



FINDING MEANING OF LIFE IN IMAM AL-GHAZALI'S CONCEPT OF *MA'RIFATUN NAFS'* THROUGH LOGOTHERAPY COUNSELING INTERVENTION

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Abstract

Various variants of life problems make every human being ever in the phase of looking for the meaning of life. This raises many questions about how the meaning of life and the extent to which a person can find the meaning of life. This paper aims to examine in depth the logotherapy and *ma'rifatun nafs'* concept of Imam al-Ghazali in finding the meaning of life. There are two main issues answered in this study, namely how the concept of *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali and how the form of synergy of *ma'rifatun nafs'* with logotherapy intervention. This research is a qualitative research with literature review approach. Finding the meaning of life can be done with logotherapy intervention with a spiritual dimension that characterizes its implementation. In the process of providing logotherapy intervention, a person must first recognize himself. This is in line with the concept of *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali in finding the meaning of life. because of the similarity in finding the meaning of life so that the concept of *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali is recommended to be applied in providing logotherapy interventions to fill the spiritual dimension.

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Keywords:

Meaningfulness of Life; *Ma'rifatun Nafs*; Logotherapy

Abstrak

Berbagai varian permasalahan hidup menjadikan setiap manusia pernah berada pada fase mencari kebermaknaan hidup. Hal ini menimbulkan banyak pertanyaan mengenai bagaimana makna hidup dan sejauh mana seseorang dapat menemukan makna hidup. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara mendalam terkait logoterapi dan konsep *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali dalam menemukan kebermaknaan hidup. Terdapat dua isu utama yang dijawab dalam studi ini yakni bagaimana konsep *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali dan bagaimana bentuk sinergitas *ma'rifatun nafs'* dengan intervensi logoterapi. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan literature review. Menemukan makna hidup dapat dilakukan dengan intervensi logoterapi dengan dimensi spiritual yang menjadi karakteristik dalam pelaksanaannya. Pada proses pemberian intervensi logoterapi, seseorang harus terlebih dahulu mengenali dirinya. Hal ini juga sejalan dengan konsep *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali dalam menemukan kebermaknaan hidup. karena adanya kesamaan dalam menemukan kebermaknaan hidup sehingga konsep *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali dianjurkan untuk diaplikasikan dalam pemberian intervensi logoterapi untuk mengisi bagian dimensi spiritual.

Kata Kunci: Kebermaknaan Hidup; *Ma'rifatun Nafs*; Logoterapi

Introduction

Various variants of life problems make every human being ever in the phase of looking for the meaning of life. This raises many questions about how the meaning of life and the extent to which a person can find the meaning of life. The process of finding the meaningfulness of life starts from a life that has no meaning to having meaning (Syifa' & Nilawaty, 2024). The meaning of life so far is understood as a process of understanding a person's understanding of himself, including various things that are considered important, valuable, and can provide special meaning that can become a life goal so that it makes a person meaningful and more valuable. This shows that the meaningfulness of life has a positive correlation with a person's mental health, which means that someone who has the meaning of life will have high mental health (Bukhori, 2014). So it can be said that finding the meaning of life is the most basic thing that humans must do to achieve happiness, tranquility, and well-being in life.

So far, scholarly conversations about the meaning of life can at least be mapped in three study trends, namely first, studies that try to reveal that to bring meaning to life by recognizing oneself, building positive relationships, and exploring the value of work, hope, appreciation, and attitude (Ahmad & Subandi, 2022; Syahrir, Hidayah, & Basir, 2022) this can be done by providing logotherapy interventions that were first applied by Viktor Emile Frankl (Syahrir et al., 2022; Ukus, Bidjuni, & Karundeng, 2015; Utami, Mar'at, & Suryadi, 2017). Other studies have shown that the provision of logotherapy interventions in addition to increasing the value of meaning in life, is also able to reduce the level of depression in individuals who experience depressive disorders (Anggoro et al., 2024). Second, in research (Kirana, 2021; Mardenny, 2018; Muniroh, 2017; Okan & Eksi, 2017; Tasmuji & Khoirudin, 2022) revealed that logotherapy intervention has a spiritual dimension in finding the meaning of life which means the ability to maintain his life physically, psychologically and spiritually. This shows that logotherapy does not reject spirituality and religion but rather supports their use.

