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THE CONCEPT OF "HERE AND NOW" IN GESTALT THERAPY AND ISLAM: A COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

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Abstract

The concept of here and now is one of the fundamental principles of Gestalt psychotherapy, emphasizing awareness of present experiences to enhance psychological functioning and therapeutic change. Although this concept has been widely discussed in Western psychology, its compatibility with the Islamic worldview remains insufficiently explored, particularly regarding how present-moment awareness relates to beliefs about the past, the future, and the hereafter. This study aims to critically compare the conceptual foundations of the here and now from Western psychological and Islamic perspectives by identifying both their reciprocal and incongruent dimensions. Employing a qualitative literature review with a comparative analytical approach, this study synthesizes classical and contemporary literature from psychology, philosophy, and Islamic scholarship. The analysis demonstrates that both perspectives emphasize present-moment awareness, intentional action, and personal transformation. However, they differ in their underlying philosophical foundations. Western psychology generally promotes present-focused awareness to reduce psychological distress associated with excessive preoccupation with the past and future, whereas the Islamic perspective encourages optimizing the present as a means of fulfilling spiritual responsibility, learning from the past (ibrah), and preparing for the certainty of the hereafter. Based on these findings, this paper proposes a conceptual framework that distinguishes the shared and divergent dimensions of the here and now across both paradigms. This framework contributes to the theoretical development of culturally and spiritually responsive counseling, particularly for Muslim psychologists and counselors seeking to integrate Gestalt principles with Islamic values.

Keywords: *Here and Now; Gestalt Therapy; Islamic Psychology; Comparative Analysis; Islamic Counseling*

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Abstrak

Konsep "Here and Now" adalah salah satu prinsip fundamental psikoterapi Gestalt, yang menekankan kesadaran akan pengalaman saat ini untuk meningkatkan fungsi psikologis dan perubahan terapeutik. Meskipun konsep ini telah banyak dibahas dalam psikologi Barat, kompatibilitasnya dengan pandangan dunia Islam masih kurang dieksplorasi, khususnya mengenai bagaimana kesadaran saat ini berkaitan dengan keyakinan tentang masa lalu, masa depan, dan akhirat. Studi ini bertujuan untuk secara kritis membandingkan landasan konseptual "Here and Now" dari perspektif psikologi Barat dan Islam dengan mengidentifikasi dimensi timbal balik dan tidak selarasnya. Dengan menggunakan tinjauan pustaka kualitatif dengan pendekatan analitis komparatif, studi ini mensintesis literatur klasik dan kontemporer dari psikologi, filsafat, dan kajian Islam. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa kedua perspektif tersebut menekankan kesadaran saat ini, tindakan yang disengaja, dan transformasi pribadi. Namun, keduanya berbeda dalam landasan filosofis yang mendasarinya. Psikologi Barat umumnya mendorong kesadaran yang berfokus pada masa kini untuk mengurangi tekanan psikologis yang terkait dengan terlalu terpaku pada masa lalu dan masa depan, sedangkan perspektif Islam mendorong optimalisasi masa kini sebagai sarana untuk memenuhi tanggung jawab spiritual, belajar dari masa lalu (ibrah), dan mempersiapkan diri untuk kepastian akhirat. Berdasarkan temuan ini, makalah ini mengusulkan kerangka kerja konseptual yang membedakan dimensi bersama dan berbeda dari masa kini di kedua paradigma tersebut. Kerangka kerja ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan teoritis konseling yang responsif secara budaya dan spiritual, khususnya bagi psikolog dan konselor Muslim yang berupaya mengintegrasikan prinsip-prinsip Gestalt dengan nilai-nilai Islam.

Kata Kunci: Here and Now; Terapi Gestalt; Psikologi Islam; Analisis Komparatif; Konseling Islam.

Introduction

The here and now is a central principle of Gestalt therapy, directing attention to what client's sense, feel, think, and enact in the therapeutic encounter. Rather than treating the past as irrelevant, Gestalt therapy approaches experience as it becomes active in present awareness and relationship (Perls et al., 1951; Woldt & Toman, 2005; Yontef, 1993). This present-centered orientation is intended to strengthen contact, personal responsibility, and the capacity for deliberate action (Corey, 2020; Wheeler & Axelsson, 2015).

Empirical and practice-oriented literature supports the clinical relevance of present-moment processes. Present-focused distancing is associated with patterns of anxiety and depression (Rinaldi et al., 2017), mindfulness research links

nonjudgmental awareness with measurable attentional and self-regulatory processes (Baer et al., 2008; Farb et al., 2007), and a recent multiple-case study indicates that Gestalt therapy can support change among clients with common mental disorders, while also showing that outcomes may vary according to personality integration (Kaisler et al., 2023). These findings do not by themselves establish an Islamic Gestalt model, but they demonstrate why present-moment awareness deserves culturally grounded examination in counseling practice.

For Muslim clients, an exclusively decontextualized reading of the present may be insufficient. Islamic thought values focused and intentional action in the present while retaining moral learning from the past through *ibrah* (lesson), *hikmah* (wisdom), and *taubah* (repentance), and orienting future action through *tawakkul* (reliance on Allah) and accountability in the Hereafter. Concepts such as *khusyu'* (attentive humility), *muraqabah* (awareness of Allah), and *itqan* (excellence and diligence) can therefore enrich present awareness without severing it from spiritual purpose. The issue is not whether Muslims should attend to the present, but how the present is interpreted within a worldview that connects temporal experience, responsibility, and ultimate accountability.

