

Vol. 15/ Issue: 36/ Autumn 2021

The Seven Earths and Seven Heavens in the Light of Jung, Maslow and Hindu Psychology



Bharat Jhunjunwala

Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Management, Bengaluru, India

bharatjj@gmail.com



Abstract

The Holy Quran tells of Allah creating seven heavens and seven earths. These have been traditionally identified cosmologically with seven stars etc. or geographically with seven lands. We provide an alternative interpretation that these refer to seven centers in the spinal cord. Each center has a physical location and a psychic quality. Abraham Maslow has suggested that a human being evolves progressively through seven needs. We suggest this evolution refers to the consciousness of a person rising through the seven centers in the spinal cord. Carl G. Jung has commented on the Hindu understanding of these seven centers and endorsed that these have psychic qualities. We find that this understanding is consistent with the Quran. In particular, a Hadith tells of the area from the Prophet's "throat to lower part of the abdomen" being washed. This is the location of the lower five of the seven psychic centers in the spine. The Hadith then goes on to tell that the Prophet ascended the seven heavens and met with Adam, Jesus and John, Joseph, Idris, Aaron, Moses and Abraham sequentially. In the seventh heaven He was shown Bait-al-Ma'mur or Allah's House which could indicate that his consciousness reached the crown center which is said to be the seat of "spiritual emancipation."

Keywords: Seven heavens, spinal cord, Maslow, Jung, Hindu psychology.

Received date: 2021/4/15

Accepted date: 2021/10/28

DOI: [10.22034/jpiut.2021.45484.2793](https://doi.org/10.22034/jpiut.2021.45484.2793)

Journal ISSN (print): 2251-7960 ISSN (online): 2423-4419

Journal Homepage: www.philosophy.tabrizu.ac.ir

We read the Ayats relating to seven heavens and seven earths in the Holy Quran in the light of the writings of psychologists Carl Jung and Abraham Maslow and Hindu psychologists find that these writings help us understand the underlying science beneath the teachings of the Quran.

We believe the Quran gives us the words of Allah. However, it often appears surreal. We have tried to understand the Quran in the light of the writings of modern psychologists. We find that seven heavens and seven earths told of in the Quran could tell of the psychic- and physical dimensions of the seven psychic centers in the spinal cord.

1 .Seven Earths and Seven Heavens

The Quran says:

It is Allah who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them. [His] command descends among them so you may know that Allah is over all things competent and that Allah has encompassed all things in knowledge (65:12).

First let us consider the seven heavens. Islamic scholars understand this Ayat in terms of Allah having created the heavens and earths physically. Dr Javed Jamil, Chair in Islamic Studies and Research, Yenepoya University considers the seven heavens to be a reference to seven tiers of the universe, namely, earth, solar system, galaxy, cluster, super cluster, outermost visible tier and uppermost invisible tier (2021, p. 8). Ayat 65:12 may be read with Ayat 67:3 that says that Allah “created seven heavens in layers.” Thus, the seven heavens must be one above the other in layers. The difficulty with this suggestion is that the earth does not form a “layer” of the solar system; nor does the solar system form a layer in the galaxy.

The Miracles of Quran website suggests that the seven heavens could be the planets of the stars: “The seven superimposed heavens [presumably “stars”] have planets like Earth, it is just that we cannot see them nor collide with them but we can detect their gravity” (Miracles of Quran, 2020, Mass in extra dimensions, para 10). However, there are innumerable stars having different numbers of planets. Thus, the number “seven” in the Ayat is not explained. Further, the stars are not located in layers.

We may now consider the seven earths. Imam Mufti on the Religion of Islam website draws our attention to two Hadith that indicate that the seven earths too were located in layers:

It was narrated on the authority of Abu Salamah that a dispute arose between him and some other people (about a piece of land). When he told Aisha (the Prophet’s wife) about it, she said, ‘O Abu Salamah! Avoid taking the land unjustly, for the Prophet said: “Whoever usurps even one span of land of somebody, its depth through the seven earths will be collared to his neck.”’

Salim narrated on the authority of his father that the Prophet said: “Whoever takes a piece of land of others unjustly, he will sink down the seven earths on the Day of Resurrection” (Al-Bukhari, n.d., cited in Mufti, 2007).

These Hadith indicate that the seven earths are in layers one above the other so that a person could “sink down” through them.

