

The Cognitive Path to Inner Peace: Contemplation and Cognitive Regulation as a Path to Peace of Mind

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ABSTRACT

Overthinking, anxiety, and mental restlessness stem from excessive thought patterns and the complex pressures of modern life are increasingly experienced by individuals in the contemporary era. Cognitive psychology holds that a person's emotional state is greatly influenced by the process of thought processing and interpretation of lived experience. From an Islamic perspective, the concept of tafakur emerges as a reflective activity involving deep mindful awareness of the self, life, and the greatness of Allah. This study aims to analyze the relationship between tafakur and cognitive regulation in cultivating inner peace through a library research approach, drawing on cognitive psychological theory and Islamic literature. The findings indicate that meditation functions as a form of cognitive regulation that assists individuals in reinterpreting negative thoughts, enhancing meaning in life, and building psychological tranquility. Thus, the integration of meditation and cognitive psychology can serve as an alternative approach to maintaining mental health and individual psychological well-being.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Humans frequently experience various demands, uncertainties, and pressures that often drain mental and emotional energy. The expectations of others and even ourselves constantly demand perfection. The ambition to achieve worldly success often makes people forget to pause and listen to their own inner voice. Amid the hustle and bustle of competition and the demands of today's technological advancements, what should make life easier actually creates new noise in the mind. The head feels filled with endless black threads.

And humans are increasingly familiar with anxiety, but increasingly alienated from inner peace. As a result, many people now feel a loss of space within themselves. In such conditions, peace of mind becomes something to seek, but it is not always easy to find.

In 2021, the global prevalence rate of anxiety disorders reached 4.42% (4421.9 per 100,000 population), and research shows that anxiety disorders are among the mental disorders with the highest prevalence in the world and are projected to continue to increase in the future [1]. In fact, it is estimated that more than 301 million people worldwide

live with anxiety disorders, indicating that peace of mind has become an increasingly pressing need in modern life [2]. Amidst rapid technological progress and materialism, many individuals feel a paradoxical inner emptiness—materially well-off, yet spiritually and psychologically unstable.

In cognitive psychology, a person's emotional state is influenced by how they process and interpret information. One form of cognitive regulation that has been widely studied is cognitive reappraisal, which is the ability to change one's perspective on an event to produce a more positive emotional response. On the other hand, the Islamic perspective explains that the search for peace of mind is not merely an effort to reduce stress or control emotions, but also a spiritual journey to draw closer to Allah SWT. The Qur'an, in Surah Ali Imran [3]: 190-191, explicitly mentions the group of *ulil albab* as those who possess active reason and conscience as people who constantly remember Allah and meditate.

2. METHODS

This research employed a literature review with a qualitative approach. The literature review was conducted by collecting, reviewing, and analyzing various literature sources relevant to the research topic, namely tafakur from the Islamic perspective of Ulil Albab and cognitive regulation in cognitive psychology as a path to peace of mind.

The data sources used in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the Quran, particularly verses discussing the concepts of *Ulil Albab* (intelligible reflection) and *tafakur* (reflection), as well as the works of Islamic figures such as Al-Ghazali. Secondary sources were obtained from scientific journal articles, books, and previous research on cognitive psychology, cognitive regulation, mental health, and the relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, which involves identifying, categorizing, and interpreting concepts found in various literature sources. Next, a synthesis

was conducted between the concepts of meditation from an Islamic perspective and cognitive regulation from cognitive psychology to identify their relationship in supporting the creation of inner peace. The results of the analysis are then presented descriptively to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of meditation and cognitive regulation in achieving inner peace.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Concept of Meditation from Ulil Albab's Perspective

Allah created humans with a superiority that sets them apart from other creatures, namely reason, which functions to think. In Islam, this thinking activity is referred to as *contemplation*. *Tafakur* comes from the word *fakkara* which means the activity of thinking, contemplating and contemplating [3]. Meditation is the activity of thinking and contemplating the signs of Allah SWT's greatness, found in the universe, human life, and various events that occur in daily life. Al-Ghazali viewed meditation as a process of deep contemplation that leads humans to recognize the attributes of Allah. This awareness then helps individuals achieve inner peace and provides a more meaningful understanding of the purpose of their lives [4].

This activity is one of the main characteristics of the Ulil Albab Islamic group, namely individuals who are able to optimally use their reason and make faith the foundation of their thinking. The concept of Ulil Albab is explained in the Quran, specifically in Surah Ali Imran verses 190–191, which describes them as people who constantly remember Allah and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth. Ulil Albab are individuals who rely not only on intellectual abilities but also possess spiritual depth, enabling them to understand the meaning behind every phenomenon in life.

