

CONTEMPLATION IN TWO MUSLIM COUNTRIES: A COMPARATIVE QUALITATIVE STUDY IN TÜRKİYE AND BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

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Abstract

This study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the perceptions of contemplation among Muslim participants in Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this study, which employed a basic qualitative research design, the semi-structured interview technique was used. The obtained data were analyzed through content analysis using the

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NVivo 15 software. The study included a total of 26 participants –15 women and 11 men– aged between 25 and 40 years, living in Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The participants were selected using the criterion sampling technique, one of the purposeful sampling methods. The findings indicate that in both countries, contemplation (*tafakkur*) is perceived not only as a mental activity but also as a multilayered process encompassing existential and religious dimensions. While Turkish participants predominantly associated contemplation with positive emotions, those from Bosnia and Herzegovina reported experiencing both positive and negative emotions simultaneously during the process. It was determined that in both cultures, contemplation increased individual awareness, strengthened psychological resilience, and contributed to meaning-making processes. Furthermore, it was understood that this thinking practice supports spiritual well-being and is viewed as an important part of religious life. The research findings reveal that despite cultural differences, contemplation essentially has a constructive and transformative function.

Key Words: Psychology of religion, contemplation, well-being, Türkiye, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Introduction

Thinking, as one of humankind's most fundamental and essential activities, is considered a process of transition from darkness to light, enabling one to penetrate the truth of things. Thinking is not limited to numerical or methodical techniques; in contrast, it refers to the effort to grasp beings along with their essential properties, interrelationships, and dimensions of meaning. In this context, contemplation and imagination, thinking and dreaming, and conception and remembrance become intertwined; in other words, the process of thinking presents a multilayered integrity with its cognitive, intuitive, and spiritual aspects.¹

Deeply rooted in various religious and philosophical traditions, contemplation refers to a conscious and deliberate process of introspection that allows an individual to delve into the depths of their thoughts and experiences.² This process contributes to a person's

¹ İbrahim Kalın, *Açık Ufuk - İyi, Doğru ve Güzel Düşünmek Üzerine* (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2024), 34-36.

² Khusnul Khotimah et al., "Tafakkur on Malik Badri's View", *Tasfiyah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 7/2 (2023), 321-322.

ability to make sense of their existence, guide their life, and gain the strength to cope with the challenges.³ It supports the individual in being endowed with good intentions and developing the will to put these intentions into practice at the behavioral level.⁴ This allows the individual to build a more meaningful and conscious relationship with themselves, their environment, and the transcendent being.

The Qurʾān encourages the individual to think and points out that thinking is an important human effort in reaching the truth.⁵ Indeed, the notion of contemplation, along with its synonyms, appears directly or indirectly in approximately five hundred verses. This frequency of the use of the word “contemplate” reveals that almost one in ten Qurʾānic verses refers to the act of thinking and that this act can be considered a form of servitude and worship.⁶ However, contemplation and contemplative practices have become a subject of research that has attracted the interest of different disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, neuroscience, and physics.⁷ Therefore, the dimensions of contemplation that intersect with these disciplines necessitate addressing it at the individual and societal levels. Accordingly, it can be argued that contemplation research conducted through interdisciplinary approaches has considerable potential to contribute to both theoretical and applied fields.

A systematic examination of the concept of contemplation allows for the development of more holistic approaches to the religious/spiritual and psychological needs of the individual. However, a review of the existing literature reveals that field research on contemplation is quite limited.⁸ While contemplation is considered

³ Hümeýra Nazlı Tan - Mualla Yıldız, “Manevi İyi Oluş Kavramının Ortaya Çıkışı ve Tanımlanması”, *Dini Araştırmalar* 25/63 (2022), 471.

⁴ Abū Ṭālib al-Makki, *Qūt al-qulūb fī muʿāmalat al-mahbūb wa-waṣfīyah al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawhīd* (Cairo: Maktabat Dār al-Turāth, 2001), 1/39.

⁵ İbrahim Sağlam, “Hadislerde Hz. Peygamber’in Yalnızlık Tecrübesi ve Hakikat Arayışı”, *Amasya İlahiyat Dergisi* 20 (2023), 195.

⁶ Nihat Keklik, *Türk-İslam Felsefesi Açısından Felsefenin Temel İlkeleri* (Ankara: İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1996), 189.

⁷ William van Gordon et al., “Contemplative Psychology: History, Key Assumptions, and Future Directions”, *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 17/1 (2022), 99.

⁸ See Gülvade Köroğlu, *Tefekkürün Manevi İyi Oluşla İlişkisi (Yetişkinler Üzerine Bir Araştırma)* (Ankara: Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, Social Sciences Institute, Master's Thesis, 2024); Nisanur Akkaya Efe, *Hümeze Sûresi Bağlamında Tüketim Çılgınlığıyla Başa Çıkma Ölümlü Tefekkürünün Etkisi* (Kocaeli: Kocaeli University, Social Sciences Institute, Master's Thesis, 2024); Mustafa Taha Şen,

with various variables in the Western literature, it can be argued that this concept has received insufficient attention in the domestic literature. This study aims to examine how individuals from two different cultures perceive the concept of contemplation and to explore the religious and psychological implications of these perceptions from a cross-cultural perspective. It can be claimed that this study has a unique value, as it is one of the few studies examining the perception of contemplation at a cross-cultural level.

1. The Concept of Contemplation

Originating from the Arabic root *f-k-r*, the term idea means “a faculty that directs knowledge toward the known”. The concept of contemplation, on the other hand, is the movement of this faculty in accordance with an intellectual perspective.⁹ To put it differently, while thought/ideation is a state of intellectual imagination inherent in every human being, the notion of contemplation is the movement of this power among the things that pass through the mind in accordance with the commands of the mind.¹⁰ The mental process that begins with stimulation from the external world continues to take shape in the individual’s internal world through the activity of neurons. In this context, there is a two-way and dynamic interaction between the external and internal worlds of a person. One mechanism that facilitates this interaction is the act of contemplation. The concept of contemplation is the process of processing the stimuli an individual experiences in the external world and making sense of them in their internal world. The meaning generated in this process creates cognitive power for the individual’s emotions and behaviors.¹¹

The notion of contemplation, often supported by symbolic objects or verbal content, involves high-level cognitive processes such as deep thinking, detailed analysis, the effort to reach the truth,¹² generating new ideas, questioning existing ones, comparing these ideas to

Tefekkür Etme Eğilimi ile Akademik Başarı Arasındaki İlişki (İstanbul: İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Social Sciences Institute, Master’s Thesis, 2024).

⁹ Abū l-Qāsim al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur’ān*, ed. Muḥammad Khalil ‘Itānī (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 2010), 386.

¹⁰ Abū l-Qāsim al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Dbārī‘ah ilā makārim al-sharī‘ah*, ed. Abū l-Yazīd Abū Zayd al-‘Ajmī (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2007), 150.

¹¹ Köroğlu, *Tefekkürün Manevi İyi Oluşla İlişkisi*, 3.

¹² Halil Apaydın, *Din Psikolojisi Terimler Sözlüğü* (İstanbul: Bilimkent Yayınları, 2016), 188.

construct new ones, and critically evaluating the validity of newly formed ideas.¹³ Taken together, these findings suggest that contemplation is a dynamic process that enables individuals to form mental representations, establish meaningful connections between existing information, and reach new conclusions through these connections.

2. Contemplation in the Islamic Tradition

In religious terminology, the concept of contemplation is defined as the process of trying to understand texts containing divine commands, transferring these meanings to the individual's inner world, and integrating them in his life.¹⁴ In the Qur'ān, it is used to refer to reasoning about God's word, objects, events, and occurrences, reaching a conclusion, learning a lesson, and striving to grasp the truth beyond appearances.¹⁵ Verses¹⁶ related to the notion of contemplation emphasize the deep connection between thought and worship and the awareness of servitude. These verses express the ability of a person to strengthen their faith by using their ability to think and the ability to give depth and meaning to their thoughts through faith.¹⁷ In philosophical traditions, contemplation as a concept is generally regarded as a reason-centered process; in Islamic literature, it is considered heart centered.¹⁸

Although contemplation appears as a mental act in the present moment, it is in fact a process that transcends time, encompassing the past, present, and future. The future-oriented dimension of this process is explained by the concept of *tadabbur*, which refers to the

¹³ Faruk Karaca, "Günümüzde Dinî Tefekkürün Yüzleştiği Temel Problemler", *Diyanet İlmî Dergi* 54/4 (2018), 108.

