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Building a Bridge Between Spirituality/Religion with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Oğuzhan Yavuz[1]
Ministry of National Education

[1] Ph.D. Candidate, Psychological Counselor, Cognitive Behavioral Therapist and Researcher, Üsküdar Ahmet Yüksel Özemre Science and Art Center, Ministry of National Education. E-mail: oguzhanyavuz26@gmail.com

Abstract
This study provides a framework for acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and draws attention to the points that ACT shares with spiritual/religious traditions. The paper first presents the history of the theory, its view of human nature, its basic concepts, and the emergence of ACT while ACT's theoretical foundations, functional analysis of behavior theory, relational framework theory, and functional contextualism theory are presented as tables. The paper then explains the shared points between ACT and spiritual/religious approaches and dicusses how basic processes of the two can be combined. It then considers the spiritual/religious-oriented methods and techniques that can be used in ACT. The conclusion highlights the differences between ACT and other therapy approaches and the themes it shares with spiritual/religious approaches. Drawing on this study and ACT philosophy, new models could be developed that take into account the Islamic belief system specific to Turkish culture.
Keywords:
Acceptance and Commitment Therapy • Spiritually-Oriented Psychological Counseling/Therapy • Integrative Approach • Spirituality

Kabul ve Kararlılık Terapisiyle Maneviyat/Din Arasında Köprü Kurmak

Öz
Bu çalışmanın amacı Kabul ve Karalılık Terapisi (Acceptance And Commitment Therapy-ACT) ile ilgili bir çerçeve sunmak ve ACT'ın manevi/dini gelenekler ile ortak olan noktalarına dikkat çekmektir. Çalışmada ilk olarak sırasıyla kuramın tarihçesine, insan doğasına bakışına, kullandığı temel kavramlara, ACT'ın ortaya çıkışına yer verilmiştir. Devamında ACT'ın kuramsal temellerini oluşturan; Davranışın İşlevsel Analizi, İlişkisel Çerçeve kuramı ve İşlevsel Bağlamsalcılık kuramları tablo halinde sunulmuştur. Ardından ACT'ın manevi/dini yaklaşımlarla ortak noktalarına değinilmiştir. ACT ile Manevi/dini geleneklerin ortak yönleri arasında ilişkiler kurulduktan sonra ACT temel süreçleriyle manevi/dini uygulamalar birleştirilip sunulmuştur. Devamında ACT'ta kullanılabilecek manevi/dini yönelimli yöntem ve tekniklerden bahsedilmiştir. Sonuç kısmında ACT'ın diğer terapi yaklaşımlarından farklılaşan noktalarına, manevi/dini yaklaşımlarla olan ortak temalarına değinilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın devamında ACT temel felsefesinden yola çıkılarak kültürümüze özgü İslam inanç sistemini dikkate alan yeni modellerin geliştirilebileceği düşünülmektedir.
Anahtar Kelimeler:
Kabul ve Kararlılık Terapisi • Manevi Yönelimli Psikolojik Danışma/Terapi • Bütüncül Yaklaşım • Maneviyat

Corresponding author:
Oğuzhan Yavuz
E-mail:
oguzhanyavuz26@gmail.com

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Cognitive behavioral therapies (CBTs) are classified into three waves or generations. Here, "wave" means a set or formulation of dominant assumptions, methods, and goals, some of which are implicit, that help to organize theory, research, and practice (Hayes, 2016). The first wave included classical behavioral therapies (Schultz & Schultz, 2007) while the second-wave included cognitive and behavioral therapies (Digiuseppe et al., 2017; Köroğlu, 2017; Türkçapar et al., 2011). CBT has been criticized for the priority is given to controlling and restructuring thoughts and beliefs while emotions remain at the forefront. Another criticism is that the CBT neglects the individual's inner experiences in the interaction of dysfunctional thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Therefore, new techniques have been developed to understand individuals' inner experiences for use in treatment.

This paved the way for third-wave therapies (Brown et al., 2011; Herbert & Forman, 2011), based on the assumption that a third person cannot evaluate an individual's inner experiences. This makes it important for that individual to develop self-mindfulness and participate in their assessment. In addition, the acceptance process is more important than other approaches, such as creating alternative thoughts or cognitive structuring with dysfunctional thoughts (Herbert & Forman, 2011). Overall, third-wave therapies emphasize mindfulness, feelings, acceptance, relationships, values, goals, and metacognition (Hayes & Hofmann, 2017).

