

The 'Loneliness Epidemic' and the Islamic Theology of Uns: Reconstructing Communal Identity in Atomized Societies

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Abstract

Despite the proliferation of digital communications, modern societies are grappling with the existential crisis of the "epidemic of loneliness" and social atomization. While secular sociology and psychology often approach this crisis through the management of social capital or clinical interventions, the current study aims to provide a fundamental alternative by elucidating the Islamic concept of Uns (spiritual intimacy/fellowship). Employing a descriptive-analytical method and a phenomenological approach, this paper scrutinizes canonical theological and Hadith texts while offering a structural critique of "liquid modernity" and the "paradox of connectivity." Research findings indicate that in Islamic ontology, the human being is an inherently relational entity. The paradigm of Uns operates within two interconnected layers: the vertical layer (intimacy with the Divine [al-Haqq] as an emotional anchor) and the horizontal layer (brotherhood, mutual social responsibility [Takaful], and the physicality of rituals). By negating alienating factors—such as suspicion and backbiting—and emphasizing "embodied presence" against the superficiality of cyberspace, Islam fills the human existential void. Consequently, the "Theology of Uns," by offering operational models such as reviving the mosque's function as a "third place," the ethics of neighborliness, and spiritual psychotherapy, creates a sustainable "ontological security." This security, transcending reductionist solutions, reconstructs collective identity in contemporary urban environments.

Keywords: Epidemic of loneliness, Islamic theology, Uns (Spiritual Intimacy), Atomized societies, Brotherhood (Ukhuwwah).

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1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Statement: *The Silent Pandemic in the Modern Era*

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, while technological advancements promised a borderless and interconnected world, humanity has confronted an unexpected and pervasive social pathology: the "Loneliness Epidemic." Contrary to the prevalent reductionist perception that regards loneliness merely as a transient emotional state, recent public health research indicates that social isolation has become a determinant factor in mortality and physical health decline. In recent years, the World Health Organization has classified loneliness as a "global health threat" and established a special Commission on Social Connection to combat this phenomenon (WHO 2023).

The severity of this civilizational crisis is such that modern governance systems have been compelled to intervene structurally. In 2018, the United Kingdom, by appointing the world's first "Minister for Loneliness," officially acknowledged that the severance of social bonds entails irreparable economic and human costs (Gov.uk 2018). Furthermore, the alarming 2023 report by the US Surgeon General warned of the lethal consequences of lacking meaningful connection (Murthy 2023, 8). Citing the foundational meta-analysis by Julian Holt-Lunstad and colleagues, this report confirms that the detrimental impact of social isolation on premature mortality is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, and Layton 2010). These robust data demonstrate the transition of "loneliness" from an individual existential experience to a structural crisis in modern societies.

1.2. *The Paradox of Connectivity: Loneliness Amidst the Digital Crowd*

The emergence of social networks and communication tools has given rise to a contradictory phenomenon referred to in sociological literature as the "paradox of connectivity." Sherry Turkle, a prominent researcher at MIT, argues in her seminal work that technology offers us the illusion of companionship without demanding the authentic requirements of friendship. This condition has led to the formation of "connected loneliness," where individuals have resorted to transmitting "reduced messages" instead of engaging in "deep conversation" (Turkle 2011, 15–19). In today's atomized societies, while individuals are more connected than ever at the level of data and information, they suffer from profound ruptures at the level of meaning.

Zygmunt Bauman, the Polish sociologist, attributes this hidden isolation to the transition to "Liquid Modernity." In this paradigm, human bonds have become so tenuous, temporary, and consumerist that they have lost the ability to generate "ontological security" (Bauman 2000, 14–20). Consequently, the issue for contemporary man is not merely the lack of physical contact, but the commodi-

fication of relationships and the reduction of the "Other" to an object of consumption.

1.3. Research Hypothesis: Uns as an Existential Necessity

In the face of this crisis, the fundamental hypothesis of the present research is that secular and purely clinical solutions are incapable of radically curing this ailment, for modern loneliness is rooted in a metaphysical crisis. Islamic theology, by proposing the key concept of *Uns* (spiritual intimacy/primordial sociability), offers an alternative ontological paradigm.

In classical philology and Quranic exegesis, a profound dialectic exists regarding the etymological root of the word *Insān* (Human). While commentators such as Ibn Abbas have traced its root to *Nisyān* (forgetfulness of the Divine Covenant) (al-Ṭabarsī 1993, 7: 52), the Basran school of philology and thinkers like al-Raghib al-Isfahani argue that *Insān* is derived from *Uns* (to become accustomed to and find tranquility in another), for humans cannot subsist in solitude (al-Iṣfahānī 1992, 94). Accordingly, this paper argues that in Islamic anthropology, "connection" is not an accidental attribute or a secondary need, but is constitutive of the human essence.

In this "communicative ontology," the concept of *Uns* transcends a mere moral recommendation to become an existential necessity. In other words, Islamic subjectivity—unlike the Cartesian subject—is defined by the proposition: "I relate [am intimate], therefore I am." The human being only reaches their potential when situated within an intertwined network of "intimacy with the Creator" (*Uns* with *al-Haqq*—the vertical layer) and "intimacy with creation" (*Uns* with creation—the horizontal layer).

1.4. Necessity and Objectives of the Research

The necessity of this research stems from the fact that existing academic literature on loneliness predominantly focuses on Western approaches, leaving the potential of "spiritual psychotherapy" embedded in the Islamic heritage (*Turāth*) largely unexplored. The objective of this paper is to bridge this epistemic gap through three fundamental steps: first, a phenomenological rereading of the concept of *Uns* as the counterpoint to modern alienation; second, elucidating religious mechanisms (such as the institution of brotherhood) for the transition from extreme individualism to collective identity; and third, providing a practical framework for enhancing mental health and social cohesion in contemporary urban environments.