¹⁴ Apaydın, *Din Psikolojisi Terimler Sözlüğü*, 189.

¹⁵ Öznur Özdoğan, "İnsana Manevi-Psikolojik Yaklaşım", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 49/2 (2008), 89.

¹⁶ The Qur'ānic verses concerning contemplation are as follows: Q 2/44; Q 3/190-193; Q 51/20-21; Q 47/24; Q 38/29; Q 50/36-37.

¹⁷ Kalın, *Açık Ufuk*, 132.

¹⁸ İbrahim Akgün, "Kur'an Perspektifinde Tefekkür ve Vasıtaları", *İğdır Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 1 (2013), 58; 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta'wīfāt*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī (Cairo: Dār al-Rayyān li-l-Turāth, 1983), 88; Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī al-Ṭūsī, *Kīmīyā-yi Sa'adat*, ed. Ḥusayn Khidīw Jam (Tehran: Sharikat-i Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī wa-Farhangī, 1961), 1/269. Süleyman Uludağ, *Tasavvuf Terimleri Sözlüğü* (İstanbul: Marifet Yayınları, 1991), 476.

individual's capacity for foresight and precaution, whereas the past-oriented dimension is explained by the concept of *tadbakkur*, which includes the individual's functions of remembering, commemorating, and learning lessons.¹⁹ Contemplation is also directly related to the concept of *dhikr*, which holds a central place in religious tradition. *Dhikr*, meaning advice and recommendation, is considered a form of contemplation.²⁰

Khwājah Yūsuf al-Hamadānī (d. 535/1140) explains the relationship between these two concepts using the metaphors of a tree and water and a tree and fruit. *Dhikr* is like the water that enables the tree to grow and develop; contemplation is like the ripe fruit that emerges at the end of this process.²¹ Another concept related to contemplation, *the naẓar*, means to look, but it refers not to a passive action but to an active process of perception.²² As such, these concepts, which serve as extensions or complements of contemplation, illuminate the complex interconnections and multidimensional nature of contemplative practice.

From a religious perspective, the fundamental subjects of contemplation are the relationships between God and the universe, the universe and humanity, and God and humanity.²³ While contemplation is praised in the ḥadīths, it is also stated that this act has certain limits. This limit is contemplating the essence of God. For the limited human mind cannot comprehend the essence of God. Therefore, it has been stated that one should refrain from contemplating in this area.²⁴

In the Islamic intellectual tradition, contemplation is examined within the framework of the relationship between existence, knowledge, and responsibility. Through contemplation, an individual's effort to comprehend the relationship between God, the universe, and humanity on a cognitive level lays the groundwork for

¹⁹ Karaca, "Günümüzde Dinî Tefekkürün Yüzleştiği Temel Problemler", 108.

²⁰ Yaşar Yiğit, "Var Oluşu Anlama ve Anlamlandırma Zemini: Tefekkür", *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* 241 (2011), 11.

²¹ Khwājah Yūsuf al-Hamadānī, *Rutbat al-bayāh*, ed. Muḥammad Amīn Riyāhī (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ṭūs, 1983), 49.

²² Kalın, *Açık Ufuk*, 34.

²³ İlhan Kutluer, "Düşünme", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1994), 10/53.

²⁴ Ethem Cebecioğlu, "Her Hayrın Anahtarı Tefekkür", *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* 241 (2011), 6.

understanding their existential purpose. This process of understanding both deepens the individual's search for meaning in their own existence and the universe and imposes moral and religious responsibilities upon them. In this respect, contemplation serves as a tool of awareness that shapes an individual's behavior and motivates them to fulfill the obligations of human existence.²⁵

The intricate placement of verses in the Qur'ān that invite contemplation and verses that exhort behavior according to moral principles is a reflection of the deep connection between thought and action.²⁶ Indeed, the ḥadīth, "A moment of contemplation is better than a year of worship",²⁷ emphasizes that contemplation is a process that restrains the individual from evil and leads them to goodness, contentment, piety, and truth (guidance).²⁸ From a Sufi perspective, the concept of contemplation is more than just a process of deep thinking; it is a practice aimed at the transformation of the self. Through the influence of contemplation, the individual's will and orientation lead to transformation.²⁹

The concept of contemplation is an inner process of enlightenment that enables an individual to make moral judgments, discerning right from wrong and benefit from harm.³⁰ This process prepares the ground for the individual to internalize the intentions, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for a virtuous life.³¹ Thus, it facilitates controlling the channels that weaken moral values. While Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) viewed contemplation as a process leading to *ma'rifat Allāh* (knowledge of God),³² Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) stated that knowledge is

²⁵ Kemal Sözen, "Din-Tefekkür İlişkisi", *Diyanet İlmi Dergi* 54/4 (2018), 88.

²⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 2001), 103.

²⁷ Abū Bakr 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad Ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Kitāb al-muṣannaf fī l-aḥādīth wa-l-āthār*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt (Beirut: Dār al-Tāj, 1989), 7/190 (no. 35223).

²⁸ Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-ʿAfīfī, *al-Taṣawwuf: al-Thawrah al-rūḥiyyah fī l-Islām* (Cairo: Muʾassasat al-Hindāwī, 2020), 225.

²⁹ Ayten - Düzgüner, *Tasavvuf Psikolojisine Giriş*, 95.

³⁰ Al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Taʿrīfāt*, 88; Sözen, "Din-Tefekkür İlişkisi", 92.

³¹ Al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb*, 1/40.

³² Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *al-Fawāʾid*, ed. ʿIṣām al-Dīn al-Ṣabābiṭī (Cairo: Dār al-Aḥādīth, 1994), 251-252; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī al-musammā bi-l-Tafsīr al-kabīr aw Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 2/95.

a natural result of contemplation. According to al-Ghazālī, contemplation is similar to the sparks produced by the striking of stone and iron. These sparks generate an illumination in the heart, guiding the individual away from worldly desires and toward transcendent realities.³³

Contemplation, as a subjective experience, can be considered a practice that deepens an individual's faith, supports their pursuit of truth, and strengthens their moral consistency. By enhancing spiritual awareness, contemplation facilitates a transition toward a goal-oriented and value-centered life. It serves as a powerful religious and spiritual mobilizing force against moral weaknesses. Thus, it contributes to guiding individuals toward a responsible and conscious life, both internally and socially.

3. The Psychological Dimension of Contemplation

The concept of contemplation and related practices are regarded as applications that enhance an individual's awareness, support well-being, and alleviate suffering.³⁴ From a philosophical perspective, the notion of contemplation is viewed not merely as a method of acquiring knowledge but also as a therapeutic process with the potential to alleviate an individual's existential suffering. In this respect, contemplation is considered an effective method that facilitates the attainment of inner peace.³⁵ Contemplation contributes to the individual's structuring and transformation of the meaning of their life in both micro (personal) and macro (cosmic-existential) dimensions.³⁶ By enabling lessons to be drawn from negative experiences, it guides the individual on which attitudes to adopt, which behaviors to avoid, and how to take precautions against adverse situations. In this way, the individual gains the ability to mobilize both internal resources and

³³ Al-Ghazālī, *Kīmīyā-yi Sa'ādat*, 2/505.

³⁴ Sebastian Medeiros et al., "Contemplation of Nature to Promote Mental Health and Prevent Depression in Youth", *Prevention and Early Treatment of Depression Through the Life Course*, ed. Vania Martínez - Claudia Miranda Castillo (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 76.