Of these third-wave therapies, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) has attracted the most attention, both experimentally and clinically. The way ACT theorists and therapists say the abbreviation is interesting, with some saying the initials separately while others say them as a word, "act". This second form is preferable because it refers to action, movement, and committed action, which are essential elements of the therapeutic process (Harris, 2018). Originally developed by Steven Hayes, Kelly Wilson, and Kirk Strosahl, ACT is based on the assumption that the usual thought processes of the healthy human mind naturally lead to spiritual suffering. Thus, ACT does not consider suffering people. Rather, the main aim is to show how a person can use their mind more effectively (Hayes et al., 2012).

The ACT has a strong and comprehensive foundation, based on functional analysis of behavior, functional contextualism, relational frame theory (RFT), and the psychological flexibility and inflexibility models (Table 1). Drawing on these three theories and especially the psychological resilience model, ACT is related to both positive and abnormal psychology (Bach & Moran, 2008; Hayes et al., 2012; Levin et al., 2014; Ramnerö & Törneke, 2020; Törneke, 2010).

Table 1.
Fundamental Philosophy and Concepts of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Functional analysis of behavior	Functional contextualism	Relative frame theory	Psychological flexibility and inflexibility models
It identifies connections between a behavior and the co-occuring environment and stimuli, and the behavior's outcomes. Through these connections, mutual interactions are observed between the behavior's precursors and results.	This is a pragmatic philosophical worldview focusing on and using things that are functional and useful in life.	This focuses on the role of language and cognition in explaining human success and suffering.	**Inflexibility Model** This includes cognitive fusion, experiential avoidance, loss of flexible contact with the present, attachment to a conceptualized self, values problems, inaction, impulsivity, and avoidant persistence **Flexibility Model** This includes cognitive defusion, acceptance, being present, self as context, values, and committed action.

ACT is naturally optimistic in assuming that even in an extraordinary moment of pain or suffering, there is an opportunity to find meaning, purpose, or will to live. ACT is therefore not just about relieving people's suffering. Rather, it tries to help people learn and grow as a result of suffering, to use their pain as a stepping stone towards having a richer and more meaningful life. According to ACT, suffering people are not impaired or malfunctioning but just clogged up. This blockage results from a psychological rigidity caused by "cognitive fusion, experiential avoidance, loss of flexible contact with the present, attachment to a conceptualized self, values problems, inaction, impulsivity, or avoidant persistence" (Hayes et al., 2012; Levin et al., 2014).

ACT therefore aims to reduce attempts to control, eliminate, or avoid dysfunctional thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations and to improve function by increasing participation in worthwhile, meaningful activities. To achieve these goals, ACT uses six basic processes: "cognitive defusion, acceptance, being present, self as context, values, committed action." These are specifically designed to reduce maladaptive behaviors and unhealthy attempts to avoid internal experiences by focusing on increasing behavioral and psychological resilience (Walser et al., 2016). They include helping clients to (1) learn to be more open to and accept their experiences rather than engaging in ineffective struggles; (2) make them more aware of their experiences and focus on the here and now rather than the past or worrying about the future; and (3) committing to doing things guided by what is truly important to them rather than what they want to avoid (Hayes et al., 1999).

Shared Features of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Spiritual/ Religious Approaches

Some aspects of ACT overlap with spiritual/religious teachings in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism. For example, spiritual/religious leaders treat

forgiveness, acceptance, the meaning of life, values, action, etc., as positive signs of spiritual life. Spiritual/religious practices can be designed to encourage the experiences and actions included in the psychological resilience model (Hayes et al., 2016).

ACT provides a unique set of processes and intervention techniques for addressing issues related to the meaning and purpose of life, which is work done by spiritual/religious advisors. This behavior-oriented psychotherapy deals with the relationship of individuals to their cognitions, feelings, sensations, and memories, and aims to encourage vitality and meaningful participation in life by creating psychological flexibility. Every intervention should be carried out with warmth, sincerity, and true compassion for the human condition (Walser, 2016). Both ACT therapists and spiritual/religious counselors focus on issues related to existence, purpose, and meaning. ACT's focus on value-oriented living guides the therapeutic process. Values and value-oriented actions are one of the most important parts of ACT interventions aimed at finding meaning in life and allowing this purpose to guide choices and actions. This is often part of the larger plan for spiritual/religious growth. Values can be used both to improve psychological flexibility and to perform spiritual/religious practices (Walser et al., 2016).

