The Significance of Religiosity and Morality among Muslim Reverts

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Abstract
Islam is an essential religion for every Muslim because it is the source for forming a value system and giving guidance to help solve all the problems of life that afflict human beings. Attaining religiosity through religious education is vital because through understanding, internalising, and practising the actual Islamic teachings, Muslims will get a worldview based on Islamicity towards this worldly life and in the hereafter. This article aims to review previous studies on the significance of religiosity and morality among reverts. This conceptual and qualitative study used document analysis methods. It found that the previous studies on Muslim reverts only focused on the educational aspect. However, this study found that the practice of reverts' morality is closely related to their religiosity's effectiveness. This study gives a significant implication to an additional reference for the State Islamic Religious Council and other Non-Government organisations involved in providing educational guidance to the Muslim reverts*.
Keywords: Religiosity, Morality, Education, Revert, Muslim.

Introduction
Islam is the religion of Allah revealed to the last Prophet Muhammad Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH) like the previous Prophets to guide humankind from darkness to light, as Allah says in Surah Ibrahim verse 1. Prophet Muhammad transformed the worshipers of idols into those adhering to monotheism faith, worshipping the God Allah alone. To this day, the Islamic missionary *(da'wah)* continues, and the effect of the conversion to Islam is always happening. Prophet Muhammad was educating the Muslim society *(Ummah)* after they embraced Islam in Mecca for 13 years by strengthening their Islamic faith in themselves. Prophet was always guiding Muslim reverts or commonly known as '*new brothers'* so that their faith in Islam was solid and unlikely to falter (Sabiq, 1991). Similarly, such a support system is essential for Muslim reverts today because conversion involves a process of transformation in various

aspects including mind, emotions, culture and beliefs (Khadijah, et al., 2017). However, this paper only focuses on the past research studies of the religiosity of our brothers and its relationship with the formation of noble values *(akhlaq mahmudah).*

Methodology
This study was conducted through a qualitative descriptive data method by analysing previous studies and literature. Research materials such as references from magazines, books, journals and theses are researched and analysed descriptively by comparing themes relating to the study's objectives. Qualitative data obtained were analysed based on the desired themes concerning several aspects of religiosity, namely *Islamic doctrine (aqidah)*, rules and regulations (*shariah*) and morality (*akhla*q) among Muslim reverts. Furthermore, the analysis is focused on the themes that contribute to the formation of values in our community.

The Concept of Muslim Revert
In Malaysia, the Muslim revert is referring to the term *mualaf*, new brother, Muslim brother or our brother is commonly used for those who convert his or her religion or belief to Islam. (Irwan et al., 2018). Our brothers who embrace Islam for peace and well-being face many challenges (Mariam et al., 2020. According to Noreha et al (2019), issues that often cause conflict to our brothers are economics and finance and facing Islamic legal issues such as family inheritance challenges. This is because when they choose Islam as their way of life, they are not given the right to inherit property from their family. After all, they are considered traitors to their ancestral religion, origin, lineage, culture and heritage. They consider this an act of insult to their race because, for them, it includes the act of breaking family ties (Azman et al., 2017).

Khadijah et al (2017) explained that our brothers face problems not only from a material point of view but they also face moral as well as spiritual problems, such as difficulty in adjusting to a new way of life, accepting physical and emotional abuse as well as misunderstandings of non -Muslims and original Muslims. At the same time, they also face problems with a deeper understanding of Islam. Besides, the status of new reverts, who are often categorised as 'second class', also contributes to the existing problems that cause conflicts in our brothers even though they have long embraced Islam and blended with life in Muslim society.

The consequences of the challenges faced by our brothers have caused many of our brothers to leave Islam. According to the study by Suariza et al (2018), the statistics of the declaration of apostasy cases for the period 2011 to 2015 received by the Selangor Islamic Religious Council was 81 cases. All applications wishing to leave Islam involve those who have embraced Islam. This can be shown through several cases that have become a public debate, such as Azlina Jailani, Kamariah Ali, and Muhammad Abdullah @ Moorthy. The study also showed that one of the main factors in the application for declaring apostasy status among our brothers is due to the collapse of our brother's household caused by the cheating wife's attitude, the husband's attitude of neglect and cruelty to his wife until finally resulting in divorce and ultimately leaving Islam. This matter is seen to be due to the lack of education and religiosity of our brothers in Islam which cause their faith to be easily shaken. In line with this study, Asyraf (2018: 62) also asserted in his study that the main problem faced by our apostate brothers is the lack of understanding of Islam and weak faith.