This paper aims to fill the void of study space that has not been touched by previous scholarship. The focus of the study in this article is to examine in depth the spiritual dimension, namely the concept of knowing oneself (*ma'rifatun nafs'*) Imam al-Ghazali in providing logotherapy interventions to find meaning in life. In line with that, there are at least two questions raised: first, how is the concept of *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali? Second, how is the synergy of *ma'rifatun nafs'* with logotherapy intervention? These two questions will be an important starting point in the entire discussion in this article.

This study departs from the argument that, in finding the meaningfulness of life, a person must first recognize himself. Recognizing oneself at least looks for the reason why we live in this world? Is it only for worldly pursuits or is there something else? Sometimes humans tend to ignore self-recognition and live only to carry out daily activities. If we start to know ourselves then daily activities in life are not empty but have meaning, value, and purpose (Syarief, 2022). In addition, knowing oneself is a process to recognize, understand, accept, and manage all potential for the development of future life goals. In Islam, self-recognition known as *ma'rifatun nafs'* has a much more complex concept which says that

whoever recognizes himself has known his God. On the other hand, meaning of life can also be found by using logotherapy intervention which also contains physical, psychological and spiritual elements.

Method

The choice of finding the meaning of life on the concept of *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali through logotherapy counseling intervention as the object of study material is based on three main reasons. First, self-recognition is one of the stages in finding the meaningfulness of life which in the Islamic view is known by the term *ma'rifatun nafs'* popularized by Imam al-Ghazali. Second, logotherapy intervention is a counseling practice in which there is a spiritual dimension that aims to find the meaning of life. Third, finding the meaning of life is important, valuable, and can provide special meaning that is able to become the purpose of life so that it makes a person meaningful and more valuable.

This research is qualitative research. According to (Djunaidi & Almanshur, 2012) qualitative research aims to produce findings that cannot be achieved by statistical procedures. The approach used in this research is literature review. Literature review is an approach that focuses on a topic in order to get an overview of the development of the topic to be studied. From this description, it can identify theories or methods, develop them, or even identify gaps between existing theories and reality in the field (Cahyono & Hartono, 2019).

The data obtained by the author by reviewing various kinds of literature materials such as books, journal articles both national and international journals, and utilizing google books access to obtain books digitally, Z-library, and google scholar to find accurate and relevant data to the study of the research being done. The search results that researchers get about the meaning of life, logotherapy and *ma'rifatun nafs'* is that the meaning of life can be found with the help of logotherapy intervention, in this case a person must recognize himself first.

Results and Discussion

1. Biography of Al-Ghazali

Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali ath-Thusi ash-Shafi'i who is better known as al-Ghazali. He was born in 450-550 Hijri in the city of Thus (Fairuzzabadi, 2018). In addition to studying *fiqh* Imam al-Ghazali was also a great Muslim Theologian from Persia, a leading Islamic philosopher judge and also Sufism. His title al-Ghazali ath-Thusi is related to his father who was a goat hair spinner namely Ghazalah and ath-Thusi his birthplace in the city of Thus, Khurasan. While the title ash-Shafi'i refers to the Shafi'i *madhhab* that he adhered to (Hasanah, 2021). little al-Ghazali then studied *fiqh* in Thus to Ahmad al-Radzakani, then after adolescence he went to the city of Jurjan to study with Abu Nashar al-'Isma'il and

finally to Naisabur to study *kalam al'Asy'ari* to Abu al-Maali al-Juwaini who was called Imam al-Haramain. After that, he visited the city of Askar to meet Nidzam al-Mulk (Prime Minister of the Saljuk Banu) and was appointed as a teacher at the Nidzamiyah University in Baghdad (Syafri, 2017). In 489 Hijri, Imam al-Ghazali visited Baitul Maqdis and began writing his book entitled *Ihya'*. Because of his love for knowledge, Imam al-Ghazali was able to master various fields of science. In addition, Imam al-Ghazali has a strong memory and is wise in arguing so that he is called *Hujjatul Islam* (Zaini, 2017). He also began to fight against lust, straighten morals, improve behavior and purify his lifestyle such as behaving nobly, detaching himself from beauty and adornment, and adorning himself with the character of pious people (Fairuzabadi, 2018).