Given that ACT's emphasis on values and value-oriented action closely agrees with many spiritual/religious traditions, it seems natural and useful to integrate religion and spirituality with ACT (Tan, 2016). In general, religious belief and spiritual contexts are crucial for many people in developing well-defined values. When the focus is on living according to one's own values, individuals interact with spiritual/religious approaches both openly and secretly. Many value lists and worksheets have been developed for use in ACT, often including spiritual/religious values. These encourage individuals to identify and explain the spiritual/religious values that are important to them for these values to guide their life choices and behaviors (Nieuwsma, 2016).

ACT and spiritual/religious approaches also intersect in relation to pain. ACT helps people to find meaning in pain by not seeing their suffering solely through the lens of a psychiatric diagnosis because of their existence. Many ACT exercises in include emotional pain, revealing values, and continuing one's life with committed action. ACT emphasizes the acceptance of human experiences, including pain, and places importance on people to act in accordance with their values. In doing so, ACT can also use calls for wisdom, action, and the unity of spiritual/religious approaches (Nieuwsma, 2016). ACT can offer theological integrity for those experiencing psychological pain and also respects pain more strongly than many contemporary therapeutic strategies and techniques. Therefore, individuals from various faith traditions can be offered integrative models that will help them effectively blend action in the external world with acceptance of the inner world for optimal functioning

instead of seeking happiness. By accepting psychological suffering while following the teachings of the sacred texts, many religiously dedicated people achieve satisfaction and develop a meaningful life (Knabb & Meador, 2016).

Another important shared concept between ACT and spiritual/religious practices is awareness. From an ACT perspective developing mindfulness is an important goal for living fully in the present and connecting to the ongoing flow of experiences. Awareness is the basis of acceptance and, more importantly, supports psychological and behavioral resilience (Hayes et al., 2012). ACT therapists therefore ensure that their clients observe cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance without being caught up in an uncomfortable thought flow and without any intervention in these experiences in order to cope with the cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance. In addition, therapy focuses on conscious mindfulness exercises to develop an open, flexible, and curious relationship with them. Among other components, mindfulness includes anchoring to the present moment, constantly developing attention, and maintaining a non-judgmental attitude to thoughts, feelings, and sensations. In this way, clients are helped to clarify a number of values that can guide their life. In short, during therapy clients can balance acceptance of the inner world with values-based action in the outer world. Thus, clients can take advantage of ACT to recognize their deepest aspirations, desires, and wishes that come from the heart (Nieuwsma, 2016).

In many spiritual practices, conscious mindfulness also refers to the relationship between the mind and the Creator or the relationship between the mind and deeper truths. For example, as a way to develop spirituality, religions use practices like prayer are (Walser, 2016). Hence, various components of spiritual/religious teachings can enrich the approaches to mindfulness and acceptance-based therapy (Thomas et al., 2017). In particular, many of the religious practices of Muslim clients, such as prayer, ablution, fasting, dhikr, murakab, and contemplation, provide focus, mindfulness, and staying in the moment (Isgandarova, 2019; Tanhan, 2019; Yavuz, 2016). Likewise, mindfulness meditation in Buddhism also relates to being in the moment, mindfulness, and especially acceptance (Kumano & Naradevo, 2016). In both the Jewish and Christian traditions, nothing is more valuable or meaningful than being right here, right now. All opportunities for both spiritual and behavioral connection begin with the ability to be present. In this way, mindful mindfulness is formed. It is concerned with being aware of and being in contact with the worlds inside and outside of us right now, without getting caught up in thoughts about the past and the future (Kohlenberg, 2016; Ord, 2016). ACT applications can be integrated with new methods and techniques developed from many applications in spiritual/religious traditions (Isgandarova, 2019).

