

POSITIVE THOUGHTS THERAPY IN ENHANCING MEMORY AND EMOTIONAL CONNECTION DURING PROPHET MUHAMMAD'S MAULID: PSYCHOLOGICAL, CULTURAL, AND SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES

Muslim Ismail ¹
Ahmad Murshidi Mustapha ²
Mohd Nazri Mat Zin ^{3*}

¹ Perpustakaan Tengku Anis, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kelantan Kampus Machang, 18500 Machang, Kelantan, Malaysia (E-mail: muslim368@uitm.edu.my)

^{2,3} Akademi Pengajian Islam Kontemporari, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kelantan Kampus Machang, 18500 Machang, Kelantan, Malaysia (E-mail: ahmadmurshidi@uitm.edu.my)

*Corresponding author: nazri743@uitm.edu.my

Article history

Received date : 2-6-2026
Revised date : 3-6-2026
Accepted date : 19-9-2026
Published date : 20-9-2026

To cite this document:

Ismail, M., Mustapha, A. M., & Mat Zin, M. N. (2026). Positive thoughts therapy in enhancing memory and emotional connection during Prophet Muhammad's Maulid: Psychological, cultural, and spiritual perspectives. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 11 (86), 474 – 479.

Abstract: *The commemoration of Prophet Muhammad's birth, known as Maulid, is a profound religious and cultural event observed across diverse Muslim societies. It is characterized by rituals such as communal chanting, recitation of poetry, acts of charity, and collective reflection on the Prophet's life and virtues (Anli, 2025; Hasani & Mehmeti, 2025). Concurrently, Positive Thoughts Therapy (PTT), an application of positive psychology, emphasizes cultivating adaptive cognitive-emotional strategies like gratitude, hope, and optimism to enhance well-being and resilience (Suldo et al., 2024; Henrichs & Hum, 2025). This paper posits that a meaningful integration of PTT with Maulid practices offers a unique, culturally congruent framework to amplify both cognitive and emotional benefits for participants. Specifically, it investigates how this integration can enhance the encoding and recall of religious memories and deepen emotional connections during the commemoration. The synthesis aims to bridge theoretical models of well-being with lived religious experience, drawing from psychology, neuroscience, and cultural studies to explore this interdisciplinary intersection.*

Keywords: *Positive Thoughts Therapy, Maulid, Islamic Psychology, Memory Enhancement, Emotional Connection, Dhikr, Neuroimaging*

Introduction

The commemoration of Prophet Muhammad's birth, known as Maulid, is a profound religious and cultural event observed across diverse Muslim societies. It is characterized by rituals such as communal chanting, recitation of poetry, acts of charity, and collective reflection on the Prophet's life and virtues (Anli, 2025; Hasani & Mehmeti, 2025). Concurrently, Positive Thoughts Therapy (PTT), an application of positive psychology, emphasizes cultivating adaptive cognitive-emotional strategies like gratitude, hope, and optimism to enhance well-being and resilience (Suldo et al., 2024; Henrichs & Hum, 2025). This paper posits that a meaningful integration of PTT with Maulid practices offers a unique, culturally congruent framework to amplify both cognitive and emotional benefits for participants. Specifically, it investigates how this integration can enhance the encoding and recall of religious memories and deepen emotional connections during the commemoration. The synthesis aims to bridge theoretical models of well-being with lived religious experience, drawing from psychology, neuroscience, and cultural studies to explore this interdisciplinary intersection.

Literature Review

This review is structured around five core themes that elucidate the integration of Positive Thoughts Therapy with Maulid practices: the psychological frameworks of PTT, neurobiological mechanisms, cultural and religious practices, cognitive-emotional benefits, and existing research gaps. Crucially, addressing these gaps reveals the primary scholarly issues driving this research: currently, there is no strong explanatory model demonstrating how elements of PTT (such as gratitude and hope) interact with traditional religious components (dhikr, Maulid narratives, and communal rituals) to facilitate memory strengthening and emotional bonding. Furthermore, the field lacks standardized frameworks necessary for systematically evaluating the psychological effects of Maulid observances.