The seven earths are explained by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2015, Commentary on 65:12) in terms of seven areas: “the seven earths or lands can also be understood as a reference not to seven levels, but to seven lands spread across the earth, hence to the seven continents or climes” But this explanation does not match with the seven earths being made in “layers” as indicated in the above Hadith.

Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid says that “there is nothing that tells us about the earths other than the one in which we live. So what we must do is adhere to what the reports say, and believe that there are seven earths, without seeking to know further, or to find out whether this is proven by modern science or not, or other things that may generate doubt and uncertainty. Rather we must believe that complete knowledge and power over these higher and lower realms belongs to Allah alone” (2014, last para). Indeed we must leave the scripture to the realm of the unknown where there exists an unsurmountable problem. However, we must try to surmount a problem before we consider it to be unsurmountable.

We now consider the possibility that the seven heavens- and earths refer to the psychic- and physical aspects of the seven centers in the spinal cord.

2 .Hindu Psychology, Jung and Maslow

Before proceeding further, we may mention at the outset that Indian Islamic scholar and author Allama Syed Abdullah Tariq has made a case for the identification of the “Sabians” mentioned in the Quran with the Hindus although other scholars identify them as Zoroastrians (n.d., pp. 43-45). The Sabians could provide a link between Hindu psychological concepts and the Quran if this view is found to be tenable.

The Hindus believe that there are seven psychic centers in the spinal cord. Grand-disciple of doyen of Yoga Swami Shivanand and author of Holistic Yoga Swami Shantidharmananda has detailed the psychic aspects associated with the seven centers. We give in the table below the physical location of the seven psychic centers in the spinal cord as per Swami Shantidharmananda and modern psychologists (2004, p. 271; Stoler, 2020). We also give alongside the psychic aspects of the centers as given by Shantidharmananda (2004, p. 271) and Jung (1932, p. 76). Jung has associated the lower six psychic centers with certain psychic aspects. He has considered the topmost seventh center to be “not relevant” from the psychic angle. We also give the seven “needs” as described by psychologist Abraham Maslow (Stoler 2018).

Table 1: Concordance of Hindu Psychology, Carl G Jung and Abraham Maslow

Location of the Psychic Center	Psychic Aspect according to Shantidharmananda.	Psychic Aspect according to Jung.	Need according to Maslow.
Crown	Spiritual emancipation	“Not relevant”	Self-Actualization
Third Eye	Control over everything	Receiving Command	Aesthetic
Throat	Elixir	Spiritual	Cognitive
Heart	Subtle sound	Consciousness	Esteem
Solar Plexus	Prosperity	Emotions, Passion	Belonging
Sacral	Peace and comfort	Desire	Safety
Root	Basis of life	Unconscious, Latent	Physiological

An explanation is in order on our reference to Jung. Freud considered the unconscious to be an impediment to the fulfillment of the material desires of the conscious. The unconscious had no “positive value” for him. Jung made a break and put the deeper desires residing in the unconscious in the driving seat. This jives with the Islamic view. Hayati Aydin, Faculty Member in the Faculty of Divinity at the Yuzuncu Yil University, Van, Turkey quotes Pakistani philosopher of the twentieth century Sir Muhammad Iqbal: “It is in the elimination of the satanic from the Divine that the followers of Freud [such as Jung] have done inestimable service to religion” (2010, page 13). Thus, while the unconscious was essentially “satanic” for Freud, Jung brought out the “divine” aspect of the same and gave it a positive orientation.

The table above shows that the crown center is the seat of “spiritual emancipation” according to Hindu psychology and the seat of “self-actualization” according to Maslow. However, as mentioned above, Jung considers the crown center to be “not useful”:

The [Crown] center... is merely a philosophical concept with no substance to us whatever; it is beyond any possible experience... There is no experience because it is one, it is without a second... This is an entirely philosophical concept, a mere logical conclusion from the premises before. It is without practical value for us (*italics provided*) (1996, p. 112).

The terms “it is one, it is without a second” points to an all-encompassing entity that rhymes with “Spiritual emancipation” as per Shantidharmananda and “Self-Actualization” as per Maslow. At the same time, in considering the crown center to be “without practical value,” Jung negates the very objective of connecting with the All-encompassing Entity that is the objective of the Quran. Thus, despite his putting the unconscious in the driving seat, Jung hesitates to connect it with the Higher Entity and the Islamic critique of him holds on this count.