³⁵ Jason Costanzo, "On the Therapeutic Value of Contemplation", *International Journal of Philosophical Practice* 7/1 (2021), 86.

³⁶ Garnik V. Akopov, "Contemplation: The Ratio of Conscious and Unconscious", *Psychological Applications and Trends*, ed. Clara Pracana - Michael Wang (Lisboa: Science Press, 2021), 50.

external assets.³⁷ Contemplation also contributes to the development of a better understanding and patient personality. For example, individuals who previously had an indecisive and anxious disposition can achieve a calmer and more peaceful state of mind through these practices, whereas individuals with stubborn and rigid attitudes can develop a more open-minded and empathetic personality.³⁸

Contemplation produces two primary categorical outcomes at the emotional and cognitive levels. At the emotional level, it elicits strong emotional responses such as wonder, amazement, helplessness, fear, admiration, respect, and love. At the cognitive level, it enables the individual to perceive previously overlooked aspects concerning both the self and the surrounding environment. Thus, contemplation deepens feelings of admiration, love, and devotion toward God while simultaneously increasing cognitive awareness of the self and relational and environmental contexts.³⁹ Individuals who remain distant from contemplative practice may experience a gradual weakening of emotions such as love, compassion, and mercy. In contrast, those who consistently engage in contemplation live in a state of continuous gratitude toward God and perceive the environment as a divine trust and gift. This perspective fosters a more sensitive, protective, and responsible attitude toward nature. Consequently, contemplation can also be regarded as a powerful practice that directs individuals toward ecological awareness.⁴⁰

An individual who develops their rational capacity through contemplation gains the opportunity to strengthen their willpower and maintain emotional balance.⁴¹ This is because contemplation and *dhikr* function similarly to the immune system in regulating evil thoughts by maintaining mental and spiritual balance.⁴² It also contributes to the

³⁷ Malik Badri, *Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospiritual Study* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2018), 28, 34.

³⁸ A. Fatoni - Deni Lesmana, "The Concept of Zikr and Tafakkur-Based Education in Improving the Morality of the Nation", *Journal of Islamic Education* 3/1 (2021), 36.

³⁹ Karaca, "Günümüzde Dinî Tefekkürün Yüzleştiği Temel Problemler", 110.

⁴⁰ Mat Akhir, Noor Shakirah - Sabjan, Muhammad Azizana, "Tafakkur as the Spiritual Mechanism for Environment Conservation", *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 14/1-2 (2015), 11.

⁴¹ Turgay Şirin, *Manevi Danışmanlıkta İhsan Modeli* (İstanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları, 2018), 179.

⁴² Badri, *Contemplation*, 28.

development of stress-coping skills.⁴³ Throughout this process, competencies such as awareness acquisition, cognitive control, self-regulation, and self-management are reinforced, which may facilitate the individual's cognitive change processes.⁴⁴

The process of contemplation can be considered a form of self-therapy that occurs spontaneously. This process, which works through the individual's internal resources without external intervention or a structured therapeutic environment, is a natural healing process.⁴⁵ The inner maturation observed in psychotherapy processes can occur simultaneously with contemplation. Especially in mood disorders, the development of contemplative capacity after the resolution of acute symptoms can play a significant role in helping an individual gain insight, which, consequently, reduces the frequency of seizures.⁴⁶ Contemplation also plays an important role in spiritual counseling. Within this therapeutic process, attention is given to the individual's existing resources, previous coping patterns, and the universal nature of problems, especially when the individual is experiencing hopelessness, helplessness, and pessimism. Nonfunctional thought patterns are taught to be replaced by more functional ones. In this respect, contemplation is similar to cognitive-behavioral therapeutic approaches. Through contemplative thinking, negative thought patterns with religious content can be replaced with positive ones.⁴⁷ This process allows individuals to gain holistic awareness and develop a more resilient attitude toward stressful life events.

4. Method

4.1. Purpose of the Research

The aim of this study is to examine individuals' perceptions of contemplation in Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina and to present a comparative analysis of participants' contemplative experiences in both countries.

⁴³ Muharrem Aka, "Zihinsel Yankıların İki Yüzü: Tefekkür ve Ruminasyon Arasındaki Çizgi", *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi* 13/5 (2024), 2229.

⁴⁴ Orhan Gürsu, "Nöropsikoloji, Din ve Psikolojik İyi Oluş", *Journal of International Social Research* 10/53 (2017), 508.

⁴⁵ Akopov, "Contemplation", 50.

⁴⁶ Mustafa Merter, *Psikolojinin Üçüncü Boyutu: Nefis Psikolojisi ve Rüyalarmın Dili* (İstanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları, 2014), 238.

⁴⁷ Şirin, *Manevi Danışmanlıkta İhsan Modeli*, 182.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How do participants in both countries explain the concept of contemplation?
2. What are the subjects of contemplation in each country?
3. What emotions emerge as a result of the contemplation experience in both countries?
4. According to participants in both countries, what functions does contemplation serve?

4.2. Research Model

This study is based on a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research refers to studies in which perceptions and phenomena are examined in their natural settings in a realistic and holistic manner.⁴⁸ Basic qualitative research is among the most common types of qualitative inquiry, aiming to understand how individuals make meaning of their lived experiences.⁴⁹ This approach aims to reveal how individuals conceptualize their experiences, the meaning frameworks through which they construct their lived worlds, and the meanings they attribute to these experiences.⁵⁰ Accordingly, the study was designed within the framework of a basic qualitative research design.

4.3. Participant Selection

This research was conducted with participants living in Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina who shared their experiences related to contemplation. The inclusion of participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina was based on the rationale that while the two countries share certain religious and cultural similarities, they differ in terms of their sociocultural and historical contexts. This distinction is expected to provide a comparative perspective on how contemplation is interpreted across two different cultural settings. In this study, participants were selected using criterion sampling, which is a purposive sampling method. The criteria determined in criterion sampling enable access to the most relevant responses to the research

⁴⁸ Ali Yıldırım - Hasan Şimşek, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri* (Ankara: Seçkin Yayıncılık, 2021), 37.

⁴⁹ Sharan B. Merriam - Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc Pub, 2016), 42.

⁵⁰ Merriam - Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 24.

questions.⁵¹ In addition, care was taken to include individuals from both countries, who represented diverse educational levels, professions, and age groups. The inclusion criteria for participation were defined as follows: (1) familiarity with the concept of contemplation; (2) being between 25 and 40 years of age; (3) being willing to articulate personal experiences related to contemplation; and (4) having lived continuously in the respective country from the past to the present. Individuals who reported having no experience with contemplation were not included in the study.

The study group consists of a total of 26 participants, including 14 from Türkiye and 12 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, all of whom identify themselves as Muslims. Adults between the ages of 25 and 40 were included in the study on the basis of the assumption that this age group possesses the necessary maturity to experience and interpret contemplative practice. During this period, individuals typically encounter various responsibilities, such as professional life, marriage, family formation, and child-rearing. Moreover, increasing age and life experiences enable individuals to engage in self-reflection, conduct a broader evaluation of life, and attain greater depth in their spiritual lives.⁵² Therefore, it is believed that this age group can adequately reflect the concept of contemplation on the basis of both their personal and social experiences. The demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of the Participants.

Category	Participants from Türkiye		Participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina	
	F	%	F	%
Sex				
Female	8	57,2	7	58,3
Male	6	42,8	5	41,7
Age				
25-34	8	57,2	1	8,3
35-40	6	42,8	11	91,7
Education level				
High school	-	-	2	16,7

⁵¹ Ahmet Saban - Ali Ersoy, *Eğitimde Nitel Araştırma Desenleri* (Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık, 2017), 109.

⁵² Hayati Hökekleli, *Din Psikolojisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2008), 283.