Theoretical Foundations of Positive Thoughts Therapy

PTT is not merely about "thinking positive" but involves structured, adaptive cognitive restructuring. It synthesizes principles from cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic, and humanistic traditions, focusing on meaning-making, strength-building, and realistic thought validation (Brinol & Petty, 2024; Woldemariam, 2020). Core interventions include gratitude journaling, hope-based goal setting, and optimism training. These constructs find deep resonance in Islamic teachings and Maulid rituals, where gratitude (shukr), hope (raja'), and trust in divine wisdom are central (Omais, 2025). When aligned with religious values, these interventions can significantly foster emotional connection and social cohesion during communal events like Maulid (Atad & Russo-Netzer, 2022; Senger & Gallagher, 2024).

However, a critical evaluation of this synthesis reveals inherent epistemological tensions. PTT is fundamentally rooted in secular, Western psychological paradigms that prioritize individual well-being and empirical outcomes. In contrast, Islamic concepts like shukr and raja' are inherently theological—anchored in spiritual submission, divine grace, and eschatological accountability rather than mere psychological utility. Transposing PTT frameworks directly onto Maulid practices risks a reductionist approach that could commodify sacred rituals into secular therapeutic tools, potentially stripping them of their metaphysical depth. Furthermore, standard PTT interventions (such as individualized journaling) may not seamlessly translate to the communal, physically embodied, and deeply oral traditions of Maulid. Therefore, rather than a simple overlay of psychological techniques, integrating PTT requires a culturally and religiously calibrated model that respects the theological integrity of the commemoration while exploring its psychological benefits.

Meta-Cognitive Processes and Memory in Religious Contexts

Meta-cognition, or thinking about one's thinking, plays a pivotal role in memory. Strategies like the selective rehearsal, savouring, and reflective narration of positive memories increase their salience, vividness, and emotional weight (Colombo et al., 2024; Moscovitch et al., 2024). During Maulid, participants engage in meta-cognitive processing by actively reflecting on and narrating the Prophet's virtues and life events. This repeated, communal retrieval strengthens the encoding of these memories, often leading to multiple narrative versions with deep emotional resonance (Duffau & Charles, 2025). Thus, Maulid acts as a natural platform for positive memory processing, enhancing both individual recall and collective memory.

Despite this promising alignment, analyzing Maulid primarily through meta-cognitive frameworks presents distinct theoretical limitations. Meta-cognition typically requires conscious, deliberate self-reflection on one's internal mental states. However, participation in Maulid is inherently embodied, affective, and highly ritualistic; practices like rhythmic chanting (dhikr) and communal singing may actually bypass active, analytical "thinking about thinking" in favor of achieving spiritual absorption or cognitive automaticity. Furthermore, equating individual meta-cognitive strategies—such as personal savouring—with the formation of collective religious memory risks a conceptual overreach. Collective memory in Maulid is sustained largely by shared cultural scripts, established oral traditions, and performative rituals, rather than isolated cognitive rehearsal. Finally, while the selective rehearsal of purely positive memories bolsters emotional well-being and social cohesion, cognitive psychology warns that this "positivity bias" can lead to idealized memory consolidation. Relying strictly on positive selective rehearsal may flatten the rich historical complexities of the Prophet's life into monolithic, purely affective narratives, complicating the balance between psychological benefit and historical objectivity.

Neurobiological and Emotional Mechanisms

Neuroimaging studies provide empirical support for the benefits of religious rituals. Repetitive practices like chanting and dhikr activate key brain regions: the posterior cingulate cortex (for self-referential processing), the amygdala and hippocampus (for emotional memory), and the prefrontal cortex (for emotional regulation) (Sik et al., 2024; Gao et al., 2019). This neural activity facilitates memory consolidation and helps regulate responses to negative stimuli. Furthermore, collective rituals induce physiological and emotional synchrony among participants, enhancing social bonding and collective memory encoding through mechanisms like aligned heart rates and shared emotional states (Sarai et al., 2024; Xygalatas et al., 2024). These findings underscore that Maulid rituals have measurable, positive effects on brain function and emotional health.