Although the here and now is widely discussed in Western psychotherapy, comparatively little scholarship has systematically examined its convergence with and divergence from an Islamic conception of time and human responsibility. This gap limits the theoretical basis for culturally and spiritually responsive use of Gestalt principles with Muslim populations. A comparative framework is therefore needed to prevent two opposite errors: importing a therapeutic concept without examining its worldview assumptions or rejecting a clinically useful process merely because it originated outside Islamic scholarship.

Accordingly, this paper asks: (1) How is the here and now conceptualized in Western psychology, particularly Gestalt therapy? (2) How is it understood within the Islamic worldview? (3) Which reciprocal and incongruent dimensions emerge from comparison? and (4) How can these insights inform culturally responsive counseling?

The study critically compares both traditions and proposes an integrative conceptual framework that preserves the psychological value of present awareness while locating it within Islamic understandings of past learning, present responsibility, and preparation for the Hereafter.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative, concept-driven literature review and comparative philosophical analysis. The purpose was interpretive rather than statistical: to clarify how the here and now is constructed within Gestalt and related Western psychological literature, how temporality and present responsibility are understood in Islamic sources, and where the two conceptual systems converge or diverge (Moleong, 2010; Zed, 2008). Because the study did not aim to estimate an intervention effect or exhaustively aggregate all publications, it should be understood as a purposive critical review rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis.

Literature was selected through purposive searching and reference chaining around combinations of the terms here and now, Gestalt therapy, present-moment awareness, mindfulness, temporal focus, anxiety, depression, Islam, Islamic psychology, *khusyu', muraqabah, itqan, ibrah, hikmah, taubah, tawakkul*, and Hereafter. Sources were eligible when they: (a) directly defined or explained present-moment awareness in Gestalt therapy or closely related psychological literature; (b) reported empirical or practice-relevant evidence concerning present focus, mindfulness, or Gestalt intervention; (c) addressed Islamic understandings of time, worship, moral agency, repentance, trust in Allah, or eschatological accountability; or (d) contributed to comparative interpretation or counseling application. Sources were excluded when they mentioned the relevant terms only incidentally, duplicated an argument without adding conceptual value, or could not support one of the comparison domains.

The final analytical corpus comprised the 53 sources listed in the reference section, supplemented by Qur'anic verses and Hadith used as primary Islamic textual evidence. The corpus included foundational Gestalt texts, contemporary counseling and psychotherapy literature, empirical studies, psychological theory and

measurement research, and classical or contemporary Islamic scholarship. Foundational sources were retained to represent the internal logic of each tradition, while contemporary and empirical publications were used to examine current psychological relevance and potential counseling applications.

Analysis proceeded in four stages. First, relevant passages were extracted and coded according to their treatment of the past, present, future, purpose of awareness, human agency, psychological change, spiritual responsibility, and ultimate outcome. Second, related codes were grouped into higher-order categories, including present awareness, contact and authenticity, psychological distress, *ibrah and hikmah, taubah, khusyu'* and *muraqabah, itqan* and intentional action, *tawakkul*, and accountability in the Hereafter. Third, categories were entered into a comparative matrix to identify reciprocal dimensions, incongruent assumptions, and possible integrative relationships. Fourth, the synthesis was reread across both traditions and translated into the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 and the counseling implications developed below.

Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation across foundational texts, empirical studies, theoretical works, and Islamic primary and interpretive sources; repeated comparison between the emerging categories and the original texts; explicit attention to both convergence and disagreement rather than forcing equivalence; and maintenance of a traceable link between the synthesis, Tables 1 and 2, Figure 1, and the cited literature. Interpretations were also checked for negative or boundary cases, particularly the mistaken assumptions that Gestalt necessarily ignores the past or that Islamic future orientation necessarily produces anxiety. These procedures support conceptual trustworthiness while acknowledging that the resulting framework remains theoretical and requires empirical validation.

Result and Discussion

1. History And Concept Of Here And Now According To The West

Understanding "here and now" begins with grasping the main approach in which this concept was developed, namely in gestalt therapy. Perls, Fritz, and Goodman

developed a therapy concept that emphasizes the fundamental idea of "contact" (Perls et al., 1951). This term encapsulated the key insights of Gestalt psychology: Rather than passively receiving and adapting to an objective reality, we engage actively with our world by reaching out, selecting, interpreting, and organizing holistic perceptions of our situations. Subsequently, we base our behaviors or actions on these interpreted perceptions. This process typically occurs automatically in a unified act of perception, interpretation, and action, often without conscious reflection. Alternatively, we may pause to consciously analyze, strategize, evaluate, and make deliberate choices while trying to understand the situation. In both cases, the underlying process remains the same: We approach situations with certain needs, some of which are conscious while others are not fully acknowledged. We then interpret the situation and respond accordingly based on our perceptions and subjective needs (Wheeler & Axelsson, 2015).

Gestalt therapy operates on the premise that individuals possess the capability to effectively manage their own life challenges. The main role of the therapist is to help clients fully engage with their current experiences in the present moment by highlighting behaviors that hinder this awareness (Bowins, 2021). Therefore, Gestalt therapy is fundamentally non-interpretative, encouraging clients to take charge of the therapeutic process themselves. They are empowered to formulate their own interpretations, express their own thoughts, and uncover their own meanings. Ultimately, clients are urged to directly confront present struggles stemming from unresolved past issues. Through experiencing and discussing these conflicts, clients gradually broaden their awareness (Corey, 2020). Meanwhile, a Gestalt therapist engages in two simultaneous actions when working with a client. The therapist engages in authentic interaction with the client while simultaneously observing how the client organizes this interaction, usually within one hour.