2. Theoretical Framework: Atomization in the Modern World

To deeply comprehend the "loneliness crisis" and propose a fundamental solution based on theology, one must first conduct a precise dissection of the human condition in Late Modernity. Existing research literature indicates that contemporary loneliness is neither an accidental occurrence nor merely a clinical dis-

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order; rather, it is the inevitable product of structural transformations in the modern human's "lifeworld" (*Lebenswelt*). This section scrutinizes the phenomenon of loneliness through the lens of the sociology of atomization to provide the necessary groundwork for introducing the concept of *Uns*.

2.1. *The Sociology of Atomization: From Durkheim's Anomie to Bauman's Liquidity*

The theoretical roots of the disintegration of social bonds can be traced back to the historical transition from *Gemeinschaft* (traditional and organic community) to *Gesellschaft* (modern and mechanical society). However, the most precise and pioneering explanations regarding the psychological costs of this transition belong to Émile Durkheim and Zygmunt Bauman.

In his classic and epoch-making work, *Suicide*, Émile Durkheim introduces the concept of "Anomie" (normlessness) as one of the primary factors in psychological breakdown. From Durkheim's perspective, anomie is a condition in which the "collective conscience" is weakened, leaving the individual in a void without the support of regulatory social norms. In explaining "anomic suicide," Durkheim argues that when society loses its power of integration and moral regulation, the individual suffers from a kind of "moral loneliness" and the infinity of desires, ultimately losing the will to live (Durkheim 1951, 241–76). This analysis served as the first serious sociological warning about the psychological costs of unbridled individual freedom and the absence of binding ties.

Continuing this theoretical trajectory, Zygmunt Bauman, the prominent post-modern sociologist, offers a more radical description of the atomization of contemporary man with his theory of "Liquid Modernity." Bauman believes that we have passed the stage of "Solid Modernity"—an era in which institutions like family, church, and trade unions created stable identity structures. In the age of liquid modernity, human bonds have assumed a temporary nature, established only "until further notice," as long-term commitments are perceived as impediments to freedom of action and individual choice.

In *Liquid Love*, Bauman asserts that modern man is constantly trapped in an exhausting tension between the "desire for belonging" and the "fear of attachment." The result of this destructive dialectic is the formation of relationships that are rapidly contracted and just as rapidly dissolved—a condition that leaves the individual in a state of permanent "ontological insecurity" and profound isolation (Bauman 2003, 1–15). Accordingly, modern atomization has created a context in which the subject has transformed into an isolated and wandering unit, necessitating a salvific paradigm (such as relational theology).

2.2. *The Psychology of Loneliness: The Dialectic of "Solitude" and "Isolation"*

In psychological literature and existential philosophy, a categorical distinction is drawn between "aloneness/isolation" (physical state) and "loneliness" (subjective feeling) to understand the pathology of modern man. This conceptual dis-

tion is the key to understanding the theological proposition of this paper regarding the differentiation between "faithful solitude" (*Khalwat*) and "painful loneliness."

Paul Tillich, the renowned theologian and existentialist philosopher, formulates this subtle dichotomy brilliantly: "Our language has wisely created two different words for these two situations: the word 'loneliness' to express the pain of being alone, and the word 'solitude' to express the glory of being alone" (Tillich 1963, 17).

Based on this, "solitude" is a voluntary, constructive, and rich state where the individual, though separated from others, is in deep connection with their inner self and the Source of Being; a context in which creativity and spiritual contemplation flourish. Conversely, "painful loneliness" is an imposed, deficit-based condition wherein the individual feels rejected and alienated even amidst a crowd.

The consequences of this type of loneliness are not limited to the psychological realm. John Cacioppo, a founder of social neuroscience, demonstrates in his clinical research that loneliness is equivalent to "social pain," activating the exact same neural circuits in the brain as physical pain. His studies show that chronic loneliness degrades the body's defense mechanisms, drastically increases cortisol (stress hormone) levels, and jeopardizes the subject's physical health (Cacioppo and Patrick 2008, 5–10).

The crisis of the atomized contemporary human is that, due to information bombardment and the fluidity of relationships, they have lost the capacity and skill for "constructive solitude" and are defenselessly trapped in the grip of "painful loneliness." At this intersection, Islamic theology, by introducing the concept of *Uns*, offers a fundamental solution to transform destructive isolation into faithful solitude.

In Shi'a Hadith corpora, this dialectic is elucidated in the most beautiful manner. Imam al-Sadiq (AS) states in a profound psychological narration:

"Mā min mu'minin illā wa-qad ja'ala Allāhu lahu min imānihi unsan yaskunu ilayhi, hattā law kāna 'alā qullati jabalin lam yastawḥish." ("There is no believer but that Allah has created for him, from his faith, an intimacy (*Uns*) in which he finds tranquility; so that even if he were on the peak of a mountain, he would never feel lonely or terrified.") (al-Majlisī 1983, 70: 111).

A phenomenological analysis of this narration reveals that in the Islamic paradigm, "faith" (*Imān*) is not merely a cognitive belief but a "psychological generator" that directly produces *Uns* (intimacy/comfort). This internal *Uns* acts as an ontological shield, neutralizing "dread" (*Waḥshah* / Alienation). The phrase "even if he were on the peak of a mountain" is a precise allusion to "physical aloneness" and absolute isolation; yet, due to the presence of "faithful *Uns*," this

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physical isolation never transforms into "social pain" (in Cacioppo's terms) or "painful loneliness" (in Tillich's terms). Thus, Islamic theology, by internalizing the concept of *Uns*, renders the individual independent of pathological dependence on oblivious crowds and teaches them how to transform their solitude into the most magnificent form of presence.

2.3. Structural Critique: Capitalism and the Commodification of Relationships

The crisis of modern loneliness cannot be analyzed merely as a reductionist psychological dysfunction; rather, a precise dissection of this phenomenon requires examining it within the context of the "political economy of neoliberalism" and the structures of Late Capitalism. The capitalist system, by promoting "hyper-individualism," redefines human identity as an "entrepreneur of the self"—an isolated subject who must constantly optimize themselves and compete with others in a ruthless market. In this paradigm, human relationships are removed from the emotional realm and are heavily subjected to market logic and "commodification."