Undergraduate	9	64,3	9	75,0
Graduate	5	35,7	1	8,3
Occupation				
Education sector	3	21,4	5	41,7
Healthcare sector	3	21,4	1	8,3
Religious services	1	7,2	1	8,3
Office and administrative services	2	14,3	2	16,7
Engineering and technical fields	3	21,4	-	-
Service sector	2	14,3	2	25,0

4.4. Data Collection

The data collection process for this study was conducted upon the completion of necessary planning procedures and the receipt of ethical approval. This approval was obtained from the Uludağ University Social and Humanities Research and Publication Ethics Committee (Decision No: 57). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face, online, and via telephone between February and April 2025. During the development of the interview questions, the opinions of three academics –two specialists in the psychology of religion and one in Islamic philosophy– were consulted. Attention was given to ensure that the questions were clear, comprehensible, and aligned with the research objectives. To obtain more in-depth data from the participants, in addition to the preprepared main questions, follow-up questions were posed on the basis of the participants' responses. Prior to finalizing the interview questions, pilot interviews were conducted with two participants from Türkiye and two from Bosnia and Herzegovina who met the predetermined criteria. On the basis of the data obtained from these pilot interviews, necessary adjustments and modifications were made to the questions.

During the interviews, the participants were asked a total of 10 questions, including 4 closed-ended demographic questions and 6 open-ended research questions. The interviews lasted approximately 30-35 minutes in Türkiye and 25-30 minutes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the data collection process, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and participation was

entirely voluntary. The semistructured interview form included questions aimed at determining demographic characteristics such as age, education level, and occupation, as well as the following questions designed to explore participants' experiences of contemplation:

1. What does contemplation mean to you?
2. How often do you engage in contemplation?
3. Which emotions do you experience while contemplating?
4. What topics do you usually reflect on during contemplation?
5. What are the effects of contemplation on your daily life? Could you explain both positive and negative effects?
6. Is contemplation important in your life? If so, could you explain why it is important?

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, by telephone, or via online platforms in both countries. This variety provided flexibility in the data collection process while being carefully planned so as not to compromise the reliability of the data. To ensure data protection and analysis, interviews were recorded with participants' permission. Participants' names were not disclosed; when presenting direct quotations, each participant was identified by a sequential number, sex (Female: F, Male: M), and country abbreviation (Türkiye: T, Bosnia and Herzegovina: BH). When presenting the codes in the tables, the frequency (f) was considered.

4.5. Data Analysis

In a basic qualitative research design, a purposive sampling approach is typically employed. The data are collected through interviews and documents. The analysis process is conducted using inductive and comparative logic. The findings are presented in the form of themes and categories, accompanied by detailed descriptions.⁵³ Accordingly, the data obtained through the interviews were analyzed using the content analysis method. The primary aim of content analysis is to reveal implicit meanings that may not be immediately apparent.⁵⁴ To enable a systematic analysis of the data,

⁵³ Merriam-Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 42.

⁵⁴ Osman Metin - Şükriye Ünal, "İçerik Analizi Tekniği: İletişim Bilimlerinde ve Sosyolojide Doktora Tezlerinde Kullanımı", *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 22/Özel Sayı 2 (2022), 276.

the stages of content analysis were conducted comprehensively and in detail.

First, the interview form was linguistically and culturally adapted for the Bosnia and Herzegovina participant group by a Bosniak researcher.⁵⁵ The form was subsequently back-translated into Turkish. With respect to the Bosnian equivalent of the concept of contemplation, expert opinion was obtained from an academic specializing in theology, and alternative expressions with high comprehensibility for the general public were identified. Since there is no single word in Bosnia and Herzegovina that fully corresponds to the concept of contemplation, the expression most appropriate for the context was chosen from options conveying meanings such as “deep thinking”, “internal reflection”, or “mental focus on a subject”.

Three criteria guided this selection: conceptual closeness, cultural comprehensibility, and natural usage of the term. Additionally, before starting the interviews, the definition of contemplation was provided to participants in a way that did not lead or influence their responses. This preliminary information aimed to prevent conceptual misunderstandings and to establish a common understanding, allowing participants to express their views freely. After the interviews were completed in both countries, the audio recordings were fully transcribed. Interviews that were brief, inconsistent, or unsuitable for analysis were excluded from evaluation.

The entire analysis process was conducted using Turkish texts. During the translation of Bosnian data into Turkish, particular attention was given to preserving semantic integrity. This approach allowed the coding process to be carried out in a single language, thereby aiming to enhance coherence between themes and the reliability of the analysis.

In the next stage, all the data were imported into NVivo 15 for analysis. NVivo 15 facilitated the coding of data, the development of preliminary themes through hierarchical relationships among codes, the finalization of themes, and the verification and updating of code-theme alignment. After the data were imported into NVivo 15, the texts

⁵⁵ The researcher is proficient in both Turkish and Bosnian and completed undergraduate and graduate education in Türkiye. This expertise enhanced the reliability of the translation and cultural adaptation process.

were carefully and repeatedly read, and participants' statements were coded according to their content similarities and differences. The resulting codes were then classified under themes and subthemes, taking semantic integrity into account.

4.6. Validity and Reliability

The researchers validated the interpretation of the data with participants during the interviews and obtained their confirmation.⁵⁶ To ensure credibility (internal validity), data were collected by two researchers, while all stages of the research process were continuously and critically reviewed by the entire research team. Data analysis was conducted carefully through ongoing exchanges of perspectives. Additionally, the codes, themes, and findings obtained were shared with experts in the field of the psychology of religion, and necessary revisions were made accordingly.⁵⁷ In this study, detailed information about the participants and the research process is provided to ensure transferability (external validity).⁵⁸ Furthermore, to ensure confirmability (external reliability), all the data related to the research process were retained.⁵⁹

To increase the reliability of the analysis process, approximately four weeks later, the same data were recoded by the coder, who was blinded to the initial coding, and the resulting codes were compared with the initial codes. Following the comparison, necessary revisions were made with the approval of all the researchers, thereby ensuring the consistency of the data analysis. To determine coding reliability, all the data were simultaneously and independently coded by a second researcher with expertise in the psychology of religion.

In the literature, the repetition of codes and the emergence of sufficient codes and themes are considered key indicators of data saturation.⁶⁰ In this study, it was observed that the generation of new codes decreased from the eleventh interview in the Türkiye group and from the tenth interview in the Bosnia and Herzegovina groups during the data analysis process. It was determined that the codes generated after this stage were insufficient to form a distinct theme.

⁵⁶ Saban - Ersoy, *Eğitimde Nitel Araştırma Desenleri*, 125.

⁵⁷ Yıldırım - Şimşek, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri*, 282.

⁵⁸ Yıldırım - Şimşek, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri*, 283.

⁵⁹ Yıldırım - Şimşek, *Sosyal Bilimlerde Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri*, 285-286.

⁶⁰ Sinan Akçay - Esra Koca, "Nitel Araştırmalarda Veri Doygunluğu", *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 24/3 (2024), 841.

5. Findings

This study, on the basis of the views of participants residing in Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina, identified six subthemes under the overarching theme of “Conceptual Foundations and Experiential Manifestations of Contemplation”. The resulting codes and themes are shared in the tables below. To capture the essence of the themes and enhance understanding, participant statements from both countries that exemplify each theme are presented below each table.

Table 2. Participant Statements on the Frequency of Contemplation

Frequency of Contemplation	Türkiye (f/%)	Bosnia and Herzegovina (f/%)
Several times a week	3 (21,4%)	4 (33,3%)
Every day	8 (57,2%)	8 (66,7%)
Occasionally	3 (21,4%)	-

The frequency of contemplation was coded as “several times a week”, “every day”, and “occasionally”. Participants’ statements were generally brief phrases. Those who engaged in contemplation several times a week typically preferred to practice on specific days or during their leisure time. A large proportion of participants in Türkiye reported engaging in daily contemplation, and daily practice was similarly common among participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina. These findings suggest that contemplation remains a vibrant and sustained practice in both societies.

