

## **Title: "A Guide for Therapists : Assisting Muslim Clients in Coping with Guilt Over Palestinian Suffering"**

### **Introduction:**

In my capacity as a scholar and Muslim psychotherapist, I often encounter clients grappling with the profound burden of guilt resulting from the suffering of the Palestinian population, especially innocent children, in conflict-ridden regions. It is within our noble tradition to offer guidance to fellow therapists on how to assist Muslim clients in managing these emotions. This article delves into the application of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) as a powerful tool to address unjustified guilt and embark on constructive actions toward a more just world while preserving one's mental well-being.

### **Understanding Different Kinds of Guilt:**

In our journey to understand and navigate guilt, it is crucial to recognize its multifaceted nature. One form of guilt that often plagues our Muslim clients is what we term 'altruistic guilt.' It arises when we perceive that we haven't done enough for those suffering in the world. This kind of guilt emerges from our deep sense of compassion and a genuine desire to contribute positively to the world.

To address altruistic guilt effectively, it is vital to embark on a process of self-reflection and self-compassion. We must begin by exploring the underlying beliefs and expectations that fuel this guilt. Often, these expectations are rooted in our own personal values and ethics, which are indeed noble but can sometimes be unrealistic. In this context, cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) proves to be particularly useful. It assists in identifying and challenging irrational beliefs, enabling us to set more achievable goals for contributing to causes we are passionate about.

Another indispensable aspect of dealing with altruistic guilt is the cultivation of self-compassion. We must recognize that our capacity to alleviate suffering in the world has its limits. While we earnestly strive to make a positive impact, we cannot shoulder the entire weight of the world's burdens. Techniques from therapies such as acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) can help us distance ourselves from our guilt and embrace our humanity.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that guilt is a complex and multifaceted emotion. There exist various forms of guilt, each with its unique underlying dynamics and therapeutic approaches. Whether it's survivor's guilt, interpersonal guilt, shame-induced guilt, or unwarranted guilt, the process often entails self-reflection, self-compassion, and the willingness to collaborate with a trained therapist to address and heal these emotional wounds.

In this therapeutic journey, we endeavour to balance our deep compassion for others with self-compassion, recognizing that our limitations do not diminish our desire to contribute positively to the world. By embracing this holistic approach, we can gradually release the burden of excessive guilt and foster a healthier, more compassionate relationship with ourselves and the world around us.

### **How Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) Could Help:**

1. **Identification of Negative Thoughts:** In the initial stage of CBT, therapists focus on helping clients identify specific thoughts and beliefs that trigger guilt. These thoughts may include ideas such as "It's my fault that I can't do anything to help them" or "I should have done more to prevent this." "I should not be laughing or enjoying any part of my life, because people are suffering."

2. **Critical Evaluation of Thoughts:** Trained CBT therapists can guide clients in critically evaluating these thoughts by asking questions like "Do you genuinely have the power to change the situation in Palestine?" and "Are these thoughts realistic and fair to yourself?"
3. **Thought Restructuring:** The goal is to help clients replace these negative thoughts with more realistic and constructive beliefs, such as "I can commit to helping Palestinian children, but I am not the sole responsible party."
4. **Learning Coping Strategies:** CBT offers practical coping strategies, such as participation in peace initiatives, the use of mindfulness and relaxation techniques, and the cultivation of self-compassion while understanding the limitations of individual influence.
5. **Behavioural Change:** CBT encourages clients to take concrete steps, such as engaging in charitable actions, sharing information about the conflict on social media, and supporting organizations striving for peace and justice in the Middle East.

#### **Importance of Not Bearing the Burden Alone:**

It is essential to acknowledge that the burden of global suffering cannot be shouldered solely by individuals or therapists. It is perilous to absorb all negative feelings and believe that one can save the entire world. The responsibility for promoting positive change is shared. Therefore, it is crucial to ventilate, seek support, and collaborate with others in the pursuit of a just world.

#### **Conclusion:**

Guilt stemming from the suffering of others, particularly the Palestinian population, can be truly overwhelming. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) equips therapists with an effective approach to address these emotions and guide clients towards constructive actions. It is imperative to remember that therapists and clients are not singularly responsible for all global issues. Collaboration, self-care, and the sharing of the burden with others are indispensable steps towards a better world and healthier mental well-being. This guide aims to assist therapists in aiding Muslim clients in navigating these complex emotions and contributing to positive change.

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