Furthermore, six essential components in Gestalt therapy that need to be considered are (a) the continuum of experience, (b) here and now, (c) the theory of paradoxical change, (d) experiments, (e) authentic encounter, and (f) process-oriented diagnosis (Woldt & Toman, 2005). "Here and now" is one of the most famous concepts

in Gestalt therapy. Gestalt therapy is a phenomenological-existential therapy developed in the 1940s by Fritz, Perls, and Goodman. Gestalt Therapy is grounded in the premise that individuals must find their own path in life and accept personal responsibility if they hope for maturity. Primarily operating on the principle of awareness, Gestalt therapy focuses on the "what" and "how" of behavior and experience in the here and now by integrating fragmented and unconscious parts of the personality (Dianti & Netrawati, 2021). As a therapy oriented toward phenomenological awareness, Gestalt emphasizes what is felt. Therapists and clients in Gestalt therapy engage in a phenomenological dialogue where they communicate about their phenomenological perspectives with the goal of helping clients become aware of what they are doing and how they are doing it. Alongside this process, clients gradually come to accept and appreciate themselves for the phenomena they experience (Yontef, 1993).

As the main concept in gestalt therapy, here and now focuses on the present moment. Here and now trying to build mindfulness, to help individuals experience life more intensely and attentively. This involves observing without judgment what we are experiencing in the moment, without being colored by hopes, worries, or judgments about the experience. Therefore, the “here and now” is a concept that underlies the practice of mindfulness and serves as one of the keys to achieving higher levels of consciousness (American Psychological Association, 2018). A basic belief of Gestalt therapy is that the present encompasses the past and helps influence the future. Everything that we have learned, everything that we have experienced is carried in the present moment. The Gestalt therapist conducts the work with the data of the here and now (Yontef, 1993). In its development, the emphasis on the present moment, when first introduced by Gestalt therapists, was revolutionary for Western psychotherapy. Instead of delving into the past, as done in deeper psychotherapies like Freudian and Jungian approaches, Gestalt focuses on the current moment where the past is embedded and therefore alive and vivid (Woldt & Toman, 2005).

In therapy sessions, the gestalt therapist engages in active listening and observation. Through the cycle of experience (COE) framework, therapists identify the

strengths of clients and also observe how they may hinder their own satisfaction by not channeling their energy towards achieving their desired goals. When the therapist attentively observes the client, they are gathering valuable data. This process of observation is crucial for forming hypotheses about the client's capacity to structure their experiences (Woldt & Toman, 2005).

The therapist's focus on the "here and now" significantly influences how we approach therapeutic interactions. For instance, if a therapist from another discipline notices a client asking questions but not waiting for answers, they might explore how this behavior is influenced by past experiences. In contrast, a Gestalt therapist would examine how these characteristics are currently playing out. For instance, this behavior might reflect a mix of curiosity and reluctance to hear potentially uncomfortable truths. This ambivalence, occurring in the shared space between therapist and client in the present moment, provides valuable insights for therapy. Addressing this ambivalence in real-time can help transform curiosity into a more mature form (Woldt & Toman, 2005). The Gestalt therapist's emphasis on the present moment does not indicate a lack of interest in understanding the development of specific interaction patterns, as we are all driven to comprehend our lives. The focus on the "here and now" underscores the belief that all transformation occurs in the present. Clients often link their current experiences to past life events, contributing to a fuller understanding of how the past influences the present (Woldt & Toman, 2005).

The concept of here and now, as seen in Gestalt therapy, is also a topic of discussion in mindfulness practice. Mindfulness involves focusing on singular attention towards present experiences in a non-judgmental or accepting manner, which allows individuals to be more goal-oriented and accepting without evaluation (Baer et al., 2008). Mindfulness emphasizes pure self-awareness and the acceptance of internal and external events (Baer et al., 2008; Sauer et al., 2013; Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008). This practice originates from meditation traditions (Kang & Whittingham, 2010)and stresses continuous awareness and acceptance in each moment (Thompson & Gauntlett-Gilbert, 2008).

Farb et al., (2007) identified two neural circuits involved in mindfulness: a midline circuit for observing, narrating, and witnessing the self, and a lateralized circuit for sensing, perceiving, and experiencing the self. It is suggested that mindfulness integrates these circuits in real time, acknowledging their differences, by aligning the observing self with present experiences of the experiencing self (Siegel, 2007a, 2007b). This integration represents internal attunement that arises from mindful awareness.

Naik et al., (2013) describe mindfulness as having three distinct characteristics. Firstly, mindfulness emphasizes purpose by encouraging deliberate effort in focusing attention on a specific object or activity, rather than allowing the mind to drift aimlessly. This deliberate focus is intended to cultivate greater awareness and control over one's mental state. Secondly, mindfulness involves presence, which requires complete engagement with the present moment. This means actively attending to current experiences without dwelling on past events or anticipating future outcomes. Thoughts related to the past or future are acknowledged as passing mental events occurring in the present. Lastly, mindfulness emphasizes acceptance, promoting a non-judgmental attitude towards whatever arises in the present moment. This includes acknowledging and observing sensations, thoughts, and emotions without categorizing them as inherently good or bad. Instead, mindfulness encourages a detached observation of these experiences until they naturally subside or transform.

