In-depth Exploration of ‘Tafakkur’ Through the Spirit of Quranic Verses

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Abstract: This study aims to elucidate the multi-dimensional aspects of 'tafakkur' as depicted in the Quran, highlighting its implications for understanding the holistic integration of intellect and spirituality in Islamic teachings. Employing descriptive analytical methods, this study examines terms related to 'tafakkur' found in the Quran. The analysis identifies a rich framework of terms interconnected with 'tafakkur', demonstrating the Quran’s comprehensive approach to employing intellect and reason. Notably, 'tafakkur' is depicted not just as a cognitive activity but as a spiritual and moral duty essential for the full realization of Tawhid. ‘Tafakkur’ significantly enriches the Islamic intellectual tradition, emphasizing that true understanding of divine unity requires active and profound contemplation. This study reaffirms the critical role of reasoned faith and intellectual freedom in Islam.

Keywords: Tafakkur, Quranic Studies, Islamic Spirituality


Kata Kunci: Tafakkur, Al-Quranic, Spirit Islam
Introduction

The term 'tafakkur' is frequently used in the Quran to signify the concept of thinking. This term is already well-known among Muslims, as it is often mentioned by Allah SWT in the Quran. Various studies have explored different dimensions related to tafakkur, encompassing aspects of psychology, covid-19, Sufism, and environmental issues. Despite this diversity, the author's research on tafakkur has posed several key questions: First, what is the Quran's perspective on the status of humans as beings capable of tafakkur? Second, to what extent are humans afforded the freedom to think? Third, what are the potential benefits of engaging in tafakkur?

One of the Quranic verses that emphasizes the high status of thinking (tafakkur) is Allah SWT's command in Surah Saba'/34: 46.

قُلْ إِنِّي أَعْتَرَفُ بِوَاحِدَةَ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلِّلَّهَ مَنْ تَفْهِمُ وَمَنْ أَتَهْزَأُ بِمَا يَتَفَكَّرُونَ مَا ضَلَّ عِمَّنْ كَانَ بِصَاحِبِكَ عَذَابٌ صَدِيدٌ

"Say, “I only advise you of one [thing] - that you stand for Allah, [seeking truth] in pairs and individually, and then give thought.” There is not in your companion any madness. He is only a warner to you before a severe punishment.”

Imam al-Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, in his exegesis 'Mafatih Al-Ghaib,' identifies two critical elements in the aforementioned verse: Firstly, the word 'wahidah' (One), which signifies the concept of Tawhid; secondly, the word 'tatafakkaru' (you think), indicating a command to engage in tafakkur. Tawhid, a core principle of Quranic teachings, and tafakkur, a means to comprehend and expand Tawhid principles in life, are intrinsically linked. Hence, one's understanding of Tawhid is incomplete without tafakkur.

The core principle of Tawhid—that God is the Singular source of all life—transcends mere acknowledgment and embodies a worldview that must be perpetually...
actualized in every Muslim's life. Thus, *tafakkur* is an integral recommendation within the principle of Tawhid, as without it, the teachings of Tawhid cannot be effectively understood or implemented.

Interestingly, the verse was revealed to the Arabs living in a harsh desert environment, preoccupied with survival and basic needs in a primitive setting. Despite these conditions, Allah SWT instructed them to engage in *tafakkur*. This underscores that *tafakkur* is always applicable, irrespective of time, place, or situation, making it a compelling subject for study through the lens of Quranic verses, approached through descriptive analytical methods based on relevant sources.”

**Discussion**

**Terminology of Tafakkur**

In the Quran, the concept of ‘thinking’ is expressed using various terms, such as understanding, comprehending, remembering, and contemplating. Each term relates to the notion of thinking but emphasizes a different aspect. Specifically, the term ‘aql, directly associated with thinking, is derived from the Arabic *aqala - ya’qilu - ‘aqlan*. In Arabic, words that share similar functions and meanings to ‘aql include dabbara (contemplating), faqiha (understanding), fahima (comprehending), nazara (observing with one's own eyes, reasoning, observation), žakara (remembering), fakkara (thinking deeply), and ‘alima (understanding clearly). There are also other terms such as Al-qalb, fi'âd, al-lubb, an-nuhâ, al-abşār, and al-hijr, which functionally and meaningfully align with the aforementioned terms.

