

A Reflective Case Study: Exploring the Impact Of *Salah* On Emotional Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how *Salah* (prayer) can enhance an individual's daily well-being. Emotional dysregulation and negative life experiences often impact personal well-being and hinder one's potential. Experiencing overwhelming feelings and persistent negative thoughts can lead to various disadvantages, pulling us away from our core values and resulting in behavioral changes or even physical illness. Therefore, distancing our minds from worldly matters and grounding ourselves can improve our spiritual well-being, which contributes to overall health. Engaging in *Salah* regularly can help eliminate difficult thoughts and feelings while guiding us toward success and fulfillment. This study employs a qualitative method through a reflective case-study approach. It focuses on understanding the mechanisms behind the experiential activity of *Salah*, utilizing digital data recording tools as the primary methodology. The research explores the integration of *Salah* into daily routines and incorporates reflexivity through content and thematic analyses derived from two mobile applications used for this purpose. The study found that increased mindfulness and the frequency of *Salah* positively impacted the emotional well-being of its practitioners. The findings are presented descriptively, integrating both theistic and scientific evidence. The study demonstrates that mindful engagement in *Salah*, facilitated by digital tools, enhances emotional well-being, offering a culturally grounded approach to integrating spirituality and mental health in modern lifestyles.

Keywords: *Salah*, Mindfulness-Gratitude Exercise, Emotional well-being, Reflective Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

Studying abroad is a life-changing opportunity for students to develop cognitive,

metacognitive and socio-affective skills. While it is often associated with positive experiences, it can present significant challenges and lead to mental burdens^{1 2}. Many students face emotional upheavals and negative experiences but remain unaware of or uninformed about the support services available at their institutions. Studies indicate that 57-90% of students report being unable to cope effectively with stress related to the circumstances³. Both international and local students worldwide face sociocultural^{4 5 6}, academic^{7 8}, psychological^{9 10 11} and economic challenges.^{12 13 14 15}

Prolonged feelings of being overwhelmed and 'living' with persistent negative thoughts can lead to significant disadvantages, such as reduced academic performance, strained relationships, and deteriorating physical health. Despite universities launching various mental guidance and awareness initiatives, many students are reluctant to participate or simply ignore these services. They often prefer to keep their problems to themselves, harboring negative emotions in isolation. Barriers such as self-stigma, perceived need, and self-reliance of self-help contribute to delays in seeking professional support. Additionally, students cite a lack of awareness services, concerns over confidentiality and discrimination, financial constraints, or doubts about the effectiveness of these services^{16 17 18}. Consequently, some students only seek help during crises, while others rely on informal sources of support^{19 20}.

Given these challenges, it is imperative to develop a simple, economical, feasible, and effective intervention to address mental health issues among university students²¹ — one that not only supports psychological well-being but also nurtures spiritual resilience and a deeper sense of purpose through the integration of theistic values.

Study Background

As an international student at a higher learning institution, I have encountered similar challenges. I often felt overwhelmed by the demands of the research projects, difficulties in intercultural collaborations, and unexpected personal and family matters. These experiences led to social anxiety and a lack of motivation in my studies. Research supports this, showing that psychological distress — ranging from normal mood

fluctuations to serious mental health issue — is increasingly common among university students and can have significant consequences.^{22 23}

During these times, I felt disconnected from my values and noticed changes in my behavior and physical health. This realization prompted me to explore coping strategies that align with my personal needs, lifestyle, culture, and belief system to achieve both academic milestones and emotional well-being. Bridging mindfulness practices with a theistic worldview can make interventions more culturally and religiously relevant for diverse groups in our society.²⁴

Living on 'autopilot', I often felt like a machine following routines, neglecting my inner voice and seeking external validation. While existing research explores mindfulness and well-being, few studies examine how Islamic spiritual practices like *Salah* can address this modern phenomenon of disconnection, particularly for Muslim women navigating dual pressures of faith and contemporary life. I realized this exhausting state could only be alleviated by grounding myself in religious obligations, yet the psychological mechanisms through which *Salah* transforms autopilot living into mindful presence remain underexplored in academic literature.

Recognizing I'm not alone in this journey, I found limited empirical studies that bridge the gap between Islamic spirituality and evidence-based emotional regulation strategies. As a Muslim woman seeking forgiveness, guidance, and illuminating paths from Allah (the Exalted) to achieve inner peace, this study addresses these gaps by investigating *Salah* as both a spiritual practice and psychological intervention for holistic well-being.

Through this journey, I identified three missing essentials in my life:

1. Mindfulness of daily religious obligations.
2. Practicing gratitude.
3. Prioritizing self-care.

I redirected my energy and time toward these priorities, with a particular focus on strengthening my perseverance in true vigilance (*muraqabah*). In Islam, *muraqabah*—a state of spiritual mindfulness and constant awareness of God's presence—is described in the Qur'an as follows: *"He said, Surely in this there is a reminder for one who has a [mindful] heart, Or lends an ear as a witness"*²⁵.

(Quran 50:37)

Muraqabah (mindfulness) is a spiritual concept²⁶ defined as the continuous awareness and conviction in the supervision of the Truth, glory be to Him, over one's outward and inward states." This vigilant self-accounting is regarded as far more important than [meticulousness] in worldly matters, insignificant as these are in comparison with the [ultimate] end of felicity.²⁷

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mindfulness and *Muraqabah*

Mindfulness, as practiced in non-religious domains, is widely recognized for its benefits in sustaining physical fitness and psychological well-being. It is defined as a tool for examining and altering thought patterns by observing how we think and feel.²⁸ By watching closely how we think and feel, we gain the ability to alter our conceptual frameworks, or thought patterns, for our own benefit.²⁹ This form of metacognition — awareness of one's awareness — empowers individuals to choose how they respond to their thoughts and emotions.³⁰

***Salah* as a Mindfulness-Gratitude Exercise**

The purpose of this study is to explore whether daily *Salah*, conceptualized here as a Mindfulness-Gratitude Exercise (MGE), can foster righteous habits and enhance emotional well-being. The operational definition of MGE, as introduced in this study, emphasizes promoting mindfulness through *Salah* and expressing gratitude for every *nikmah* (blessing) that Allah the Exalted has bestowed upon His creations.

Gratitude, as a concept, involves a two-step process: (1) recognizing that one has obtained a positive outcome, and (2) recognizing that this outcome stems from an external source.³¹ The second point is particularly significant in this study, as it underscores the Islamic tradition's rational foundation for God's existence and the purpose, meaning, comfort, and guidance that belief in Him provides.³²

Mankind's primary responsibility, as stated in Islam, is to worship Allah, the Exalted.