From a spiritual/religious perspective, ACT practices reduce human suffering through elements like transcendence, immensity, and interconnectedness. In a

spiritual/religious context, relying on a transcendent being to relieve pain can be an important resource. In ACT, acceptance and mindfulness, based on a transcendent sense of self, allow for an unlimited encounter with ongoing experience in a state of flux. In ACT, immensity and connectedness are encouraged as part of the study of psychological resilience. These concepts are also reflected in the ACT model of the therapeutic relationship (Walser et al., 2016). Immensity is an experience of vastness, a sense of self that is not limited to space and time. Connectedness, on the other hand, expresses an underlying sense of unity with others and the world (Pargament, 2007). The client and the therapist discover the prevalence of suffering – that it is one of those mindfulness experiences of all humanity. Thus, the problem is not that people suffer but that we have a relationship with the pain we experience. Life includes change, loss, and death while pain is an inevitable part of these experiences. However, the way we relate to pain is not inevitable. Observing experience from a contextual and transcendent perspective, and guiding the client to relate flexibly to internal events, fosters a sense of infinity and interconnectedness (Walser et al., 2016). ACT attaches great importance to positive psychology, contextual perspective, spirituality, social justice, and multiculturalism. For this reason, ACT is an important approach that can be used for various spiritual/religious groups to address biopsychosocial and spiritual problems and/or improve well-being (Tanhan, 2014).

A Spiritual/Religious Look at the Basic Processes of ACT

Cognitive Defusion Versus Cognitive Fusion

Cognitive fusion occurs when thoughts appear as absolute truths or commands we must obey, threats to be dismissed, or things we must pay our full attention to (Harris, 2020). An example of this is when somebody reacts to the sentence "I am a useless person" as if he is a useless person, and to the sentence "I will not succeed" as if failing to succeed is inevitable for them (Köroğlu, 2011). Cognitive defusion, on the other hand, is to look at thoughts from one step back and see them as just words. Rather than controlling thought and changing it, the emphasis is on changing our relationship with it. In this way, thoughts are allowed to come and go through our minds, and a distance is put between us and the thought (Harris, 2018). Let's consider a client who is fused with the idea that they are a sinner. Here, we can see that there is no distinction between the clients thinking and him/herself whereas someone who says, "I have the thought that I am a sinner" or "I realize that I have the thought that I am a sinner" distances themesleves from their thoughts and sees them only as thoughts.

When considering cognitive defusion from a spiritual/religious perspective, most spiritual/religious teachings focus on the importance of performing actions (Hayes et al., 2016). For example, Islam helps people gain perspective on their

behavior after thinking and suggests acting in accordance with a meaningful life rather than suggesting new ways of thinking (Yavuz, 2016), as stated in the Qur'an: "We created man, and of course, we know what is passing through him, and we are closer to him than the jugular vein, while two receivers sitting on his right and left take and record what they are doing" (Qur'an, 50:16). Similarly, the hadith is expressed as follows: "*Allah Ta'ala will not call my ummah to account for this thing unless he does something bad that is going through them or speaks about it."* (Bukhari, Talaq: 11; al-Ayman, wa'n-nuzur: 15). Keeping a distance between thought and humans in both the Qur'an and hadith supports cognitive defusion (Yavuz, 2016). In this way, it becomes easier to let dysfunctional thoughts come and go (Kara, 2020). It may also be important for spiritual/religious counselors whatever their background to use cognitive defusion in their counseling if they often often work with issues like anger, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Robb, 2016). In summary, spiritual/religious activities (prayers, sacred texts, stories, and rituals) help a person overcome cognitive fusion and develop new perspectives (Tanhan, 2019).

Experiential Avoidance Versus -Acceptance-

Experiential avoidance is the avoidance of unwanted thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences or trying to get rid of them altogether (Harris, 2018). ACT is based on the assumption that the main problem faced by most clients is life aversion, which is the avoidance of one's own unwanted thoughts, feelings, sensations, and other special events (Bach & Moran, 2008; Yavuz & Nalbant, 2021). Conversely, acceptance is to adopt a deliberately open, receptive, flexible, and willing stance towards life at any moment. Acceptance is not passive tolerance or submission. On the contrary, it is a deliberate and willing stance as part of living a worthwhile life that transforms the function of inner experiences from events to be avoided into a focus of interest, curiosity, and observation (Hayes et al., 2013). Acceptance mainly entails making space for all events, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that occur, and approaching them with an observant self without interfering with them. This allows more time and effort for activities that make life meaningful (Hayes, 2016).