To prevent such a situation from happening, when our brothers start their new life as Muslims, they should be empowered with Islamic knowledge, understanding and religiosity

of Islam. Islam contains a life system consistent with nature and encompasses all aspects of life. Therefore, our new brother's religiosity is essential because it determines the direction of our brother's life in this world and the hereafter, whether from the physical, spiritual, intellectual, emotional Qutb (1983) and holistic aspects (Nazri, 2020).

Concept of Religiosity: *Aqidah*, *Shariah* and *Akhlaq*
The word "religious" is defined in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010) as "believing strongly in the existence of a God or Gods". Anuradha & Opatha (2017) defined religiosity as th strength of one's connection to or conviction for their religion. "One's connection" is like a bond to religion. "Conviction for their religion" means belief in their religion. From the perspective of Islam, religion is the bond between God as the Ultimate Reality and His creations, with humans being one of the creations. It is a way of life (*al-din*) or path (*tariqah*) with God that encompasses a Muslim's work, faith, and being. Results from one living are in a state of surrender to God. It implies sanctifying all daily living into worshipful acts consistent with the *tauhid or absolute monotheistic* principle. Thus, religiosity means performing religious practices covering all its dimensions so that it can be felt and permeate into the soul (Al-Qaradawi, 1988).

Thus, "religiosity" in Islam means seeking knowledge and understanding of the teachings of Islam to have complete comprehension and consciousness by living as a way of life in Islam. It encompasses three components, namely, firstly, faith (*aqidah*); secondly, the rules and regulations (*shariah*); and thirdly, the commendable good attributes (*akhla*q) seen within the comprehensive and integrative scope of Islam (Zukiple et al., 2006: 1). In line with this, Al-Qaradawi (1984: 12) describes the concept of religiosity as encompassing in all aspects of life with faith (*aqidah*) as a way of life, worship as a practice of life, *shariah* as a rule and guidance of life, and noble morals as an ethic of life. The combination of faith, *shariah* and morals will give human beings a balanced life physically, spiritually, mentally and emotionally (Nazarudin et al., 2017).

In this regard, Qutb (1983) believes that human life must be based on a religion that contains a life system consistent with human nature and must be realised in all aspects of life. This is only possible with the belief, knowledge, practice and experience of Islam. The higher these four categories of dimensions and components are, the higher one's religiosity is. Islamic knowledge plays an essential role as faith strengthens from the knowledge of *Tawhid*. At the same time, rules and regulations provide guidance from the knowledge of *Fiqh*, and commendable good attributes are the outcome of the knowledge of *Tasawuf*. The knowledge of *tasawuf* deals with self-purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*) through the elimination of evil deeds (*mazmumah*) and the creation of good deeds (*mahmudah*) within one" s inner-self (Syukri, 2010).

Therefore, religiosity is very important in human life because it has a significant influence on behaviour, personality and emotional calm (Lubis, 1982, Zukiple et al., 2006). Highlights on discussions of past studies on several aspects of religiosity, namely faith *(aqidah)*, Rules and Regulations *(sharia*h) and morality (*akhla*q).

Religiosity in Aspect of Islamic Doctrine or Faith (*aqidah*)
The Muslim reverts are from various backgrounds of religious beliefs before embracing Islam. For that, our brothers should aim to develop Islamic education to enable themselves to become true Muslims and achieve success in this world and the hereafter. Thus, Ahmad Yunus

et.al explain that the main foundation of Islamic education that needs to be understood by the reverts is the understanding and appreciation of the knowledge of *aqidah*.

