

THE ALCHEMY OF HAPPINESS IN NOORDIN HASSAN'S "TONIGHT, THE TURTLES CRY"

(Alkimia Kebahagiaan dalam "Malam Ini Penyuu Menangis" Karya Noordin Hassan)

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Abstract

Current interest in the nature of happiness has made it a new focal point in the study of literature. While in the West it has been analysed in relation to the dramatic form of tragedy, there has been no corresponding research on it within the context of Islamic theatre. As the founder of *teater fitrah*, an Islamic brand of theatre, Noordin Hassan and his plays could prove to be fertile grounds from which the issue of happiness could be explored. Hence, this paper aims to discuss Noordin's play, "Tonight, the Turtles Cry" (1994), from an Islamic conceptual framework for happiness as derived from two philosophers, al-Ghazali and al-Attas. Al-Ghazali's *The Alchemy of Happiness* (1910) and *Ihya' 'Ulum-id-Din* (1982) as well as al-Attas' "The Meaning and Experience of Happiness" (2014) provide the main theoretical texts from which this framework is taken. Elements of this framework consists of the following: knowing oneself, knowing Allah SWT, knowing this world, which includes ways on building and developing one's relationship with one's family and community, having an appreciation for nature and, finally, having

a strong conviction in the hereafter. The analysis used is through close reading of the text. The findings of this paper show significant aspects of Noordin's play as reflecting these components of happiness and showcasing values that are needed to sustain the wellbeing of a person.

Keywords: Happiness, Noordin Hassan, al-Ghazali, al-Attas, Islamic theatre

Abstrak

Makna kebahagiaan ialah tumpuan utama baharu dalam pengajian kesusasteraan. Walaupun di Barat hal ini telah dianalisis melalui hubungannya dengan tragedi, sebuah genre drama, belum ada lagi penyelidikan yang serupa, sepanjang yang diketahui, dalam konteks teater Islam. Sebagai pengasas teater fitrah, sebuah teater Islam, Noordin Hassan dan dramanya memberikan ruang yang cukup untuk menerokai isu kebahagiaan. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk membincangkan "Malam Ini Penyu Menangis" (1994), karya Noordin Hassan, berdasarkan kerangka konsep kebahagiaan Islam yang diperoleh daripada dua ahli falsafah, al-Ghazali dan al-Attas. The Alchemy of Happiness (1910) dan Ihya' 'Ulummiddin (1982) karya al-Ghazali serta "The Meaning and Experience of Happiness" (2014) karya al-Attas ialah teks teoretis utama kerangka kerja ini diambil. Unsur kerangka kebahagiaan ini terdiri daripada yang berikut: mengetahui diri sendiri, mengenali Allah SWT, mengenali dunia ini, termasuk cara-cara membina dan mengeratkan hubungan seseorang dengan keluarga dan masyarakat, serta menghargai alam semula jadi dan, yang terakhir, mempunyai keyakinan teguh mengenai wujudnya akhirat. Kaedah analisis yang digunakan adalah dengan mencermati karya sastera dengan teliti. Dapatan penelitian menunjukkan aspek penting dalam drama Noordin mencerminkan komponen kebahagiaan ini dan memperlihatkan nilai yang diperlukan untuk mengekalkan kesejahteraan seseorang insan.

Kata kunci: Kebahagiaan, Noordin Hassan, al-Ghazali, al-Attas, teater Islam

INTRODUCTION

If in the Western form of dramatic tragedy the protagonist's heroism is marked by his ceaseless yet futile hope for ever-elusive happiness, the