This is clearly articulated in the Quran:

*"I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me. I seek no provision from them, nor do I need them to feed Me."*³³

(Quran 51:56-57)

Gratitude is expressed through actions — using the tongue, heart and body to follow Allah's commandments.³⁴ A grateful servant is one who obeys Allah and acknowledges His blessings with sincere devotion.³⁵

Prophetic Example of Gratitude

In a hadith narrated from Aisyah (RA)³⁶, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) would pray at night for such a long time that his feet would crack. Aisyah (RA) asked, *"O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)! Why do you do this when Allah has forgiven your past and future faults?"*

He replied:

يَا عَائِشَةُ أَفَلَا أَكُونُ عَبْدًا شَكُورًا

*"Shouldn't I love to be a thankful slave
(of Allah)?"*

(Sahih al-Bukhari, 4837)

This hadith serves as a profound inspiration to explore *Salah* as an act of worship that allows individuals to express their deep gratitude for blessings such as health, faith, and life itself. *Salah* requires mindfulness and contentment, guiding Muslims to adhere to its prescribed procedures and timings with sincerity to experience both its immediate and long-term benefits. It encourages individuals to be watchful and mindful, fostering feelings of contentment and gratitude.

Salah: A Priority in Worship

The importance of *Salah* is further emphasized in another hadith. Abdullah (RA) narrated:

I asked the Prophet (ﷺ) "Which deed is the dearest to Allah?" He replied, "To offer the prayers at their early stated fixed times." I asked, "What is the next (in goodness)?" He replied, "To be good and dutiful to your parents" I again asked, "What is the next (in goodness)?" He replied, "To participate in Jihad (religious fighting) in Allah's cause." `Abdullah added, "I asked only that much and if I had asked more, the Prophet (ﷺ) would have told me more".³⁷

(Sahih al-Bukhari, 527)

This hadith highlights the priority of *Salah* as the most beloved deed to Allah, reinforcing its significance in a Muslim's daily life. By performing *Salah* with mindfulness and gratitude, a Muslim can fulfill their spiritual obligations while nurturing emotional well-being.

The Importance of Salah

The primary focus of this study is *Salah*, a fundamental act of worship in Islam, and its prioritization is highly encouraged. In Islam, Allah the Exalted teaches us through the Quran how to navigate adversities and challenges in life. The key turning point lies in strengthening our connection with Allah and improving the quality of our *Salah* over time. Allah the Exalted said:

"And seek help in patience and As-Salat (the prayer) and truly it is extremely heavy and hard except for Al-Khashi'un [i.e. the true believers in Allah – those who obey Allah with full submission, fear much from His Punishment, and believe in His Promise (Paradise, etc.) and in His Warnings (Hell, etc.)"]".³⁸

(Quran 2:45)

Salah serves as a deliberate and procedural act of worship, providing a break to surrender completely to the Creator. As the first deed to be evaluated on Judgment Day, *Salah* is often considered challenging to perform consistently and with full mindfulness. The difficulty of maintaining focus during *Salah* often mirrors the challenges we face in sustaining attention and intention in our daily lives.

Islamic knowledge, encompassing *Fardu Ain* (individual obligations) and *Fardu Kifayah* (communal obligations),³⁹ emphasizes the significance of *Salah* as an obligatory practice for all Muslims, with no exceptions.⁴⁰

Spiritual and Practical Benefits of Salah

Frequent practice of *Salah* is essential for cultivating spiritual discipline, which translates into self-discipline in everyday life. This act of worship, which is also a self-improvement strategy gradually nurtures a spiritual mindset that seeks tranquility,

leading to inner peace. A calm mind, in turn, enhances the performance of daily tasks.

Islam prescribes the five daily prayers, each offering Muslims an opportunity to realign with their life purpose – worshipping Allah – and reconnect with their values. The more frequently *Salah* is performed, the clearer and stronger a Muslim's connection with their values. These prayers provide moments of reflections that foster spiritual, physical and emotional comfort. Through silent reflection and mindfulness, *Salah* encourages Muslims to remain present in the moment without worrying about what is past or future or elsewhere in creation.⁴¹

This study distinguishes itself from previous research by specifically examining the roles of *Salah* in enhancing emotional well-being and mindfulness as a tool for combating emotional dysregulation and negative thought patterns. While past research has often relied on self-reported surveys or observational methods, this study employs digital data recording tools (mobile applications) to capture real-time reflections on *Salah*'s impact, providing a more dynamic and empirically grounded analysis.

Previous studies may have used quantitative measures (e.g., scales on religiosity and well-being), but this work adopts a reflective case-study method, combining content and thematic analyses to explore the lived experiences of practitioners, offering deeper phenomenological insights. Many existing studies either approach *Salah* from a purely theological lens or a secular psychological perspective, whereas this research integrates both, presenting findings that align Islamic spirituality with contemporary mental health discourse. While mindfulness interventions (e.g., MBSR) are well-studied in Western contexts, this study uniquely positions *Salah* as a culturally embedded mindfulness practice,

demonstrating its applicability in Muslim mental health and daily self-regulation. Rather than just correlating prayer frequency with well-being, this study explores the mechanisms—such as present-moment awareness, detachment from worldly stress, and realignment with core values—that explain how *Salah* enhances emotional stability.

Theoretical Framework:

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

The study is grounded in Self-Determination Theory – SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985), which posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fundamental psychological needs driving motivation and well-being. By applying this framework, the study explores:

- How *Salah* fulfills these needs
- Its impact on intrinsic motivation (e.g., personal satisfaction, spiritual alignment)
- Behavioral and emotional outcomes linked to mindful *Salah* practice.

SDT provides a psychologically validated lens to interpret the researcher's experiences, bridging spirituality with cognitive-behavioral science.

Intervention Structure:

Al-Ghazali's Six Steps of Spiritual Development

To operationalize *Salah* as an emotional well-being intervention, the study adopts Imam Al-Ghazali's (1058–1111 CE) framework from *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, which outlines a structured path for self-improvement:

1. Musharatah (Self-Examination) – Setting intentions and resolutions.
2. Muraqabah (Self-Guarding) – Monitoring thoughts and actions.
3. Muhasabah (Self-Evaluation) –

Reflecting on deeds and behaviors.

4. Mu'aqabah (Self-Penalty) – Holding oneself accountable for shortcomings.
5. Mujadah (Striving) – Persisting in self-discipline and spiritual effort.
6. Mu'atabah (Repentance) – Seeking forgiveness and committing to growth.

The study examines how these steps were internalized and practiced, combining first-hand experiential data with empirical research to assess their impact on emotional regulation.