In spiritual/religious teaching applications, tolerance, patience, gratitude, repentance, consent, trust, forgiveness, etc. lead to acceptance. In Buddhist teaching, acceptance is achieved through the five faculties of disillusionment, willingness, commitment, receptivity, and insight (Kumano & Naradevo, 2016). In Judaism, the process of acceptance after a loss is shortened in Judaism, especially through mourning rituals (Kohlenberg, 2016). Christians believe that the expulsion of humas from heaven, a kind of fall and division, brought separation whereas acceptance can bring integration (Knabb et al., 2010). Islam, which emphasizes the need for people to take contemplative actions, assumes that the emotions and thoughts that arise from

contemplating our own creation and life can guide our meaning in life (Sözen, 2018; Yiğit, 2011). By making a place for thoughts, contemplation enables them to come together, thereby eliminating escaping and avoidance behaviors. Muslims perform daily rituals of gratitude, consent, trust, and tolerance, although some Muslim clients do so from a rules-based rather than an authentic, internalized perspective. Hence, their acceptance may be what ACT describes as passive acceptance. It may therefore be useful for the therapist to be aware of the spiritual resources that help the client transition to active, productive acceptance (Tanhan, 2019).

Loss of Flexible Contact With the Present Versus -Being Present-

According to ACT, cognitive fusion and experiential avoidance can easily disconnect us from our here-and-now experiences. Most of us can easily get caught up in the predominance of the conceptual past and future anxiety by remembering our negative memories, thinking about what we are going through, imagining what awaits us in the future, and worrying about what has not yet happened (Harris, 2018; Hayes, 2016). Being in the moment does not mean completely devaluing the past. We need our past. However, instead of being stuck with our past thoughts or concepts, it is important to possess the only moment that we really have; that is, the present moment. If we can be aware of the present moment, it the next moment may be drastically and creatively different because we are aware yet do not impose anything in advance on the next moment (Kabat-zınn, 2019). The benefit of this is to be able to see everything about life, whatever we like or dislike, as it is now (Atalay, 2020).

The experience of being in the moment is found in many spiritual/religious teachings. In particular, Buddhism's methods to achieve mindfulness overlap with ACT's concept of being in the moment (Fung, 2015; Hayes, 2002). In Buddhism, wisdom is achieved along with the four noble truths and eight layered paths. Thanks to wisdom, the ignorance that leads to desire and devotion will disappear to achieve salvation from pain. The key to achieving salvation is meditation (Nhat-Hanh, 2006). As one of the eight ways, right mindfulness techniques are applied to reduce the impact of thoughts without changing their content, for example treating a thought as if it were an object, by giving it shape, size, color, texture, and form. Buddhism's techniques align with current ACT techniques (Hayes, 2002). Similarly, many Islamic practices involve being in the moment as advocated in ACT, such as being Ibn al-vakt in the Sufi tradition, which is defined as not bringing the troubles of the past and the concerns of the future into the present moment (Sayın, 2012). This Sufi concept represents just an initial level and state of mindfulness (Günaydın, 2020) while a person who knows the value of the moment they are living in will experience inner peace and rise up the levels in their soul (Sayın, 2012). Islamic religious rituals of ablution, prayer, and post-prayer actions require attention and being in the moment (Tanhan, 2019). Likewise, it is very important

to be present in the Jewish and Christian faith to perform religious rituals and perform worthwhile actions. These are intended to achieve conscious mindfulness without being stuck in thoughts about the past and the future. With conscious mindfulness, people can establish connections with themselves, their environment, and the Creator (Kohlenberg, 2016; Ord, 2016; Rosmarin, 2021).

Attachment to Conceptualized Self Versus -Self as Context-

A person with a conceptualized defines and restricts themselves with limited concepts (Terzi & Tekinalp, 2013), such as considering themselves ugly, smart, stupid, beautiful, rich, strong, shy, or aggressive. Self as context, on the other hand, is not related to thoughts and feelings but provides a vantage point from which we observe our thoughts and feelings. It is an area where these feelings and thoughts can move. We can access this psychological space by realizing what we have noticed or by becoming aware of our consciousness. Here, we can watch our own feelings and thoughts without getting caught up in life. A good alternative term for this is pure mindfulness. In ACT, self as context is used to facilitate acceptance when the client is afraid of being harmed by their inner life. It can provide separation when they are overly attached to their conceptual self, help them make conscious choices by creating a space where thoughts and feelings do not control behavior, and lead to dedicated actions (Harris, 2018).