Islamic version of drama is one that clearly depicts an enduring belief in the power that the Almighty God, Allah SWT, has on granting happiness to His human creations. From the 1970s through the 1990s, this was certainly the underlying message that reverberated in many of Noordin Hassan's plays that were staged during this period. The Islamic belief that man is also originally moulded to follow his inborn disposition to obey and worship Allah SWT because of His power over His creatures also led Noordin to group his plays under the label *teater fitrah* or *fitrah* theatre, with the word *fitrah* in Arabic meaning "natural constitution". While a number of critical works have discussed the Islamic components of Noordin's plays as socio-historical manifestations of the Islamic resurgence that took place in Malaysia from the 1970s onwards (Krishen Jit, 1984; Md. Salleh, 2005), very few critics have actually attempted to read Noordin's plays from an Islamic perspective. Although Solehah has also written on the way Noordin's plays concentrated on showcasing certain values in Islamic ethics (Solehah, 2005), she does not discuss these from any theological standpoint. Unlike these earlier works, articles by Rohani stand out for having analysed Noordin's plays from a number of Islamic conceptual frameworks, such as al-Faruqi's concept of unity as applied in Noordin's play "1400" (Rohani, 2016) as well as al-Ghazali's concept of good governance in *Sirih Bertepuk Pinang Menari* and *Mana Setanggihnya?* (Rohani, 2015). Since Noordin himself had clearly set out to elucidate in artistic terms the tenets and teachings of Islam through his plays, this paper is an attempt at fulfilling a gap within current studies on Noordin's Islamic brand of theatre by approaching his play, "Tonight, the Turtles Cry", from al-Ghazali's conceptual framework for happiness. For this purpose, Malim Ghazali and Mohd Bahadun's (2009) translated text from the original Malay language is used as a reference in this paper.

BACKGROUND

In the world of modern Malay drama, particularly in the 1970s up to the 1990s when Islamic philosophy gained traction amongst many Malay-Muslim intellectuals in Malaysia, discourse regarding what constituted an Islamic theatre began to emerge. Noordin Hassan (1929 - present), as the foremost modern Malay-Muslim playwright at that time, became increasingly well known for having his own conception of drama that embodies and propagates Islamic values, which he calls *teater fitrah* or *fitrah* theatre. Born in Pulau Pinang in 1929, he had spent some time in

England studying in the field of education as well as gaining exposure to the type of experimental theatre that would eventually influence the form that his dramas took throughout his active involvement in modern Malaysian drama. In the creative process and staging of his plays, Noordin was able to convey both Islamic and Malay values that reflected the thinking and philosophy of the Muslim-Malay people of his country (“Biografi Noordin Hassan”, 2011). According to Noordin, there are six principles in *teater fitrah* that every Islamic theatre show should uphold, as published in his work, *Teater Fitrah dan Esei Pilihan* (2002).¹ Within the limited scope of this paper, only three are mentioned here. The first principle is that a play should lead to the belief that having faith in Allah SWT is at the core of human nature, or *fitrah*. This inevitably produces, as in the second principle, a realization in the minds of the characters and, ultimately, the audience that the purpose of life is to submit to Allah SWT completely. A play, as the fourth principle states, should highlight that having faith in Allah SWT would influence one’s spirituality, resulting in confidence and belief in Him and the teachings of Islam beyond any doubt. Of the six principles, only the first, the second and the fourth principles are somewhat directly related to the concept of happiness, which is discussed in this paper.

“Tonight, the Turtles Cry”, originally written in Malay and performed as *Malam Ini Penyu Menangis*, is a semi-autobiographical play based on the life of the late poet J.M. Aziz,² whose real name was Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahman³ and who was left blind in mid-life as a result of being infected with leprosy. In spite of his blindness, he wrote a number of poems that gained him recognition amongst well-known Malaysian artistes, particularly poets. The play was staged for the first time on 1 October 1994 in conjunction with the official opening of the Experimental Theatre, National Culture Complex, by the Prime Minister of Malaysia at that time, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. It was staged for the second time at Primula Hotel, Kuala Terengganu, in 1996. J.M. Aziz and his wife were in attendance for both performances (Noordin, 1995, p.39). In “Tonight, the Turtles Cry”, there are three separate stories with a similar theme: a wife’s enduring love and devotion towards her husband. All three stories are intertwined with J.M. Aziz’s poems, becoming a single and unique whole play. In fact, the title of the play comes from two of J.M. Aziz’s poem, “Tonight” (*Malam Ini*) and “The Turtles Cry” (*Penyu Menangis*) (Noordin, 1995, p.39). As Noordin mentions in his article on the play, the stories are meant to educate his audience and also J.M. Aziz himself who, as a member of the audience,