Study Objectives

This study integrates theistic (Islamic) and scientific perspectives to investigate how *Salah* enhances emotional well-being, using digital mindfulness tools and qualitative reflexivity. The research aims to:

1. explore how mindful *Salah* practice helps in managing emotional dysregulation and negative life experiences;
2. understand how *Salah* integrates into daily routines as a culturally grounded approach to mental health;
3. assess the role of digital tools (mobile applications) in tracking and enhancing mindful *Salah* practice.
4. utilize qualitative case-study methods for exploring personal experiences with *Salah*.

Significance of Study

This research holds significant value for multiple stakeholders within the Muslim community (*Ummah*). By providing an evidence-based understanding of how *Salah* enhances emotional well-being, it reinforces its role not just as a ritual but as a form of mental health self-care. The study also offers mental health professionals a culturally sensitive therapeutic lens, enabling

clinicians to integrate Islamic practices—such as mindful *Salah*—into treatment for Muslim clients.

Beyond clinical applications, this work advances interdisciplinary research at the intersection of psychology and Islamic studies. It bridges gaps between spirituality and cognitive science, paving the way for further exploration of religiously grounded mindfulness practices.

Addressing Critical Gaps

Without empirical validation, the psychological benefits of *Salah* may remain anecdotal, limiting its recognition in mainstream psychology and restricting its therapeutic potential. Many Muslims currently face a lack of faith-aligned mental health approaches, contributing to underutilization of services. If left unaddressed, mental health interventions may remain secular-dominated, overlooking Islamic frameworks that could improve engagement and effectiveness for Muslim populations.

Additionally, the absence of research on digitally tracked *Salah* practices could hinder the development of Islamic mental health technologies. This study demonstrates how technology—such as mobile apps and tracking tools—can support faith-based well-being, opening doors for innovative Islamic mental health solutions. Without such advancements, Muslims risk being left behind in the digital well-being landscape.

Broader Implications

For policymakers and educators, this research highlights the need for religiously inclusive well-being programs in schools, workplaces, and healthcare systems.

Ultimately, this study is not only academically valuable but socially necessary.

It empowers Muslims with scientifically validated spiritual tools, enriches mental health practices, and fosters inclusive well-being innovations. Without it, a vital opportunity to merge faith, science, and technology for holistic health would be lost.

METHODOLOGY

This study investigates the impact of *Salah* on emotional well-being and daily life performance through an autoethnographic approach, supported by Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and structured by Imam Al-Ghazali's framework of spiritual development.

Research Design: Autoethnography

Autoethnography serves as the primary methodology, allowing for an in depth, first-person exploration of how *Salah* influences emotional and psychological states. As a qualitative method, autoethnography enables reflective examination of lived experiences within their cultural and spiritual context⁴². In this research, the researcher engages in a self-reflective process, systematically documents and analyzes her emotional journey, focusing on *Salah*'s role in fostering righteous habits and enhancing emotional well-being. This introspective approach provides rich, nuanced insights into the transformative effects of *Salah* beyond conventional empirical measures.

Conceptual Framework: Synthesizing Theory and Methodology in Application



Figure 1.0: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1.0, illustrates the flow of how the research is grounded and implemented to explore the intrinsic needs in cultivating emotional well-being and spiritual awakening.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This study employs a mobile application to capture all research data. To track prayer frequency, participants' *Salah* adherence was recorded using the Daily Deeds mobile app⁴³ (Sagdullaev, 2021). Concurrently, emotional experiences were documented through digital journaling with the Penguin Diary app⁴⁴ (Saeki, 2019). Data collection spanned a continuous 63-day intervention period.

Collected data were analyzed both thematically and descriptively to uncover patterns in prayer frequency, emotional responses, stress management strategies, and daily functioning. By integrating autoethnography, Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Al-Ghazali's spiritual framework, this study provides a culturally nuanced examination of the psychological benefits of *Salah*. The findings offer empirical support for faith-based mindfulness practices and deliver actionable insights for mental health professionals working with Muslim clients. Furthermore, the results lay the groundwork for developing Islamic well-being technologies—such as mindfulness applications—that promote the spiritual richness and practical beauty of Islam to a broader audience.

Overall, this methodology facilitates a holistic, interdisciplinary investigation into the role of *Salah* in enhancing emotional and spiritual well-being.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reflection by the Participant: Lived Experiences Across Al-Ghazali's (2020) Six Steps

As an autoethnographic study, this research drew on two primary data sources: (1) recorded frequency of Salah performance and (2) personal reflections documented over sixty-three (63) days. The reflective approach required deep engagement with my own experiences, combining systematic introspection with analytical interpretation to derive meaningful insights.^{45 46}

Through qualitative reflection, the researcher identified the frequency of mindful prayer as a measurable outcome aligned with the study's first research aim: *to explore how the practice of mindful Salah contributes to managing emotional dysregulation and coping with negative life experiences*. The forthcoming discussion will detail how I applied Al-Ghazali's (2020) Six Steps for performing *Salah*, integrating a reflexive narrative with relevant scientific evidence corresponding to each step.

The intervention began with *musharatah* (setting preconditions) before *Salah*. I established a clear intention—an "anchor"—to maintain mindfulness throughout every step of the prayer. This practice of deliberate intention-setting fostered mental clarity and prepared me to perform *Salah* with heightened awareness. By consciously planning each action, I observed improved focus and intentionality in my worship.

This finding aligns with neuroscientific research on executive function, which governs goal-directed behavior through mechanisms such as attention, working memory, inhibitory control, and planning. Executive function operates effortfully, consciously, and primarily in novel or non-

habitual tasks.⁴⁷ The sequential, structured nature of *Salah* mirrors the brain's capacity for procedural execution, suggesting a cognitive-spiritual synergy. This congruence underscores the divine wisdom in designing acts of worship to simultaneously nurture spiritual devotion and cognitive engagement.

Neuroscientific research suggests that the brain has distinct regions not only for executing control but also allocating it across various tasks.⁴⁸ Studies on goal-setting and behavior change often highlight constructs such as attention, working memory, inhibitory control and planning – collectively referred to as executive function.⁴⁹ Executive function has three defining characteristics: it is effortful, operates consciously, and is engaged in pursuit of novel goals rather than habitual or overlearned ones.⁵⁰ The effort involved meant tasks had to be completed sequentially and required mental focus.⁵¹ Thus, the procedural nature of *Salah* aligned with what the human brain is primed to handle, further underscoring Allah's wisdom in designing acts of worship to fulfil both spiritual and cognitive needs.

