

## Personality Development and Human Values

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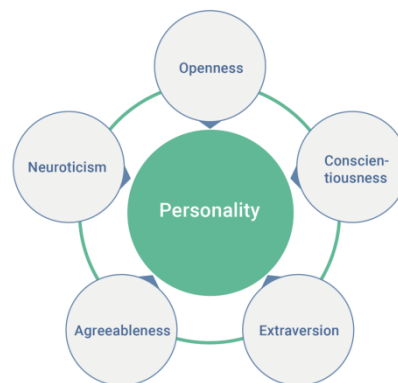
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### What are Personality and Its Traits

The everyday, outward identity of the individual is what is commonly understood as personality. There are many different definitions given for personality, sometimes confusing! I believe that since truth is beautiful and does not have to be complicated, I would rather go for a simpler but profound explanation given by 'Abdu'l-Baha who provided a binary definition – Personality is one of two kinds. One is the natural or God-given personality which the Western thinkers call individuality -- the inner aspect of man which is not subject to change. The second personality is the acquired virtues and perfections, with which man is adorned [1].

In other words one's personality has two angles: inherent and acquired. Inherent personality are those endowments with which one is born, The Western thinkers call it individuality; it is not subject to change. To recognize and be aware of them will make it possible for man to make constant efforts to strengthening the positive tendencies and overcoming their weaknesses [2]. The second angle is the acquired virtues and perfections, with which man is embellished. When the individuality of man, i.e., his inborn and natural virtues is adorned with acquired virtues and perfections then we have character.

### Big Five personality traits



The relationship between the big five personality traits

The Big Five personality traits, also known as the five factor model (FFM) uses descriptors of common language and therefore suggests five broad dimensions commonly used to describe the human personality and psyche. The five factors have been defined as follows – [3]

- **Openness to experience (*inventive/curious vs. consistent/cautious*):** Appreciation for art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, curiosity, and variety of experience. Openness reflects the degree of intellectual curiosity, creativity and a preference for novelty and variety a person has. It is also described as the extent to which a person is imaginative or independent and depicts a personal preference for a variety of activities over a strict routine. High openness can be perceived as unpredictability or lack of focus, and more likely to engage in risky behavior or drug taking. Moreover, individuals with high openness are said to pursue self-actualization specifically

by seeking out intense, euphoric experiences. Conversely, those with low openness seek to gain fulfillment through perseverance and are characterized as pragmatic and data-driven—sometimes even perceived to be dogmatic and closed-minded.

- **Conscientiousness (*efficient/organized vs. easy-going/careless*):** A tendency to be organized and dependable, show self-discipline, act dutifully, aim for achievement, and prefer planned rather than spontaneous behavior. High conscientiousness is often perceived as stubbornness and obsession. Low conscientiousness is associated with flexibility and spontaneity, but can also appear as sloppiness and lack of reliability.
- **Extraversion (*outgoing/energetic vs. solitary/reserved*):** Energy, positive emotions, surgency, assertiveness, sociability and the tendency to seek stimulation in the company of others, and talkativeness. High extraversion is often perceived as attention-seeking, and domineering. Low extraversion causes a reserved, reflective personality, which can be perceived as aloof or self-absorbed.
- **Agreeableness (*friendly/compassionate vs. challenging/detached*):** A tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others. It is also a measure of one's trusting and helpful nature, and whether a person is generally well-tempered or not. High agreeableness is often seen as naive or submissive. Low agreeableness personalities are often competitive or challenging people, which can be seen as argumentativeness or untrustworthiness.
- **Neuroticism (*sensitive/nervous vs. secure/confident*):** The tendency to experience unpleasant emotions easily, such as anger, anxiety, depression, and vulnerability. Neuroticism also refers to the degree of emotional stability and impulse control and is sometimes referred to by its low pole, 'emotional stability'. A high need for stability manifests itself as a stable and calm personality, but can be seen as uninspiring and unconcerned. A low need for stability causes a reactive and excitable personality, often very dynamic individuals, but they can be perceived as unstable or insecure.

The Big five personality trait is the model to comprehend the relationship between personality and academic behaviors. This model was defined by several independent sets of researchers. These researchers began by studying relationships between a large number of known personality traits. They reduced the lists of these traits (arbitrarily) by 5–10 fold and then used factor analysis to group the remaining traits (using data mostly based upon people's estimations, in self-report questionnaire and peer ratings) in order to find the underlying factors of personality [4].