Research using ‘mu’jam and Arabic dictionaries shows that the term *tafakkur*, originating from the root *tafakkara* and its derivatives, appears 18 times in the Quran—13 times in verses from al-Makkiyyah and 5 times in al-Madaniyyah verses. According to Ahmad Warson Munawwir, *tafakkur* is the masdar form of *tafakkara, yatatafakkaru,*

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tafakkuran, originating from the root word *fakkara*, which means to think.\textsuperscript{8} It is observed that *tafakkur* appears more frequently during the Meccan period than during the Medinan period. This distinction is significant as during the foundational period of religious principles, particularly on matters of faith in Mecca, the Quran encouraged humans to engage in *tafakkur* (thinking) to strengthen the faith of new Muslims and to fortify their resolve against pressures from the disbelievers of Mecca.

Specifically, here are the verses from al-Makkiyyah derived from the root word *tafakkara*, totaling 13 verses: (1) Q.S. Al-Muddatsir/74: 18 with the term *fakkara*; (2) Q.S. Saba’/34: 46 with the term *tatafakkarū*; (3) Q.S. Al-An’am/6: 50 with the term *tatafakkarūn*; (4) Q.S. Al-’Araf/7: 184 with the term *yatafakkaru*; (5) Q.S. Al-Rum/30: 8 with the term *yatafakkaru*; (6) Q.S. Al-’Araf/7: 176 with the term *yatafakkarūn*; (7) Q.S. Yunus/10: 24 with the term *yatafakkarūn*; (8) Q.S. Al-Nahl/16: 11 with the term *yatafakkarūn*; (9) Q.S. Al-Nahl/16: 44 with the term *yatafakkarūn*; (10) Q.S. Al-Nahl/16: 69 with the term *yatafakkarūn*; (11) Q.S. Al-Rum/30: 21 with the term *yatafakkarūn*; (12) Q.S. Al-Zumar/39: 42 with the term *yatafakkarūn*; and Q.S. Al-Jatsiah/45: 13 with the term *yatafakkarūn*. The five verses in Al-Madaniyyah are: (1) Q.S. Al-Baqarah/2: 219 with the term *tatafakkarūn*; (2) Q.S. Al-Baqarah/2: 266 with the term *tatafakkarun*; (3) Q.S. Ali ‘Imran/3: 191 with the term *yatafakkarūn*; (4) Q.S. Al-Ra’d/13: 3 with the term *tatafakkarūn*; and (5) Q.S. Al-Hasyr/59: 21 with the term *yatafakkarūn*.

Al-Ragib al-Asfahani in his book al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb Alqurān relays various opinions from Arab literary figures and concludes that *al-fikr* results from the transformation of the word *al-fark*, meaning to rub. The form *al-fark* is used for concrete objects, whereas *al-fikr* is applied to abstract concepts and objects of thought. *Al-fikr*, therefore, denotes a deep exploration to uncover the essence of a subject.\textsuperscript{9}

In the Quran, understanding the command to think also involves two other closely related terms: ‘*aqlun* (intellect) and *qalbun* (heart). There are 49 verses discussing the use of intellect, namely ‘*aqalū* 1 verse, *ta’qilūn* 24 verses, *na’qilu* 1 verse, *ya’qilu* 1 verse, and *ya’qilūn* 22 verses. The interaction between ‘*aqlun* (intellect) and *qalbun* (heart) is crucial in the process of thinking, as these are the innate capacities prepared to make humans capable of thought. Without the use of ‘*aqlun* (intellect) and *qalbun* (heart), it

\textsuperscript{8} Munawwir, 1068.

would be impossible for humans to engage in tafakkur. Thus, the Quran frequently emphasizes the significance of these potentials.