Robert Putnam, the distinguished political scientist, in his epoch-making work *Bowling Alone*, presents shocking statistical data showing how "social capital" has collapsed in Western societies (particularly the United States) in recent decades. He argues that civic institutions, local associations, and traditional structures—formerly the nexus of interaction, dialogue, and solidarity—have given way to "individualized consumption" and isolated entertainment (Putnam 2000, 18–24). This structural decline of civic engagement has dismantled support networks, leaving the individual defenseless against existential crises.

Furthermore, Byung-Chul Han, the contemporary philosopher and cultural theorist, in his critique of the "Transparency Society" and the digital age, argues that we have moved past the traditional concept of "community" toward the formation of a "digital swarm." With his phenomenological subtlety, Han asserts that in the digital swarm, although individuals are gathered together in cyberspace, no "collective spirit" (*Geist/Spirit*) or organic bond connects them. They are merely atomized units categorized based on consumption algorithms and data-driven preferences (Han 2017, 10–15).

In this cybernetic space, the commodification of relationships leads to a terrifying phenomenon termed "the erosion of the Other." This means the modern subject no longer encounters a "human Other"—with all their complexities, suffering, and ethical demands—but only an edited "image" that serves solely to be liked, consumed, and to affirm the subject's own Ego. This structural atomization and emotional commodification constitute the primary breeding ground for the epidemic of loneliness; a condition that demonstrates why individual-centric clinical solutions are insufficient for curing loneliness and how vital it is

to replace them with a "communicative ontology" (such as the Islamic concept of *Uns* and Brotherhood).

3. Theological Foundation: Etymology and Ontology of *Uns* in Islamic Tradition

To propose a fundamental solution to the epidemic of loneliness in the contemporary era, it is essential to transcend the level of clinical symptoms and penetrate the layer of "ontology." In Islamic theology, the issue of "connection" is not merely a secondary psychological need but is embedded in the definition of the nature and quiddity of the "human being." This section, through philological and exegetical analysis, demonstrates how the Islamic tradition defines the human not merely as a "Rational Animal" (*al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq*)—as is common in the Aristotelian tradition—but as a "being of intimacy" (*al-mawjūd al-musta'nis*) who is inherently relational.

3.1. Philology of Human (*Insān*) and Intimacy (*Uns*): The Dialectic of "Forgetfulness" and "Fellowship"

In classical Arabic lexicography and Quranic exegesis, two meta-narratives exist regarding the root of the word *Insān* (human), each unveiling a dimension of human existence. Analyzing these two roots is key to understanding the place of *Uns* in the human psychological structure:

A) The Narrative of Forgetfulness (*Nisyān*):

The first view, attributed to Ibn Abbas (the prominent early Islamic exegete), traces the root of *Insān* to *Nisyān* (forgetfulness). Citing verse 115 of Surah Taha ("And We had already taken a promise from Adam before, but he forgot..."), Ibn Abbas argues that man was named *Insān* because he forgot the Primordial Covenant ('*Ahd al-Alast*) with God (al-Ṭabarsī 1993, 7: 52). This etymology emphasizes "epistemic lack" and the human's inherent vulnerability to negligence (*Ghaflah*).

B) The Narrative of Intimacy (*Uns*):

The second view, developed by the Basran school of philology and thinkers like al-Raghib al-Isfahani, considers *Insān* to be derived from *Uns* (fellowship, becoming accustomed to, and finding tranquility in another). In his monumental work *Al-Mufradāt*, al-Raghib asserts that humans are so named because they cannot survive in solitude and have an intrinsic need for their own kind to sustain their existence (al-Isfahānī 1992, 94).

Allamah Tabataba'i, in his magnum opus *Al-Mizan*, while acknowledging both roots, tips the scales in his anthropological analysis in favor of "innate sociability" (*Madanī bi-l-ṭab*). Interpreting the verses of creation, he states that the creation of a mate for the human being was for the purpose of "*li-yaskuna ilayhā*" ("that he might find rest in her"). From Tabataba'i's perspective, this repose and tranquility constitute the supreme instance of *Uns*, which forms the essence of human life. By introducing concepts of "employment" (*Istikhdām*)

and "society" (*Ijtimā'*), he argues that the need for the "Other" is embedded in human nature (*Fiṭrah*), and the human subject is an incomplete being without social connection (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1995, 2: 176; 8: 487).

Ontological Conclusion:

Integrating these two views offers a dynamic image of the human: a being who is, on one hand, constantly at risk of "forgetting" the Truth and falling into a crisis of meaning, and on the other, can only overcome existential anxiety through *Uns* (connection with the Source of Being and fellow humans). In this paradigm, imposed isolation is synonymous with "dehumanization," as it blocks the channel for realizing the human's "intimate nature."

Unlike "modern subjectivity," which Descartes established with the proposition *Cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"), Islamic subjectivity is defined by the proposition: **"I relate, therefore I am"** (*Uno, ergo sum*). This paradigm shift provides a solid theoretical foundation for critiquing hyper-individualism in the modern age and offering a therapeutic model based on "Relational Theology."

3.2. *Uns with the Real (Theocentric Intimacy): The Substratum of Existential Security*

In the epistemic geometry and anthropology of Islam, analyzing the phenomenon of loneliness without considering human "existential poverty" (*Faqr al-Wujūdī*) is an incomplete and reductionist analysis. Contrary to secular psychology, which attributes loneliness solely to the "absence of the human Other," Islamic theology locates the ultimate root of dread and alienation (*Wahṣhah*) in the "absence of the perception of Divine Presence." This approach, which can be termed **"Theocentric Intimacy,"** argues that the first and fundamental layer of curing loneliness is reconstructing the connection between the "impoverished self" and the "Absolute Rich."

Shi'a devotional texts offer a unique encyclopedia of the psychological states of the wayfarer (*Sālik*), wherein God is introduced not as a distant and passive observer, but as "The Intimate Companion" (*al-Anīs*) who fills human existential voids.