God willing, God willing, God
willing, God willing, God willing, God
willing God willing (12)

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ
وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا
بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ (١٩١)

It means: *Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, there are signs for people of understanding. (namely) those who remember Allah while standing or sitting or lying down and they think about the creation of the heavens and the earth (saying): "Our Lord, You did not create this in vain, Glory be to You, so protect us from the torment of hell.*

This verse shows that the benefits that people get from practicing meditation are that it makes it easier for people to be grateful and praise Allah, and it makes it easier for them to do good deeds [4]. Thus, meditation becomes a means to gain a broader understanding of oneself, life, and the relationship between humans and Allah SWT.

3.2 Cognitive Regulation in the Perspective of Cognitive Psychology

Cognitive psychology emphasizes that humans are active beings in constructing an understanding of their environment. According to information processing theory, individuals not only passively receive information but also actively regulate how that information is perceived, understood, and remembered [5]. Through cognitive processes such as perception, reasoning, and interpretation, individuals attempt to understand the events they experience and determine appropriate responses to them. An individual's reaction to a stimulus is not always manifested in visible behavior. This response can emerge as a mental process, such as memory, confusion, anxiety, frustration, or various other psychological conditions. Furthermore, the information received can also be processed into certain attitudes or judgments, such as feelings of like or dislike toward an object, individual, or situation [6]. According to [7], It's not the event itself that directly causes a particular emotion, but rather the individual's interpretation of that event. Therefore, two people experiencing the same event may exhibit different emotional

responses because they have different ways of thinking.

The ability to manage and change these thought patterns is known as cognitive regulation. Cognitive regulation is a mental process in cognitive psychology that involves the ability to monitor, guide, and adjust mental processes to achieve specific goals and be more adaptive in various situations. One widely researched cognitive regulation strategy is cognitive reappraisal, an emotion regulation strategy that involves reinterpreting the meaning of a stimulus or situation to change the emotional response. This strategy works in the early stages of the emotion process (antecedent-focused), thus preventing negative emotions from developing too strongly [8]. Individuals do not change the facts of the incident, but change the way they view the incident so that negative emotions such as anxiety, anger or sadness can be reduced.

Other research suggests that cognitive reappraisal is associated with better mental health. Individuals who are able to use cognitive reappraisal flexibly tend to have lower levels of stress and anxiety and higher psychological well-being [9]. This strategy helps individuals reduce negative emotions, such as anxiety and frustration, by changing their perspective on the experiences they have had [10]. Therefore, cognitive regulation is an important factor in maintaining mental health and psychological well-being.

For example, someone who fails an exam may interpret the event as evidence of their incompetence, leading to feelings of anxiety and despair. However, through cognitive reappraisal, individuals can change their perspective by viewing the failure as an opportunity to learn and improve their learning strategies. This change in interpretation helps reduce negative emotions and increase adaptability.

3.3 Meditation as a Form of Cognitive Regulation in Islam

Although these two disciplines have different origins, meditation and cognitive regulation share similarities in their

underlying psychological mechanisms. Both involve the process of reflecting on and evaluating life experiences to generate more adaptive and meaningful understanding. Meditation serves not only as a spiritual practice but also as a cognitive process that helps individuals construct more positive meanings for life experiences. Through meditation, a person is encouraged to view various events, including failures, difficulties, and trials, as part of God's provisions containing wisdom. This process of giving meaning aligns with the concept of cognitive reappraisal, as individuals attempt to change their interpretation of an event so that negative emotions that arise can be better managed [11].

From a cognitive psychology perspective, meditation can be understood as a cognitive reappraisal process based on spiritual values, namely a reflection process that enables individuals to reinterpret disappointing experiences through a faith perspective [11]. When someone faces a calamity, meditation helps them interpret the event as a test that holds wisdom. This interpretation reduces negative thoughts and increases acceptance of the situation. Meditation has advantages over secular cognitive regulation because it focuses not only on changing thought patterns but also connects individuals with a transcendental dimension. When someone practices meditation, they not only evaluate an event rationally but also place it within the framework of the belief that every occurrence is part of God's plan, which contains wisdom. This perspective can foster patience, gratitude, and trust in God, ultimately supporting the creation of inner peace [12].