Table 1: Key Themes in Integrating PTT with Maulid Practices

Theme	Key Insights	Supporting Paper
Integration of Positive Psychology with Religious Practices	Positive thoughts therapy, when integrated with Islamic rituals(dhikr, chanting, prophetic psychotherapy), enhances memory encoding and emotional well-being during Maulid.	(Briñol & Petty, 2024; Munawar et al., 2023; Suldo et al., 2024; Zulkipli et al., 2025)
Meta-Cognitive Processes	Meta-cognitive strategies (positive thought validation, repeated positive memory retrieval) are central to memory salience	(Briñol & Petty, 2024; Z. Chen et al., 2025; Colombo et al., 2024)

and emotional regulation in religious contexts.		
Cultural Adaptation & Methodological Challenges	Culturally tailored interventions are essential; empirical validation is limited by challenges in quantifying religious experiences and adapting psychological scales.	(Anli, 2025; Applebaum, 2019; Latif et al., 2024)
Neurobiological & Social Mechanisms	Neuroimaging shows that communal chanting and rituals activate brain regions for emotional regulation and memory consolidation.	(Y.-F. Chen et al., 2022; Cockayne & Salter, 2021; Sik et al., 2024)
Interdisciplinary Frameworks & Gaps	Integrated models (e.g., SALAAM Framework) are emerging, but systematic empirical studies on Maulid memory enhancement are lacking.	(Kaplick et al., 2019; Nabi et al., 2023; Rothman & Coyle, 2020)

Source: Synthesis from reviewed literature (Chen et al., 2025; Contractor et al., 2023; Anli, 2025; Hazaymeh, 2026).

Cultural Variations and Mnemonic Practices of Maulid

Maulid celebrations exhibit rich cultural diversity, incorporating local traditions in Kosovo, Sudan, Indonesia, Algeria, Morocco, and China (Hasani & Mehmeti, 2025; Zhou et al., 2024; Siddiqi, 2024). This cultural adaptation ensures relevance and deepens emotional engagement. Mnemonic techniques are inherent to these practices; the repetitive chanting, formulaic language, rhythmic poetry, and oral transmission of Maulid texts are powerful tools for memorization and internalization (Gintsburg, 2017; Weinrich, 2020). These techniques, reinforced by communal recitation, facilitate both individual memory retention and the preservation of collective religious heritage. Acts of communal generosity, such as distributing food (sadaqah) and performing aqiqah, further strengthen social bonds and act as psychosocial mechanisms for building trust and solidarity (Shaleh et al., 2025; Sulfinadia et al., 2023).

Cognitive, Emotional, and Mental Health Benefits

Empirical evidence associates participation in religious commemorations like Maulid with significant mental health benefits. These include reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, lower levels of rumination, and enhanced resilience, self-acceptance, and spiritual calmness (Zahir & Qoronfleh, 2025; Pohan et al., 2024). The integration of Islamic spiritual practices with modern psychotherapeutic models shows particular promise. For instance, dhikr has been shown to reduce anxiety and improve sleep quality, and its integration with mindfulness-based therapies enhances treatment efficacy and cultural acceptability (Wijayanti et al., 2025; Abdulkerim & Li, 2022; Isgardarova, 2024). Models like Islamically Modified Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (IM-CBT) and the SALAAM framework exemplify successful integrations that support memory, emotional regulation, and spiritual well-being (Munawar et al., 2025; Kaplick et al., 2019).

Gaps in Literature and Future Directions

Despite promising intersections, significant research gaps persist. There is a scarcity of empirical studies that directly investigate the application of PTT within the specific context of Maulid (Anli, 2025). Methodological challenges abound, particularly in quantifying subjective spiritual experiences and adapting Western-developed psychological scales and interventions to Islamic contexts without compromising religious authenticity (Applebaum, 2019; Latif et al.,

2024). The lack of standardized tools to measure memory and emotional outcomes specific to religious commemorations further hinders robust evaluation.

Future research must prioritize culturally sensitive and interdisciplinary methodologies. Key directions include: 1) Conducting mixed-methods studies that combine neuroimaging with qualitative interviews to explore individualized positive thought strategies during Maulid; 2) Developing and validating culturally adapted intervention protocols that merge Prophetic psychotherapy (iman, islam, ihsan) with modern techniques like mindfulness and cognitive restructuring (Zulkipli et al., 2025; Rothman & Coyle, 2020); 3) Creating standardized assessment tools for religious memory and emotional outcomes; and 4) Expanding interdisciplinary frameworks (e.g., SALAAM) to systematically evaluate and guide the integration of positive psychology and Islamic spiritual practices (Tanhan, 2019; Aldahadha & Al Dwakat, 2025).