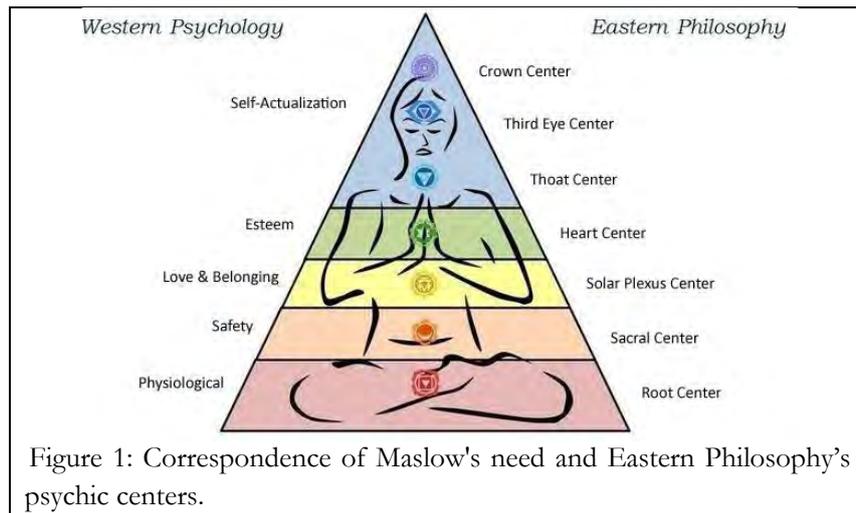
Abdallah Eric David Rothman undertook a survey of Islamic psychologists for his dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Department of Psychology, Kingston University, London, He reports a number of psychologists saying, “Jungian psychology as being perhaps the closest form of Western psychology

to that of an Islamic perspective, but [though] Jung's ideas were similar, but not entirely the same" (2019, p. 122).

Jung wrote in a letter at the age of 80, "I do know that I am obviously confronted with a factor unknown in itself, which I call 'God.' God is a circle whose center is everywhere, but whose circumference is nowhere" (1960). Thus, Jung did not accept the existence of God though he did not deny it either. He left it to the realms of the unknown while Islamic philosophy determinedly posits His existence. These differences between Jung and Islamic view relate to the seventh crown psychic center and do not come in the way of understanding the lower six psychic centers.

Psychologist Abraham Maslow developed a seven-level hierarchy of needs: "Physiological," "Safety," "Belonging," "Esteem," "Cognitive," "Aesthetic" and "Self-Actualization." Before proceeding further, we may mention that Islamic scholars have found Maslow's concept of self-actualization to be close to the Islamic view. Abdallah Eric David Rothman says, "Abraham Maslow's notion that the goal of psychological growth and development is 'self-actualization' resonated with me" (2019, p. 122). Similarly, Hayati Aydin says that Maslow was among the few western psychologists who recognizes the best and highest of the soul structure, namely, Nafsi Mutmainna (2010, p. 1). We now move forward recognizing both the positive aspects and limitations of Jung and Maslow described above.

Dr. Diane Roberts Stoler, neuropsychologist, trauma therapist, brain injury survivor and co-author of *Coping with Concussion and Mild Traumatic Brain Injury* has associated Maslow's needs and the seven psychic centers in the spine as detailed by Hindu psychology (2018). She writes: "the various Maslow hierarchy levels were almost identical to the seven Chakras used in these areas!" "Chakra" is the name used for these centers in Hindu psychology. She has associated the four lower psychic centers with the four lower needs as shown in Figure 1. However, she gives a picture in which the three highest needs are subsumed into one need, namely, "self-actualization." We shall show below that the subsuming of three higher centers into one could be indicated in a Hadith.



This discussion establishes that there are seven centers in the spinal cord that are located one above the other in layers. These centers have a specific physical location. These could be mentioned as the “seven earths” in Ayat 65:12.

Iranian scholar Alireza Farhang has suggested that the number “seven” can be “considered as an ‘entity’ beyond [the] sensible world and spins [psychic centers] also are one of its possible manifestations” (personal communication, April 9, 2021). These centers also have a psychic dimension as indicated by Shantidharmananda, Jung and Maslow in the table above. This could be mentioned as seven heavens in this Ayat.

3 .Six Days and the Throne

The Quran says:

It is He who created the heavens and earth in six days and then established Himself above the Throne. He knows what penetrates into the earth and what emerges from it and what descends from the heaven and what ascends therein; and He is with you wherever you are. And Allah, of what you do, is Seeing (57:4).