### What Is Personality Development

Personality Development or Self Development is a lifelong process and not confined to a particular age group. One of the first realizations one needs to attain in the process of his self-development and character building is the awareness about his duality, a material and a spiritual reality [5].

For psychology to be effective in helping man to develop his whole human qualities, it has to be a spiritual psychology to learn about his dual nature, his physical or animalistic qualities of self-seeking, and his capacity of developing spiritual qualities of universal love and self-sacrifice [6]. Holistic Personality development requires man to rise above the lower side of his nature and move towards his angelic side [7]. A personality without this angelic character is deformed crippled.

Our individuality, our inborn spiritual essence whose potential exists in each human being at birth, is raw material, so to speak, of our spiritual development. It is, moreover, praiseworthy because it is divine in origin and consists of our outstanding, individual and specific spiritual attributes: knowledge, power, faithfulness, generosity, mercy and wealth are among those endowments. Our personality by this definition is all of the positive characteristics of our divinely originated nature. Personality is the form that we give to that raw material; what we become in the course of life through the refining process of education and through our own efforts.

The second aspect of personality refers to the characteristics acquired throughout a lifetime. These may be human or divine, perfect or imperfect, vices or virtues. They are perceived as a continuum or a modification of our individuality, our original God-given nature.

Praiseworthy characteristics can best be acquired through individual effort and striving, and through the benefits of training and education. These characteristics are a further refinement of the original God-given characteristics of our individuality, in the same way that the beauty of the statue is a refinement of the original marble [8].

Although our individuality is in-born, yet the development of our personality is largely in our own hands. There is no mystery in it. If we habitually perform praiseworthy deeds and reveal heavenly attributes, we will become praiseworthy and heavenly. The force of habit is regarded as of special value in the building up of the acquired personality as is the affirmation of free will and the sense of responsibility in personal development. The given individuality at birth contains a promise of perfection. But whether that promise will be fulfilled or not depends on us. The given individuality can be subjected to perversion. Through bad habits we can even reach the low point, where we are no longer able to distinguish good from evil or no longer have the power to resist evil. Willfully violent individuals are also examples of those who no longer choose to resist evil [9].

In the process of personality development, knowing oneself is the most fascinating and valuable study. It is said that the greatest loss is for the person who spends his life without having recognized his own self. After all, if he does not recognize his own self—his strengths, his powers, his unique endowments—what will he develop? Man has learnt how to rule, everything in the world, except the square foot under his own hat, says Edward Carpenter [10]. One of the most effective tools for such self-discovery and recognition is to engage in self-introspection and evaluation on a regular basis, say every day.

### **Human Values and Personality Development**

It is said that the reality of man is his thought not his body. His thoughts act like a magnet that attracts their like to him. If man speaks and acts with pure thoughts, happiness follows him; and if he speaks and acts with evil thoughts, pain follows him. A negative mind can never produce happiness. One's thought is like a shadow that will never leave him. An educationist once said that to have a sweet apple tree, the tree should be sweet; you cannot have a sweet apple tree by hanging sweet apples to an ordinary tree. What makes our thoughts positive and our tree sweet are the noble qualities and values we cherish deep within us and practice in our public and private life. Hence an important aspect of our personality development is to nurture the human values we believe in and put them into action. Among these values are gratitude, truthfulness, love, justice, thirst for knowledge, contentment, inner peace, integrity, hope, see good and practice a sin-covering eye, and forgive and forget.