was expected to draw parallels between his own life and those of Prophet Job's and Mamat's (1995, p.42). Each of the stories is based on a historical event, the life of Prophet Job (a.s.) is taken from the Quran while the story of Mamat and his wife, Minah, is from the travel writings of Hugh Clifford (1866-1941), which he wrote when he was a British Resident of Pahang. Noordin had read both narratives as a secondary school student and found them memorable because of the virtues and values embedded in them (1995, p. 42).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, or otherwise known as al-Ghazali (1058-1111), remains the most notable contributor to the Islamic discourse on happiness. Having written *Alchemy of Happiness* (1910) (originally written in Persian as *Kimiya-yi Sa'ādat*), he makes an overt connection between Islamic core beliefs and man's wellbeing. Written shortly before 1105, the book emphasises the knowledge one acquires of oneself, one's God, this world and the hereafter as information that would bring about self-contentment. While *The Revival of the Religious Knowledge* (1982) (more commonly known and mentioned by its original Arabic title, *Ihya' 'Ulum-id-Din*, and written in the 11th century) is similar to *The Alchemy* in its treatment of the components needed for a person's wellbeing, it is lengthier and more detailed than the latter. Hence, in this paper, references are made to both works regarding the elements of happiness in al-Ghazali's writings. In Volume 4 of *Ihya' 'Ulum-id-Din*, for example, al-Ghazali brings attention to a list of desirable virtues that one should instill in oneself in order to experience happiness. This information is noticeably absent in *The Alchemy*. Following al-Ghazali, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1931-present), Malaysia's contemporary Islamic philosopher, expands his discussion on knowledge of the self and God as pre-requisites to experiencing *sa'adah* (or happiness) in *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam* (2014). Al-Attas' unique contribution to al-Ghazali's framework is, in his elucidation of the term, opposite of *saadah*, which is *shaqwah*. Al-Attas explains that in the Quran, *shaqwah* is a generic term that means "misery." Hence, it could also be used to address similar conditions in specific contexts, such as *khawf*, which is fear of the unknown, of solitude and foreboding dread that accompanies a rejection of God and His guidance in this world and the hereafter. In the West, this rejection is dramatised in the form of an

artistic enactment of the life of an ill-fated protagonist whose tragic flaw (*harmatia*) and pride (*hubris*) conspire together with nature to bring about fear of an impending misery. To the ancient Greeks, *eudaimonia* (a word that is commonly translated into English as “happiness”) can only be felt momentarily since it is brought about by luck and fortune and, therefore, cannot be predicted. For Muslims, however, happiness is achievable since their knowledge of themselves as servants of Allah SWT, whose purpose in life is to worship and obey Allah by committing good deeds as well as forbidding themselves and others from doing bad deeds, would eventually lead to an everlasting “spiritual” happiness in this world and the hereafter. From these two philosophers, it can be deduced that the elements of happiness are, firstly, one’s knowledge of not only oneself, but also God and the world, which comprises of one’s family and community as well as appreciation for nature, and, secondly, a strong conviction in the hereafter.

DISCUSSION

Like many of his plays, Noordin’s “Tonight, The Turtles Cry” has many religious references. One character is even called “Syaitan” or Satan, an archetypal figure whose appearance is accompanied by disturbing music, a red light that often shines on his face as well as his emergence from a wildly burning fire in Act Ten. Acting as foes to this figure are two female characters, Woman I and Woman II, both of whom symbolise angels, as shown in the same act. One character has also reportedly just returned from either *hajj* or *umrah*. Another character, Shaharudin, uses the Arabic term *munafik*, which means hypocrites, to describe Muslims who are practicing their religion outwardly without any real conviction in its teachings (p. 146). There is even an episode in the play where a character breaks the fourth wall and directly requests the audience to recite *al-Fatihah* for those who are killed in Act Seven (p. 168).

Yet, as Noordin has mentioned in his essay on *teater fitrah*, the elements that make a drama Islamic stretches beyond mere references to certain Islamic expressions and figures that are mentioned in the Quran. In his notion of Islamic theatre, belief in Allah SWT is the most essential element. Correspondingly, the Islamic concept of happiness emphasises the frequent remembrance of God and having a positive relationship with Him. In the same *teater fitrah*, the second and fourth principles could well fit into the broader classification of the same Islamic conceptual framework for

happiness as these call for an understanding of oneself as the servant of Allah SWT. This also requires one to not only know oneself but also be on good terms with one's family as well as to instill within oneself a set of fundamental values. In line with this emphasis on family is the importance of having a positive relationship with one's community by becoming a fully functioning and active member. As nature is part of one's community, appreciating and conserving it are paramount to one's wellbeing. This is also in addition to accepting one's responsibility as a vicegerent or *khalifah*. Lastly and most importantly, one should acknowledge the existence of the hereafter and understand its relation to the present world. The following discussion focuses on each of these factors affecting one's happiness and how these are demonstrated in Noordin's play, "Tonight, The Turtles Cry".