Terms Related to Tafakkur

In the Quran, there are numerous terms associated with the activity of thinking (tafakkur). These terms can be categorized into two groups:

1. **Terms related to the tools used for thinking**

1) **Al-‘aqlu** (العقل): The term that clearly and directly points to the tool used for tafakkur is al-‘aql (mind). The word al-‘aql is the masdar form of the verb ‘aqala (عقل), i.e., ‘aqala - ya‘qilu - ‘aqalan, meaning mind or intellect. Al-‘aql also conveys the meanings of al-hijr (الحجر) or al-nuhā (النحي), which denote intelligence. The verb ‘aqala means to bind or captivate, thus a person using their intellect is someone who captivates or restrains their desires. The word ‘aql appears 49 times in the Quran, all in verb form. It appears once in the past tense, while the remaining instances (48 times) are in the present tense, often linked with the plural marker wau, as in the forms ta‘qilūn or ya‘qilūn. The verb ta‘qilūn recurs 24 times and ya‘qilūn 22 times, while ‘aqalū, na‘qilu, and ya‘qilu each appear once.

2) **Al-qalb** (القلب): Al-qalb derives from qalaba, meaning to change, shift, or turn. Its plural form is qulūb, meaning hearts. According to Imam Al-Ghazali, Al-qalb has two meanings: physically, as a clump of flesh in the chest containing life-sustaining blood, often referred to as the heart; and metaphorically, as the essence of a person capable of understanding and wisdom.

3) **Fu‘ād**: Besides al-‘aql (intellect) and Al-qalb (heart), another term directed towards the tool used in tafakkur is fu‘ād, whose plural is af’idah. Linguistically, fu‘ād also means heart. In the Quran, intellect as a thinking tool is sometimes referred to by fu‘ād, both in singular and plural forms. This term is part of the triad of primary instruments for acquiring knowledge, which are as-sam‘u (hearing), al-basharu (sight), and fu‘ād (heart), as referenced in Q.S. Al-Isra’/17:36. Instances using the
word *af‘idah* are observable in Q.S. An-Nahl/16:78. Linguistically, *fu‘ād* derives from *fa‘ada, yaf‘adu, fa‘dan*, which in the al-Munawwir dictionary means “to strike the heart” or “to affect the heart”. Fundamentally, *al-fu‘ād* shares meanings with *Al-qlab*, yet, as noted by al-Raghib al-Asfahani, *fu‘ād* here connotes something glowing or illuminating. This term is primarily employed to describe a vessel of stable knowledge and consciousness. In the Qur'an, *fu‘ād* is mentioned 16 times in various formulations: three times as *fu‘ād*, twice as *fu‘ādaka*, eight times as *af‘idah*, and three times as *af‘idatuhum*. The combined mention of *sam‘u* (hearing), *absār* (vision), and *af‘idah* (hearts) occurs in several surahs, totaling seven times. In certain contexts, within the Qur’an, *Al-qlab* is used interchangeably with *fu‘ād*, as seen in Q.S. Al-Baqarah/2:7.

4) **Lubb**: Within the Qur'an, the term ‘*aql* is occasionally referred to by another term, *lubb*. This term appears within the phrase *ulū al-albāb*, indicating a synonymy with *al-‘aql, Al-qlab*, and *fu‘ād*. The mention of *lubb* occurs 16 times across 10 surahs of the Qur’an, with nine appearances in Meccan surahs (makiyyah) and seven in Medinan surahs (madaniyyah). Among the Medinan mentions, four are in the form of a call (nidā’), specifically in Q.S. al-Baqarah/2:179, 197; Q.S. al-Mā‘idah/5:100; and Q.S. aṭ-Ṭalāq/65:10-11. The term Albāb is the plural form of *lubb*, translating literally to intellect and heart. *Lubb* essentially signifies the essence or the core, reflecting the critical components within a human. The verb form, *labuba*, means to become wise or intelligent. *Lubb* denotes an intellect that is pure or devoid of impurities or flaws. In Tafsir al-Mishbah, M. Quraish Shihab explains that *al-Albāb* represents the essence of something. For example, a nut has a shell that encases its content, termed lub. Hence, *ulu al-Albāb* refers to those possessing a pure intellect, unobscured by any shell, i.e., the fog of ideas that could engender confusion in thought.