A) Phenomenology of Loneliness in the Supplication of Abu Hamza al-Thumali:

The Supplication of Abu Hamza al-Thumali presents a precise phenomenological depiction of the human psyche's transition from "dread" to "intimacy." In a key passage, Imam al-Sajjad (AS) states:

"Yā mawlāya bi-dhikrika 'āsha qalbī wa bi-munājātika barradtu alama al-khawfi 'annī"

("O my Master, only by Your remembrance has my heart lived, and through in-

timate discourse with You, I have cooled the pain of fear within me.") (al-Ṭūsī 1991, 591).

Lexical analysis of this phrase reveals that "remembrance" (*Dhikr*) and "intimate discourse" (*Munājāt*) function beyond mere religious rituals; they are mechanisms for "vivification" (*āsha qalbī*) and "pain relief" (*tabrīd al-alam*). The term "pain of fear" (*alam al-khawf*) in this context refers precisely to the "existential anxiety" stemming from loneliness and helplessness in the world. In Sajjadian theology, loneliness is a metaphysical ailment whose definitive cure is not the "human Other," but the realization of the pervasive presence of the Real (*al-Haqq*).

B) The Emotional Anchor in the Munajat of Imam Hasan (AS):

This psychological dynamic requires a safe haven to protect the human subject from the turbulence of Liquid Modernity. Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (AS), in a luminous passage of his supplication, describes God as the ultimate **"Emotional Anchor"**:

"Yā man ilayhi yafirru al-hāribūn, wa bihi yasta'nisu al-mustawḥishūn" ("O You to whom the fleeing run [from worldly anxieties], and by whom the terrified [from loneliness] find intimacy and tranquility.") (Ibn Ṭāwūs 1993, 181).

This proposition indicates that in the face of the dread caused by atomization and social alienation, transcending toward the Infinite is an effective defensive strategy. In this paradigm, God is the sole source capable of ending "alienation" (*Istihāsh*) and filling a void that no mortal human can fill.

C) The Strategy of "Substitution" in *Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya*:

Based on this foundation, the concept of "*Uns* with the Real" is presented in *Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya* as a unique strategy for "internal self-sufficiency" (*Istighnā*). In Supplication 21, Imam al-Sajjad (AS) offers a formula that can be called the "Substitution Model":

"Bal ij'al sukūna qalbī, wa unsa nafsī, wa istighnā'ī wa kifāyatī bika wa bi-khiyārī khalqika"

("Rather, place the repose of my heart, the intimacy of my soul, and my independence and sufficiency in [connection with] You and the best of Your creation.") (Imām al-Sajjād 1992, Supp. 21).

It must be noted that this paradigm never implies "isolationism" or the negation of social relationships; rather, its goal is to establish emotional independence. The terms "independence" (*Istighnā*) and "sufficiency" (*Kifāyah*) in this passage denote precisely this meaning. Modern man, due to severance from the celestial, places the heavy burden of meaning-making and filling spiritual voids entirely on human relationships (spouse, friend, or social network). Since humans are limited and finite, their inability to carry this burden leads to frustration and compounded loneliness.

The model of "*Uns* with the Real," by connecting the individual to the Eternal Source, liberates them from the "pathological need" for validation and attention from others. Thus, only one who has achieved existential security through "*Uns* with the Real" and enters society with a "rich" and "giving" state can establish a healthy relationship (free from morbid dependency) with "creation."

3.3. Degrees of *Uns*: From Self-Knowledge to Knowledge of the Other (Phenomenological Analysis of al-Ghazali)

In the transition from "*Uns* with the Real" (vertical layer) to "*Uns* with Creation" (horizontal layer), Islamic theology faces a subtle challenge: How can one enter constructive interactions without falling into the abyss of negligence (*Ghaflah*) and dissolving into social masses? Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (450–505 AH), in his masterpiece *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, particularly in the "Book on the Etiquette of Companionship and Brotherhood" (*Kitāb Ādāb al-Ulfah wa al-Ukhuwwah*), provides a comprehensive answer to this question. From al-Ghazali's perspective, "social intimacy" (*al-Ulfah*) is not an accidental state but an acquired skill and the fruit of "self-discipline" (*Ta'dīb al-Nafs*).

A) The Dialectic of "Solitude" ('*Uzlah*) and "Social Mixing" (*Mukhālaṭah*):

Al-Ghazali begins his discussion by analyzing the tension between "solitude" and "social mixing." Unlike some ascetic currents that prescribed absolute isolation, he believes that the perfection of *Uns* lies in the balance between these two states. Positing the fundamental proposition that "Intimacy is the fruit of good character, and separation is the fruit of bad character" (al-Ghazālī 2011, 2: 228), al-Ghazali argues that the inability to connect with others is not a sign of asceticism but a symptom of "moral illness."

In al-Ghazali's paradigm, "*Uns* with creation" is a form of "social asceticism." Citing the narration of Abu Dharr al-Ghifari—"Solitude is better than a bad companion, and a righteous companion is better than solitude" (al-Ghazālī 2011, 2: 256)—he offers a quality control criterion for relationships. Accordingly, the Muslim individual must possess the ability to "oscillate" between solitude and public presence; solitude to connect with the Source of Being, and public presence (*Mukhālaṭah*) to flow that light into the veins of society.

B) Transition from "Commodified Relationships" to "Love for the Sake of God" (*al-Ḥubb fī Allāh*):

In explaining the motivations for connection, al-Ghazali offers a precise classification that remarkably resembles the modern critique of "commodified relationships." He divides relationships into three categories: 1. Relationships for immediate pleasure (like enjoying a beautiful face), 2. Relationships as a means to another end (like befriending a ruler for status), and 3. Relationships where the bond itself is the goal, which is "Love for the Sake of God" (al-Ghazālī 2011, 2: 233–35).

Al-Ghazali warns that the first two categories are unstable and fragile (what Bauman calls "liquid relationships") because with the cessation of the cause (pleasure or profit), the relationship also collapses. Conversely, "sustainable *Uns*" is formed only when the "Other" is recognized not as an object for consumption but as a "locus of manifestation of Divine Attributes." He asserts: "Whoever loves a human being for the sake of their obedience to God and their belovedness to God, this is Love for the Sake of God" (al-Ghazālī 2011, 2: 237).