Theme	Code	Working Groups	
		Türkiye (f/%)	Bosnia and Herzegovina (f/%)
Definition of the Concept of Contemplation	Going beyond the visible and attaining divine consciousness	3 (21,4%)	3 (25,0%)
	The effort to understand	2 (14,2%)	7 (58,3%)
	Deep thinking	3 (21,4%)	5 (41,6%)
	Wonder-inspired thinking	1 (7,1%)	-
	Reflection through awareness of God's power	5 (35,8%)	2 (16,6%)

Table 3. Codes Related to the Theme of Defining the Concept of Contemplation

This theme is derived from participants' perspectives on how they make sense of contemplation. Table 3 demonstrates that the meanings ascribed to contemplation are constructed within psychological and religious frameworks.

Exemplar statements related to this theme from the Türkiye group are presented below: One participant emphasized the pursuit of divine consciousness and the effort to attain truth, stating the following:

Contemplation involves striving to perceive the inner meaning behind reality –not merely what is visible but the latent significance beneath it. It is an attempt to understand by lifting the veil of appearances and reaching toward the essence and truth of existence; this, I believe, constitutes the foundation of contemplation. (T-F2)

Contemplation was described as a state in which emotion and a sense of admiration are intertwined. One participant articulated how this process begins with wonder and emotional intensity:

We refer to contemplation as thinking, but in my view, it is more about astonishment and wonder. When encountering something magnificent –even something seemingly small– it involves feeling admiration in response to its beauty, grandeur, and sublimity. This can occur during moments of great happiness as well as during times of sorrow. In fact, during sorrowful moments, when the heart becomes more tender, it is about fully opening oneself to God and asking, “What am I meant to learn from this?” (T-F8)

Within the Türkiye group, contemplation was articulated as a process of moving from the material to the spiritual, pointing toward divine awareness:

I believe contemplation is the direction of thought toward God. That is, by reflecting on something material –whether it be a mountain, a stream, or contemplating death in a cemetery– it becomes a process of moving from matter to meaning. I think of it more as a leap from the physical to the metaphysical. (T-M14)

In the Bosnia and Herzegovina group, contemplation was mostly defined as a mental and conscious process:

Contemplation is an intensely focused effort and cognitive process aimed at understanding the deeper meaning and

truth of something. It goes far beyond superficial thinking, seeking to penetrate the essence of things and uncover their genuine meaning. Contemplation is a process that helps individuals attain inner clarity, connect with higher purposes, and develop genuine awareness of their thoughts and actions. (BH-M7)

A participant from Bosnia and Herzegovina stated that contemplation is closely intertwined with an existential quest and religious awareness:

Contemplation involves reflecting on the purpose of life. It is about maintaining a continuous connection with God. This represents one dimension of contemplation: the individual considers the purpose of their life and the reason for their existence, asking, "Why am I here?" You are here to serve God, and subsequently, your duties in this world follow. All of this is considered part of the contemplative process. (BH-F8)

Another notable emphasis within the Bosnia and Herzegovina group is the perception of contemplation as a circular journey, one without a clear beginning or end:

Contemplation is an ongoing state of analysis. It involves continuously revisiting the past, scrutinizing experiences, and searching for their underlying reasons. Subsequently, thoughts turn toward God, existence, and the unseen, intuited, and ineffable metaphysical reality. Altogether, it resembles a journey-one without a beginning or an end. It is as if we are silently and profoundly moving within the same circle, endlessly revolving. (BH-F3)

Overall, participants in both groups described contemplation not only as a cognitive process but also as an inner search and a state of spiritual awareness. In the Türkiye group, the code "Reflecting Through Awareness of God's Power" was more prominent, whereas in the Bosnia and Herzegovina group, the codes "Deep Reflection" and "Effort to Understand" were emphasized more strongly. In both groups, contemplation was defined as an effort by the individual to move beyond the superficial and establish contact with truth and divine consciousness.

Table 4. Codes Related to the Theme of Topics of Contemplation

Theme	Code	Working groups	
		Türkiye (f/%)	Bosnia and Herzegovina (f/%)
Topics of Contemplation	The relationship between natural phenomena and divine justice	1 (7,1%)	-
	Natural beauty	4 (28,5%)	-
	The lives of the Prophet and the Companions	1 (7,1%)	-
	Challenging life events and the search for solutions	5 (35,7%)	1 (8,3%)
	Underlying wisdom of events	4 (28,5%)	1 (8,3%)
	Death	1 (7,1%)	2 (16,6%)
	Creation	-	1 (8,3%)
	The afterlife	-	5 (41,6%)
	Self-enquiry	-	10 (83,3%)
	The purpose of existence	-	1 (8,3%)

The codes that make up the theme of contemplated topics are shown in Table 4. These codes reveal the themes that participants focused on during the contemplative process. A participant from Türkiye expressed this situation as follows:

When I experience negative events, I engage in contemplation. That is, I think about the reasons and causes behind them. Contemplation allows individuals to perceive events from different perspectives. However, when positive events occur, I am also concerned with their underlying truth – particularly their dimension related to the afterlife. (T-F13)

Moreover, although limited in number, it is observed that participants in the Türkiye group also tended to contemplate issues such as death, natural phenomena, and divine justice:

Death and the blessings bestowed by God come to my mind. (T-M10)

In the Bosnia and Herzegovina group, existential themes such as death, the afterlife, and creation were more frequently contemplated during the process of contemplation. In addition, self-enquiry emerged as the most frequently expressed code within this group. Statements from several participants clearly illustrate this situation:

In my opinion, something needs to happen in order to trigger such deep contemplation. For example, the war in Gaza right now. I cannot say that I am angry with myself, but this sense of helplessness is very exhausting. Then, I start to think: What is the meaning of all this? Do I deserve this? After all, I am also a Muslim, just like them. How is it possible that I can possess all the blessings of this world? Because, personally, that is how I feel—we are alive, we are healthy, and we are together. When events like this occur, such as what is happening in Gaza, they lead me into deep contemplation. Then, I begin to analyze the situation more thoroughly. (BH-F6)

What a person thinks about most is this: ‘Have I done enough of the right things?’ That is, could what you have done become a form of salvation in the future, could it hold meaning? Did you come into this world with a purpose, or are you merely someone moving from point A to point B? Every day, at the end of the day, one asks oneself: What did I do today? Why am I here? And when you think that you did not do something well, there is a gnawing feeling of regret – “I wish I had done it differently”. One feels an inner urge to say, “I wish I could correct this; it should not have been this way.” (BH-M5)

Similarly, another participant addressed creation, the afterlife, and self-enquiry together:

In general, I contemplate God’s creative power the most. After that, I contemplate how prepared I am for the next life. I contemplate why I am doing this work and the meaning behind it. (...) Many times, I have asked myself questions about my job – whether it is the right work, whether I should continue, or whether I should go to work at all. Even today, I continue to ask myself these questions. (BH-F2)

On the basis of these statements, fundamental concepts such as purpose, wisdom, cause, and meaning –embedded in questions of “why” and “for what reason”– can be considered integral components of the process of contemplation. On the other hand, it is observed that the concept of the afterlife shapes everyday preferences and decision-making:

Of course, a person first thinks about daily tasks and life itself, but then the thoughts shift toward deeper issues. While we are occupied with worldly affairs and difficulties, questions about the ultimate purpose of our existence and the meaning of life remain in the background. What awaits us after death? How should we understand life, blessings, and our purpose of creation in this world? Contemplation helps us not to forget these fundamental realities and questions, as it reminds us that the ultimate purpose of life is far greater than mere daily concerns. (BH-M7)

Overall, the findings indicate that participants in the Türkiye group tended to contemplate primarily natural beauty, challenging life events, and the search for meaning, whereas participants in the Bosnia and Herzegovina group focused more on self-enquiry and metaphysical issues. This suggests that the content of contemplation varies according to cultural and socioreligious contexts.