Al-Faqih Muhammad ibn al-Hasan Ibn Abdullah al-Husaini al-Wasithi, in his book entitled *ath-thabaqat al-Aliyyah fi Manaqib ash-Shafi'iyyah*, states that Imam al-Ghazali had ninety-eight written works. As-Subki, in his book *Thabaqat ash-Shafi'iyyah*, states that Imam al-Ghazali had fifty-eight written works. Thasy Kubrizadah in his book *Miftah as-Sa'adah wa Misbah as-Siyadah* mentions Imam al-Ghazali had eighty written works. He goes on to say that al-Ghazali's books and treatises are difficult to determine in number so it is said that he had nine hundred and ninety-nine works. Although this does not seem commonplace, but for people who know al-Ghazali's temperament may justify it (Fairuzabadi, 2018). The books written by al-Ghazali in the field of Sufism are based on several sources, but there are still many other books written by al-Ghazali, but according to some sources the books were burned and thrown into the river when the Mongol army destroyed the city of Baghdad. Among others, *Bidayah al-Hidayah*, *Minhaj al-'Abidin*, *Mizan al-'Amal*, *Kimiya as-Sa'adah*, *Misykah al-Anwar*, *Ihya' 'Ulumuddin*, *Al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal*, *Al-Adab fi al-Din*, *Kitab al-Arba'in*, *Ar-Risalah al-Laduniyah* and *Raudhah al-Thalibin* (Syafri, 2017).

Ibn Asakir argues that *al-Imam Hujjatul Islam* al-Ghazali passed away on Monday, the fourteenth of the month of Jumadil Akhir in the year 505 Hijri when he was 50 years old and was buried in *Zhahir*, which is one of the areas of Thabran. Ibn al-Jauzi in the book *al-Muntazhim* said, "one of al-Ghazali's students once asked him before he died, 'make a will to me' then, al-Ghazali replied, 'Be sincere'. He repeated these words until he died (Fairuzabadi, 2018). May Allah set apart for him various glories in the hereafter, just as He set apart for him the knowledge he received in this world thanks to His grace.

2. Imam al-Ghazali's Concept of *Ma'rifatun nafs'*

Starting al-Ghazali's explanation of recognizing oneself (*ma'rifatun nafs'*) by explaining that in humans there are three human characteristics, namely *shifatul baha'im*, *shifatusy shayathin*, and *shifatul malaikah* (Jamrah, 2021; Nafi, Mulyani, & Afifah, 2022) Then the most important thing is that humans have a lot of potential

or abilities that are not possessed by other creatures. Humans have reason, besides that humans have subtle feelings that can devastate the whole of nature and other creatures. However, many humans do not realize the potential that exists in themselves so that they are willing to live in distress and suffer in the world hereafter. This proves how important it is to recognize oneself.

As the hadith of the prophet quoted by Imam al-Ghazali namely “*man ‘arafa qalbahu faqad ‘arafa nafsahu waman ‘arafa nafsah faqad ‘arafa rabbah*” (who knows his heart then he has known himself and who knows himself then he has known his Lord) (Iyubenu, 2023) of course what is meant by this hadith is more than just outward recognition and not also the attributes worn such as positions, socio-economic status and so on (Nafi et al., 2022). The meaning of the sentence above is then explained in the book *Minhajul Abidin* by Imam al-Ghazali that *ma'rifatun nafs'* is part of an invitation to recognize one's position as a servant of Allah and can only undergo all the provisions of His *qadha* and *qadar* with pleasure and the best efforts that result in an understanding that in this life there are things that we can control and cannot control (Christyanto, Rahman, & Hafidhuddin, 2021). Understanding this simple concept leads us to avoid all situations or conditions that worsen our relationship with Allah SWT.

A person who experiences confusion, despair and even confusion in thinking is an indication that he wants to reach the level of knowing Allah without first knowing himself (Fauzi, Suhartini, & Ahmad, 2020; Nafi et al., 2022) In the Qur'an there are various orders and recommendations for humans to also pay attention to themselves, for example in QS. Adz-Dzariyat verses 20-21 says, “And (also) for yourself. So do you not pay attention?”. humans face difficulties in recognizing themselves compared to when they study objects outside their reality. This difficulty is thought to be because the existing sciences used to study man as an object are not sufficient to reveal the nature of man himself. The helplessness of science has been achieved by humans by asking several questions related to humans and their lives, including; what is life? Is life eternal? What is man? (Bay, 2022). In the Qur'an there are verses that explain the importance of knowing oneself, Allah SWT says in surah Al-Hasyr 49: 19.

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَٰسِقُونَ

Meaning: And do not be like those who forget Allah, so that Allah makes them forget themselves. They are the wicked. (QS. Al-Hasyr: 19).