In mindfulness practice, individuals often utilize the "here and now" as a focal point for their attention. This involves concentrating on the sensations of breathing, bodily feelings, or the sights and sounds present in their surroundings. This approach helps them connect with the current moment and develop a feeling of presence and mental clarity. Additionally, mindfulness promotes an attitude of openness and impartiality towards whatever emerges in the present instant. This allows individuals to witness their experiences without becoming entangled in reactive behaviours or automatic thoughts. By being fully engaged and mindful of the present moment, individuals can respond to circumstances with increased clarity, empathy, and calmness. In summary, mindfulness, and the idea of the "here and now" are closely

intertwined as mindfulness practice entails nurturing an awareness of the present moment and a recognition of one's experiences as they unfold in the present.

2. Concept of Here and Now in Islamic Paradigm

Research into the concept of “here and now" from a Western perspective has been explored. Individuals primarily engage directly with their immediate experiences in the present moment, yet they often engage in considerations, evaluations, and planning that extend beyond the current time or location, involving other people's experiences and hypothetical scenarios. The starting point is one's direct encounter with the present moment. Moving beyond this involves creating mental representations of what is not directly experienced, and the further removed an object is from direct experience, the more abstractly it is construed.

Lower-level construal allows individuals to immerse themselves in the specific details of their immediate circumstances, while higher-level construal enables them to assess the broader significance that may apply across various scenarios (Liberman & Trope, 2008). According to Liberman & Trope (2008), different dimensions of distance are mentally linked, and distancing along any of these dimensions leads to higher levels of construal, which in turn have comparable effects on prediction, evaluation, and behavior.

In Islam, the concept of "here and now" is deeply rooted in the teachings of the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad. It emphasizes the importance of living in the present moment, focusing on one's spiritual growth, and being mindful of one's thoughts, emotions, and actions. This concept is closely tied to the idea of mindfulness and contemplation, which are essential aspects of Islamic meditation and spiritual development. One important aspect of the here and now concept in Islam is spiritual improvement through prayer (*dua*). Prayer (*dua*) in Muslim life serves as a vital exchange for blessing, prosperity, and maintaining relationships between life, the afterlife, and the divine, shaping villagers' temporal orientations towards the past, present, and future (Henig, 2020).

The Qur'an encourages Muslims to be present in the moment, free from distractions and worries about the past or future. However, Islam, as a comprehensive religion (syumul) does not deny the past and the future. This is reflected in verses such as *"Say, 'O Muhammad, we believe in Allah and the Revelation given to us, and in Abraham, Ismail, Isaac Jacob and the tribes. We believe in the Revelation revealed to Moses, Isa. and all the other prophets of their Lord. We make no distinction between them, and to Him we submit.'"* (3:83; 2:136). This verse highlights the importance of living in the present, submitting to Allah's guidance, and following the teachings of all the prophets (Ahmad, 2005).

The Prophet Muhammad also emphasized the importance of living in the present. He said, *"Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him speak goodness or remain silent."* This hadith encourages Muslims to focus on their spiritual growth and to avoid unnecessary speech. It also highlights the value of silence and contemplation, which are essential for spiritual development. In Islamic meditation, the concept of "here and now" is often referred to as "*muraqabah*." This involves being mindful of one's thoughts, emotions, and actions, and cultivating a sense of presence and awareness in the moment. It is believed that by focusing on the present, one can develop a deeper connection with Allah and achieve spiritual growth (Yaqeen Institute, 2024). In addition to the concept of muraqabah, the here and now in Islam is also very visible when drawn into worship such as *salah* and *dhikr*. Being *khusyu'* in salah involves maintaining a focused and humble heart while standing before Allah SWT (Rusli, 2016). In order to complete the prayer movement perfectly, Islam provides guidance to its adherents to carry it out with *tuma'ninah* (pure tranquility). *Tuma'ninah*, in particular, relies on calm which is difficult to obtain if someone does not reach "here and now". This state of *tuma'ninah* has also been seen to have a positive impact on mental health (Wulandari et al., 2022).

Furthermore, in the Islamic perspective, the notion of the present moment is intricately linked with the belief in the afterlife and hereafter, which holds greater significance than worldly matters (Husseini, 1956). Islamic beliefs regarding the afterlife underscore the significance of the divine in the context of humanity,

encompassing both the present life and the hereafter. This approach highlights the value of spiritual readiness for the hereafter, prioritizing preparation beyond material concerns. Nonetheless, contemporary Islamic scholars advocate for a balanced approach that acknowledges the importance of worldly pursuits, such as scientific advancement, economic growth, and democratic principles, to foster progress and well-being (Husseini, 1956). Islamic beliefs regarding the afterlife underscore the significance of the divine in the context of humanity, encompassing both the present life and the hereafter (Smith, 1977).

Belief in the Hereafter is a fundamental pillar of Islamic faith, essential for completing one's belief as a Muslim. While the concept of life after death and the Hereafter is present in all divine religions, Islam places unique emphasis on this belief. The Holy Quran underscores the paramount importance of believing in the Hereafter, ranking it second only to belief in God. This topic is extensively covered in the Quran, spanning nearly one third of its verses with over 1200 mentions. Virtually every page of the Quran touches upon the concept of the Hereafter. Belief in God and the Hereafter are intertwined in the Quran about 30 times, delineating a clear boundary between atheism and religious belief in Islamic theology. In Islam, belief in the Hereafter entails the resurrection of the soul and body on the Day of Judgment for accountability (Iqbal et al., 2023).