C) Brotherhood as an Existential Structure (Altruism/*Īthār*):

The pinnacle of al-Ghazali's theory manifests in the discussion of "Rights of Brotherhood," where he unveils the concept of "Altruism" (*Īthār*) as the highest degree of *Uns*. Al-Ghazali writes: "The lowest degree of brotherhood is that you treat him as you treat yourself, and the highest degree is that you prefer him over yourself" (al-Ghazālī 2011, 2: 240).

This analysis indicates that curing modern loneliness in Islamic theology requires a Copernican revolution in individual psychology: a shift from "Ego-centrism" to "Altro-centrism." Al-Ghazali emphasizes that "sustainable *Uns*" is achieved only when the individual can exit the "prison of narcissism" and encounter the surrounding world with compassion and altruism.

4. Theology of Brotherhood (*Ukhuwwah*) and the Negation of Alienation

4.1. Rereading the Concept of the "Pact of Brotherhood": From Political Alliance to Existential Kinship

One of the most revolutionary and symbolic actions of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) upon his arrival in Medina was the establishment of the institution of *Mu'ākhāt* (Pact of Brotherhood). A phenomenological analysis of this historical event reveals that through this initiative, the Prophet (PBUH) deconstructed the "Social Ontology" of the Arabian Peninsula—which had revolved for centuries around "Tribal *Aṣabiyyah*" (blood-based solidarity)—and replaced it with a new model based on "Faith-based Kinship."

A) Transition from "Blood" to "Belief":

In pre-Islamic society, an individual's identity and psychological security were defined exclusively within the framework of the tribe, and "loneliness" (in the sense of being ousted or expelled from the tribe) was practically equivalent to social death. By implementing the Pact of Brotherhood between the Emigrants (*Muhājirūn*) and the Helpers (*Anṣār*), the Prophet (PBUH) altered this deterministic equation. Ibn Hisham reports in his *Sīrah* that the Prophet (PBUH) addressed his companions, saying: "*Tawākhaw fī Allāhi akhawayni akhawayni*" ("Become brothers in the way of Allah, two by two") (Ibn Kathīr 1998, 5: 593).

This pact was not a mere moral compliment or a purely political maneuver; rather, as Allamah Tabataba'i clarifies in *Al-Mizan*, this brotherhood in early Islam

carried binding legal consequences, including mutual inheritance (*Tawāruth*). Although the priority of inheritance was later returned to blood relatives with the revelation of the verse *"And those of [blood] relationship are more entitled [to inheritance] in the decree of Allah"* (al-Anfāl: 75), its spiritual, supportive, and mutual responsibility aspects were never abrogated (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1995, 16: 415; 4: 542).

B) Sociological Analysis: Family as "Choice":

From the perspective of historical sociology, Montgomery Watt considers this action as the founding of a "Super-tribe" built upon ideology rather than biology (Watt 1956, 240–45). This precise "Social Engineering" aimed to ensure that the individual detached from traditional structures (the Emigrant) would not feel a sense of "rootlessness" in the new society (Medina).

For contemporary man, severed from traditional and blood ties by the transformations of modernity, rereading this model contains a strategic proposition: "Family" and "support networks" can be a conscious **"Choice"** revolving around shared values, not merely a **"Biological Determinism."** This transition from "blood" to "belief" serves as an antidote to the existential isolation of modern man, who seeks belonging in a liquid world.

4.2. Mutual Responsibility (Solidarity/Takāful): Phenomenology of the Metaphors of "Edifice" and "One Body"

In Islamic social theology, the bond between believers transcends the level of a "Civil Contract" and ascends to the rank of an "Organic Unity." To combat the epidemic of loneliness—rooted in social fragmentation—Shi'a Hadith corpora offer a model of solidarity wherein the suffering of one individual is perceived as a dysfunction in the entire system. This abstract concept is manifested in two fundamental metaphors: the "Edifice" (structure) and the "Body" (organism).

A) The Structural Metaphor: The Believer as a Pillar of the Edifice

One of the most famous Prophetic propositions, reflected in authoritative sources of both Sunni and Shi'a traditions, likens the community of faith to an intertwined structure:

"Al-mu'minu li-l-mu'mini ka-l-bunyāni yashuddu ba'duhu ba'dan"
 ("A believer to another believer is like a building whose parts reinforce each other.") (Makārim Shīrāzī 1353–1374, 3: 51).

A phenomenological analysis of this metaphor indicates that in the Islamic view, individual "loneliness" and isolation signify the "weakening of the entire social edifice." The verb *"yashuddu"* (reinforce/strengthen) implies a kind of "ontological dependency"; the identity and stability of each brick (individual) depend on its connection to and reliance on the adjacent brick. In the modern world, where individuals are juxtaposed like atomized pebbles lacking the mortar of connection, this metaphor emphasizes the necessity of a "Structural Bond."

B) The Organic Metaphor: The Theory of the "One Body"

In a deeper layer, traditions found in *Al-Kāfī* (Chapter on Rights of Brotherhood) elevate human relationships from a mechanical relation (edifice) to a biological and vital relation (body). Imam al-Sadiq (AS) states in a brilliant narration:

"Al-mu'minu akhū al-mu'mini ka-l-jasadi al-wāḥidi, ini ishtakā 'uḍwun minhu wajada alama dhālika fī sā'iri jasadihi"

("The believer is the brother of the believer, and they are all like one body; if one member of it complains [of pain], the effect of that pain is felt [as sleeplessness and fever] in the entire body.") (al-Kulaynī 1986, 2: 166).

This narration transforms "loneliness" from a private matter into a "systemic pain." In capitalist societies, the suffering of the lonely individual remains confined within themselves ("Privatization of Suffering"); however, in the "One Body" model, the isolation of one member must be felt by the entire social network. Allamah Majlisi, in his profound commentary in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, emphasizes that this "conscience of pain" (shared feeling of pain) stems from the single root of believers' souls in the metaphysical realm and their metaphysical connection (al-Majlisī 1983, 71: 268).