During the *muraqabah* (self-guarding) phase, I identified three critical components of mindfulness in *Salah*:

1. Flow of *Salah* (*Rukn Qalbi*) – Maintaining awareness of the prayer's overarching structure.
2. Recitation (*Rukn Qawli*) – Ensuring audible recitation while reflecting on the meanings of the verses.
3. Physical Movements (*Rukn Fi'li*) – Performing postures (e.g., *rukū'*, *sujūd*) with deliberate presence.

These elements align with the *Fardu Ain* (obligatory individual) teachings in Islam, emphasizing the integration of heart, speech, and action in worship. To deepen focus, I consistently returned to my pre-established

"anchor," audibly recited verses to engage auditory processing, and contemplated their meanings. Additionally, I employed visualization techniques—such as imagining the Day of Judgment and crossing the *Sirat*—to evoke *khusyu'* (devotional awe) and reinforce Allah's promises and warnings. This practice not only anchored my attention to the present moment but also fostered a profound emotional and spiritual connection to the act of worship.

In my autoethnographic journey, I consciously employed personalized devotional techniques to cultivate *khusyu'*—a state of profound humility, submission, and emotional resonance—during *Salah*. This state, as articulated by classical scholars, transcends mere physical stillness; it embodies a heart-centered attentiveness (Ibn Qayyim, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*), where the worshipper's internal surrender manifests externally.

My practice was rooted in two interdependent pillars: (1) *taqwa* (fear-consciousness of Allah) and (2) *ihsan* (the awareness of divine omnipresence), both of which align with Imam Ibn Qayyim's definition of *khusyu'* as "the heart's steadfastness before Allah, infused with humility".⁵² This conceptualization was further nuanced by Imam al-Junayd al-Baghdadi's Sufi perspective, which frames *khusyu'* as "the heart's trembling humility in the presence of the All-Knowing"⁵³ emphasizing its affective dimension.

The prophetic tradition underscores *khusyu'* as an internal reality externalized (Hakim al-Tirmidhi, *Nawādir al-Uṣūl*), a notion I experienced viscerally. For instance, during *sujud*, my intentional visualization of Allah's greatness—coupled with whispered *adhkar*—elicited physical tremors, a phenomenon echoing al-Ghazali's assertion of the brain-heart-spirit nexus (Iḥyā' 'Ulūm

al-Dīn, 2011). Al-Ghazali's framework posits that the spiritual heart (*qalb*) mediates between the corporeal heart and the cognitive brain, a triangulation that my practice corroborated: somatic focus (e.g., controlled breathing in *ruku'*) sharpened mental focus, which in turn deepened emotional submission.

The neurological dimension of this struggle became apparent when analyzing attention lapses during recitation. Al-Ghazali's proposition of the "cardio-cognitive nexus" (Iḥyā', 3:12) found empirical support in my journaling - moments of somatic awareness (like focusing on forehead pressure during *sujud*) correlated with decreased mental chatter. This physical anchoring echoes the Quranic metaphor of "skin shivering" then "softening" at divine remembrance (39:23), suggesting an embodied theology of worship.

I have personally experienced the most transformative realization that came through Surah Al-Fatihah's structural rhythm. By visualizing each verse's thematic essence (e.g., "*Maliki yawmi-d-din*" evoking divine judgment situation imagery), I experienced what modern neuroscience might call "neural entrainment" - where ritualized movement, auditory recitation and visual imagination synchronized attention networks. This aligned remarkably with Ibn Qayyim's description of *khusyu'* as "the heart standing before its Lord with radiant stillness" (Al-Fawā'id, p.87).

Challenges emerged in maintaining this state beyond isolated moments. The Quranic warning about prayers performed "in a state of heedlessness" (4:142) became painfully relevant during periods of distraction. This journey revealed *khusyu'* as neither purely cognitive nor solely spiritual, but what the Quran terms "a believing heart in a sound body" (26:89) - requiring simultaneous neurological discipline and soulful surrender. The experiential data suggests that the Quran's somatic metaphors

(trembling skins, weeping eyes) may be more than poetic devices, but actual neurophysiological markers of optimal worship states.⁵⁴

To address these challenges, I implemented:

1. **Pre-Salah Grounding Techniques:**
I took a deep breath (diaphragmatic breathing) before *Takbir* to center myself. Diaphragmatic breathing (also called abdominal breathing or deep breathing) is a technique that engages the diaphragm—the primary muscle responsible for respiration—to promote efficient oxygen exchange and relaxation.⁵⁵
2. **Pray for seeking refuge from distractions:**
“*A ‘ūdhu billāhi min ash-shaytān ir-rajīm.*” (I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan). I recited *Ta’awwudh* every time before starting the prayer.
3. **Environmental Control:**
To ensure that we stay focused and free from distractions, it is important to designate a quiet, device-free space for *Salah*.
4. **Gradual Visualization:**
I used mental imagery for some recitations during the prayer (e.g., *Du’a Iftitah*, and *Surah Al-Fatiha*) to help engage deeply with the meanings and the movements.

Reflective Analysis: Cultivating Khusyu’ Through Mindful Salah

a. Mindfulness and Divine Presence

By intentionally anchoring my attention to the present moment (*hāḍir al-qalb*) during *Salah*, I observed a dual effect: (1) a heightened consciousness of Allah’s majesty (*taqwa*), and (2) a somatic-psychic tranquility (*sakīnah*) arising from the recognition of His innumerable favors (*ni‘am*). This practice aligns with the Qur’anic imperative of *ihsan*⁵⁶—worshipping Allah “as

though you see Him” (*Sahih Muslim* 8)—which manifested as an emergent state of humility (*tawāḍu‘*) and spiritual refinement.

The variability of *khusyu’*—its presence or absence—functioned as a barometer for the prayer’s quality, underscoring its contingent nature on intentionality (*irāda*), volitional effort (*jahd*), and the internal struggle (*mujāhada*) against distractions (*wasāwis*).⁵⁷ Furthermore, the fact that *khusyu’*, could be present or absent and served as a criterion for the perfection of prayer emphasized its dependence on individual’s choice, willingness and efforts.⁵⁸

The third phase of the intervention highlighted the necessity of *muḥāsaba* (self-auditing) to ensure ritual integrity (*ṣiḥḥat al-ṣalāh*). A critical component was *ṭuma’nīnah*—calm, deliberate movements prescribed in *rukū‘*, *i’tidāl*, *sujūd*, and *tashahhud*—which served as both a structural and spiritual checkpoint. During *i’tidāl*, the brief pause after reciting “*Rabbanā laka al-ḥamd*” (*Muslim* 404) became a temporal space for real-time prayer assessment:

- **Procedural accuracy:** Verification of completed *rak‘āt* and anticipation of subsequent actions (e.g., *qunūt* or *tashahhud*).
- **Recitational quality:** Monitoring pace (*tartīl*), articulation (*makhārīj*), and emotional resonance of Qur’anic recitation.
- **Cognitive flow:** Mitigating mind-wandering through metacognitive awareness, wherein the *act of self-observation* itself reinforced focus.