These studies indicate that Islam integrates the concept of the present moment by stressing the significance of reality and human well-being in the current world, alongside contemplation of the Hereafter, emphasizing Allah's centrality in all aspects of life (Corazza, 2004; Hasanah, 2010; Stone, 1981). In summary, the concept of "here and now" in Islam emphasizes the importance of living in the present moment, focusing on spiritual growth, and being mindful of one's thoughts, emotions, and actions. It is closely tied to the idea of mindfulness and contemplation, which are essential aspects of Islamic meditation and spiritual development.

3. Reciprocity And Incongruity Here And Now Between Islam And West Concept

Reciprocity Between Western and Islamic Concepts of Here and Now

Islam views "the framework of time" as something very important and valued as a gift from Allah. Almost all acts of worship in Islam are connected to time, such as the prayers, Hajj, and fasting during Ramadan (Sabiq, 1991). One surah in the Quran, Al-Asr, is specifically dedicated to highlighting the importance of time in Islam. Al-'Asr translates to "time" or "period." Through time, humans conduct their activities (Ghoffar, 2008). Allah swears by time in this surah to emphasize that humans are indeed at loss, destined for ruin, if they do not fill their time with faith, righteous deeds, and advising each other in truth and patience (Ghoffar, 2008). Therefore, filling time with righteous deeds is a priority and requirement in religion.

If we look at the framework of time, we find three divisions: the past, present, and future (Shipp & Aeon, 2019). This division of time also becomes a focus in many psychological approaches. Individually, people typically have the ability to direct their attention to the past, present, and/or future. This ability is known as temporal focus. Temporal focus can operate at various levels, with individuals living in the moment, recalling the past, or envisioning their future (Shipp & Aeon, 2019). On the other hand, in Islam times and moments are specifically designated in various versions depending on the conditions such as *ghadah, 'am, sanah, waqt, dahr, ajal, 'ashr, sa'ah, layl, nahar, yawm, shahr, hin, ' ashr, bukrah, ashila, 'asyiyya', 'isya'* (Wardah, 2018).

In the Qur'an, time is expressed in two distinct ways: terms denoting durations with definite boundaries and terms denoting durations without clear boundaries. Expressions indicating a clearly defined duration highlight specific times or moments of virtue, worship, and the passage of time marked by celestial events like the rotation of the sun and moon, all of which are observable by humans. On the other hand, expressions indicating durations without clear boundaries encompass concepts like inevitability, resurrection, spiritual mastery, death, determination of death, and the day of judgment—events that remain unknown to anyone (Wardah, 2018).

In this context, human experiences in the past and the present moment are considered part of the known time. However, what will happen in the future is

unknown. Yet, this uncertainty does not mean that humans should disregard it. On the contrary, it serves as a basis for humans to earnestly utilize the present moment, because believers understand that the future time (the hereafter) is certain. The importance of here and now in Islam is for example shown in worship. Worship in Islam is not enough just to carry it out and merely discharge one's obligations. More than that, worship needs to be appreciated and interpreted (Wan Ismail & Mohamad Saleh, 2022). This appreciation and meaning will be present if a person present himself fully during the worship and humbles himself to Allah in carrying it out (*khusyuk*) (Razif, 2017). Moreover, as a Muslim in any case, he is not only required to be present here and now, but also required to be able to carry out everything seriously (*Iitqan*). *Itqan* brings enthusiasm to a Muslim to carry out everything as perfectly as possible accompanied by strong efforts so as not to miss the appointed time (Ayub, 2017).

In another context, "here and now" is often used to refer to the current condition or state, which pertains to this world (*dunya*/ the material or physical world) and the present time (the current moment). This contrasts with the concept of the "hereafter" or "*al-akhira*," which refers to the life after death in Islamic belief (Abdel Haleem, 1998). With this, Islam actually has no contradiction, because both of these situation Allah created and recognized very well. If we separate and only focus on one of them, especially if here and now is interpreted as solely focusing on the world (*dunya*), then this is a mistake. Focusing only on the hereafter is also a mistake, because the hereafter can only be achieved if we utilize the potential that exists in the world. This is in line with the words of Allah "*But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world: but do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief*" (28: 77). Therefore, if here and now is interpreted as a world where with the worldly pleasures that Allah has given, we can achieve a better life in the afterlife, namely heaven, then here and now like this is something that is praiseworthy and recommended. Because a believer should use his world for things that are beneficial for his afterlife, and does not seek the world in a way that is arrogant and haughty (Tuasikal, 2013).

Until this point, we can draw several conclusions regarding the convergence of Western concepts with Islam, which can be summarized in the following table.

Table 1. Reciprocal Dimensions of the "Here and Now" in Western and Islamic Perspectives

Western Concept	General View in Islam	Alternative Concepts in Islam	Underlying Foundation	Counseling Implication	Explanatory Information
Here and now: Focus on the present moment, particularly during ongoing experience and action.	Islam embraces present-moment awareness while encouraging believers to make the best use of the present in obedience to Allah.	• *Khusyu'* (full concentration in worship) • *Itqan* (excellence in every action) • *Muraqabah* (awareness that Allah is always observing one's actions)	**Western:** Phenomenological awareness and authentic contact. **Islam:** God-consciousness (*taqwa*) and spiritual accountability.	Both perspectives encourage counselors to increase clients' awareness of their present experience. However, Muslim counselors may additionally integrate spiritual awareness and intentional worship into present-focused interventions.	The reciprocal dimension lies in encouraging individuals to optimize the present moment. Nevertheless, Islam interprets present awareness as preparation for the Hereafter through conscious obedience and closeness to Allah.
Here and now as engagement with worldly life (*al-hayah al-dunya*).	Islam recognizes worldly life as meaningful because it serves as preparation for the Hereafter.	• *Hasanah fi al-Dunya* • *Hayatan Tayyibah*	**Western:** Human flourishing within present life. **Islam:** Worldly life as a trust and preparation for eternal life.	Counselors may encourage clients to pursue psychological well-being while simultaneously recognizing personal values, moral responsibility, and long-term spiritual goals.	Both paradigms acknowledge the importance of engaging fully with the present world. However, Islam views worldly engagement as inseparable from preparation for the Hereafter.