C) Social Solidarity (*Takāful*): Beyond Sympathy

The operational fruit of this theology is the creation of "Mutual Responsibility" (*Takāful*). A narration from the Prophet (PBUH) in *Al-Kāfī* states: "The most beloved of people to Allah is the one who is most beneficial to people" (al-Kulaynī 1986, 2: 164). In this paradigm, this benefit (*Nafʿ*) is not solely financial; it includes "imparting *Uns*" and "removing the dread of loneliness" from the heart of another.

Therefore, in the Islamic tradition, indifference to the isolation of another is considered not merely a moral failing but an "exit from the circle of faith." This support system guarantees the individual's psychological security not based on personal assets but based on "membership in the body."

4.3. Negation of Alienation: Negative Ethics and the Preservation of Social Fabric

In modern social philosophy, "Alienation" refers to a condition where the subject recognizes the other not as a "fellow human" or a "mirror," but as an "object" or a "threat." While the previous sections focused on "positive ethics" (such as *Uns* and *Ukhuwwah*), this section elucidates "negative ethics" in Islam. By strictly prohibiting behaviors such as suspicion, backbiting, and tale-bearing, Islam effectively protects "Social Ecology" and prevents the virus of atomization from penetrating the social fabric.

A) Suspicion (*Sūʿ al-Ẓann*): The Epistemological Root of Alienation

The first step in the disintegration of a relationship and the onset of the atomization process occurs in the mental realm. The Holy Quran, with the explicit command *"Avoid much [negative] assumption"* (al-Ḥujurāt: 12), regulates the be-

liever's "epistemic system" before addressing external behaviors. Suspicion is a form of "negative prejudgment" that places the "Other" in the position of the accused and destroys the possibility of "Mutual Understanding." Allamah Tabataba'i clarifies in *Al-Mizan* that suspicion, although it does not alter external reality, poisons the human's "perceptive vessel" and hinders the realization of *Uns* (Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1995, 18: 483).

B) Backbiting (*Ghaybah*) and Tale-bearing (*Namimah*): Assassination of Presence and Severance of Bonds

If suspicion is the mental beginning of alienation, backbiting (*Ghaybah*) is the objective embodiment of destroying the social fabric. The Quran's shocking metaphor (eating the flesh of a dead brother) implies the "Dehumanization" of the relationship; where the "absent one" becomes an "object" for verbal consumption. Al-Shahid al-Thani, in his specialized work *Kashf al-Rībah*, identifies backbiting as the primary cause of "the separation of hearts" (al-Shahīd al-Thānī 1990, 10–55).

Furthermore, "Tale-bearing" (*Namimah*) is introduced in Hadith as the catalyst for social friction. The Prophet (PBUH) calls tale-bearers those who "separate lovers" (al-Kulaynī 1986, 2: 369). In today's "Post-truth" era, where digital rumors have replaced face-to-face dialogue, these teachings serve as a protocol for the "sustainability of human networks."

C) The Dialectic of *Uns* and *Istihāsh*: Critique of Dissolution in the Mass

However, the emphasis on social convergence never implies "conformity with the heedless crowd" or dissolving into the "amorphous Mass." Imam Ali (AS), in a proposition delineating the boundary between "Constructive Solitude" and "Pathological Isolation," states:

"Thamarat al-unsī bi-Allāhi al-istihāshu min al-nās"

("The fruit of intimacy with Allah is feeling alienated [and keeping distance] from people [who are heedless and worldly].") (al-Tamīmī 1990, 1: 199).

This noble Hadith offers a radical critique of the modern concept of "being social at any cost." In the age of social media, where individuals drown themselves in "digital crowding" to escape loneliness, the Imam (AS) reminds us that "Authentic Intimacy" requires a kind of "**Critical Distancing**" from superficial societal currents. Thus, the Islamic model does not invite humans to isolation, but calls them to the "Conscious Choice of Companions" (Faith-based Brotherhood) against "Blind Integration into the Mass." This "alienation from people" (*Istihāsh min al-nās*—referring to the heedless public) is a necessary condition for protecting "*Uns* with the Real" and "*Uns* with the Friends of God" (*Awliyā*).

5. Comparative Analysis: Digital Connection vs. Theological Presence

The crisis of loneliness in the contemporary lifeworld is not due to a lack of "Connection," but is a consequence of the decline of "Presence." While digital

technologies have enabled 24/7 borderless connectivity, they have simultaneously given rise to a paradox that can be termed "**Connected Loneliness**." This section, through an ontological critique of the foundations of virtual communication, elucidates the Islamic model of *Uns* as a quality-oriented alternative based on "**Embodiment**."

5.1. The Superficialization of Relationships: The Erosion of "Presence" in Cyberspace

Social media platforms are designed based on the algorithmic logic of "maximization of connection" and "reduction of friction," yet this facilitation does not necessarily equate to "meaningful communication." Sherry Turkle, Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT, argues in her critical analysis that in the digital realm, humanity has retreated from "Conversation" to "Connection" (mere message transmission). From Turkle's perspective, face-to-face conversation requires an unmediated encounter with the human complexities of the "Other," the acceptance of meaningful silences, and the risk of empathy; whereas digital messages are edited, controlled, and reduced versions of the "Self" that allow for the concealment of vulnerability (Turkle 2015, 19–35). The result of this process is the formation of relationships that, although vast in quantity, lack "emotional resonance" in quality.

At a deeper level, Hans Belting, the prominent theorist of the anthropology of images, demonstrates that in the age of new media, the "digital image" often assumes functions previously tied to "physical presence." This displacement leads to a phenomenon that can be called the "**Absence of Presence**." In virtual communication, the body loses its privileged position as the primary locus of perception and feeling, resulting in a kind of "**Disembodiment**," where relationships are increasingly reduced to the exchange of visual and textual signs (Belting 2011, 12–18). From this perspective, this "disembodiment" can be considered one of the origins of modern existential emptiness and loneliness; for *Uns*, in its true sense, entails the engagement of the human being's totality (soul and body) with another, not merely an encounter with their digital representation.

