like the other individuals in the realm, nor can they find themselves in the same circumstances as the common subjects. All these privileges stem from the fact that these princes, due to their connection to the throne, enjoy the favor, love, and dignity of the king. Thus, the term "Sons" refers to exclusivity, privilege, and nearness while the phrase "And His beloved" is akin to an explanatory addition to "The sons of Allah." This means that the term "Sons" is interpreted as implying exclusivity and being beloved, and this concept of love is not merely based on their intrinsic qualities; rather, it is a consequence of it, which is the immunity from punishment and retribution. They want to claim that because we are the sons of God—i.e., His beloved friends—whatever we do are permissible, and we will never encounter punishment. Our end will only lead to mercy and dignity since punishing us conflicts with the privileges, love,

and dignity that we possess." (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 5, 406)

It is due to this narcissistic belief that the Jews replaced reality with their fantasies and believed that they would only experience a limited number of days in punishment:

"And they said: The Fire will not touch us except for a few days." (al-Baqarah/80)

In other verses of the Holy Quran, religious self-importance is emphasized as a clear example of collective narcissism:

"And they said, 'None will enter Paradise but those who are Jews or Christians.'" (al-Baqarah/111)

"And the Jews said: The Christians are not based on anything, and the Christians said: The Jews are not based on anything." (al-Baqarah/113)

"And [the People of the Book] said: Be Jews or Christians, then you will be guided." (al-Baqarah/135)

The Holy Quran states that this religious superiority complex and exclusivity are unfounded, merely products of their mental constructs and imaginations:

"These are only their vain wishes. Say: Produce your proof if you are among the truthful." (al-Baqarah/111)

In another verse of the Holy Quran, the exclusivity of salvation and liberation to a specific name, thought, belief, or group is strongly reproached, and it defines it as revolving around none of these titles but rather introduces it as dependent on true faith and devoted worship:

"Yes, whoever submits their face to Allah while being righteous, then their reward is with their Lord, and there will be no fear upon them, nor will they grieve." (al-Baqarah/112)

What causes narcissism in this and all similar individual or collective cases is a certain kind of religious belief that leads a person to

make false claims, sets unrealistic expectations for themselves, and deprives them of the means of guidance.

## Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine religious narcissism and its components, focusing on psychological foundations. Narcissistic personality disorder is one type of personality disorder recognized in psychological and psychoanalytic studies, characterized primarily by self-inflation, a lack of empathy, and a need for admiration. Such an individual perceives themselves as right, superior to others, and deserving of respect and admiration, while deeming others as lowly and insignificant, whose sole duty is to acknowledge their superiority. This type of perspective and stance arises because the narcissistic person is caught in delusion and false beliefs, resulting in a distorted perception of themselves and others.

In Islamic teachings, various characteristics are described that portray narcissism in a general sense and religious narcissism in a specific sense. The analysis of religious and psychological sources throughout this research presented three main components of "Self-righteousness, absolutism, and exclusivity" for religious narcissism, which also encompass other components. Based on these components, the narcissistic individual's outlook towards themselves and others is dogmatic, definitive, and prejudiced, considering those who align with them and their beliefs as insiders, while viewing others as outsiders; thus, just as a narcissistic personality, according to psychological principles, has an illusion of superiority and entitlement, religious narcissism is characterized not by true faith but by a claim to righteousness and a deluded sense of religiosity, where the primary harm is self-deception, undermining both their own beliefs and those of others.

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