Meditation not only invites humans to observe the world around them, but also to delve into the world that resides within themselves. In the silence of contemplation, humans learn to listen to their own thoughts, recognize hidden anxieties, and understand the origins of the anxiety that has burdened the heart. This process aligns with metacognition, namely the ability to recognize and assess one's own way of

thinking. Through meditation, negative thoughts that previously filled the inner space are slowly filtered and reorganized, then replaced with a clearer, more hopeful, and meaningful understanding. Thus, meditation is not only an act of worship that brings humans closer to God, but also a way to tidy up mental chaos, calm emotional turmoil, and bring peace to the deepest recesses of the soul.

3.4 The Role of Meditation and Cognitive Regulation in Achieving Peace of Mind

Peace of mind is not a destination found at the end of a journey, but rather a state that arises from how one views the journey itself. When the mind is able to see a destiny that must be accepted, a loss that must be forgiven, and a future that can only be entrusted to Allah SWT, the heart gradually finds peace. In Islam, this state is known as *nafs al-muthmainnah*, a soul that is at peace because of its closeness to Allah SWT. This awareness gives rise to an attitude of *tawakkul* (reliance) that calms the heart, as one no longer bears the entire burden of life alone. The heart finds a place to lean on, while the mind finds reason to remain hopeful.

Meditation contributes to the creation of inner peace through several psychological and spiritual mechanisms. First, meditation helps individuals reinterpret life experiences in a more positive and meaningful way. When someone faces failure, loss, or hardship, meditation encourages them to view the event not merely as a source of suffering, but as part of God's decree containing wisdom. This process aligns with the concept of cognitive reappraisal, which is the ability to change one's perspective on a situation, thereby reducing negative emotions and increasing psychological well-being. Research shows that cognitive reappraisal is an effective emotion regulation strategy for improving resilience, mental health, and individual well-being [13].

Second, meditation helps individuals discover the spiritual meaning behind various life experiences. In Islamic psychology, meditation is understood as a reflective

process that enables one to connect life experiences with divine values, allowing feelings of disappointment, sadness, or anxiety to be transformed into learning and self-empowerment. [11] explains that meditation functions as a form of cognitive reappraisal combined with spiritual meaning-making, namely the search for meaning based on Islamic teachings. Through this process, individuals not only change their way of thinking but also strengthen their spiritual connection with Allah SWT.

Third, meditation helps cultivate an attitude of trust (relief), gratitude, and self-acceptance. When a person realizes that not everything is within their control and that every event occurs by Allah's permission, the psychological burden stemming from excessive worry can be reduced. This acceptance makes individuals more able to face life's uncertainties with calm and optimism. Various Islamic psychological studies show that spiritual practices such as meditation, dhikr, and self-reflection contribute to reducing anxiety and increasing inner peace [12].

Peace of mind Emotional well-being, or inner calm, is closely related to the use of adaptive emotion regulation strategies. Individuals with inner calm tend to use cognitive reappraisal more frequently and less frequently use less adaptive strategies, such as expressive suppression. This finding suggests that equanimity is not a spontaneous state, but rather the result of cognitive processes that help individuals maintain harmony between their thoughts, emotions, and life experiences.

4. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, peace of mind is not a state born of a life that is always easy or free from problems. Peace grows from a person's ability to interpret every event that occurs in

their life. Meditation and cognitive regulation are closely linked in the process of achieving peace of mind. In cognitive psychology, cognitive regulation helps individuals manage attention, evaluate thoughts, and develop more adaptive interpretations of various life experiences. From the Islamic perspective of Ulil Albab, meditation is a reflective activity that integrates reason, heart, and spiritual awareness to understand the signs of God's greatness and discover the meaning of life.

This study demonstrates that meditation and cognitive regulation meet in guiding people to discover the meaning behind every life experience. While cognitive regulation organizes thinking to avoid becoming trapped in anxiety and negative judgments, meditation expands that meaning by fostering an awareness that every event is within the wisdom and will of Allah SWT. Through this combination, people not only learn to understand what happens in their lives but also learn to accept, be grateful for, and grow from it.

In a world that moves faster and is often filled with anxiety, meditation teaches people to pause, listen to their inner voice, and view life with clearer eyes. From this reflection comes the understanding that not every loss is the end, not every hardship is a punishment, and not every wait ends in disappointment. There is wisdom hidden in every test, there is a lesson in every wound, and there is God's love that always accompanies every human step.

Thus, The Cognitive Path to Inner Peace is not simply a journey of the mind in managing thoughts, but also a journey of the heart in finding meaning. When the mind is able to understand and the heart is able to accept, peace is no longer something to be sought externally, but rather grows slowly from within the soul, constantly meditating, thinking, and surrendering to God.

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