Interpretation of Reciprocity

The reciprocal dimensions identified in Table 1 suggest that the similarities between the Western and Islamic understandings of the *here and now* should not be interpreted as evidence that both paradigms share identical philosophical assumptions. Rather, these similarities emerge because both traditions recognize that meaningful personal transformation can only occur through conscious engagement with the present moment. Regardless of their different intellectual and theological backgrounds, both perspectives acknowledge that human awareness, intentionality, and responsible action are fundamentally enacted in the present rather than in the past or the future. Consequently, the present moment functions as the primary context in which individuals experience reality, make decisions, and initiate change.

From the perspective of classical Gestalt therapy, present-moment awareness serves as the foundation for increasing clients' awareness of their thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, and interpersonal interactions. By encouraging authentic contact with immediate experience, Gestalt therapy seeks to facilitate psychological integration and enhance individuals' capacity for self-regulation and personal growth. In contrast, the Islamic perspective places similar emphasis on conscious presence but interprets it within a broader spiritual framework. Concepts such as *khusyu'*, *muraqabah*, and *itqan* encourage Muslims to remain fully present while simultaneously maintaining awareness of Allah, moral responsibility, and the ultimate purpose of human existence. Thus, although both paradigms emphasize awareness and intentional action, the source of motivation and the ultimate meaning attributed to these practices differ substantially.

These observations indicate that the reciprocity identified in this study is primarily functional rather than philosophical. In other words, both perspectives promote present-moment awareness because it facilitates meaningful action, yet they differ in the worldview that legitimizes such action. While the Western therapeutic tradition generally frames awareness as a pathway toward psychological well-being and authentic living, the Islamic worldview extends the significance of present awareness beyond psychological functioning by integrating ethical responsibility,

spiritual consciousness, and preparation for the Hereafter. This shared functional emphasis, despite differing philosophical foundations, provides an important basis for dialogue between Gestalt psychotherapy and Islamic counseling, and serves as the starting point for developing a culturally responsive conceptual framework.

On the other hand, many psychologists believe that when someone focuses on the past, that person will have maladaptive work and life outcomes such as depression (Shipp & Aeon, 2019). Conversely, when we concentrate on uncertainty regarding potential future threats, it hampers our capacity to evade or lessen their adverse consequences, leading to the onset of anxiety (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013). Because of these assumptions, Gestalt offers to focus on the current moment and the ongoing process of the client experience (Kaisler et al., 2023). Conditions such as those above where depression and anxiety become consequences for the past and future may occur. However, we also need to openly accept that current research shows that current focus increases life satisfaction but is correlated with impulsive behavior. Meanwhile, the focus on the future is more cognitive and leads to life and work achievements (Shipp & Aeon, 2019). This shows that focusing on the present does not always produce good things and neither does thinking about the future.

Islam accepts all states of time, whether past, future, and especially the present. Among all these time frames, Allah also greatly emphasizes the present moment. However, the belief in Islam about the present exists with the awareness that believers cannot reach back into the past, and we do not know if we will still have a chance to live in the future. Meanwhile, the hereafter is a certainty that Muslims will experience based on their faith. Therefore, there is no other choice for a Muslim except to make use of the present moment. Thus, the concept of "here and now" in Islam emerges from a different idea compared to the West. The West utilizes the present to avoid excessive sensitivity towards the future, which leads to anxiety and depression about the past (Joyce & Sills, 2018). On the contrary, "here and now" in Islam arises from the motivation that we need to rectify the past and prepare for the future. And the best time to utilize it is by optimizing the "here and now," or the present.

Regret in Islam, especially regretting mistakes and errors from the past, is considered praiseworthy. Regretting sins is indeed part of the highly encouraged process of repentance (Tuasikal, 2012). However, mere regret alone is not sufficient to fulfill the conditions of repentance because two other conditions are required: abandoning the wrongdoing and resolving not to repeat it (Ridho, 2019). In fulfilling all these conditions, we are also required to act promptly because we do not know if we will have the opportunity tomorrow or not (3:133). Therefore, to act promptly in making amends for past wrongdoings, the answer is to start doing it immediately "here and now". In Islam, everything that happens in the past should not be discarded, but rather taken as a lesson (Ibrah or lesson learned) (59:2). Ibrah can lead us to wisdom and insight (hikmah), because through Ibrah we can gain wisdom in the form of lessons or moral messages that can be drawn from events or stories that occurred in the past.