This Ayat speaks of the six days, the Throne, earth and heaven in continuity suggesting a connection between them. We suggest that the creation in “six days” may be related to the rise of consciousness through the six psychic centers. The consciousness may then ascend to the seventh topmost center of the spine and attain “Spiritual emancipation” or “Self-Actualization” as shown in the Table above. This may be referred to as Allah establishing Himself on the Throne in the spinal cord, say, of a Prophet.

Dr. Jamil has objected that “God does not require any object to sit on” (2021, p. 21). That is indeed true. However, the word “*is'tawā*” used in this Ayat for “established” could be used in the sense of “riding” or “sit firmly” as used in Ayat

43:13. Thus, it could suggest the crown center “riding” or controlling the lower centers. Regarding the throne, Seyyed Hossein Nasr explains:

Since mounting the Throne suggests the physical movement and location of a body, while God has no body according to Islamic thought, many commentators note that this phrase is a symbol for God’s demonstration of His Sovereignty over His creation (2015, Ayat 54:7).

Indeed, Allah has no body and He does not need a physical Throne. However, it can be a psychic Throne where man can connect with Allah. This Ayat could be understood to show Allah’s sovereignty over the cosmic creation as well as to the crown center’s sovereignty over the lower psychic centers. In this way we find that the “mounting” of the Throne could be a pointer to the rise of consciousness to the level of “Spiritual emancipation” or “Self-Actualization.”

Another Ayat says that the Throne was located on water:

And it is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days - and His Throne had been upon water (11:7).

The “water” here could indicate the cerebrospinal fluid that surrounds the brain and a layer of which is on the top of the brain (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021). The Crown Center is located at the top of the skull—above the cerebrospinal fluid—hence on water.

4. Three, Four, Five, Six

Another Ayat throws light on the heavens and earths:

Have you not considered that Allah knows what is in the heavens and what is on the earth? There is in no private conversation [of] three but that He is the fourth of them, nor are there five but that He is the sixth of them - and no less than that and no more except that He is with them [in knowledge] wherever they are (58:7).

The Tafsirs on this Ayat by Ibn Abbas, Al-Jalalayn, Ibn Al Kathir and Seyyed Hossein Nasr are silent on the numbers given in this verse. However, Syed Abul A'ala Maududi asks, “The question may arise why have three and five been mentioned here instead of two and three? Why has two and then four been left out? The commentators have given many answers to this question but in our opinion the correct answer is that this style has been adopted for maintaining the literary beauty of the Quran. Without this the style would have suffered from blemishes” (n.d., comment on 58:7-13). While this explanation is plausible, it does not preclude an alternative interpretation in terms of the six lower psychic centers. The lowest “one” and “two” centers may have been subsumed to be within the “three.” The statement “no less than that and no more” implies a certain fixity about the number “six” and matches with the six lower psychic centers.

5 .The Pathways

Two Ayats mentioned previously and Ayat 51:7 tell of certain movement between the heavens and the earths. We have italicized the relevant words in these Ayats:

It is Allah who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them. [His] command descends among them... (65:12).

It is He who created the heavens and earth... He knows what penetrates into the earth and what emerges from it and what descends from the heaven and what ascends therein... (57:4).

By the heaven containing pathways (51:7).

Ayat 65:12 indicates a downward movement in the seven heavens and earths: "command descends among them." Ayat 57:4 indicates a downward-upward movement "descends-ascends" between the seven heavens and earths. Ayat 51:7 tells of movements in the pathways between the heavens.

These three Ayats read together indicate a downward-upward movement between the seven heavens and earths. The ascending tracts of the spinal cord carry sensory signals up while descending tracts carry motor signals down the brainstem (Saladin, 2003, p. 486). These movements could be indicated in these Ayats.

Dr Zafarul-Islam Khan, editor of Milli Gazette and translator of the Quran says the word hubuk used for pathways in 51:7 refers to "beautiful architecture" (personal communication, March 22, 2021). While this is plausible, the alternative suggested by us may also be considered.

6 .The Prophet's Visit to the Seven Heavens

The Prophet narrated a dream:

A golden tray full of wisdom and belief was brought to me and my body was cut open from the throat to the lower part of the abdomen and then my abdomen was washed with Zam-Zam water and (my heart was) filled with wisdom and belief (Bukhari 054:429).

This Hadith tells of the area from the Prophet's "throat to lower part of the abdomen" being washed. This is the location of the lower five of the seven psychic centers in the spine. The upper three centers are sometimes depicted as one as done by Stoller in the figure above. Thus, the seven physical centers can be depicted as five starting from the throat to the root. This Ayat may mention five- or seven psychic centers in the Prophet's spinal cord being washed with Zam Zam water.