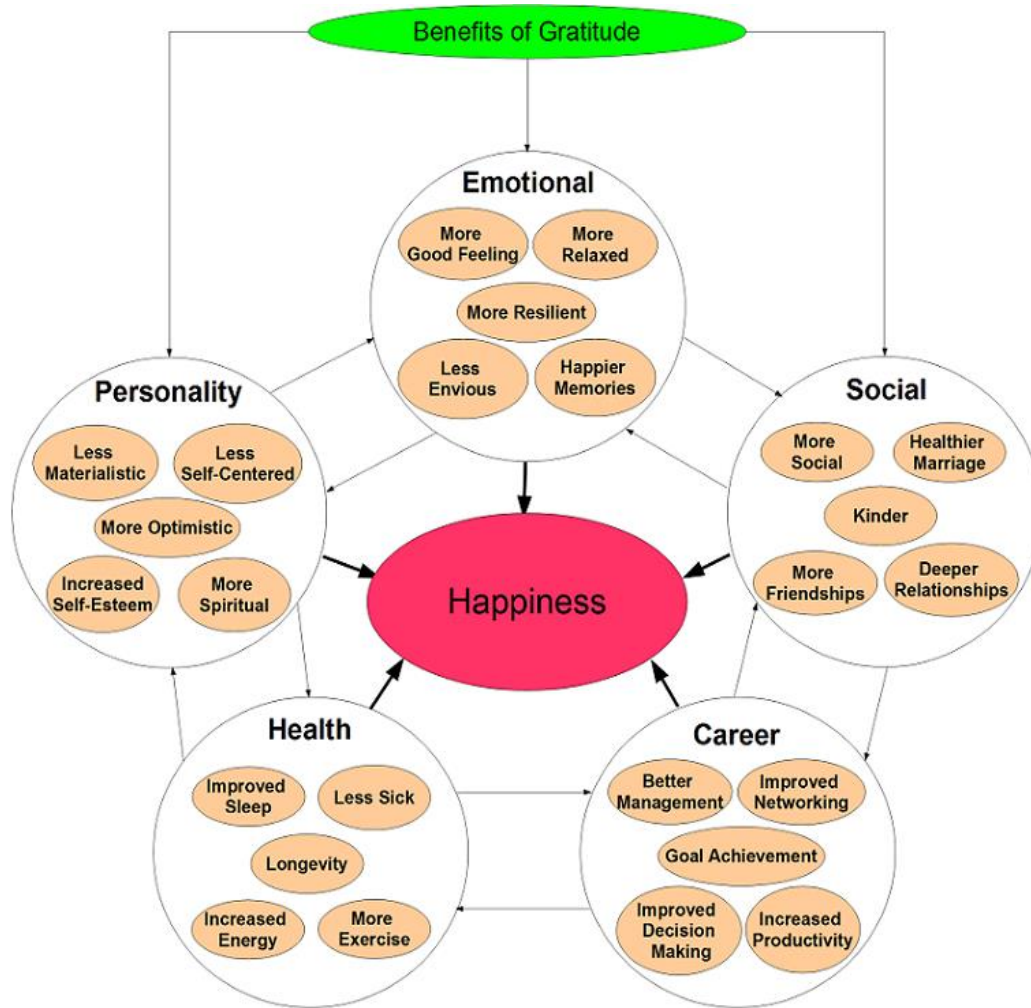
According to Amit Amin, the attitude of gratitude has 31 benefits and impacts on a person [11]. By practicing gratitude towards others, one's attention moves from his own self and focuses on the acts of altruism by other. The benefits include becoming happier, becoming a more lovable personality, more stable emotionally, more optimistic that is connected to more happiness, less materialistic, less self-centered, more self-esteem. One also become more friendly, more respectful, will have deeper relationship, and show more resilience. Gratitude makes one more spiritual as the person wishes to be grateful to a kind creator.

### **How Value Education Develops One's Personality**

Values are what bring excitement and meaning to one's life. They influence your desires and your actions toward living a fulfilling and robust existence. They are also a measuring tool that let you know when things are "off-track" and offer an anchor with which to connect your choices to. Understanding what your values are about life, work, relationships and yourself will allow you to make better decisions and will support you in committing to the decisions you make. Facing any new situation is easier by connecting the process to your values will bring much needed clarification and provide for a smooth and successful passage to the next stage of your life [5].

Values here are not your ordinary "laundry list" that you might expect. These "values" are not necessarily moral or spiritual principles laid down by the Ten Commandments. The values we are speaking of are at the core of your individual being and are what feed the joy and exuberance of your life. What lights you

up? What excites from the inside out? What contributes to your sense of well-being? What is present when



Benefits of Gratitude [12]

there is synergy in your life? What, if taken away, would leave you less than whole? Knowing the answers to these questions offers a connection between what you are wanting from your life and the actions you must take in order to have what you want. Your values may not be visible but the effect and impact of your values are. On a daily basis you are either living your values or you are not. When you are not living your values disharmony is sure to be lurking. If you are facing personal difficulties asking yourself the question, "Which of my values are not being met?" might be a good place to start in finding a meaningful solution.