The word *aqidah* is derived from the word 'aqada, which means bond or knot. According to Islamic terms, faith means a firm belief without particular hesitation in believing in Allah, His angels, His books, His Messengers, and the hereafter and believing in the provisions of the creatures, whether good destiny or evil destiny (Ab. Aziz, 2016: 9- 10). Al-Qaradawi (n.d.:17) explains that *aqidah* means a firm and justifying belief (*tasdiq*) in Allah and His Messenger without doubt and hesitation. Then radiated from that steadfastness is the sincere effort of jihad in the way of Allah through wealth and soul (effort). Thus, faith encompasses firm beliefs without doubt, principles that need to be believed, and the effect of those beliefs is practising the teachings of Islam. The outcome is achieving good moral behaviour. As a result, a person with strong faith will feel obedience in the heart Al-Ghazali (1988) and be encouraged to worship Al-Ghazali (2004) with confidence in the retribution of Allah and the punishment of his torment.

Faith is not hidden in the heart but radiates through the thoughts and sentiments of the conscience, and all bodily organs and senses are equally directed towards faith believing in Allah as in, Surah al-Mukminun 23: 1-9. Sabiq (1991) says that faith is the soul of every person. By holding steadfast to faith, one will live in good condition, and it will be a guiding light so as not to stray in the twists and turns of life. He said such matters to instil true faith in the heart, and the way is with systematic education, understanding and practising the teachings so as to nurture it until it is fertile and strong in order to reach the peak of happiness that is desired.

Religiosity in Aspect of Rules and Regulations (*shariah*)
The dimension of sharia has to do with one's worship according to the pillars of Islam, as Allah mentions in Surah at-Taubah 9:71. Having faith is not limited to the tongue but connects the belief with the practice of shariah. The implications of strong faith and conviction have a strong effect on the sense of obedience in the human heart Al-Ghazali (1988: 432) and become a motivator for worship (Al-Ghazali, 2004: 211-225). When a person embraces Islam, it begins with the confession of *shahadah* and living his faith with the practice of worship that is performing prayers sincerely, living a way of life as a Muslim, paying zakat, maintaining self-respect, maintaining trust and promises and keeping prayers as a true believer (Ab. Aziz 2016: 9). This is explained as Allah SWT says in Surah Al-Mu'minun 23: 1-9.

In line with this, Huda and Mariam (2017: 2-3) asserts that worship means making Allah as the focal point of worship and rejecting everything other than Him. It is also defined as everything that is liked and pleased by Allah which includes words, deeds and all external and internal practices. The combination of the two external and internal dimensions can increase the level of religiosity in a Muslim life. Thus, the aspect of worship is very important in attaining religiosity because worship plays a role in arranging an individual's relationship with his God as well as a way to present *ubudiyah* to God outwardly. In addition, the relationship between faith and sharia is very important as it identifies aspects of beliefs that involve the worldview of something believed and when put in practice, it reflects the understanding and religiosity of such beliefs (Zulkefli & Salahudin, 2019:108).

Religiosity in Aspect of Morals (*akhlak*)
According to Dewan (2015), morality (akhlak) means character, conduct and behaviour. According to the Kamus Lisan Al-Arab, morality (akhlaq) means habit or character (Ibn Manzur

1997: 304). Al-Ghazali (1967), believes that morality is derived from the word "khulq", which means that personality arises from the soul and action is taken promptly without thinking deeply. Ibn Misykawayh (1968) echoed the view of al-Ghazali that akhlaq is the inner strength that always motivates people to do good deeds without thinking and is developed through training and practice. Thus, morality is good or bad behaviour that describes a person whose religiosity is reflected in his character and behaviour (Hanani & Razaleigh, 2017: 90).

Furthermore, the process of moral improvement is closely related to the healing of the soul and trying to adorn oneself with noble qualities and morals. In order to achieve a healthy soul, Al-Ghazali (1988: 1039) suggested that efforts to improve morals should be made through the process of training by controlling the nature of anger and lust, for example. Diligent training (leisure) with obedience to control one's desire must be done to obtain noble morals. The source of moral reference, which is a measure of good-bad or noble-reprehensible of one's behaviour is different from the concept of ethics and morals as explained by the West. The source of Islamic morality is al-Qur'an and al-Hadith, while the source of ethics and morality for the West is from the mind or the majority of society's views (Yunahar, 2004)