The Hadith then goes on to tell that the Prophet ascended the seven heavens and met with Adam, Jesus and John, Joseph, Idris, Aaron, Moses and Abraham sequentially. In the seventh heaven He was shown Bait-al-Ma'mur or Allah's House which could indicate the crown center being the seat of "spiritual emancipation" as said by Shantidharmananda and "self-actualization" as said by Maslow.

7 . Naqshbandi

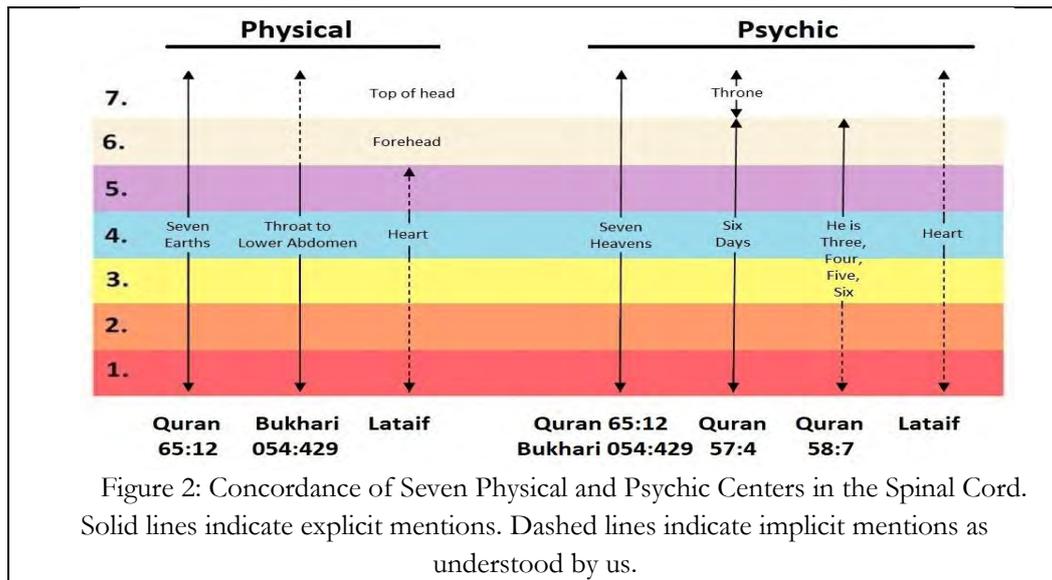
According to the Naqshbandi order there are five psychic centers located around different parts of the chest known as Lataif. The function of these Lataifs is Zikr, concentration towards Allah, to make possible Kashf, to perceive the omnipresence of Allah and to perceive the closeness of Allah. The Sixth Latifah is located at the forehead and functions to purify the human soul. The Seventh Latifah is located at the top centre of the head and serves to absorb the Barakah of Allah into the entire body (Awan, 2021). This system concords with our suggestion if we think of the heart to be holding the keys to the lower five psychic centers. The location of the sixth Lataif at the forehead corresponds with the location of the sixth psychic center at the “third eye.” The function of the seventh Lataif, namely, absorbing the Barakah of Allah, especially matches with that of “spiritual emancipation” as said by Shantidharmananda and “self-actualization” as said by Maslow.

We must mention that Sayyid Rami al Rifai of the Naqshbandi order is ambivalent about the connection between the Hindu chakras and Lataif. On the one hand, he says, “Chakras are located in entirely different locations on the body and deal with different things than the Lataif” (1436, p. 24). On the other hand, he says, the location of chakras along the spine “is perfectly accurate if we think about the spinal cord and it’s role. When every Organ in the body wants to send a signal through the nervous system to the brain, including the heart, it sends it through the spinal cord, so along this cord at various locations on it are chakra points associated with each organ.”

His main contention is that while the Hindu system focused on healing physical illness, “Islam focused on the workings (“psychology”) of the self which centered around the heart and through that the rest [o]f the body would be healed...” (1436, p. 31). Thus, Rifai does not deny the existence of the chakras. The difference is in the focus, not in the content. The cleansing of the six lower centers can be done either by cleansing the lower six centers directly as done in the Hindu approach; or by cleansing the forehead and the heart center, and the heart center then cleansing the lower four centers as done in the Naqshbandi approach.

8 . conclusion

We give in the chart below the concordance of the physical- and psychic aspects of the seven centers in the spinal cord in the Ayats and traditions given above.