Once you know what your values are, your life will never be the same. Living your values will bring you increased joy and confidence in all areas of your life: it will simplify decision making as your choices will suddenly seem so obvious; it will bring a sense of freedom and relief as you finally begin to understand what it is that makes you pulse beat; and it will add purpose and meaning to your actions because you will have built a foundation that guides and supports you in achieving greater personal fulfillment. After all the universe is founded in moral laws, or what we call human values, only.

### **Volition: A Pre-Requisite for Personality Development**

The distinction made by 'Abdu'l-Baha helps us to understand both the nature and God-given aspects of personality. His definition also puts an emphasis on the notion of free will in the development of spiritual qualities, a concept which was of great importance to Victor Frankl. Frankl stressed repeatedly the notion

of the individual's responsibility for his or her own spiritual being even under the most adverse conditions. In Man's Search for Meaning he writes –

*'The experiences of camp life show that man does have a choice of action ... Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress ... everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.'*

In the same vein, Frankl writes of finding meaning in the fleeting circumstances of life: 'Thus, the transitory-ness of our own existence in no way makes it meaningless. But it does constitute our responsible-ness; for everything hinges upon our realizing the essentially transitory possibilities [13].'

A similar point is made by 'Abdu'l-Baha about the necessity for the self to construct the personality that is obtained through the effort of man, and through training and education. When he uses the term 'individuality', He does not appear to intend personality as it is commonly understood. The two are usually synonymous in western society: your individuality is your personality. In western thinking, your individuality is expressed through those character traits, attitudes and behavior patterns that are unique to you and particular to you. This sum constitutes personality. In conventional psychology, the differences in personality are the expression of our individuality. We might itemize them, as Alice Heim did, as 'all the traits, sentiments, aptitudes, prejudices, emotions, attitudes, moods, self-perceptions, abilities, interests, skills, recollections, desires, ambitions and manner which make up the individual'. He, however, reinterprets the familiar terms for a divine purpose. He sees personality within the greater overall context of 'character' [14].

### **Vision and Purpose in Life**

Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life ... (and) is able to live and even to die for the sake of his ideals and values.

A public-opinion poll was conducted a few years ago in France. The results showed that 89 percent of the people admitted that man needs "something" for the sake of which to live. Moreover, 61 percent accepted that there was something, or someone, in their own lives for whose sake they were even ready to die.

Another statistical survey, of 7,948 students at forty-eight colleges, was conducted by social scientists from Johns Hopkins University. ... Asked what they considered "very important" to them now, 16 percent of the students checked "making a lot of money"; 78 percent said their first goal was "finding a purpose and meaning to my life."... There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: "He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*." I can see in these words a motto which holds true for any psychotherapy. In the Nazi concentration camps, one could have witnessed that those who knew that there was a task waiting for them to fulfill were most apt to survive [15].

And in a study conducted by the Baha'i Academy last year, over a thousand students from 9 colleges in Maharashtra discussed in 77 focus groups what was the purpose of their lives. Over 70% answered the purpose of their life was to serve society and bring about change! This was followed by building their personality and achieving goals, inculcation human values and being a good human being, and living a meaningful and joyful life.

The above observations indicate that the youth have placed higher purposes as their top priority in life, such purposes that are noble and non-materialistic [16].

### **Success**

An important factor that influences one's personality development is his success. Success does not have a universal definition, because it very much depends on one's perspective, vision and values. Hence to have a stable personality, one has to define his success based on his vision and values. It is said that success breeds success; however it depends on the condition that one remains a learner throughout his life and career.

To conclude let's think of the following statement which says – “Anybody can be happy in the state of comfort, ease, health, success, pleasure and joy; but if one will be happy and contented in the time of trouble, hardship and prevailing disease, it is the proof of nobility [17].”

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(\* ) Bahá'í Academy, [www.bahaiacademy.org](http://www.bahaiacademy.org) , is an educational institution engaged in research and action, since year 2000, in the field of value education for institutions of higher learning. Its programme of Education in Universal Human Values provides short and long term courses focusing on capability building among the youth for fostering personal development and social progress. Its Campus is located at Panchgani Hill Station in the Western Ghats and has regional teams in Odisha and Karnataka.

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