According to Al-Qadarawi, (1994), morality in the view of religion in general and Islam in particular, morality has a high position in the context of faith in God. This correlation is mentioned in the hadith of the Prophet as he said " The most perfect believer in respect of faith is he who is best of them in manners." (Abu Dawud, 42:87). Religion and moral excellence are one thing and inseparable between both. Religion is like spirit to morality, while morality is like air to spirit. Therefore, the formation of morality is important in Islam. He said that a Muslim that is conscious of God and leads a way of life according to the teachings of Islam (*al-damir al-dini*) would produce people who fear Allah and the judgment day, always conscious of the punishment of their evil deeds by Allah, not deceitful and always trustworthy and sincere (Al-Qadarawi, 1994). A clear understanding of the importance of attaining religiosity will guide Muslims to comply with the requirements and the practice of shariah, thereby achieving the outcome reflected in the behaviour with noble morals.

Relationship Between Religiosity and Morality *(akhla*q) among Our Brothers
Morality *(akhla*q) is significant because it is part of the necessities in the life of a Muslim. The moral system will have a profound effect on the formation of the value of one's life, either positively or negatively. A good morality will produce positive emotional effects such as happiness, relief, open-mindedness, etc. Nevertheless, if moral purity fails to be lived up to, it will also produce adverse emotional effects such as sadness, humiliation, restlessness, anxiety, etc. This is because morality plays a role in monitoring one's behaviour (Hanani et al., 2017: 91). Whereas according to Alnida et al (2018: 124), morality is essential to create peace and security of human beings in this world and the hereafter. Thus Prophet Muhammad was sent to improve human morals to create peace of mind, as stated in Surah Al-Ahzab verse 21.

There are several studies done on the subject of religiosity among our brothers. For example, Yasmoon and Razaleigh (2019), in their study entitled "*Tahap Kepuasan Mualaf Terhadap Pengurusan Kelas Bimbingan Agama oleh Majlis Agama Islam Kelantan (MAIK))*" explained that religiosity encompasses all aspects of our brothers' lives to develop them spiritually, intellectually, emotionally and physically. Meanwhile, a study conducted by Roslieza & Athiroh (2016: 11-12) entitled "*Peranan Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA) Kelantan Terhadap Pembangunan Modal Insan Muallaf: Tinjauan Awal*" focuses on the methodology of dakwah conducted by MACMA Kelantan on their members-who are

mostly Chinese Muslims. The study confirms that religiosity among the members of MACMA Kelantan was strengthened with a focus on Islamic education by organising *al-Quran* classes and a seminar to reinforce *Aqidah* and *Akhlaq.*

Religiosity is significant for the Muslim reverts who face various challenges in migrating to Islam as they can seek peace and well-being in their new life. Arifin (1977); Mariam et al (2020) For that, al-Ghazali (n.d.) stated that the effort to seek religiosity is vital as it ensures that a Muslim is in the right direction for achieving happiness in this world and the hereafter. In this regard, Zulkiple and Norsalimah (2006) are of the view that moral values should drive the formation of the direction of the true Muslim's life   according to the framework of Islam. Therefore, moral education, with the combination of religiosity for a person who migrated to Islam, cannot be separated.

Furthermore, Yunus et al (2017), in their research entitled "*Pengajaran Akidah dalam Kalangan Mualaf di Institut Dakwah Islamiyah (PERKIM)*" explained that a strong faith (*aqidah*) education would foster a good understanding of Islam and instil religiosity especially in building the human capital personality of our brothers. In line with this, the study by Azman et al (2018) entitled "*Tahap Kefahaman Akidah dalam Kalangan Mualaf di Negeri Selangor*" found that 52% of our brothers do not understand the aspects that affect *aqidah*. He stressed that cultivating *aqidah* in the soul is the best nurturing approach because it produces a strong power in the human heart and soul. He suggested that a structured module on the study of our brothers with emphasis on aspects of *aqidah* be developed before extending it to aspects related to worship and morality.