Knowledge of the Self

Since happiness originates from the feeling one has of oneself, it becomes tantamount for one to know the nature of one's purpose in this world. While al-Ghazali emphasises a person's heart (*qalb*) as his source of self-knowledge, al-Attas further extends this to other elements such as his soul and self (*nafs*), his intellect ('*aql*) and his spirit (*ruh*). Since the self is composed of both the body and soul, it has two types of soul: firstly, the animal soul (*al-nafs al-hayawaniyyah*) and, secondly, the rational soul (*al-nafs al-natiqah*). Whether a person attains happiness or not depends on which soul he aligns himself with (al-Attas, 2014, p.92). A person who subordinates his animal soul to his rational soul, allowing the latter to direct his individual actions after deliberation and in accordance with his theoretical faculty, would have a virtuous character that is characterised by god-fearing (*taqwa*) as well as inclination for good and avoidance of evil (*amal maqruf wa nahi mungkar*).

Virtues, according to al-Attas, are divided into external and internal ones. While external virtues are relegated to the observance of religious commandments, such as prayer and fasting, and are directed solely towards Allah, internal virtues are derived from both reason and revelation and require "a positive disposition in the self inducing good intentions (*niyyah*) to be followed by action ('*amal*) with sincerity of purpose (*ikhlas*) and truthfulness to oneself (*sidq*)" (al-Attas, 2014, p. 96). Knowledge of the self also leads to the acknowledgement of one's good and bad qualities and assigning to oneself duties that would allow the self to overcome the bad qualities as an act of self-purification. The process through which self-knowledge is

attained is through meditation (*taffakur*) and this results in the realization of higher order virtues, such as repentance (*tawbah*), patience (*sabr*), gratitude (*shukr*), hope (*raja*), fear (*khawf*), divine unity (*tawhid*) and trust (*tawakkul*). All of these virtues will finally lead to the highest virtue for the attainment of happiness in life, which is love of God (*mahabbah*) (al-Attas, 2014, p. 97). From this list of virtues, Volume 4 of al-Ghazali's *Ihya' 'Ulum-id-Din* extols, amongst others, the importance of patience and gratitude that are supported by various examples from the Quran and Hadith.

In "Tonight, the Turtles Cry", J.M. Aziz and the Prophet Job a.s. seem to have attained peace (*salam*) that could only have resulted from being patient and grateful to Allah SWT for His Bounties. Faced with the misfortune of being afflicted with diseases that alter their appearances for the worse, they remain steadfast in their love and faith in God (*mahabbah*) as they trust that He will eventually reward them in the hereafter (*tawakkal*). It is notable that because of this, they do not feel resentment against other people, as demonstrated by Prophet Job's attitude towards his wife, who eventually repents for her sin. Remarking on his play, Noordin mentions that one similarity that all three sub-plots have is the devotion that a wife shows to her unfortunate husband (1995, p. 42). Although al-Ghazali does not elaborate this in detail, one Hadith that he quotes emphasises the benefits of having a good wife: "Hazrat Omar asked the Prophet SAW: What wealth shall we keep? The Prophet said: A remembering tongue, a grateful heart and a believing wife" (al-Tirmidhī 3094, as cited from al-Ghazali's *Ihya*, Vol. 4, p. 175).