Table 5. Codes Related to the Theme Emotions Elicited by Contemplation

Theme	Code	Working groups	
		Türkiye (f/%)	Bosnia and Herzegovina (f/%)
Emotions Elicited by Contemplation	Sense of limitation	4 (28,5%)	-
	Fear	1 (7,1%)	4 (33,3%)
	Embarrassment	1 (7,1%)	1 (8,3%)
	Feeling of divine nearness	6 (42,8%)	5 (41,6%)
	Trust and surrender	2 (14,2%)	2 (16,6%)
	Hope	2 (14,2%)	8 (66,6%)
	Peace and relaxation	7 (50%)	10 (83,3%)
	Humility and reverence	1 (7,1%)	-
	Mental confusion	-	2 (16,6%)
	Anxiety and restlessness	-	4 (33,3%)
	Regrets	-	1 (8,3%)

As a result of the analysis of participants' responses from both societies, the theme "Emotions Elicited by Contemplation" emerged. Under this theme, the emotions expressed were largely positive, although some negative emotions were also reported. The statements of participants from Türkiye indicate that contemplation generally

reinforces feelings of peace, relaxation, and a sense of divine closeness. However, some participants also reported experiencing emotions such as a sense of limitation, deficiency, and embarrassment during contemplation.

Some statements of the Turkish participants related to this theme are as follows:

Fear-whatever the reason-leads a person toward gratitude. By this fear, I do not mean the fear of death. This fear refers to the fear of losing what one has, the fear of losing a loved one. (T- M10)

Most of all, I feel incomplete; I feel that I am limited. (T-F7)
Generally, there is a sense of relief along with sadness. This trust, the effort a person makes to maintain their connection with the Creator, also makes me happy in a way. It feels like not entirely distancing oneself from the situation, still being able to do something, still striving for something. Because when a person ignores or fails to contemplate a situation, they may drift further away from it. Contemplation leads to the strengthening and sustaining of one's connection with God. (T-F5)

I feel very happy when I contemplate. This is not because of reaching God, but because I am able to comprehend Him, to perceive Him in that moment. One feels peaceful, and of course, there is a sense of satisfaction from having drawn closer to God. (T-F11)

Among participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, mental confusion, and regret were expressed. However, these emotions emerged alongside a strong sense of hope and peace. In this respect, hope functions as a coping resource and a spiritual lens for the individual during the process of contemplation.

Sometimes this causes stress, sometimes restlessness, sometimes peace, sometimes morale-depending on the situation. If I experience something positive, I usually have positive emotions. However, when I do something wrong, I start to question myself and sometimes feel fear. The thought of God's mercy and the awareness that I am a believer comforts me. (BH-F11)

During the process of contemplation, the feeling of gratitude predominates. I am thankful to God for everything I have in my life, but sometimes I also feel a sense of fear, wondering whether my gratitude is sufficient. Afterward, I feel love – the love for God the Creator. This process purifies the heart and strengthens one's devotion to the Lord. (BH-F9)

For example, hope is a state of expectation. It is not just that. Sometimes joy is also involved. When you sincerely wish for something, you carry hope along with that wish, and a bit of joy comes with that hope. But, overall, I can say that the dominant emotions are expectation and some mental confusion. (BH-F3)

One of the positive effects is that I feel better after contemplating the purpose and meaning of life. However, sometimes I also feel a bit weak or deficient, thinking “I missed this, I neglected that”. These thoughts affect me. (BH-M8)

In light of these statements, it can be suggested that in Türkiye participants, contemplation primarily fosters balancing and soothing emotions such as peace, hope, and trust and a sense of divine closeness. Among Bosnian participants, although some negative emotions are present, these emotions appear to be internally regulated and balanced through hope and a sense of peace. This difference may be related to the distinct cultural and historical backgrounds of the two Muslim communities.

Table 6. Subthemes and Their Corresponding Codes Related to the Theme “The Effects of Contemplation”

Theme	Sub-themes	Working Groups	
The Effects of Contemplation	Psychological Effects	Türkiye (f/%)	Bosnia and Herzegovina (f/%)
		Opportunity to make sense of experiences	3 (21,4%) 2 (16,6%)
		Increasing psychological resilience	1 (7,1%) 3 (25,0%)
		Strengthening the inclination towards correct behaviors	5 (35,7%) 10 (83,3%)
		Developing positive problem-solving strategies	2 (14,2%) 1 (8,3%)
		Mental tranquility	1 (7,1%) 2 (16,6%)
		Hope for the transience of difficulties	1 (7,1%) 2 (16,6%)
		Distancing oneself from feelings of loneliness	3 (21,4%) -
		World devaluation	3 (21,4%) -
		Mental fatigue	- 1 (8,3%)
		Perceived as absent-minded and thoughtful	2 (14,2%) -
	Religious Effects	The maintenance of spiritual awareness	4 (28,5%) 6 (50%)
		Feeling God's power and support	1 (7,14%) 2 (16,6%)

The theme of the effects of contemplation examines the impact of contemplation on individuals' mental, emotional, and spiritual processes within the framework of two subthemes: “Psychological Effects” and “Religious Effects”. The findings obtained from participants in Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina are presented in Table 6.

Within the theme “Psychological Effects”, contemplation is observed to provide individuals with various psychological benefits while occasionally also giving rise to certain negative experiences. A comparison of the data from Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina

reveals that, in both countries, contemplation prominently serves functions such as making sense of experiences, enhancing psychological resilience, and strengthening orientation toward appropriate behavior. In particular, the code related to orientation toward appropriate behavior was strongly emphasized in both groups. In this respect, contemplation can be described as a factor that nurtures individuals' self-control and moral self-evaluation processes. Among the findings specific to the Türkiye group, codes such as distancing oneself from feelings of loneliness, developing positive coping strategies, and devaluing the world stand out.

The participants' statements reflected this situation as follows:

I do not think contemplation has any negative effects. Its positive effect is that it gives individuals the opportunity to think and to evaluate events more effectively. (T-F1)

Through contemplation, a person re-educates themselves and learns from their mistakes. If someone comes up to you and says, "What you did was great, keep it up" this motivates you and helps you become even better. But, if you have done something wrong, contemplation makes you reflect and directs you toward change. You learn to look at events from a different perspective, and then you say to yourself, "I should not do this anymore". (BH-M1)

At the end of the day, I sometimes feel anxious about the things I have done. Questions such as "Could I have done better?" come to my mind. However, I then tell myself, "Okay, God is merciful". With this thought, I try to develop a positive perspective toward every situation I experience. (BH-F2)

I think I cannot live without contemplation because I would feel very lonely. That's why-I mean, as I said, I cannot imagine myself without contemplation. Whenever I am alone, I engage in contemplation. (T-M12)

One participant stated that contemplation may lead to mental fatigue, while another noted that during contemplation, an individual's distracted and inner-looking appearance may be misinterpreted within the social environment, describing this as a potential negative outcome.

In my opinion, the negative effect of contemplation is that it puts a person into an overly thoughtful state. This can be misunderstood by others. For example, they may think, "They are thinking too much; are they ill-intentioned or are they thinking something bad about me?" Whereas you are actually thinking about something entirely different. This could be considered a negative effect. On the positive side, because contemplation encourages thinking, it helps a person find a rational solution. God has given human beings reason, and through this reason –that is, through contemplation– a person can find the right way out. (T-M4)

The effects of contemplation on daily life can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, it enables individuals to constantly question themselves, to evaluate how good or lacking they are, and to strive to become a better person. This provides inner development and awareness. However, when this self-questioning becomes excessive, it can lead to mental exhaustion. Continuously occupying oneself with questions such as "Did I do the right thing?" or "Did I say something wrong?" can make it difficult to relax and to live in the present moment. (BH-F10)

If contemplation leads to a way of thinking that excessively neglects this world, it may result in a person failing to take their share of worldly life. If it gives too much space to notions of nothingness or the meaninglessness of the world, this could be considered a negative aspect. However, this is not directly related to contemplation itself; rather, it stems from an incorrect attitude adopted in the process of contemplation. (T-M14)

According to the participants' statements, contemplation contributes to individuals' ability to make sense of negative experiences in their lives; however, when this process is interpreted incorrectly, it may weaken individuals' ties to worldly responsibilities and expectations. This situation indicates that a certain balance is required for the practice of contemplation to be sustained in a healthy manner. Accordingly, the code "Devaluation of the World" included in the analysis is addressed as a reflection of potential negative outcomes

that may arise from individual orientations within the process of contemplation.