This practice mirrors Ibn Al-Qayyim’s assertion that *ṭuma’nīnah* is the “spirit of *Salah*” (*Rūḥ al-Ṣalāh*), without which prayer becomes a hollow performance (*ẓāhir bi-lā bāṭin*) (*Al-Wābil al-Ṣayyib*, p. 45).

The practice of *ṭuma'nīnah* emerged as a symbol of mindfulness practice in *Salah* which is encouraged to be applied in real life situation. During *i'tidāl*, the micro-pause after "*Rabbanā laka al-ḥamd*" became a hermeneutic interval—a moment to audit the prayer's structural integrity (e.g., *rak'āt* count) and qualitative dimensions (e.g., *tartīl*). This mirrors the Prophetic injunction to 'pray as if it is your last' (Ahmad 23074), wherein temporal awareness collapses the mundane into the divine. Here, *muḥāsaba* transcended mere checklisting; it became an act of *muraqaba* (self-vigilance) against the entropy of distraction.

Additionally, it was encouraged to recite the following supplication, as stated in a hadith⁵⁹ narrated Rifa'a bin Rafi' Az-Zuraqi:

One day we were praying behind the Prophet (ﷺ). When he raised his head from bowing, he said, سَمِعَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ حَمَدَهُ A man behind him said, رَبَّنَا وَلَكَ الْحَمْدُ، حَمْدًا كَثِيرًا طَيِّبًا مُبَارَكًا فِي (O our Lord! All the praises are for You, many good and blessed praises). When the Prophet (ﷺ) completed the prayer, he asked, "Who has said these words?" The man replied, "I." The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "I saw over thirty angels competing to write it first."

The Prophet (ﷺ) stood straight after bowing until all the vertebrae of his spine returned to their natural position (Sahih al-Bukhari 764). By focusing on the words of this supplication, their meaning, and the background story, I found that it helped to properly place *Thoma'ninah*, fostering *Khusyu'* (humility) and calmness during *Salah*.

Neurocognitive Foundations of Khusyu': The Default Mode Network in Islamic Ritual Prayer

Interestingly, it was discovered that a set of brain regions called the brain's default network became active in relaxed individuals compared to when they performed externally engaging tasks.⁶⁰ This indicated that the state of *khusyu'* occurred within the brain's default network, as *Salah* incorporates *Thoma'nina* an obligatory element. The default network was also active during directed tasks such as recalling past events or thinking about what might happen in the future.⁶¹

Metacognitive and Ethical Dimensions of Muhāsabah in Islamic Spiritual Practice

The practice of *muḥāsabah* (self-evaluation) represents a critical intersection of neurocognitive function and Islamic ethical development. Contemporary neuroscience reveals that self-referential evaluation engages the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) and posterior cingulate cortex (PCC) - key components of the default mode network.⁶² This neural activity mirrors the Islamic concept of retrospective accountability (*ḥisāb al-nafs*) and prospective moral imagination (*tafakkur*), processes explicitly encouraged in Qur'anic verses such as 59:18: "O you who have believed, fear Allah. And let every soul look to what it has put forth for tomorrow - and fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do."

The Prophetic tradition emphasizes *muḥāsabah* as both a daily practice and lifelong ethical commitment. As narrated by Umar ibn al-Khattab (RA): "Hold yourselves accountable before you are held accountable"⁶³ This aligns with modern continuous improvement (*kaizen*)⁶⁴ principles while transcending them through its theocentric framework. The neurological processes underlying *muḥāsabah* –

particularly the integration of memory retrieval (hippocampal activity) and future projection (ventromedial PFC activation)⁶⁵—facilitate what al-Ghazālī termed "the science of the heart's rectification" (*‘ilm al-muhāsaba*).

As demonstrated in the ḥadīth: "The wise person is he who holds himself accountable and works for what comes after death" (Tirmidhī 2459), this practice develops what contemporary virtue ethics might term moral identity integration.⁶⁶

The fourth step, *Mu'aqabah* (self-penalty), involved educating the soul. Al-Ghazali emphasized that neglecting the soul facilitated susceptibility to sin, which could become habitual and difficult to overcome.⁶⁷ Therefore, a responsible person needed to compensate for their mistakes to deter repeating them in the future.

My personal challenges with maintaining *ḥudūr al-qalb* (mental presence) during *Salah* reflect the universal human vulnerability to *wasāwis* (devotional distractions). The ḥadīth narrated by Abū Hurayra (Bukhārī, 1232; Muslim, 389) validates this experience:

*The Prophet (ﷺ) said: When any of you stands up to pray. The devil comes to him and confuses him to that he does not know how much he has prayed. If any of you has such an experience, he should perform two prostrations while sitting down before pronouncing the final salutation (taslim) (Bukhari and Muslim).*⁶⁸

This compensatory act was essential for worshippers, as it facilitated humbly asking mercy and forgiveness from Allah the Exalted. The practice of *mu'aqabah* embodies a neuroethical framework wherein compensatory acts—such as *sajdat al-sahw* (Bukhārī, 1232)—function as both ritual rectifications and cognitive-behavioral

interventions. This Prophetic prescription functions as:

- a. Ritual Error Correction: A structured means to rectify lapses without invalidating the prayer.
- b. Humility Cultivation: The physical act of prostration (*sujūd*) embodies submission (*khudū*), activating somatic markers of remorse while symbolizing return to divine grace.⁶⁹

By imposing tangible consequences for lapses (e.g., forgetfulness in prayer), this practice disrupts the reinforcement cycles underlying habitual negligence.⁷⁰ The convergence of theological and empirical findings reveals that *Ṣalah* serves as an epitome of human ethical development—demonstrating how Islamic law institutionalizes restorative justice. Through its emphasis on compensatory acts (e.g., *sajdat al-sahw*), it aligns with psychological evidence demonstrating that reparative behaviors reduce recidivism,⁷¹ while fulfilling the Qur'anic imperative to 'rectify and reconcile' (4:114)

The fifth step, *Mujāhadah* (renewed striving), confronts the fundamental human struggle: the internal battle against the self. Disciplining innate desires presents a persistent challenge in daily practice, as maintaining moral consistency and sustained worship requires deliberate effort. To elevate our steadfast commitment, Al-Ghazali suggested disciplining our souls by taxing them with [more] additional devotions and a variety of tasks, both to address past omissions and to compensate for previous negligence.⁷² This was how those who labored for God behaved.⁷³