Noordin's play also addresses the more important question regarding the reason behind certain people's lives being full of hardship while others live in full luxury. According to Noordin, Islam's answer is simple: it is God's test on His creations. It is only through our realization of the purpose of our creation and of our responsibilities to God that we are able to accept the fate that has been assigned to us by Him. According to al-Ghazali, this again requires the presence of higher order virtues in a person's heart, particularly patience (*sabr*) (al-Ghazali, *Ihya* Vol. 2, p. 61-112). For Noordin, J.M. Aziz fully comprehended this and, hence, is able to "sing" lines of poetry; to him, the acronym J.M. does not stand for *Jiwa Merana* (Suffering Soul) but *Jiwa Menyanyi* (Singing Soul) (1995, p. 42). In the play itself, a minor character, Halimi, describes J.M. Aziz as having "a soul that praised and danced, like the movement of "The Whirling Dervishes" dancers that attempted to come close to Allah; not "The Suffering Heart" (169). Patience is also the

direct subject of one poem in the play as it is figuratively linked to several attributes: clarity of vision (“Patience is water/of the sea/ shady clear”), strength of conviction (“Patience is a fence/ a dyke/ ... shall never crack”) and stability of mind (“Patience is the roots / of the living tree/ its roots support the earth”). In contrast to the irrational impulses of youthfulness, patience can provide a person with room for further reflection of Allah’s SWT bounties (pp. 180-181).

Knowledge of God

If the experience of happiness from self-knowledge would eventually lead one to love Allah SWT, then this love would be incomplete without a clear understanding of the divine object of affection. Al-Ghazali mentions that one way to achieve this level of comprehension is by being afflicted with an illness (al-Ghazali, 1910, p. 15). To a sufferer, his illness becomes a test of endurance in order to prove his love for Allah SWT. One line in Noordin’s play reads, “And when a man is tested by God, only then he will know whether he is diamond or glass” (p. 147). This is also a reference to the male characters in the play, namely J.M. Aziz, Prophet Job (a.s.) and Mamat, all of whom are tested by Allah SWT when they lose their health. Only in illness could one find time to contemplate on the full extent of Allah’s SWT mercy on His Creations. For example, in Act Four, when Nik informs others that J.M. Aziz has fallen sick and could no longer see, Shamsinar replies with a word of gratitude to Allah SWT, “But he possesses a clear mind. God takes one and replaces it with another”; in response to this, Wan praises Allah SWT (p. 155). Noordin’s audience is also encouraged to adopt this view as indicated by the stage directions in the play where, for example, one character invites the audience to sing lines from a poem: “Their soul is not suffering/ Allah AWT loves them” (p. 147). In other words, the state of being afflicted with various illnesses in the play is transformed into occasions where Allah’s creations become closer to Him.

Al-Ghazali also views man’s knowledge of his own constitution as allowing him to be acquainted with the attributes of his Creator. Yet, he continues that because Allah’s SWT greatness far exceeds our power of comprehension, our knowledge of Him must be accompanied by devotion and worship as these could foster love for Him (al-Ghazali, 1910, p. 16). Noordin’s play seems to suggest that J.M. Aziz’s knowledge of Allah’s SWT compassion and mercy is the reason for his demonstrations of the very same

attributes in his relationships with other people, even though they may make disparaging remarks and ridicule him because of his physical appearance. It further suggests that J.M. Aziz has managed to overcome depression and resentment against those who ridicule him, becoming instead, in the mouth of the character Anita, “rich in humanity” (p. 148). In response to this, the character Sofea Jane states, “That is Rahman, Rahim, and the bounty of God” (p. 148). Indeed, in the play, any exclamation from the mouth of the characters, such as “God” or “Allah”, would often be followed by a sense of awe or gratitude, signifying the piety engrained in the characters’ personalities and attitudes. Correspondingly, the lines in J.M. Aziz’s poem “With You” describes Allah’s SWT characteristics figuratively. Allah SWT is “the umbrella” that protects the poet; “the buoy” that anchors him to his religion; “the lamp” that enlightens his life; and “the map” that provides him with a direction (pp. 178-179).

Along with other higher order virtues that al-Ghazali mentions in Volume 4 of *Ihya’ ‘Ulum-id-Din* is *tawakkul*, or “trusting in God’s plan”. This term is used to describe an individual who has absolute faith in God and who believes that even in the worst of situations, everything would eventually be well again. Even when his family is experiencing misfortune, such as the loss of a family member, a Muslim should seek consolation in the fact that Allah SWT is the ultimate owner of everything and everyone. In Act Eleven of the play, Nik mentions about Prophet Job (a.s.), who consoles his wife about the loss of his own children when he says, “...[a]ll our children are a trust from Allah SWT. They were never actually ours” (p. 181). In relation to the importance of acquiring knowledge of the self and God as the means of attaining happiness, it is important to also gain knowledge of this world.