Conclusion

The integration of Positive Thoughts Therapy with the rituals and spiritual practices of Maulid presents a compelling, culturally congruent approach to enhancing cognitive and emotional well-being. This synthesis demonstrates that meta-cognitive strategies, gratitude, hope, optimism interventions, and communal practices like dhikr and chanting are central to these benefits, operating through well-supported neurobiological and psychosocial mechanisms. Maulid provides a natural, rich context for positive memory encoding, emotional regulation, and social cohesion. However, to fully realize this potential, the field must address existing research gaps through methodological innovation, cultural adaptation, and rigorous empirical study. By grounding interventions in both psychological theory and religious tradition, this integrative approach can offer holistic support for mental, emotional, and spiritual health within Muslim communities.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to the Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kelantan, for providing the research facilities and institutional support essential to the completion of this conceptual synthesis. The authors also extend their gratitude to Perpustakaan Tengku Anis and Perpustakaan Tun Abdul Razak for their invaluable assistance and access to resources that greatly supported this work. Appreciation is further conveyed to colleagues for their insightful comments and constructive feedback throughout the development of this manuscript.

References

- Anlı, G. (2025). Positive Psychology Practices in Muslim Communities: A Systematic Review. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 64(5), 3448 – 3470. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-024-02111-9>
- Briñol, P., & Petty, R. (2024). Fundamental processes of positive change. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 37(1), 202–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2024.2424146>
- Colombo, D., Pavani, J.-B., Quoidbach, J., et al. (2024). Savouring the Present to Better Recall the Past. *Journal of Happiness Studies*. 25(1-2), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-024-00721-2>
- Contractor, A.A., Messman, B., Gould, P., et al. (2023). Impacts of repeated retrieval of positive and neutral memories on post-trauma health: An investigative pilot study. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 81, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbtep.2023.101887>
- Gao, J., Leung, H.K., Wu, B.W.Y., et al. (2019). The neurophysiological correlates of religious chanting. *Scientific Reports*, 9(1), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-40200-w>
- Hasani, I., & Mehmeti, S. (2025). Historical and Spiritual Manifestations of Mawlid Celebrations in the Republic of Kosovo. *Afkar*, 27(1), 141 – 164, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol27no1.4>
- Kaplick, P.M., Chaudhary, Y., Hasan, A., et al. (2019). An Interdisciplinary Framework for Islamic Cognitive Theories. *Zygon*, 54(1), 66 – 85, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12500>
- Munawar, K., Ravi, T., Jones, D., & Choudhry, F.R. (2025). Islamically Modified Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Muslims with Mental Illness: A Systematic Review. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 12(2), 161 – 178, <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000338>
- Omais, S. (2025). Happiness and Well-Being in Islam: Intersections Between Positive Psychology, Psychology of Religion and Islamic Psychology. *Happiness and Well-Being in Islam*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-95353-8>
- Rothman, A., & Coyle, A. (2020). Conceptualizing an Islamic psychotherapy: A grounded theory study. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 7, 197–213. <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000219>
- Shaleh, A.R., Bahri, S., Abraar, M.N., et al. (2025). Recitation of Seurembek, psychological well-being, and community resilience from the perspective of positive psychology. *Psikohumaniora*, 10(2), 277 – 296. <https://doi.org/10.21580/pjpp.v10i2.27842>
- Sik, H.H., Skouras, S., Gao, J., et al. (2024). Religious Chanting and Self-Related Brain Regions: A Multi-Modal Neuroimaging Study. *Journal of Visualized Experiments*, 2024(207), <https://doi.org/10.3791/66221>
- Suldo, S.M., Fefer, S.A., & Shum, K.Z. (2024). *Providing Positive Psychology Interventions in Group Counseling. Handbook of Cognitive-Behavior Group Therapy with Children and Adolescents: Second Edition*, 270 – 291. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351213073-18>
- Wijayanti, L., Septianingrum, Y., Sultoni, A., et al. (2025). Effectiveness of Combination Dhikr and Salawat on Anxiety and Sleep Quality in Hemodialysis Patients in Indonesia: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 64(4), 2542 – 2557. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-025-02342-2>
- Xygalatas, D., Lang, M., Maño, P., Krátký, J., & Fischer, R. (2024). Emotional contagion in a collective ritual. *American Journal of Human Biology*, 36(12). <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajhb.24111>
- Zulkipli, S.N., Suliaman, I., Abidin, M.S.Z., & Hidayat, Z. (2025). Internalization of Iman, Islam, and Ihsan as the Foundation of Prophetic Psychotherapy for Mental Health: A Thematic Analysis of Sahih al-Bukhari Hadiths. *AlBayan*, 23(2), 289 – 331, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajhb.2411110.1163/22321969-20250175>