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5) **Al-Abṣār, an-nuhā, and al-ḥijr**: Alongside the terms al-’aqlu, Al-qalbu, fu’ād, and lubb, the Qur’an occasionally employs other expressions to describe ‘aql, including al-Abṣār, an-nuhā, and al-ḥijr. Al-Abṣār is the plural of baṣar, signifying vision, understanding, eyes. Its verb baṣara-yabṣuru-baṣaran denotes knowing, understanding, seeing.\(^{23}\) In the Qur’an, al-Abṣār refers to ‘aql, used within the phrase ulū al-Abṣār, indicating those who are rational or possess insight,\(^{24}\) mentioned in various chapters including Āli Imrān/3:13, an-Nūr/24:44, ṣad/38:45, and al-Ḥasyr/59:2. An-nuhā is the plural of nuhyah, another term for mind or intellect, originating from the verb nahā-yanhā-nahyan, meaning to forbid or prevent.\(^{25}\) This term is so named because the intellect prevents one from undertaking inappropriate actions and is also known as “binding intellect,” restraining individuals from engaging in unworthy deeds.\(^{26}\) This term is mentioned in the Qur’an twice, both in surat Tāhā. Lastly, al-ḥijr, derived from ḥajara-yahjuru-hajran, means to prevent or forbid. Al-ḥijr is also referred to as intellect, as it enables individuals to restrain themselves from following base desires.\(^{27}\) This term appears in surat al-Fajr, verse 5.

**ذِيْ حِجْر فِيْ ذٰلِكَ قَسَمٌ لْهَلِّ**

“Is there [not] in [all] that an oath [sufficient] for one of perception?”

2. **Terms Related to the Activity of Thinking**

There are several terms in the Qur’an that can be categorized under this theme, including:

1) **Al-Ra’yu (الرأي)**: The term al-Ra’yu or al-Rāyah (الراية) is derived from ra’a (رأي), which means to see and think. According to the Munjid dictionary, ra’a (رأي) implies looking with the eyes accompanied by thought. On the other hand, al-Rāyah (الراية) indicates the activity of knowing, whether through the senses, imagination, thought, or feelings. Al-Ra’yu also conveys the concept of reaching a specific conclusion between two matters.\(^{28}\) Thus, knowledge about something imperceptible does not fall into the category of opinion (al-Ra’yu). The term al-Ra’yu, which
encompasses both sensory and heartfelt perception, is exemplified in Q.S. al-An’am/6:76-77.

2) **Adh-Dhikru (الذكر):** Adh-Dhikru (الذكر) is the infinitive form of the verb dhakara (ذكَر), meaning to mention or remember. Mentioning is done with the tongue, and remembering with the heart. Ar-Raghib al-Asfahani distinguishes dhikr into two types: dhikr bi Al-qalb (thinking with the heart) and dhikr bi al-lisan (remembering with the tongue). He further emphasizes that each implies a process of recalling what has been forgotten and remembering to comprehend new knowledge or ideas.

According to Yusuf al-Qardhawi, tadhakkur represents the highest function of the intellect, while dhākirah (memory) is the repository for knowledge and information used by humans as needed. A person without memory has effectively lost themselves, as they lack recollection of their identity and life history. The distinction between tafakkur and tadhakkur is that tafakkur is conducted to generate new knowledge, whereas tadhakkur is performed to revisit previously acquired information and knowledge.