Within the theme “Religious Effects”, of contemplation, the codes “Maintenance of Spiritual Awareness” and “Feeling God’s Power and Support” are included. Participants from both countries indicated that contemplation plays a renewing and sustaining role in spiritual awareness. In particular, among the Bosnia and Herzegovina group, spiritual awareness was associated with contemplation in a more continuous and broader context. Participant statements related to this theme are presented below:

Whenever you start thinking deeply about something, your consciousness begins to take you somewhere. For example, you tell yourself: “You were born, then you died, then you will be resurrected, and then you will never die again”. Thoughts like these come up; sometimes they may seem absurd, but they make you reflect. Someone must have created this entire order. (...) You wonder: “How did this happen? Where did it come from? Where are we going?” These thoughts are generally positive. (BH-M5)

The existence of God comforts me. Why? Because in every situation, I feel that I am with Him, that I am together with Him. I believe that, ultimately, God will provide me with a way out. In fact, you should not trust yourself too much; you should trust God. When you rely on yourself, you can make mistakes. Let me put it this way: I see this as a grace from God. (T-M12)

When the findings are considered holistically, contemplation appears to be experienced both as an awareness practice that supports psychological well-being and as a state of consciousness that reinforces spiritual orientation. Participants’ evaluations of everyday life events and reflections on existential questions indicate that contemplation is a multidimensional process that reconstructs individuals’ personal and religious meaning frameworks.

Table 7. Codes Related to the Theme the Importance of Contemplation

Theme	Code	Working groups	
		Türkiye (f/%)	Bosnia and Herzegovina (f/%)
Importance of Contemplation	Key to understanding experiences	3 (21,4%)	3 (25,0%)
	Basis for self-evaluation	2 (14,2%)	7 (58,3%)
	Supporting life satisfaction	2 (14,2%)	1 (8,3%)
	Strengthening the connection with God	6 (42,2%)	4 (33,3%)
	Essence of religion	9 (64,2%)	8 (66,6%)
	Finding life purpose	-	2 (16,6%)

This theme reflects participants' views on why contemplation is considered important in both societies. Rather than focusing on the specific benefits they gain, participants sought to explain why this practice is valuable and indispensable. In both societies, contemplation was perceived as the essence of religion and evaluated as a central element. However, the distribution of codes reveals differences between the societies. For example, the perception of contemplation as a basis for self-evaluation was more prominently emphasized by participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas the strengthening of the connection with God was mentioned more frequently by participants from Türkiye. Additionally, statements regarding contemplation's function in finding life purpose were reported only by participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina. In both societies, contemplation was observed to play an important role in making sense of experiences and was directly linked to life satisfaction. The participants' statements clearly support this meaning:

In my life, contemplation probably encompasses all the small steps I take toward self-knowledge – the things I read, see, and learn, often through trial and error. The most important matter is that a person must first know themselves, and the greatest way to achieve this is through contemplation. I can say that contemplation holds a significant place in my life. (T-M9)

I believe that contemplation should not only be considered important, but it should be obligatory for every believer.

When you contemplate, you understand your essence and the truth, and when you relate it to God's signs, you grow closer to your Lord. Contemplation leads a person to understand themselves, grasp their essence, and perceive reality. But, to live without contemplation is like being a robot; the days just pass, but none of it has meaning. In this way, a person becomes trapped in a constant routine. Within that routine, the ability to grow closer to and understand God is lost. (BH-F9)

Contemplation helps us understand ourselves and our surroundings, make correct decisions, and live more consciously. Becoming aware of ourselves, questioning the meaning of our actions, and approaching others with empathy enables us to take better steps in life. (...) In short, contemplation is an important tool both for my personal development and for being able to exhibit a more conscious and respectful attitude toward others. (BH-F10)

Conclusion

In this study, six subthemes were identified under the overarching theme "Conceptual Foundations and Experiential Manifestations of Contemplation", which are examined in detail below.

The research findings revealed that participants in both Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina define contemplation beyond a purely cognitive process within a multilayered field of meaning encompassing existential and religious dimensions. In both countries, contemplation is fundamentally regarded as a practice of deep thinking, with the perception of meaning beyond the apparent being central to the process. However, some differences in emphasis between the two countries are notable. Participants from Türkiye primarily define contemplation in terms of recognizing and wondering about God's power, whereas participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina approach it as a journey associated with inner deepening and existential inquiry. In this context, the tendency of participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina to perceive contemplation on a more existential plane can be considered a distinguishing characteristic.

The existing literature also supports this multidimensional approach. A significant portion of participants in Read's study defined

contemplation as deep thinking – a serious and prolonged cognitive engagement;⁶¹ Akopov's research associated contemplation with the concepts of "immersion in oneself" ("in their own world", "withdrawal into oneself", "being in your world", "experiencing in yourself", etc. 42%), "a state of calm" ("humility", "pleasure", "unity with the world", etc. 46%), and "pensiveness" (12%).⁶² In the study by Mamat and colleagues, contemplation was found to be a practice that enables individuals to perceive the wisdom behind events and to move away from superficial thinking.⁶³ From this perspective, the present study demonstrates that contemplation is a multidimensional concept both as a process of meaning-making and as a form of spiritual awareness. Consistent with the literature, the findings highlight the ontological and cognitive dimensions of contemplation. Moreover, cultural differences between the Türkiye and Bosnia and Herzegovina groups are reflected in the ways in which the concept is understood. In this sense, contemplation can be considered an experience shaped by cultural context but essentially performs similar functions across different societies.

The data indicate that contemplation differs thematically between the two countries. In the Türkiye group, contemplation was primarily directed toward nature, natural beauty, and external events and was shaped through concrete experiences. This aligns with the Qur'ānic calls to "contemplate the creation of the heavens and the earth", which appear repeatedly, reflecting the place of nature-focused contemplation in religious texts.⁶⁴ In the Bosnia and Herzegovina group, contemplation was approached primarily within the framework of metaphysical aspects, inner inquiry, and belief in the afterlife. This orientation can be linked culturally and historically to experiences of war and to Sufi heritage. Nevertheless, these areas of contemplation do not appear to lead Bosnian participants toward pessimism; in contrast, they seem to foster awareness and processes of inner transformation.

⁶¹ Dan R. Read, *Thinking Deeply in College: An Inquiry into Contemplation Amongst Undergraduate Students* (Indiana: Taylor University, Master of Arts in Higher Education (MAHE) Theses, 2019), 20.

⁶² Akopov, "Contemplation", 48.

⁶³ Akila Mamat et al., "Literature Review on Concept of Tafakkur in Islamic Mysticism", *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 9/4 (2019), 52.

⁶⁴ Q 3/190-191; Q 10/5; Q 11/7; Q 44/29.

This approach parallels the function of death awareness highlighted in various studies, which is understood to deepen and enrich life.⁶⁵

In the Sufi tradition, the phenomenon of death has also been employed as a systematic and effective method for advancing religious and spiritual development. In particular, practices such as remembrance of death (*tadhakkur al-mawt*) and contemplation of death (*tafakkur al-mawt*) play integral roles in the training of the self (*nafs*). The search for meaning is likewise considered one of the fundamental drives in human life.⁶⁶ The search for answers to these questions involves individuals facing the religious and spiritual domains, influenced both by personal discovery and by enculturation and social learning. Even as a purely cognitive activity, the effort to uncover the meaning of life requires a high level of concentration. From this perspective, the endeavor to make sense of life –a strong religious motivation– can be considered an important process that elevates the level of awareness necessary for human development.⁶⁷

One notable finding of the study is that the emotions experienced during the process of contemplation vary culturally. In the Türkiye group, contemplation was predominantly associated with positive emotions such as divine closeness, relaxation, and hope. In contrast, participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina expressed contemplation in terms of negative emotions, including fear, anxiety, restlessness, regret, and mental confusion. However, these negative emotions appeared to be balanced by positive feelings such as hope and peace. Compared with the Turkish participants, the more intense expression of negative emotions among the Bosnian participants is a particularly striking finding of the study. Indeed, Read noted that contemplation can give rise to emotions such as fear, anxiety, and restlessness, as excessive thinking and analytical tendencies may transform contemplation into a negative experience.⁶⁸ This difference can be explained by the fact that contemplation involves confronting the

⁶⁵ Robert Frager, *Heart, Self, & Soul: The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance, and Harmony* (Wheaton, Ill.: Theosophical Publishing House, 1999), 248; Irvin D. Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 30; Erol Göka, *Psikoloji Varoluş Maneviyat* (İstanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2021), 136.