During my *Salah* practice, I confronted uncomfortable truths—the gaps in my worship stemming from *fiqh* illiteracy and spiritual complacency. The realization that

my obligatory prayers stood on shaky foundations (lacking proper *thuma'ninah*, *khusyū'*, or even correct recitation) prompted a radical self-intervention. I instituted a tripartite compensation system:

1. **Qabliyyah Fajr** (2 rak'ahs) - A dawn pact with my Creator before the world awoke
2. **Ḍuḥā** (4 rak'ahs) - Solar gratitude markers between breakfast and lunch
3. **Witr** (3 rak'ahs) - Nocturnal reconciliation with the day's shortcomings

The addition of *qabliyyah* and *ba'diyyah* prayers for *Zuhr*, *Aṣr*, and *Ishā'* initially felt like temporal loss—as a graduate student, those 10-15-minute increments seemed catastrophic to my schedule. Yet in practicing this *mujāhadah* (deliberate struggle), I discovered a paradox: the more time I "sacrificed," the more barakah manifested in my remaining hours. My study sessions gained laser focus; previously wasted 30-minute scrolls through social media were replaced with 4 rak'ahs of *ḍuḥā*. The neurological clarity⁷⁴ in meditators became my lived reality—not through secular mindfulness, but through the Sunnah's prescribed rhythm.

This embodied *tazkiyah* (self-purification) aligns with Al-Ghazālī's (1106/2011) prescription in *Iḥyā'* (Vol. 1): "The *nafs* (ego) only yields to what is most bitter to it." By forcing myself to pray when least inclined (midday exhaustion, post-dinner lethargy), I weaponized ritual against my lower self's resistance. The quantitative growth—from 17 to 34+ daily rak'ahs—became qualitative transformation. Verses of *Sūrah al-Fatihah* that once passed my lips mechanically now triggered somatic awe, my back muscles remembering the Prophet's (ﷺ) instruction to "perfect your bowing" (Muslim 1105).

The culminating stage, *Mua'tabah* (self-reproach) which involved vigorous and yet illuminating self-dialogue during *munajat* (private supplication).⁷⁵ This practice facilitates a dual process of:

1. Divine reconciliation: Seeking restoration with *al-Raqīb* (the Watchful Sustainer) through intimate confession.
2. Pedagogical self-censure: Transforming guilt into corrective wisdom ('ibra).

I personally, believe that central to this practice is tripartite contemplation—a systematic audit of:

- a. *Ibadat* (acts of worship): Scrutinizing gaps in prayer quality, *zakāh* accuracy, etc.
- b. *Akhlaq* (character): Assessing honesty in speech, patience in adversity.
- c. *Muamalat* (social transactions): Evaluating fairness in relationships.

Islam institutionalizes this reflection through *Tahajjud*—the nocturnal "gift prayer" performed after voluntary awakening. The Qur'anic imperative, "And from [part of] the night, pray with it as additional [worship] for you; perhaps your Lord will raise you to a praised station." (Qur'an 17:79).

This liminal temporal space (between midnight and dawn) is neurologically optimal for metacognition, as the brain's default mode network shows heightened activity during sleep transitions.⁷⁶ The Prophet (ﷺ) confirmed its supremacy:

"The most excellent fast after Ramaḍān is in Allah's month, al-Muḥarram, and the best prayer after the obligatory ones is the night prayer." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim 1163)

Through my spiritual journey, I discovered that intentional time-blocking for daily contemplation became the keystone of maintaining existential alignment with our

primordial purpose: *ubudiyyah* (complete servitude to Allah). By scheduling fixed periods for meta-cognitive interrogation—asking myself, “How would the Prophet (ﷺ) have responded in this situation?” or “Does this action reflect *shukr* (gratitude) for Allah's favors?”—I transformed routine self-checks into transformative spiritual audits.

Al-Ghazālī's (2020/1441H) *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* provides a profound framework for such introspection, particularly in *Kitāb al-Munājāt* (The Book of Supplications). One poignant excerpt that resonated with my struggles reads:

“Woe to me! The more I age, the greater my sins. Woe to me! The longer I live, the more numerous my acts of disobedience. How long will I repent, how long will I repeat? Have I not a moment to feel shame before my Lord?”.⁷⁷

This therapeutic vulnerability before Allah found its purest expression in the pre-dawn vigil (*tahajjud*). There, in the liminal space between sleep and dawn, I learned that prostration is not just physical submission but emotional decompression—where bottled anxieties dissolve into the prayer mat. The Prophet's (ﷺ) promise that “*in the last third of the night, Allah descends to the lowest heaven*” (Bukhārī 1145) became tangible as my *munajat* transitioned from scripted *du'as* to raw, stammering confessions. Each tear shed during *sajdah* seemed to reknit fractured hope, while the rhythmic recitation of “*Rabbi ghfir warham wa anta khayr al-rahimīn*” (My Lord, forgive and have mercy, for You are the best of merciful) became cognitive-behavioral therapy for the believer's soul.

Content Analysis: *Salah* Status Recorded in Daily Deeds Mobile Application

Figure 1.0 below shows the *Salah* status recorded over sixty-three (63) days. Overall, I observed the percentage of prayers performed on time throughout the intervention study. Initially, I felt uncertain and disappointed with my low percentage of praying on time. However, I began to regulate these feelings by reflecting on Allah the Exalted' After feeling uncertain about my low percentage of the praying on-time status, I started to regulate my feelings by recognizing Allah the Exalted's mercy towards women, as He grants us a period of self-care and rest every month.

This realization is a profound blessing that many women often take for granted. By making a conscious effort to understand how prioritizing *Salah* on time impacts my spiritual growth, I became motivated to improve my actions and strive for better consistency in praying on time. At the same time, I cultivated a deeper sense of gratitude for Allah's generosity and mercy toward women.

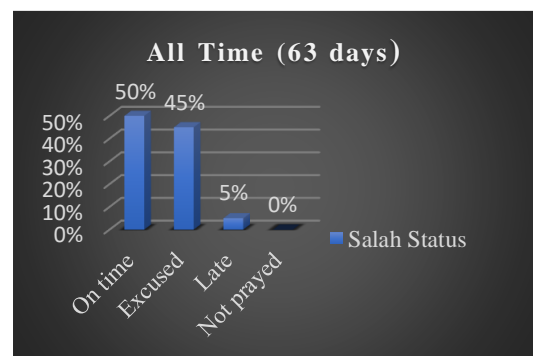


Figure 1: *Salah* Status Summary for 63 Days

Weekly *Salah* Status and Reflections

Meanwhile, Figure 2.0 below illustrates the weekly *Salah* status, which significantly raised my enthusiasm for

prioritizing *Salah* in my daily life. Observing weekly improvements boosted my passion to consistently praying on time. Recognizing my weaknesses, such as delaying prayers, motivated me to practice *Mujahadah* (renewed striving) and *Mua'tabah* (repentance) during private prayers.