3) **As-Samu (السمع):** Linguistically, as-samu means hearing with the ears, but in Qur’anic studies, it also signifies the activity of listening with understanding and obedience. The basic sense of hearing is mentioned in Q.S. al-Maidah/5:42. Meanwhile, as-samu that encompasses understanding and obedience is exemplified in Q.S. al-Baqarah/2:285.

4) **Al-Basharu (البصر):** The term al-basharu (البصر) is derived from baṣara - yabsūru - baṣaran, which means to know, understand, and see. From baṣara comes baṣar, whose plural form, al-Abṣār, denotes vision, understanding, and eyes. In the Qur’an, al-Abṣār signifies ‘aql, featured in the expression ulū al-Abṣār, indicating those who are rational or possess understanding, found in places such as Q.S. Āli Imrān/3:13, Q.S. al-Nūr/24:44, Q.S. ṣad/38:45, and Q.S. al-Ḥasyr/59:2.

5) **Ad-Dabbaru (الدبر):** Ad-Dabbaru (الدبر) is derived from dabbara (دبر), meaning the back. Opposite to ad-dabbaru (الدبر) is al-qubulu (القلب), meaning the front. Ad-Dabbaru signifies examining the rear aspect of something, while tadabbara al-amra

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29 Munawwir, Kamus Al-Munawwir, Arab-Indonesia Terlengkap, 448.
30 Al-Asfahani, Al-Mufradat Fi Gharibil Quran.
32 Munawwir, Kamus Al-Munawwir, Arab-Indonesia Terlengkap, 87.
33 Kašīr, Taafsir Al-Qur’ān Al-’Azīm, 320.
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Tadabbarah means to consider and reflect upon the consequences or outcomes. In *Lisān al-‘Arab*, it is described as “you contemplate something in your thoughts.” The same meaning is indicated by the verb form *dabbara*. In the Qur’an, phrases derived from the root *da*- *ba*- *ra* appear in 44 verses. However, only four clearly pertain to the concept of reflecting or pondering, two using the phrase *yaddabbarū* and two using *yatadabbarūn*, found in Q.S. Al-Mu’minūn/23:68, Q.S. Ṣād/38:29, Q.S. An-Nisā’/4:82, and Q.S. Muhammad/47:24.

6) **An-Nazru (النظر):** The term *an-nazru* ( النظر) is the infinitive form of the verb *nazara* (نظر), which linguistically means to look, sometimes with the physical eyes and other times with the “eyes of the heart,” indicating activities such as reasoning, considering, reflecting, and investigating. In the Qur’an, words derived from the letters *na*- *ẓa*-*ra* in various forms appear in 129 instances across 115 verses. Al-Raghib explains that *an-nazru* ( النظر) means directing one’s sight or thoughts to perceive or observe something. The phrase *an-nazru ilā* ( النظرالي) means to look with the eyes, while *an-nazru fi* ( النظر في) means to think. However, in the context of verses using the phrase *an-nazru ilā*, they generally imply thinking.

**The Quranic Spirit Toward the Command to Tafakkur**

Historically, the Quran was first revealed in the Cave of Hira. The earliest verses disclosed were from Surah Al-’Ala, verses 1-5. These initial verses demonstrate the Quran’s effort to encourage humans to know Allah through the command ‘*iqra’* (read). Here, reading is not merely a recommendation but emphasized as a mandate. In the principles of ushul fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), a command implies an obligatory action. The Quran uniquely begins the journey of knowing Allah through a process that includes reading, inherently involving thinking, whereas other religions and beliefs typically

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35 Munawwir, 384–85.
39 Al-Ashfahani, *Al-Mufrahadat Fi Gharibil Quran*.
originate from doctrinal aspects. Unlike other faiths, the Quran “challenges” humans to test the validity and truthfulness of God as detailed in Allah’s words.