Related to this, a study conducted by Zulkefli and Salahudin (2019: 99) entitled "*topik akidah dan syariah dalam pengetahuan masyarakat orang aslimuslim di selangor*" shows that the level of understanding of islamic teachings among orang asli muslims in selangor is low. This is due to their need for knowledge about islamic teachings such as *aqidah* and *shariah*. Thus, the lack of knowledge and understanding is a factor that causes a low level of religiosity and difficulty in practising the teachings of islam even though they have embraced islam for a long time. Thus, they stressed that the basic knowledge of aqidah and *shariah* is fundamental in developing the human values of our brothers to appreciate and practice the teachings of islam, including the formation of morals. Concerning this, Supriadi (2018: 43), in a study entitled "*problematika muallaf dalam melaksanakan ajaran agama islam di desa tumbang runen kecamatan kamipang kabupaten katingan*." stated the lack of religiosity reflected by our brothers who are 'lazy' and 'negligent' in performing their prayers and fasting with the excuse of their busy work schedule.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Roziah and Jaffary (2017: 69-73) entitled "*Penghayatan Agama Islam dalam Kalangan Bidayuh Muslim Sarawak*" examines the Islamic practices among our brothers in Sarawak. The assessment focuses on the practice of religion in the daily life of the Bidayuh community in various aspects such as socio-economic, cultural, educational and other fields after embracing Islam. The results show that the earnestness of our brothers to seek knowledge through the guidance of religious studies classes has a high impact on the religiosity in their lives with the display of morals from less perfect to more perfect, such as from leisurely wasting time to appreciating every moment available to perform worship, flowing charity *(amal jariah)* and so on, from drinking alcohol, getting addicted to drugs and all that intoxicants to living a healthier life without drugs, alcohol and so on. The effect of religiosity also improves the lives of their children and family members,

especially in the aspects of morals and daily behaviour. For example, they like to help their parents and grandparents and are diligent in their school homework.

Referring to the guidance and assistance channelled to the muslim reverts, Siti Adibah and Siti Zubaidah (2018: 99), in their study entitled *"pengurusan mualaf di malaysia: kerjasama dinamik antara agensi kerajaan dan bukan kerajaan"* examined the extent to which authorities address welfare issues and the spirituality of our brothers. They stated that islamic education is vital to meet the spiritual needs of the development of human values of our brothers. The result of their understanding of the teachings of islam is reflected in all aspects of their life through adherence to the implementation of islamic worship, adherence to islamic morals and dealings, confidence and strength of spirituality through islamic faith, the effect of believing in allah through islamic guidance and guarantee of their social welfare. The study findings suggested that a long-term plan be created for reverts' spiritual and material development.

In line with a holistic education, Syifaq and Radhi (2018) asserted that Islamic education could encourage the formation of noble morals and drive towards achieving human capital excellence based on the concept of soul purification *(tazkiyah al-nafs)*. The study done by Hanani, et.al (2019: 283) entitled "*Pendekatan Psikologi Dakwah dalam Menangani Masalah Saudara Baru* ", also discusses the da'wah's psychological approach by focusing on the approach of *tazkiyyah-al nafs*, a motivation that can motivate our brothers to do good while being encouraged to leave all evil. This approach can also push our brothers towards a better life and form positive thinking in developing better moral values.

Next the study of Najwa, et.al (2020) "*Hubungan Emosi Dan Akhlak Dalam Kekeluargaan Saudara Baru Selepas Memeluk Islam*" found a very significant relationship between emotions and morals in the context of the family relationships of our brothers after embracing Islam. This means that if the reverts gain support after their conversion to Islam, it will surely produce positive emotions and encourage them to display better morals to navigate a more meaningful life. However, this study only touches on the emotional aspect and its correlation with the morals of the new brothers (Najwa et.al., 2020)

Meanwhile, the study by Wan Zuhaira and Nur A'thiroh (2018) entitled "*Dakwah Kepada Saudara Baru di Kelantan*" discusses the weaknesses of the dakwah approach, inefficiency and lack of attractiveness used by dakwah organisations in their Islamic teaching efforts which causes our new brothers to be less interested and committed to the teachings of Islam. This shows the importance of an effective and efficient da'wah approach channelled to the reverts. This is in line with the opinion of Hisban and Edhy (2017), who stated that religious education could build and develop human personality and morals by practising the beliefs of religious teachings and values in daily life.