Knowledge of the World: Relationship with Family

While al-Ghazali considers knowledge of this world as the third main element needed to achieve happiness in *Alchemy of Happiness*, it appears to him as simmering with temptation to the extent that, at any given moment, one could stray from the right path. Yet, many of his other works are filled with advice that would equip fellow Muslims with the way to lead a righteous life on this earth. It would then be reasonable to view what he has to say about life in this world within the current worldwide emphasis on community engagement in the discourse of wellbeing and sustainable development as it leads to a comprehensive coverage of its parts, which are family, community and nature.

In Volume 4 of *Ihya' 'Ulum-id-Din*, al-Ghazali outlines several important higher order virtues that should be inculcated in individuals, families and communities in order to produce a better world. One of these virtues is patience, which he divides into three types. The first is being patient with physical pains, including serious diseases. The second is to have patience by suppressing one's inclination to do evil. Al-Ghazali sees this as requiring the relinquishment of happiness and pleasure. The third is the satisfaction one gains by being patient, or rather satisfied, with one's present possessions as everything that one owns has only been entrusted to one temporarily and will eventually be returned to their Creator (al-Ghazali, 1982, Vol 4, p. 64). In addition, it is mentioned in Volume 2 of *Ihya' 'Ulum-id-Din* that a wife's responsibility is to obey her husband and to remain chaste and loyal to him.

In "Tonight, the Turtles Cries", the first type of patience is obviously demonstrated by J.M. Aziz himself, who suffers from leprosy. Anita, a minor character in the play, observes that "eventually, for his patience, philosophised in his poems, J.M. Aziz is no longer sad," and instead becomes "rich in humanity" (p. 148). Patience as the key towards maintaining a loving and supportive relationship between a husband and wife could also be viewed as one of the main themes of the play. Indeed, without it, the play could be mistakenly read as a disparate assembly of three stories from different periods and timelines. On closer scrutiny, however, the theme that emerges is one that exalts a wife's patience in dealing with adversity and the undying support that she gives to her husband. The couples in the play are Mamat and Minah, Prophet Job (a.s.) and his wife and J.M. Aziz and Cik Lijah. In Act Eight, readers are told that Minah is determined to take care of Mamat even though he has an incurable disease that leaves him immobile. As a result, she is ostracised by fellow villagers and, in the eyes of Tuk Penghulu, has "brought shame to this village" (p. 171). When asked why she does not leave him at the hospital, she replies that she will take care of him as she has promised him that she would even though he has not asked her to do so. The problems encountered by Mamat and Minah parallel those faced by J.M. Aziz and Cik Lijah. J.M. Aziz is suffering from leprosy and, as a consequence, has lost his eyesight. Even though their circumstances look bleak, Cik Lijah does not become despondent and continues to care for him and their seven children without any complaint. The same also happened to Prophet Job (a.s.) and his wife; as we are told in the Quran, Prophet Job (a.s.) suffered from a skin-related illness and, as a result, was temporarily abandoned by his wife. All these couples have passed the real test of marriage. Regardless of their

husbands' disabilities, the wives willingly shoulder the responsibility to care for them.

Knowledge of the World: Relationship with Community

In Volume 2 of *Ihya' 'Ulum-id-Din*, entitled the "Book of Worldly Usages", al-Ghazali places special emphasis on strengthening the ties of friendship and brotherhood, particularly with fellow Muslim friends and acquaintances and also, generally, with one's community. The most crucial way of doing this is by practicing good conduct with others. Al-Ghazali quotes one Hadith that defines good conduct. When the Prophet (SAW) had advised Abu Hurairah (r.a.) to observe good conduct and the latter asked him what kind of behaviour constituted good conduct, the Prophet (SAW) answered, "Keep the tie of relationship with one who cuts it off, forgive one who oppresses you, [and] give charity to one who deprives you" (*Sahih Muslim* 6197, as cited from al-Ghazali's *Ihya*, 1982, Vol. 2, p. 87). Al-Ghazali continues to state that the best Muslims are those who build their ties of friendship based on their love of God and, for a person, the most important benefit of cultivating good friendships is the ability to intercede on behalf of his or her friends if they were sent to hell in the hereafter. Similar to the rights of a husband and wife, friends are also encouraged to share each other's worldly belongings and to refrain from engaging in disputes or quarrels. In relation to the community, Muslims are encouraged to greet each other with *salam* and smiles as well as to pray or make *duā* for one another. They should also participate in communal activities, such as visiting the sick and performing funeral prayers for the deceased (al-Ghazali, 1982, Vol. 2, p. 209).