There are numerous verses that cater to the human intellect's need to be employed as effectively as possible. The significant portion and opportunity given to humans for thought indicate an initiative for analysis and scrutiny that everything considered starts from a critical stance. Here, being critical does not adopt a general philosophical concept that begins with doubt, but rather how information, teachings, and more are given room for discussion in the academic realm. It is undeniable that Islam has guaranteed freedom of thought. Nevertheless, the diverse human potentials must be free and independent; the most crucial aspect to cultivate in a person is to think, and certainly, nurturing thought requires freedom, meaning the absence of obstacles, barriers, or hindrances that impede the momentum of thinking.

The terms “being religious” or “having belief,” resulting in conviction (‘itiqad), carry connotations of being closed and wrapped. The closure of human hearts and convictions can derive from two sources: sometimes from correct and free thought, and sometimes from incorrect habits, traditions, and puritanism. In this sense, belief can not only provide solutions for humans but, conversely, involves the closure and packaging of thought, which can be highly detrimental to both individuals and society. Therefore, there exists a vertical, not horizontal, distinction between thinking and believing, as belief (faith) sometimes stems from thinking (thought) when faith is formed with proper evidence and logic, and sometimes due to fanatical attitudes and erroneous customs. Clearly, Islam will never accept a belief and conviction rooted in unfounded feelings, blind imitation, and pre-Islamic fanaticism.

Hence, the concept of blind imitation or following the thoughts and actions of others without prior consideration is forbidden in Islam. Such a stance diminishes the role of intellect as a significant gift from God to humanity. Through blind imitation, humans

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44 Manzâr, *Lisân Al-‘Arab*, Jilid VI.

would be incapable of forming civilizations and effecting change. The pre-Islamic societal mindset believed that their life successes depended on following their ancestors, which hindered contemplative activities. Thus, Allah sent Prophet Muhammad to encourage them to employ their intellect toward a civilized existence.

While Islam restricts thinking about the Divine essence in specific instances, broadly, it supports the freedom of thought. From an Islamic perspective, a Muslim not only has the right to think but is also expected to accept religious beliefs and principles (monotheism, justice, and the Day of Resurrection) through reasoning and argumentation. When encountering criticism internally, he has the right to present it to knowledgeable individuals so that his criticisms can be addressed. This is in contrast to Christianity, where certain topics are deemed off-limits and referred to as matters of faith, thus barring intellectual intervention.

In most verses, the Quran encourages humans to think, reason, and contemplate the universe. Humans are challenged with their intellectual capacity to discern what is beneficial and harmful to themselves. They are invited to break free from all shackles, captivities, misguidances, and deviations, enabling them to stride forward toward attaining perfection (Q.S. Fusshilat/41:53). “And on the earth are signs for those of assured faith; and in yourselves. Then do you not see?” (Q.S. Al-Dzariyat/51:20-21).

Conclusion

The Quranic emphasis on 'tafakkur’—deep, reflective thinking—is a profound testament to the intrinsic value that Islam places on intellect and contemplation. This study has underscored that 'tafakkur' is not merely a suggested activity but a divine command that deeply integrates with the fundamental Islamic principle of Tawhid. This highlights the inseparability of understanding God's unity and engaging in thoughtful reflection. The analysis of various terms related to thinking in the Quran reveals a rich tapestry of interconnected concepts that illustrate the complexity and depth of intellectual engagement encouraged by the Quran. These terms not only define the tools and activities of thinking but also reflect the holistic approach the Quran takes towards utilizing intellect and reason. This study shows that 'tafakkur' transcends mere cognitive function, embedding itself as a spiritual and moral obligation. In conclusion, this exploration of 'tafakkur' not only enriches our understanding of Islamic teachings on intellectual engagement but also calls for a renewed appreciation of how Islam encourages an active,
questioning, and reflective faith. This aligns with the broader Islamic ethos of enlightenment and liberation through knowledge, promoting a faith that is both deeply rooted in tradition and dynamically engaged with the world.”

Bibliography