5.2. Uns as the Quality of Presence: Beyond Likes and Notifications

In the logic of platform capitalism, the value of a social bond is measured by quantitative units such as "likes," "shares," and "follower counts"—units devoid of ontological depth and ethical weight. Conversely, the Islamic theological and Hadith tradition emphasizes behaviors that define *Uns* as an "**Existential Flow**" and a metaphysical exchange between two souls.

In Shi'a Hadith corpora, the concept of "**Visiting a Religious Brother**" (*Ziyārat al-Akh*) is introduced not as a ceremonial act or customary visit, but as a powerful mechanism for "discharging dread" (*Takhliyat al-Wahshah*) and "injecting

tranquility" (*Sakīnah*). Imam al-Sadiq (AS) states in a brilliant narration in *Al-Kāfī*:

"Mā zāra muslimun akhāhu al-muslima fī Allāhi wa li-llāhi illā nādāhu Allāhu 'azza wa jalla: Ayyuhā al-zā'iru ṭibta wa ṭābat laka al-jannah"

("No Muslim visits his Muslim brother for the sake of Allah but that Allah Almighty calls out to him: 'O visitor! You have become pure [from spiritual impurities], and Paradise is made pleasant for you.'") (al-Kulaynī 1986, 2: 178).

The word "*ṭibta*" (you have become pure/good) implies a kind of "mental health" and "**Existential Catharsis**" achieved solely through "physical presence" and the effort of traveling to meet another.

Furthermore, the remarkable emphasis of traditions on "**Handshaking**" (***Muṣāfaḥah***) indicates the vital importance of "**Tactile Interaction**" in consolidating the bond of faith and bestowing spiritual blessing. Allamah Majlisi, after citing the narration in *Al-Kāfī* regarding handshaking—which states that when two believers meet and shake hands, "their sins fall away like leaves from trees"—clarifies that in the case of the Infallibles (*Ma'ṣūmīn*), this effect manifests as the "elevation of ranks" or the "forgiveness of the Shi'a's sins through their blessing" (al-Majlisi 1983, 73: 23; al-Kulaynī 1986, 2: 179).

A phenomenological analysis of these propositions reveals that in Islamic theology, the "body" is a carrier of Divine Mercy. "Liking" in cyberspace is an act that occurs without "expending existence," whereas *Muṣāfaḥah* requires breaking the sanctity of isolation, intertwining energy fields, and touching the reality of the Other. This touch is precisely the antidote that cures the atomization and coldness of modern relationships.

5.3. Return to Physicality: Collective Rituals and Reconstructing the Sense of Belonging

One of the most serious detriments of Liquid Modernity is the abstraction and mentalization of social bonds. Islam, by emphasizing "**Embodied Rituals**," compels the individual to exit the cocoon of their loneliness and integrate into a "tangible totality." Collective rituals in Islam are not merely symbolic; they are the "objective embodiment of brotherhood":

- **Congregational Prayer (*Ṣalāt al-Jamā'ah*):** The concept of "*Tarāṣṣ al-Ṣufūf*" (standing shoulder to shoulder and filling the gaps) in congregational prayer creates a kind of mandatory and sacred physical convergence. This contact of shoulders collapses class, racial, and individual boundaries, reminding the lonely individual that they are "part of a solid wall" (*Bunyānun Marṣūṣ*). This physical symmetry gradually leads to cardiac symmetry.
- **Hajj Pilgrimage:** Hajj is the greatest anti-atomization maneuver in human history; where the individual, in *Ṭawāf* (circumambulation), dissolves their individual identity (Ego) into the "mass of believers." Here, the sense of "forlorn-

ness" is replaced by the magnificent experience of "membership in the *Ummah*," and the collective circular motion reconstructs ontological security.

- **Communal Iftar (Commensality):** In Islam, "Feeding" (*Iṭ'ām*) and "Communal Eating" are strategic tools for the "reconciliation of hearts" (*Ta'līf al-Qulūb*). Robin Dunbar, the evolutionary psychologist, shows in his research that "**Commensality**" (eating together) increases endorphin and oxytocin levels in the brain, stabilizing social bonds (Dunbar 2017, 198–205). By sanctifying the dining spread (*Sufrah*) and recommending communal eating, Islam transforms the biological act of eating into a bonding social ritual.

In the digital age, where the individual is imprisoned in "isolation behind the screen," returning to this physicality and presence in sacred spaces where the "Other" is touchable, smellable, and audible is the only path to a genuine exit from the epidemic of loneliness.

6. Practical Framework and the Model of Collective Identity Reconstruction

Transitioning from an "atomized condition" to an "**Intimate Society**" (*al-Mujtama' al-Musta'nis*) requires an intelligent redesign of urban living structures and psychological protocols. The theology of *Uns* must not remain in the realm of abstraction; rather, it must manifest in the form of social institutions and therapeutic models. This section proposes three operational layers to breach the enclosure of loneliness in the modern world.

6.1. Reviving the Social Functions of the Mosque: The Mosque as a "Third Place"

In urban sociology, Ray Oldenburg coined the concept of "**The Third Place**" to describe vital spaces that are neither "home" (first place) nor "work" (second place), but neutral, accessible grounds for voluntary, informal, and bonding gatherings among citizens (Oldenburg 1989, 20–35). Oldenburg argues that the erosion of social life in modern cities is largely due to the decline and commercialization of these third places and their gradual replacement by consumption-oriented shopping centers and forms of electronic communication—a condition that can be considered one of the grounds for intensifying feelings of loneliness and isolation in the contemporary world.

In Islamic civilization, the "Mosque" functioned precisely as a "**Transcendental Third Place**." Reviving the mosque as a focal point of *Uns* requires transcending its purely "Calendar and Ritualistic" function (limited to prayer times) toward social functions. A mosque capable of acting as a center for local conflict resolution, a hub for skill-sharing, and a space for face-to-face dialogue serves as an antidote to atomization. According to traditions, mosques are "the houses of Allah on earth," and those who enter them are considered "Visitors of God," whose dignity God has obligated Himself to honor (al-Majlisī 1983, 81: 6). Accordingly, the mosque, beyond being a place of individual worship, acts as a "**Community Anchor**," where the lonely individual, by joining the congregation of worshippers

and mosque frequenters (*Ummār*), integrates into a "Trans-spatial Collective Identity"—an identity that can moderate parts of the anxiety of modern isolation.