In "Tonight, the Turtles Cry", characters interact with each other in a harmonious communal setting. Many of the characters treat each other well, as can be seen in Acts Three and Four when Nik, Shamsinar, Wan and Young Girl, who despite meeting for the first time, are all able to entertain each other by singing and reciting *pantun*. In one episode, Nik describes his loving relationship with J.M. Aziz as though he were a member of the former's family. Additionally, in Acts Six and Seven, J.M. Aziz is shown to have such a close affinity to his fellow fishermen that he even writes them a poem so that they are able to pay homage to their dead fellow fishermen, Jaafar and Ibrahim, both of whom had drowned while trying to intercept a boat of Vietnamese refugees.

Being respectful to each other is also integral in maintaining a harmonious relationship within a community. In one episode in Act Eight of the play,

Hugh Clifford, a British Resident of Pahang, pays a visit to the ostracised couple, Minah and Mamat. Even though he belongs to a higher social order in Malaya's colonial society, he feels honoured to have shaken the hand of a devoted wife, Minah. Likewise, many of the characters in the play do not seem to be jealous of each other's achievements. Instead, they admire and acknowledge them. One such example is in Act Four when Nik admits to having written a few poems but does not bear any ill-feelings towards his friend, J.M. Aziz, whose works are more widely read than his.

Knowledge of the World: Appreciation for Nature

In Volume 4 of *Ihya' 'Ulum-id-Din*, al-Ghazzali mentions about the immense benefits that nature has for human beings. Indeed, there is nothing on this earth, according to al-Ghazali, that does not provide any benefit for mankind (al-Ghazali, 1982, Vol. 4, p. 378). Therefore, human beings must ponder and reflect on earth's bounties and marvel at its diversity and the benefits that it provides for mankind. Foremost amongst these is the fact that one can see the attributes of Allah SWT through His creations and the more one thinks about them, the more one learns about His glory and power, bringing one closer to Him (al-Ghazali, 1982, Vol. 4, p. 378). For example, through animals, one can admire Allah's SWT craftsmanship of His creations, the way He constructs them in their habitat, the way they hunt for or collect food as well as the care that they give to their offspring.

Repeated mentions are made of the sea as exuding a sense of homeliness as well as representing the cycle of life. Lines written into the play, which originally appeared in J.M. Aziz's poem "The Beach and The Sea" (*Pantai dan Laut*), tell readers that the beach and the sea are both the beloved "motherland" of the poet. These had previously provided him with the means of livelihood for he had worked as a fisherman when he was healthy. Yet, the very same poem also describes the ocean as "the gateway of death" since many fishermen have also drowned at sea whilst trying to earn their livelihood. A. Samad Said is cited in the play as remarking, "The sea, which is the source of livelihood, had its own way of testing and punishing the fishermen" (157). While the sea's unpredictability is expected, it is man's inattentiveness to his fellowmen, particularly those who are disabled, that leaves much to be desired. A. Samad Said observes J.M. Aziz's poems as saying, "The test from the sea, however, isn't that sad; it's man's insensitivity towards the fishermen that he (J.M. Aziz) often moans about" (p. 157). It

could also be inferred here that the crying turtles of the title of the play are allusions to the downtrodden and physically disabled members of society whose pain and suffering are simply overlooked by others.