The verse above shows that forgetting Him causes man to forget himself, and ultimately leads man to transgression (Bay, 2022). *Ma'rifatun nafs'* leads a person to know God with full confidence, at least humans believe that God exists as the ruler of all nature. Therefore, man's ability to achieve the degree of *ma'rifatullah* depends on his ability to know himself (Nasihin, 2018). further according to al-Ghazali is to

know oneself truly to a high awareness and knowledge of what the self really is, where it comes from and what it was created for (Arroisi, 2019). This shows that knowing oneself is one of the ways a person can achieve happiness.

After knowing the importance of knowing oneself, there are several benefits of *ma'rifatun nafs'*, namely first, recognizing oneself, one will be able to recognize one's abilities and potential. Second, realizing that he is a very valuable creation of Allah SWT so that he will not allow himself to be damaged and degraded. Third, knowing that humans consist of two parts, namely the spirit and the body so that humans will not only pay attention to their bodies but also pay attention to their souls through thoughts, words and actions that contribute to influencing their souls. Fourth, someone who knows himself will look for the reason for his existence and believe that he and all of Allah SWT's creations were not created by chance. Fifth, knowing oneself greatly contributes to a deeper assessment of self-awareness and improvement (Bay, 2022). Thus, recognizing oneself means being willing to accept oneself sincerely, which often sees others as a measure of success regardless of the extent of our abilities, sometimes we are even trapped by the stigma of others (Nafi et al., 2022). Therefore, by knowing oneself, one is not only able to recognize their potential but also able to put themselves in the right place, not forcing ourselves to adapt too hard, and know what we need.

3. Forms of Synergy of *Ma'rifatun Nafs'* with Logotherapy Intervention

Logotherapy was first applied by Victor Emile Frankl, which was compiled based on personal experiences while surviving in a Nazi camp. This therapy was not only applied to himself but Frankl secretly provided therapy for prisoners who experienced depression and had suicidal thoughts (Ahmad & Subandi, 2022). Dangerous actions such as suicide are caused by the inability to find the meaning of life from the events they experience so that logotherapy helps a person to find the meaning of life in everyday life and helps a person in appreciating old age. Logotherapy shows three basic human values to live the meaning of life, namely creative values, experiential values, and attitudinal values so that the main task of logotherapy is not only to help someone find the meaning of life but also to help someone realize these three values according to the conditions they experience (Lesmana, 2021). The ability to make meaning of life is something that greatly affects a person's life. Someone who does not have the meaning of life will feel empty, useless, worthless, and have no motivation to do activities so that it affects the quality and productivity of his life (Syahrir et al., 2022).

Frankl, the originator of the concept of the meaning of life, states that the meaning of life is the quality of life in living his life. How much is the actualization of the potentials and capacities contained in himself, and the extent to which a person is able to reach and achieve ideals and react with a deeper meaning of life (Khoiruddin, 2021). Logotherapy in accordance with the meaning of logos which

means spirituality recognizes the “existence” of the spiritual dimension (Muniroh, 2017), in addition to the physical and psychological dimensions and believes that the freedom of will and the will to live meaningfully are the main motivations of every human being (Jarman & Mukharom, 2021). This is a characteristic in logotherapy counseling that focuses on the meaning and conceptualization of humans as bio-psycho-social-spiritual beings (Mirsanti & Jayanti, 2020). The spiritual aspect of logotherapy counseling seeks to connect a person with the regulator of life such as the existence of direction in life, interpreting life events positively, and having targets to be achieved in life in other words, a person has a purpose in life so that his life becomes more meaningful (Mayasari, 2014).

The effectiveness of logotherapy can be achieved when a person is able to recognize themselves and know their potential and shortcomings, so that it can help them find the purpose and meaning of life (Ahmad & Subandi, 2022). High self-recognition will result in high meaning of life, and vice versa (Syahrir et al., 2022). Recognizing oneself is the ability to recognize, understand, accept, and manage all potential for future life development. Recognizing oneself or *ma'rifatun nafs'*, namely self-awareness that begins with a deep contemplation of oneself (Hamdisyaf, 2021) is the first step to finding the meaningfulness of life.