The objective data recorded in the *Daily Deeds* mobile application kept me on track and fueled my motivation to elevate this essential act of worship – *Salah* – to the next level. It heightened my mindfulness and cultivated a mindset of integrity and excellence (*Ihsan*), inspiring me to embody these principles in both thought and practice. *Salah* as the ultimate gift and responsibility to Allah the Exalted, preparing for the Reckoning Day.

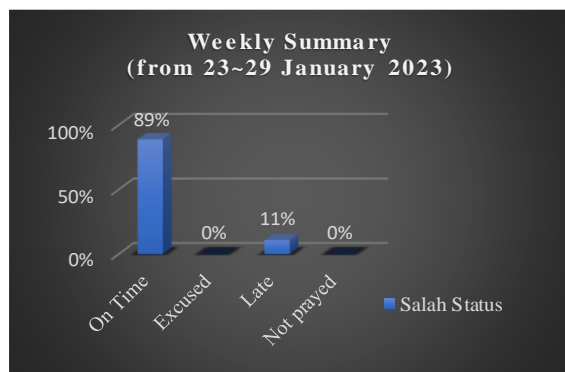


Figure 1: *Salah* Status Summary for 1 Week

Additional Reflections

Generally, *Salah* as outlined in Al-Ghazali's steps⁷⁸ for personal transformation and spiritual growth reveals an intricate connection with psychology, biology and neuroscience. This reflects Allah the Exalted's infinite power and greatness, as seen in the detailed teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Allah the Exalted says in the Quran:

"It is Allah who erected the heavens without pillars that you [can] see; then He established Himself above the

*Throne and made subject the sun and the moon, each running [its course] for a specified term. He arranges [each] matter; He details the signs that you may, of the meeting with your Lord, be certain".*⁷⁹ (Quran 13:2)

Integrating my daily *Salah* practice with digital journaling using two mobile applications (*Daily Deeds* and *Penguin Diary*) led to the following reflections:

Daily Deeds⁸⁰

1. **Increased Awareness:** The app heightened my sense of responsibility for performing the five daily prayers. Observing my *Salah* frequency over sixty-three (63) days encouraged me to engage willingly in this exercise.
2. **Data Visualization:** The visuals guided me to pay closer attention to both the quality and quantity of my prayers. They provided a motivational force to develop consistent, punctual, and mindful acts of worship.

Penguin Diary⁸¹

1. **Emotional Expression:** Journaling offered a safe space to express my feelings, limitations, and new insights. Writing my thoughts in a soothing way fostered a growth mindset.
2. **Life Observation:** Recording my daily thoughts helped me reflect on four key aspects of my life: emotions, family, health, and learning. Understanding triggers enabled me to work on them effectively, with the learning aspect being the most fulfilling.

Autoethnographic Data Analysis: Emotion Regulation

a) Quick Grounding – The Power of Breath and Presence

Through consistent *Salah* practice, I developed an acute awareness of my physiological and emotional states, allowing me to ground myself rapidly. Deep diaphragmatic breathing, integrated into both prayer and daily life, became an autonomic response to stress.

During a high-pressure work conflict, I noticed my body tensing—my jaw clenched, and my breath grew shallow. Instead of reacting impulsively, I instinctively paused and engaged in a grounding technique inspired by *Salah*'s mindfulness: three controlled breaths (inhaling for four counts, holding for four, and exhaling for six). As I breathed, I silently recited *adhkar* (e.g., "*La ilaha illallah*"), anchoring my awareness in Allah's presence.

Even in chaotic moments, my body remembers: *Breathe. Allah knows what's in your heart. Allah is with you. You are here, not lost in the storm.* This fusion of breathwork and remembrance (*dhikr*) swiftly shifted my nervous system from a fight-or-flight state to rest-and-digest, illustrating how ritual prayer cultivates a trained synergy between mind and body.

b) Reduced Reactivity – The Pause Between Stimulus and Response

Salah imposed a sacred pause in my daily reactions. Where I once snapped at interruptions, I now experience a mental "*Salah buffer*" — a moment of reflection before responding. A notable example occurred during a family disagreement; my instinct was to retaliate harshly, but the discipline of *sujood* (prostration) reminded me of

humility. By physically lowering myself in prayer, I symbolically lowered my ego, opting for silence instead of escalation. This aligns with the Prophet's (ﷺ) teaching: "*The strong is not the one who overcomes people by force, but the one who controls himself in anger*" (Bukhari).

c) Positive Modelling – Salah as an Ethical Framework

Prayer became a cognitive filter for decision-making. For example, when a colleague provoked my stance, I had a moment of pause and began asking: "*Would this align with the state of khusyu' (devotion) I cultivate in Salah?*", "*Is this truthful?*", "*Is it kind?*" Like polishing fogged glass, it clarified my choices: *How would the Prophet (ﷺ) respond?* The answer often arrived in the quiet of *sujood*. My initial resentment dissolved into strategic patience. *Salah* has structured pauses (standing, bowing, prostrating) seem to rewire impulsive neural pathways, fostering deliberate responses.

d) Anger Management – From Turbulence to Tranquillity

Once, a heated argument left my hands trembling. I stepped away, performed *wudu'*, and began to pray. As my forehead touched the ground, the fire in my chest gradually cooled. The entire Surah Al-Ikhlās played in my mind, but one verse echoed most clearly: 'Allah—the Sustainer 'needed by all'' (Quran 112:2). With each prostration, the weight lifted until, by the *salam* concluding my prayer, my heart had found its stillness - that profound peace that comes only in complete surrender.