4. Incongruity Between Western and Islamic Concepts

Critical Analysis of the Incongruity

Besides approaching the past with wisdom, Islam also guides us in dealing with the future effectively. The uncertainty of the future (or what is known in Islam as the destiny that will unfold) brings many benefits. Our lack of knowledge about the future in Islam doesn't always lead us to anxiety; instead, it encourages vigilance. Muslims also approach the future with calmness because we know that whatever happens is what Allah has decreed, and what Allah has not decreed will not occur (Tuasikal, 2010). Our lack of knowledge about the future encourages us to continue striving for the best (*ikhtiar bil itqan*), and to place all our efforts with reliance on God (*tawakkul*) (Tuasikal, 2010). Striving diligently and supplementing our efforts with reliance on God (tawakkul) are both valued in Islam. Hence, when is the best time to strive and perfect our reliance on God? The answer is undoubtedly "here and now."

Based on the explanations above, it can be concluded that the fundamental incongruity between Islam and the West in interpreting "here and now" is illustrated in the following table.

Table 2. Incongruity Between Western and Islamic Concepts of the "Here and Now"

Concept	Basis of Emergence		Philosophical Difference	Counseling Implication	Explanatory Information
	Western	Islamic			
Here and now: Focus on the present moment, especially when engaging in ongoing experience and action.	The emphasis on the present emerged within classical Gestalt therapy as a therapeutic response to excessive attachment to unresolved past experiences and anticipatory anxiety about uncertain future events.	Muslims believe in the certainty of the Hereafter and therefore strive to make the best use of the present moment. Present awareness is motivated by the responsibility to rectify past mistakes, perform righteous deeds, and prepare for life after death.	**Western:** Present awareness is primarily grounded in a phenomenological and therapeutic orientation aimed at psychological integration. **Islamic:** Present awareness is grounded in a theocentric worldview that integrates psychological awareness with spiritual accountability before Allah.	Present-focused interventions remain valuable in counseling. However, for Muslim clients, present awareness may be enriched through concepts such as *khusyu'*, *muraqabah*, *itqan*, *taubah*, and *tawakkul*, enabling psychological and spiritual growth simultaneously.	The past is not always a source of depression; in Islam it may become a source of *ibrah* (lessons) and *hikmah* (wisdom). Likewise, the future is not necessarily a source of anxiety but encourages vigilance, responsibility, and thoughtful preparation while maintaining trust in Allah.
Here and now: Focus solely on worldly life and sever ties with the Hereafter.	In its more secular interpretation, the *here and now* may be understood as emphasizing present worldly existence without explicit reference to life after death.	Islam recognizes worldly life (*al-hayat al-dunya*) as meaningful, yet always as preparation for the Hereafter. Separating worldly life from the Hereafter contradicts the Islamic worldview and the pillars of faith.	**Western:** Human flourishing is often interpreted within the context of present earthly existence. **Islamic:** Worldly life and the Hereafter constitute an inseparable continuum in human existence.	Counseling should encourage clients to engage fully in present life while simultaneously considering long-term moral, spiritual, and existential goals. This perspective allows psychological well-being to be integrated with spiritual well-being.	Islam strongly emphasizes the importance of the Hereafter without neglecting worldly life. Muslims are encouraged to seek *hasanah fi al-dunya* and *hasanah fi al-akhirah*, reflecting a balanced orientation toward both dimensions of existence.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The present synthesis both supports and extends previous psychological research. Rinaldi et al. (2017) showed that psychological distance from the present differs across anxiety and depression, supporting the clinical importance of temporal orientation. Baer et al. (2008) and Farb et al. (2007) demonstrated that present-centered awareness involves identifiable facets and neural modes rather than a vague instruction to stop thinking about the past or future. Similarly, Kaisler et al. (2023) provided practice-based evidence that Gestalt therapy may facilitate change in common mental disorders, while indicating that client structure and context influence the therapeutic process. The current analysis extends these studies by arguing that, for Muslim clients, present awareness also carries moral, relational, and eschatological meaning.

The synthesis also qualifies interpretations of Gestalt that portray the here and now as temporal isolation. Classical and contemporary Gestalt sources maintain that past experience is available through its present manifestation (Woldt & Toman, 2005; Yontef, 1993). This position partially converges with the Islamic emphasis on transforming the past into ibrah, hikmah, and taubah. The divergence lies mainly in purpose and ontology: Gestalt literature generally frames present awareness in terms of contact, integration, and psychological growth, whereas Islamic sources additionally situate action before Allah and in relation to the Hereafter. The proposed framework therefore does not simply attach Islamic terminology to an existing technique; it identifies where therapeutic processes may be shared while their ultimate meanings remain distinct.

Toward an Integrative Understanding of the Here and Now

Following the comparative analysis presented in Tables 1 and 2, this study proposes an integrated conceptual framework to illustrate the relationship between the Western and Islamic understandings of the *here and now*. As shown in Figure 1, both paradigms recognize the importance of present-moment awareness as the primary context in which personal transformation occurs. However, they differ in the philosophical foundations that give meaning to the present. The Western perspective primarily emphasizes present awareness to facilitate authentic contact, reduce psychological distress associated with excessive attachment to the

past or anxiety about the future, and promote psychological growth. In contrast, the Islamic perspective situates present awareness within a broader spiritual worldview in which the present serves as the only moment in which believers can learn from the past, fulfil their responsibilities, and prepare for the certainty of the Hereafter.