The willingness to find the meaning of life can be done by providing logotherapy interventions. The techniques used in finding the meaning of life according to Bastaman are four ways, namely, positive behavior, relationship bonding, worship and self-knowledge or in Islam called *ma'rifatun nafs'* (Khoiruddin, 2021). *Ma'rifatun nafs'* is one of the spiritual counseling techniques termed happiness chemistry by al-Ghazali (Muhammad, 2021). Here are some ways to recognize yourself before knowing Allah SWT in Sufism that can be actualized when providing logotherapy counseling, namely:

a. Self-introspection or *muhasabah*

Introspection or in the world of Sufism better known as *muhasabah* is a method of introspection. This method prioritizes conscience to know the good and bad of behavior where a person examines what has been done, if there are bad actions, then this self-introspection is an exercise with determination to become a better human being (Mutmainah, 2021). As a Muslim, it is an obligation to self-introspection which aims to find out what things have been done while living in this world (Nafi et al., 2022).

There are six processes that are carried out to do *muhasabah* according to Al-Ghazali, namely:

1. *Musyarahah*, which is giving various requirements to weigh the benefits obtained both worldly and ukhrawi when doing everything.

2. *Muraqabah*, self-reflection with full confidence that everything we do is inseparable from Allah's supervision, so that this raises our prudence in behavior.
 3. *Muhasabah*, trying to analyze everything that has been done and trying to correct any mistakes by not repeating them.
 4. *Mu'aqabah*, counting oneself for all shortcomings.
 5. *Mujahadah*, being serious.
 6. *Mu'atabah*, is a stage to educate oneself to always be humble through giving advice to oneself to always obey Allah's commands and stay away from His prohibitions (Mutmainah, 2021).
- b. Knowing oneself outwardly
- Knowing yourself physically is a manifestation of seeing the signs of the greatness of Allah SWT which is reflected in our physical creation is an initial introduction to yourself (Nafi et al., 2022). Islam contains two undur *dzahir* and *bathin*, but if you only practice one of them, there will be imbalances and will not be perfect. When someone only practices the inner without the outer, they will become *zindiq* (a deviant group). In Sufism, Imam Al Ghazali emphasized that people who eliminate the external side are called fake (Saleh, 2012).
- c. Knowing the inner self
- Knowing the inner self in question is the spirit that is in the body. Knowing oneself inwardly is also as important as knowing oneself outwardly. When someone only practices outwardly without inwardly, they will be classified as ungodly people (Saleh, 2012).
- d. Always remember the purpose of self-creation
- Knowing yourself is inseparable from remembering the purpose for which this self was created. Allah SWT created humans to believe in Him in addition, humans were created to be caliphs on this earth which of course as leaders should be protectors on the earth of Allah not as destroyers (Nafi et al., 2022). Thus, remembering the purpose of self-creation will always lead us to the true purpose and meaning of life.

The above points related to how to recognize oneself in the Islamic concept have actually also existed in logotherapy interventions. For example, self-analysis which has the same concept as *muhasabah* in Sufism which is a process of observing and reflecting on various aspects of oneself to gain insight into the purpose of life. In addition to self-analysis, there is also self-monitoring, which is a way for a person to control himself and self-disclosure, which is a way in which a person displays the best version of himself, which is also part of the way of knowing oneself in logotherapy interventions (Nafi et al., 2022). This shows the integration of logotherapy interventions by focusing on the spiritual aspects of Imam al-Ghazali's concept of *ma'rifatun nafs'*. As explained that the provision of logotherapy

interventions is inseparable from elements of the spiritual dimension to find the meaningfulness of life (Okan & Eksi, 2017). The existence of a spiritual dimension in providing logotherapy interventions has been able to complement in overcoming various problems of a person (Kirana, 2021). The presence of the spiritual dimension is a form of providing solutions to problems experienced by a person in the spiritual aspect. This proves that the provision of logotherapy intervention encourages the use of spiritual or religious elements to lead a person to find Divine light, which is the path of truth in his life that leads to the discovery of the true purpose and meaning of life (Mustafa, 2011).

Conclusion

The meaning of life is an important thing that a person must have. Finding the meaning of life is the most basic problem. A counseling approach that is often used to help someone find the meaning of life is logotherapy. Logotherapy intervention has a spiritual dimension that characterizes its implementation. In addition, in the process of providing logotherapy intervention, a person must first recognize himself. This is in line with the concept of *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali in finding the meaning of life. because of the similarities in finding the meaning of life so that the concept of *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali is recommended to be applied in providing logotherapy interventions to fill the spiritual dimension that characterizes logotherapy. The researcher realizes the limitations in this study which only focuses on providing suggestions for the development of counseling science in general and logotherapy interventions in particular. So, to complete this research, it is hoped that future researchers will explore more deeply the integration of logotherapy with the concept of *ma'rifatun nafs'* Imam al-Ghazali to see the extent of the impact given in finding the meaningfulness of life.

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