We have three overlapping indications of physical locations of the psychic centers. Ayat 65:12 could tell of seven earths. Bukhari 054:429 could tell of the Prophet's body being cut open from the throat to the lower abdomen. The "throat" could subsume the two higher centers just as Stoler has done in Figure 1 above. The Naqshbandi Lataif could tell of five points in the heart that could correspond with the lower five centers. These five, along with the forehead and "top of the head" could make the seven physical centers.

At the psychic level, Ayat 65:12 and Bukhari 054:429 could tell of the psychic dimension of the seven centers as seven heavens. Ayat 57:4 could tell of Allah creating the six lower psychic centers in six days then establishing Himself above the throne at the crown center. Ayat 58:7 could tell of Allah being three, four, five and six—no less than that and no more. These could be the six lower psychic centers. The Lataif could tell of reaching the divine through the heart.

We present this discussion before the scholars so that the psychology embedded in these Ayats and Hadith can be understood in modern terms. Needless to say, it also provides a possible bridge between the Islamic and Hindu psychological thinking.

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank Hamid Ali, Jamshed Akhtar, Javed Jamil, M A Hashmi, Mohammadullah Khalili, Shakeel Ahmed Siddiqui, Siraj Naqvi and Zafarul-Islam Khan for their kind comments.

References:

- A'ala Maududi, S. A. (n.d.). Translated by Dr. Zafar Ishaq, *Introduction to the Understanding of the Qur'an*. Retrieved August 29, 2021 from <https://www.islamicstudies.info/tafheem.php?sura=58&verse=7&to=13>.
- Al-Bukhari, S. (n.d.). *Hadith Collection*. Retrieved August 28, 2021 from www.hadithcollection.com.

- Mufti, I. (2019). The Seven Earths, The Religion of Islam. Retrieved April 14, 2021 from <https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/299/seven-earths/>.
- al-Munajjid, S. M. S. (2014). Meaning of the verse 'It is Allah Who has created seven heavens and of the earth the like thereof.' Islam Q&A. Retrieved April 11, 2021 from <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/192413/meaning-of-the-verse-it-is-allah-who-has-created-seven-heavens-and-of-the-earth-the-like-thereof>.
- al Rifai, S. R. (1436). What Is The Difference Between The Lataif, Chinese Meridians, and Buddhist and Hindu Chakras. *The Islamic Journal*, Issue No 5.
- Awan, H. A. M. A. (n.d.). The Spiritual System. Retrieved April 12, 2021 from <http://www.owaisiah.com/spiritualsystem.htm>.
- Aydin, H. (2010). Concepts Of The Self In Islamic Tradition And Western Psychology: A Comparative Analysis. *Studies in Islam and the Middle East*, 7:1.
- Encyclopaedia Britannica (2020). Cerebrospinal fluid. Retrieved April 14, 2021 from <https://www.britannica.com/science/cerebrospinal-fluid>.
- Jamil, J. (2021). *A Systematic Study of The Holy Quran*. Mangalore: Mission Publications.
- Jung, C. G. (1932). The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga, Edited by Sonu Shamdasani. *Bollingen Series XCIX*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.
- Jung, C. G. (1960). Letter to 'The Listener' on January 21, 1960. *Tamboo*. Retrieved April 8, 2021 from <https://tamboo.co.za/%CE%B2%CE%B9%CE%B2%CE%BB%CE%B9%CE%B1/jung-on-god/>.
- Miracles of Quran (2020). Seven Heavens. Retrieved October 27, 2020 from https://www.miracles-of-quran.com/seven_heavens.html.
- Nasr, S. H. (2015). *The Study Quran*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Rothman, A. E. D. (2019). *Building an Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: A Grounded Theory Study* (Doctoral dissertation), Kingston University, . London.
- Saladin, K. S. (2003). *Anatomy & Physiology: The Unity of Form and Function*, Third Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Shantidharmananda, S. (2004). *The Holistic Yoga*. New Delhi: Srikunj Sadbhavana Manch.
- Stoler, D. R. (2018). Maslow's Hierarchy vs. 7 Chakras- Interestingly Similar! *Psychology Today*. April 15, 2018. Retrieved August 28, 2021 from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-resilient-brain/201804/maslows-hierarchy-vs-the-7-chakras-interestingly-similar>.
- Tariq, S. A. (n.d.). *Now or Never*. Rampur: Raushni Publishing House.