Hisban and Edhy (1917) also stated that religiosity could be known through several essential aspects, namely the aspect of belief in religious teachings (*aqidah*), aspects of strength of putting in practice religious teachings *(shariah)*, aspects of appreciation of religious teachings or the actualisation of virtue and goodness *(ihsan)*, aspects of knowledge of religious teachings (knowledge) and aspects of the implementation of religious teachings or the outcome behaviour of moral values. (morality). Religiosity involves the holistic integration of three all-embracing aspects of one" s relationship: the vertical man-God relationship (*hablun-min Allah*), the inward man-inner-self relationship, and the horizontal man-nature relationship (*hablun-min al-nas*). Religiosity is the appreciation of religious values and the need for their internalisation. Thus, the implications of the output of religiosity and morality can be seen from three levels, namely "religious orientation", "self-efficacy", and

"meaning of life", as illustrated in the Integrated` Framework of Religiosity and Morality (see Figure 1).
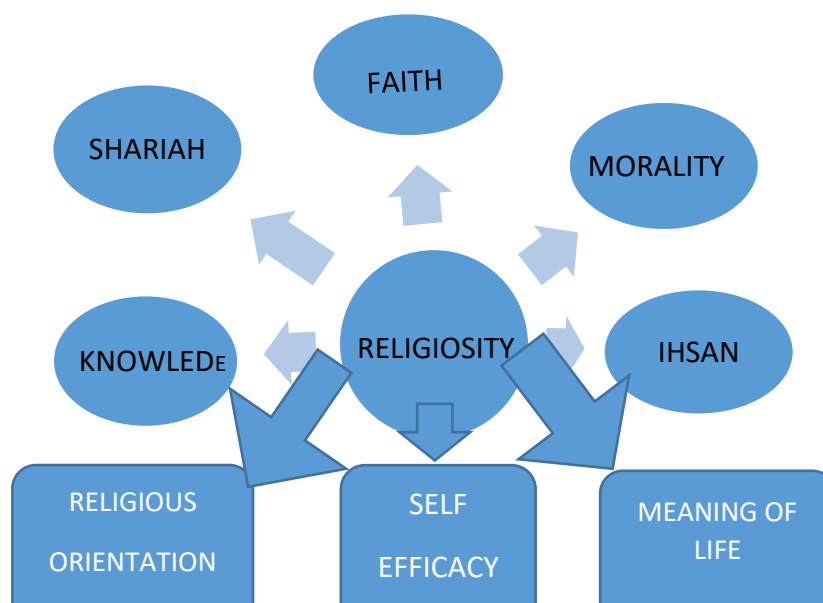

Figure 1 – The Integrated Framework of Religiosity and Morality

First, religiously oriented reverts will benefit their religion or beliefs in their daily life. Religion is already integrated and inseparable in their life; with this, our brothers will carry out the teachings of the religion as prescribed by Islam. Secondly, a person with high self-efficacy believes that they can do something to change the events around them and will try harder to overcome existing challenges. Thus, the revert who achieves self-efficacy will have confidence and a positive outlook that motivates him to perform a task or action in achieving an outcome. Thirdly is the achievement of the meaning of life. The higher one's faith and piety, the more positive the appreciation of one's religion in daily life. This will help a person deal with his problems with the surrounding community. The higher one's religiosity, the more meaningful life is. When the meaning of life is achieved, our brothers will experience a significant and precious life which produces a feeling of happiness (Hisban and Edhy, 1917).

Conclusion

The teaching and learning of the basics of *Islamic doctrine (aqidah)*, rules and regulations (*shariah*) and morality (*akhla*q) should be taught to Muslim reverts to ensure that these aspects are understood and practised in their lives. They need to be guided and instructed with a holistic religious education to achieve religiosity so that they can practice the Islamic way of life coupled with displaying noble moral values and achieving the meaning of life and lasting happiness in this world and the hereafter. Confidence and strength of spirituality through the study of Islamic beliefs will result in adherence to the implementation of Islamic worship, adherence to Islamic morals and leading a way of life as prescribed by *al-Quran* and *al-Sunnah* (the prophetic tradition), the complete guidance in Islam.

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