6.2. *The Ethics of Neighborliness (Jiwār): Breaking the Siege of Vertical Living*

Modern architecture and the prevalence of vertical apartment living have led to a phenomenon sociologists term "**Civil Inattention**"—a paradoxical condition where individuals live in extreme "physical proximity" (mere centimeters apart) yet remain emotionally and socially completely "alien." Islam, by offering the precise protocol of *Jiwār* (neighborliness), seeks to transform "physical proximity" into "spiritual kinship."

In the Islamic tradition, the rights of the neighbor are so immense and fundamental that the Prophet (PBUH) stated: "Gabriel recommended the neighbor to me so much that I thought he would assign him inheritance" (al-Suyūṭī n.d., 2: 496). Rereading these rights in the present era can translate into "Apartment Protocols," including the revival of the tradition of "**Tahādī**" (mutual gift-giving for the reconciliation of hearts) and responsibility for the mental health and security of adjacent residents. In fact, the rule of "forty houses in every direction," mentioned in traditions as the boundary of neighborhood, defines a "**Micro-community**" wherein "loneliness," due to emotional monitoring and social solidarity (*Takāful*), finds no opportunity to establish itself or become chronic (al-Majlisī 1983, 84: 3).

6.3. *Modeling for Spiritual Psychotherapy: An Uns-based Counseling Protocol*

Prevalent contemporary psychotherapies (such as CBT) often focus on strengthening ego functions and enhancing individual autonomy. However, Malik Badri, the father of modern Islamic psychology, argues that curing existential ailments is possible only by "transcending the self" toward the monotheistic horizon and restoring the vertical relationship with God (Badri 2000, 65–70). Based on the concept of *Uns*, a three-stage therapeutic protocol can be formulated for clients struggling with loneliness:

1. **Reconstructing the Vertical Connection (Theocentric Connection):**
Transition from Dread to Remembrance (Dhikr). In this stage, the therapist helps the client redefine loneliness not as "rejection," but as an opportunity for "Solitude with the Truth" (**Cognitive Reframing**).
2. **Recognizing the Other:** Educating the client to view the "Other" from a theocentric perspective—not as a rival or object, but as a "Mirror" and locus of Divine Providence; a perspective that can alleviate **Social Anxiety**.
3. **Service-Oriented (Altruism):** Curing loneliness through engagement with the suffering of others. The approach of "Service to Creation" (*Khidmat al-Khalq*) in Islam, by extracting the individual from the "cycle of depressive rumination"

and connecting them to collective benevolent action, reattaches them to the semantic network of society (Rasool 2021, 198–202).

This therapeutic model views loneliness not as a chemical defect in the brain, but as a "Bonding Disconnect" that can only be repaired by re-establishing the flow of *Uns* (at three levels: with the Self, with God, and with Creation).

7. Conclusion

7.1. Summary of Findings: The Paradigm of *Uns* vs. Secular Connection

Through a phenomenological and theological analysis, the present research has demonstrated that the "epidemic of loneliness" in the contemporary world, beyond being a psychological dysfunction or a sociological rupture, is rooted in a "**Metaphysical Crisis**." While secular and neoliberal approaches attempt to cure this crisis by managing "Functional Interactions" or enhancing "Nominal Social Capital," Islamic theology offers an ontological and multi-layered solution based on the concept of *Uns*.

The superiority of the *Uns* paradigm over modern approaches was elucidated through three key axes:

1. **First:** Islam treats loneliness through "Connection to the Infinite" (*Uns* with the Real), which leads to the creation of a sustainable "**Ontological Security**." This serves as an anchor that prevents the individual's psychological collapse amidst the fluctuations of modern "liquid relationships" (Bauman 2000).
2. **Second:** The transition from "Atomized Individualism" to "**Organic Brotherhood**," wherein mutual responsibility (*Takāful*) elevates human relationships from the level of "Transaction" to the level of "Altruism" (*Īthār*).
3. **Third:** The emphasis on the "**Quality of Presence**" and the "**Physicality of Rituals**," which acts as a serious antidote to the "superficialization of relationships" and "disembodiment" in the digital sphere.

Ultimately, this paper argued that *Uns* is not merely a moral choice but is **constitutive** of the nature of the "Human" (*Insān*) (al-Iṣfahānī 1992), and returning to this primordial root (*Fiṭrah*) is the only way to safeguard mental health in post-industrial societies.

7.2. Limitations of the Research

Despite the attempt to provide a comprehensive model, this research faced certain limitations:

1. The primary focus was on classical texts and the theological-Hadith heritage (specifically Shi'a sources); due to volume constraints, it was not possible to analyze cultural differences across various Muslim societies.
2. Translating precise theological concepts such as *Uns*, *Waḥshah* (dread), and *Istihāsh* into modern psychological terminology always carries the risk of "**Reductionism**." An effort was made to mitigate this through rigorous philological referencing.

3. This study was qualitative and theoretical in nature, and its findings require the support of **Empirical Data** in real-world fields.

7.3. Suggestions for Future Research

Given the horizons opened in this paper, the following suggestions are offered for researchers in this field:

- **Quantitative and Interdisciplinary Studies:** Conducting field research to measure the statistical correlation between "adherence to collective rituals" (such as congregational prayer and the Arbaʿīn Pilgrimage) and the "reduction of suicide rates" and "alleviation of loneliness" in metropolises, modeling methodologies from Religion and Health studies (Koenig, King, and Carson 2012).
- **Theology and AI:** Investigating the challenging question of whether Artificial Intelligence and social robots can offer an experience of *Uns* (or a simulation thereof). Where does the boundary lie between "**Artificial Intimacy**" and "**Theological Uns**"? This domain could lead to a serious critique of Transhumanism from an Islamic perspective.

Intimate Architecture and Urbanism: Researching urban design based on "Rights of Neighborhood" (*Jiwār*) to facilitate face-to-face interactions and combat the isolation inherent in apartment living.

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