The framework further demonstrates that the *here and now* functions as a dynamic bridge connecting past experiences and future orientation rather than existing as an isolated moment detached from time. Within the Islamic paradigm, past experiences are transformed into *ibrah* (lessons), *hikmah* (wisdom), and *taubah* (repentance), while future orientation is guided by *tawakkul* (trust in Allah) and accountability in the Hereafter. These processes converge in present-moment awareness through values such as *khusyu'*, *muraqabah*, and *itqan*, encouraging intentional and meaningful action. Accordingly, the proposed framework suggests that an Islamic understanding of the *here and now* does not reject the psychological benefits emphasized in Western approaches but rather expands them by integrating spiritual responsibility and eschatological awareness. This conceptual synthesis provides a theoretical foundation for culturally responsive counseling practice, particularly for Muslim psychologists and counselors seeking to integrate Gestalt principles with Islamic values.

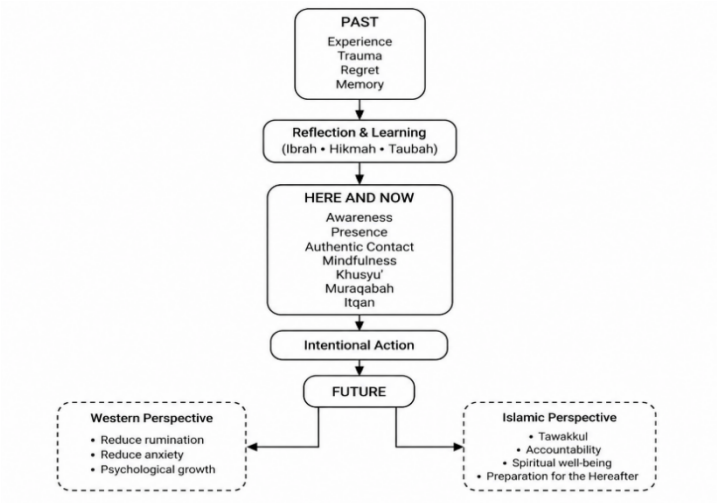


Figure 1. Integrated Conceptual Framework of the "Here and Now" from Western and Islamic Perspectives

Rather than positioning the Western and Islamic perspectives as mutually exclusive, the present analysis suggests that both paradigms offer complementary insights into understanding present-moment awareness. The Western tradition contributes a well-established psychological framework for cultivating awareness, authenticity, and therapeutic change, whereas the Islamic worldview enriches this framework by embedding present awareness within a broader spiritual narrative that connects past reflection, present responsibility, and future accountability before Allah. The conceptual framework proposed in this paper therefore represents a synthesis of these complementary perspectives and offers an initial theoretical foundation for integrating Gestalt principles with Islamic values in culturally responsive counseling practice. Future empirical studies are needed to examine the applicability of this framework in clinical, educational, and counseling settings involving Muslim populations.

Implications for Muslim Counseling Practice

The framework suggests that counselors should assess how a Muslim client understands time before introducing here-and-now exercises. The counselor can ask what the client is noticing in the present, how a past event is shaping the current experience, what lesson or responsibility the client identifies, and how faith informs the next constructive action. This sequence retains the Gestalt focus on immediate awareness while avoiding the implication that the past should be erased or that concern for the future is inherently maladaptive.

In session, Gestalt experiments may be adapted through four principles. First, present sensations, emotions, thoughts, and relational behavior should be explored phenomenologically without premature moral judgment. Second, past experience may be processed as it appears in the present and, where appropriate, connected with ibrah, *hikmah*, or *taubah* rather than repetitive self-condemnation. Third, future-oriented worry may be differentiated from responsible planning: the counselor can support *ikhtiar* and *itqan* while using tawakkul to address unproductive attempts to control uncertainty. Fourth, explicitly religious language or practices, including reflection on

Qur'anic meanings, *du'a*, *dhikr*, *khusyu'*, or *muraqabah*, should be incorporated only with the client's informed preference, adequate counselor competence, and respect for professional and ethical boundaries.

A brief implementation sequence is therefore proposed: establish consent for spiritual integration; identify the client's immediate experience; deepen awareness of bodily, emotional, cognitive, and relational processes; connect relevant past material with learning or repair; translate awareness into a specific present action; and review future responsibility through balanced effort and reliance on Allah. Counselors should avoid using religious concepts to silence distress, impose repentance, bypass trauma processing, or replace indicated psychological or psychiatric care. Supervision, cultural humility, and referral to qualified religious scholars are appropriate when theological questions exceed the counselor's competence.

Conclusion

This study's principal contribution is an Islamic counseling-oriented conceptualization of the here and now. Western Gestalt and Islamic perspectives converge in valuing awareness, intentional action, and transformation in the present. They diverge in the philosophical meaning assigned to that present: Gestalt primarily emphasizes contact, integration, and psychological growth, whereas Islam connects present action with learning from the past, responsibility before Allah, and preparation for the Hereafter. The proposed framework therefore expands rather than rejects the therapeutic value of present awareness.

For practice, Muslim counselors may use here-and-now interventions to explore immediate experience while helping clients transform the past into ibrah, hikmah, or taubah and approach the future through responsible effort, *itqan*, and *tawakkul*. Such integration should remain client-led, ethically bounded, trauma-informed, and consistent with the counselor's competence. It should neither spiritualize all distress nor use religious concepts to avoid necessary psychological assessment and intervention.

The framework remains a conceptual synthesis derived from a purposive literature review and has not yet been empirically validated. The review also concentrates on selected Gestalt, psychological, and Islamic sources and does not represent the full diversity of Islamic philosophical and theological traditions. Future research should test the framework through qualitative studies of Muslim clients and counselors, develop and validate measures of Islamic present-moment awareness, and evaluate culturally adapted Gestalt interventions in clinical, educational, and community counseling settings.

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