Nature also functions as a reflecting mirror to the greatness of Allah SWT and His craftsmanship. In another poem, similes are drawn between the eyes of the female performer of Malay traditional dance, or *inang rodan* as she is known in Malay, and faraway stars, precious stones, daylight as well as flowers (pp. 158-159). Her eyes are not simply similar to the celestial bodies; they are the *zaharah* and *kejora* of the poet's imagination. Much more than these, they represent "pearls of deed" and "magical wisdom" that also belong to the poet and his wife as he writes, "her (the *inang rodan*'s) eyes are my wife's eyes/ are my eyes too" (p. 158). While it is through "their" eyes that he sees "the beauty of my motherland/ beautifully developing," the poet would not have been able to enjoy this enchanting sight without "the bounty of Allah's light/ penetrating my inner eyes/ red beautiful and bright/ *Alhamdulillah*, I'm thankful to Allah" (pp. 158-159). Clearly, the message here is that without Allah's SWT craftsmanship that went into making this special kind of light, which can even penetrate a blind man's eyes, we would not be able to appreciate nature's beauty. In another poem, J.M. Aziz's "blessed cure" takes the form of rainfall that brings good news and colours that are Allah's SWT blessings, simultaneously curing the earth from drought through its rejuvenating properties (p. 184).

Knowledge of the Hereafter

Whilst knowledge and relationship between the self, God and this world serve to bring comfort to man's existence on earth, it is only through knowing with certainty the existence of the hereafter that one experiences a real sense of happiness. Al-Ghazali identifies the human soul, or *nafs*, as specifically providing the locus for this feeling of contentment since not only could it provide one with the realities of the spiritual world but it also has the ability to transcend death. Essentially independent of the human body, the soul is capable of retaining both feelings of happiness and sorrow in the hereafter. This is because both the soul and the emotions it experiences are everlasting. Al-Ghazali remarks that Muslims are encouraged to remember death in order to keep away from this deceitful world and to prepare for the hereafter (*The Alchemy*, 1910, p. 22). To a righteous soul, the apex of happiness could only be experienced upon meeting Allah SWT in the Day of Reckoning.

While death is not a leitmotiv in “Tonight, the Turtles Cry” since it is mentioned only a few times in the play, there are various allusions to it that remind readers that everything in this world belongs to Allah SWT and it is ultimately to Him that we will return. In one episode, Nik retells the story of Prophet Job’s children who had all died suddenly and the illness that had afflicted him. In this period of intense mental breakdown, Prophet Job (a.s.) tries to console his wife by saying that “all [their] children are a trust from Allah. They were never actually [theirs]” (p. 181). Following al-Ghazali, it could be viewed that ascertained by his knowledge of the hereafter, Prophet Job (a.s.) is comforted by the thought that the soul will continue to exist even after one’s physical demise. Thus, the passing of family members should be viewed not as a tragic but, rather, a solemn event wherein souls simply return to their Creator. In Act Seven, a poem of J.M. Aziz titled “Shining Forever”, which initially depicts the precarious lives of his fellow fishermen, ends with the poet’s promise to recite *al-Fatihah* and *Qulhuwallah* for his dead friends, Jaafar and Ibrahim.

CONCLUSION

Although many years have passed since he was actively involved in staging plays as a dramatist and director, Noordin Hassan is still highly regarded in Malaysia for being the first in the country to introduce an experimental form of Islamic theatre. While debates in the performing arts community in Malaysia continue to concentrate on the appropriate ways of entertaining the audience that is line with Islamic dictates on behaviour and dress codes as well as subject matter, it is perhaps wiser to view the larger picture that Noordin’s plays seem to be saying about Islamic beliefs and lifestyle, as is evidenced in this reading of “Tonight, the Turtles Cry” from al-Ghazali’s framework for happiness. While the form of his plays is experimental, the message that they convey is simple: happiness is an achievable state if one learns to know not only oneself but also one’s God, this world by appreciating one’s family, community and nature as well as one’s eternal abode, the hereafter. Whilst many studies have tried to contextualise Noordin’s drama by connecting it to the advent of Islamic resurgence in Malaysia, this paper shows the timelessness of the issues brought about by “Tonight, the Turtles Cry” and its appropriateness to current debates on happiness within the wider discourse on sustainable development. It is hoped that future studies would follow this lead by analysing his other plays that are connected to many other present-day issues such as good governance and gender equality.

NOTES

1. For more information on Noordin and teater fitrah, please read Solehah Ishak's "Histrionics of Development: A Study of Three Contemporary Malay Playwrights", 1987, 99-130.
2. For more information on J.M. Aziz's life, please read Sharif Putera's J.M. Aziz yang Kukenal in *Dewan Sastera*, Mei, 2020, 36-39.

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