⁶⁶ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), 105.

⁶⁷ Faruk Karaca, *Dini Gelişim Psikolojisi* (Trabzon: Eser Ofset Matbaacılık, 2016), 167.

⁶⁸ Read, *Thinking Deeply in College*, 33.

unknown and engaging in existential inquiry. Thought processes that focus on metaphysical themes such as death, meaning, and the afterlife may generate emotional tension in some individuals.

On the other hand, the concept of awe, which emerges as a notable finding in our study, highlights the emotional richness of the contemplation process. Awe can be considered a fundamental religious emotion that reflects the emotional depth of contemplation, encompassing both admiration and a sense of unease.⁶⁹ According to Stebbins, awe and enthrallment are emotional experiences that emerge as a result of processes related to contemplation and spirituality.⁷⁰ On this basis, it can be argued that contemplation generally allows constructive emotions to expand and deepen while diminishing the influence of destructive emotions.

The findings of the study indicate that contemplation leads to changes in areas such as awareness, emotional balance, meaning-making, and well-being for both Turkish and Bosnian participants. Indeed, findings that contemplative practices reduce stress levels,⁷¹ enhance mindfulness as well as subjective and psychological well-being,⁷² support the development of posttraumatic growth and psychological resilience,⁷³ and decrease negative emotions⁷⁴ are consistent with the results of this study. On the other hand, Özkul and Alpaslan reported that the primary source of motivation significantly affecting life satisfaction is the need to think and understand and that this motivation has a positive effect on life satisfaction.⁷⁵ These findings

⁶⁹ Esra İrk, "Huşû Deneyiminin Duygusal ve Psikolojik Boyutları", *Eskişehir Osmangazi Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 12/1 (2025), 266-270.

⁷⁰ Robert A. Stebbins, *Leisure and Positive Psychology: Linking Activities with Positiveness* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 71.

⁷¹ Tessa McGarrigle - Christine A. Walsh, "Mindfulness, Self-Care, and Wellness in Social Work: Effects of Contemplative Training", *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* 30/3 (2011), 227-228.

⁷² Adam Hanley et al., "Associations Between Mindfulness, Psychological Well-Being, and Subjective Well-Being with Respect to Contemplative Practice", *Journal of Happiness Studies* 16/6 (2015), 1423-1436.

⁷³ Angelika Zuber-Aguirre, *The Lived Experience of Contemplating Purpose and Meaning in Life* (Minneapolis: Capella University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2016), 133.

⁷⁴ Jennifer M. Bach - Tharina Guse, "The Effect of Contemplation and Meditation on 'Great Compassion' on the Psychological Well-Being of Adolescents", *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 10/4 (2015), 363-365.

⁷⁵ Ahmet Sait Özkul - Ali Murat Alparslan, "Yaşam Doyumunu Artıran Motivasyon Kaynağı: Düşünme-Anlama İhtiyacı", *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi* 8/4 (2019), 3282.

support the meaning-making function of contemplation identified in the present study. However, in this research, cognitive gains such as increased concentration, attention regulation, focus, and mental clarity were not prominently emphasized. This may be explained by participants' tendency to associate contemplation more with emotional and psychological content.

In both countries, contemplation was described as a state of awareness that preserved spiritual vitality, fostered a connection with God, and deepened religious orientation. In K ro lu's study, positive and significant relationships were found between the level of contemplation and the subdimensions of spiritual well-being, whereas a negative relationship was observed between contemplation and the level of anomie.⁷⁶ These findings indicate that contemplation supports social adaptation and psychological balance. Alhabshi noted that the balanced practice of contemplation and action-based spiritual exercises during prolonged periods of crisis contributes to individuals' spiritual well-being and inner resilience.⁷⁷ Tamin noted that Qur nic contemplation in counseling is effective in developing patience;⁷⁸ however, Thomas and Ibrahim emphasized that contemplation of the conceptual metaphors in the Qur n is an effective therapeutic method that supports both psychological and spiritual well-being.⁷⁹

In Islamic spiritual counseling, contemplation is also considered an important technique that can enhance a client's ability to cope with difficulties.⁸⁰ Within  irin's religious counseling model, practices such as contemplation, repentance, and prayer were found to reduce students' levels of anxiety.⁸¹ Similarly, in Karakaş's model of inner

⁷⁶ K ro lu, *Tefekk rin Manevi İyi Olu la İli kisi*, 103-109.

⁷⁷ Sakinah Mohamad Alhabshi, *Spiritual Wellbeing and Resilience During a Prolonged Crisis: An Analysis and Integration of Contemplation-Based and Action-Based Practices from an Islamic Perspective* (California: Berkeley University, Degree of Master of Arts, 2022), 36-38.

⁷⁸ Daris Tamin, "Applying Qur nic Contemplation in Counseling", *The International Journal of Counseling and Education* 1/1 (2016), 5-6.

⁷⁹ Nur Sakinah Thomas - Nur Jehaada Ibrahim, "The Effectiveness of Contemplation on Conceptual Metaphor in Cognitive Spiritual Therapy", *Revelation and Science* 12/1 (2022), 61-63.

⁸⁰ Muhammet  erif Keskin  lu - Halil Ek i, "Islamic Spiritual Counseling Techniques", *Spiritual Psychology and Counseling* 4/3 (2019), 345.

⁸¹ Turgay  irin, *Bili sel Davranı çı Psikoterapi Yakla ımıyla B t nle tirilmi  Dini Danı manlık Modeli* (Sakarya: Sakarya University, Institute of Social Sciences, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2013), 249.

peace, contemplation of death was found to enhance an individual's level of spirituality and facilitate coping with obsessive-compulsive disorder.⁸² These findings indicate that contemplation can be used as an effective technique in psychological counseling, in coping with crises, and in various therapeutic processes.

When all the findings are considered together, contemplation appears to be an experience that supports both psychological and spiritual well-being. Overall, contemplation has a predominantly positive character, strengthening an individual's self-awareness while also enhancing the ability to evaluate surrounding beings and events from multiple perspectives. In this way, it provides new directions for thought and serves as a protective framework against challenges experienced on different levels. In other words, contemplation facilitates renewal not only on a cognitive axis but also on a practical, action-oriented axis.

It is evident that participants in both societies placed strong emphasis on the importance of contemplation. The tendency to regard contemplation as a central component of religion was prominently expressed in both countries. This suggests that participants are aware of the place of contemplation in religious texts and recognize it as one of the key concepts in the Qur'ān.

This study highlights the perception of contemplation in two different cultures and its religious and psychological implications. However, the research has certain limitations. To increase the diversity of the findings, future studies should include samples from different age groups and individuals with diverse sociodemographic characteristics. Additionally, incorporating contemplation-based approaches into psychological counseling, spiritual counseling, and certain educational programs is expected to strengthen individuals' psychological resilience. Finally, studies could be conducted to examine the effects of recent war experiences on individuals' patterns of contemplation and emotional processes.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

⁸² Ahmet Canan Karakaş, "Manevi Danışmanlıkta İç Huzur Modelinin Obsesif Kompulsif Bozukluğa Etkisi (Vaka Örnekli)", *Birey, Toplum ve Din*, ed. Nevzat Gencer - Muammer Cengil (İstanbul: Çamlıca Yayınları, 2021), 127-128.

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