Autoethnographic Data Analysis: Spiritual Growth

a) Magnified *Imaan* – The Armor of Divine Connection

Salah transformed from a ritual obligation to a sanctuary. During a period of grief, the physical act of *ruku'* (bowing) became a metaphor for surrendering burdens to Allah. The verse "*Seek help through patience and prayer*" (2:45) manifested tangibly—I felt protected, as if each *rak'ah* wrapped me in spiritual resilience. This echoes Ibn Qayyim's observation that *Salah* is "*a light for the heart and a cure for its diseases*" (Al-Wabil al-Sayyib).

b) Redha – Trust as a Transformative Lens

A challenging life situation initially plunged me into despair, yet my post-prayer reflections gradually uncovered hidden blessings within the difficulties—whether societal discrimination, cultural alienation, or other trials. Through *tawakkul* (complete trust in Allah), I learned to reinterpret adversity: either as divine preparation for greater challenges ahead or as a means to draw nearer to Him. This transformative perspective became ingrained through my daily practice of reciting "*Hasbunallahu wa ni'mal Wakeel*" ("Allah is sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs") after each *Salah*. The wisdom of the Prophet's ﷺ words resonated deeply: "*How wonderful is the affair of the believer! Indeed, all his matters are good for him...*" (Sahih Muslim). What once appeared as misfortune revealed itself as mercy in disguise—when viewed through the lens of *redha* (contentment with Divine decree).

c) *Husnudzon* – Liberating the Mind from Assumptions

Salah's focus on the present moment curtailed my tendency toward "*what-if*"

catastrophizing. During a health scare, instead of spiraling into fear, I recited *surah Al-Mulk* in *qiyam*, anchoring myself in Allah's sovereignty. This cultivated *husnudzon billah* (positive expectation from Allah), dissolving anxiety about the future and regrets over the past.

d) *Muraqabah* – The Flow State of Divine Awareness

In *tashahhud*, the stillness of sitting became a meditation on "*ashhadu an la ilaha illallah*"—a mantra dissolving mental clutter. Research on "flow states"⁸² parallels this: the repetitive motions of *Salah* induce a trance-like focus, merging action and awareness. Post-prayer, this clarity extended to creative problem-solving, as if the *barakah* of *Salah* unlocked intuitive insights.

Study Limitations

This study acknowledges several inherent limitations in its autoethnographic approach. The very nature of autoethnography, with its emphasis on personal narrative and subjective experience, presents several challenges that must be thoughtfully considered.

One of the primary limitations concerns the strain between subjectivity and generalizability. By centering the researcher's individual experiences, this approach makes it difficult to extrapolate findings to wider Muslim communities. The emotional impact of rituals like *sujood* can vary dramatically depending on numerous factors including one's sectarian background, cultural upbringing, level of religious knowledge, mental health status, and even physical capacity for prayer.

The dual role of researcher and subject introduces another significant limitation: the potential for unconscious bias in interpreting experiences. There is a risk of selectively

interpreting experiences to align with desired outcomes (e.g., overemphasizing positive effects while minimizing struggles like intrusive thoughts during prayer).

A further constraint involves the difficulty of measuring and quantifying emotional and spiritual experiences. While clinical studies might track physiological markers like cortisol levels or use standardized anxiety scales, autoethnography relies on qualitative self-reflection.

This study's attempt to incorporate some measurement through prayer-tracking technology and journaling presented its own challenges. The act of self-monitoring through a mobile application risks transforming worship into a performance, potentially altering the very experience it seeks to document. Similarly, the requirement to immediately journal about post-prayer states may disrupt the natural tranquility that often follows *Salah*.

Finally, the temporal scope of autoethnography presents limitations. As a methodology that typically examines a defined period of time, it cannot fully capture how the emotional impact of *Salah* might evolve over years of practice or during extended periods of life stress. The long-term developmental aspects of prayer's psychological and spiritual benefits - how they might deepen, change, or face challenges across different life stages - remain beyond the reach of this single narrative.

While this study's autoethnographic approach offers deeply personal insights into *Salah*'s role in emotional well-being, it is not without constraints. These limitations—whether the subjectivity of self-reported data or the complexities of integrating digital tools—are not shortcomings of the method itself, but reminders of the need for methodological pluralism.

Autoethnography, like any lens, reveals certain truths while obscuring others; its greatest value emerges when complemented by other forms of inquiry. By acknowledging these boundaries, the researcher honors both the richness of individual experience and the collective work needed to advance understanding in this field.

Future studies might combine autoethnography with longitudinal designs, physiological measures, or cross-cultural comparisons to provide a more comprehensive understanding of *Salah*'s emotional dimensions. The current study's findings should therefore be viewed as a deeply personal but necessarily partial perspective on a profoundly complex spiritual practice.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to illuminate the profound intersection between Islamic spirituality and emotional well-being by examining *Salah* as both a mindful practice and a theistic discipline. Grounded in autoethnographic inquiry and supported by digital mindfulness tools, the research explored how structured prayer cultivates emotional regulation, spiritual resilience, and intentional living.

The findings reveal that *Salah* operates on multiple dimensions—physiological, cognitive, and spiritual—to foster emotional well-being. Through breath-centered grounding, sacred pauses that reduce reactivity, and ethical modeling rooted in Prophetic teachings, *Salah* serves as a dynamic framework for self-regulation. The integration of mobile applications, while presenting methodological limitations, offered valuable insights into habit formation and reflective practice, bridging traditional worship with contemporary self-tracking tools.

Spiritually, the practice deepened *tawakkul* (trust in Allah), *redha* (contentment), and *husnudzon* (positive assumption), transforming adversity into opportunities for growth. The rhythmic discipline of prayer—from wudu's sensory reset to *sujood*'s surrender—emerged as a therapeutic ritual, aligning with both Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on autonomy and Imam Al-Ghazali's vision of *ihsan*.

While autoethnography provided intimate, nuanced perspectives, future research could benefit from mixed-method approaches—combining qualitative narratives with biometric data (e.g., heart rate variability during *Salah*) or cross-cultural studies comparing diverse Muslim experiences. This study, however, lays a foundational understanding of *Salah* not merely as an act of devotion, but as a holistic well-being practice, harmonizing divine commandments with psychological resilience.

The study's findings transform academic discourse to speak to the lived realities of diverse contemporary Muslims. For overburdened professionals juggling career and faith, *Salah* offers sanctuary from the domination of productivity metrics. For isolated international students and homesick migrants navigating identity in secular societies, the physical act of prostration becomes an embodied affirmation of belonging. Even for those struggling with faith—the doubters, the weary, the spiritually injured—the ritual's repetitive structure offers a merciful invitation to return without preconditions.

The research underscores the Quran's timeless promise: “Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace” (13:28). This divine principle manifests practically when *Salah* shifts from dutiful obligation to mindful conversation with the

Creator. Mental health professionals serving Muslim populations should note this potent intersection: here lies an evidence-based, culturally-grounded therapeutic modality preserved for fourteen centuries yet perennially adaptable to modern emotional needs. And for every believer who has ever stood before their prayer mat feeling distracted or disconnected, this autoethnography offers both validation and invitation: your struggles are seen, your small returns celebrated, and your next prayer—always—a fresh opportunity for divine conversation and self-renewal.

Ultimately, *Salah* is performed not merely as an obligatory duty, but as a conscious act of servitude (*'ubūdiyyah*), embodying the believer's recognition of their inherent dependence on Allah and their singular devotion to expressing gratitude (*shukr*) for divine beneficence.

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