Both Eastern traditions and Islam have self as context aspects. In the Qur'an, the basic concept that refers to the self is the nafs, which are expressed in the form of seven stages: "nafs-i emmare, nafs-i levvame, nafs-i mülhime, nafs-i mutmainne, nafs-i raziyye, nafs-i merdiyye, and nafs-i kamile" (Tanhan, 2017). A person can experience these stages both linearly and recursively. However, moving forward to the final stage and staying on track requires constant effort to handle any experience with a mindful, conscious, open, and accepting mind. Here, the idea that people see that they can switch between stages and define themselves differently at each stage coincides with the contextual self-concept of ACT. For example, if a Muslim client consistently identifies themselves only with nafs-i emmare (I am all bad; I am all good; I am a sinner) because of various thoughts, feelings, experiences, or actions, then the client is classified as "conceptually self." If a Muslim client is aware of their good and bad behavior and strives to be open to them, and identify and treat them with caution, they are classified in ACT as "self as a process". This corresponds to nafs-i levvame (accusing self) and nafs-i mülhime'ye (inspired self) (Tanhan, 2017). Finally, the transition to the "contextual self" in ACT coincides with the fourth stage of the nafs (Yavuz, 2016).

In Islam, murakabe techniques are also important in the transition through these stages. These techniques, such as observation, contemplation, accounting, and

tedebbur, are similar to the self as context in ACT (Isgandarova, 2019). An important concept in Islam is rabita, which means connection, relationship, and being a member of a larger entity that transcends one's self, which is very similar to self as context (Tanhan, 2017). Finally, repentance is important in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism to eliminate the consequences of bad actions through fasting, sacrificing, purification rituals, charity activities, etc. Similar beliefs are found in Eastern traditions, especially Confucianism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Katar, 2012). These support the escape from the conceptual self by making a person reverse their past wrong behavior. By performing these practices, individuals can establish contact with the self as context.

Weakening of the Bond Established With Values Versus -Values-

Values are often confused with goals. While there is a list of our goals and every goal achieved can be recorded, there is no end to realizing values. For example, spending quality time with our children is a value that can last a lifetime. Having children is a goal. It is done and finished. While wanting to be a doctor is a goal, helping people is a value (İzgiman, 2021). While each client may have quite a limited number of basic values, each can be approached with numerous goals, thereby increasing psychological flexibility. If necessary, active efforts can be made to uncover values that have remained unnoticed for some time (most likely reflecting some kind of experiential avoidance) by forcing clients to express what they want their lives to represent (Zettle, 2007). Conversely, loss of contact with the principles that people consider important and meaningful for them and that could enrich their livesweakens the bond established with values (LeJeune & Luoma, 2019). To make life more meaningful, an individual needs to be aware of the problems in their value judgments, clarify the uncertainty, and be in contact with their values (Köroğlu, 2011).

Many people position their most meaningful values within a spiritual/religious framework (Park & Edmondson, 2011). In Judaism, for example, the ethical will and the understanding of repairing the world are consistent with ACT's view of values. Judaism considers the value of restoring the world as obligatory for every person to make the world a livable place. By combining the sensitivity and skills offered by ACT in therapy and the sensitivity of the Jewish faith, studies have developed effective applications (Kohlenberg, 2016). Christians organize their lives by focusing on values llike love, non-judgmentalism, forgiveness, and giving to the needy, based on the life and teachings of Jesus (Knabb et al., 2010). Similarly, Islamic spirituality plays an important role in developing interpersonal relationships and shaping values, such as "[h]ealthy interpersonal relationships, justice, respect for differences, humility, tolerance, benevolence, forgiveness, responsibility, getting along with neighbors, attending funerals, love, showing compassion, honesty, respect for the elderly, gratitude to the Creator, philanthropy, hospitality" (Tekke, 2019).

Indeed, values are the most compatible dimension between Islam and ACT because, it Muslims take long-term actions consistent with values without being stuck on the short-term goals of daily life (Yavuz, 2016).

Dysfunctional Behavior Versus -Committed Action-

Dysfunctional behaviors are basic actions that prevent us from living in mindfulness and in line with values. They prevent us from continuing our lives fully and richly or cause us to be stuck in a problem when we encounter difficulties (Harris, 2018). People who engage in dysfunctional behaviors exhibit behavioral repertoires (substance abuse, self-harm, etc.) to escape or avoid the environments they have determined to get rid of their negative internal experiences or reduce their intensity. This narrow repertoire of behaviors toward inner experiences leads to a lifestyle based on negative reinforcement and weaker meaning rather than a lifestyle based on values (Yavuz, 2015). Conversely, committed action means committing to do what is really important; that is, to engage in personally meaningful activities that support what the person values (Hayes et al., 1999). In short, these are the behaviors people that exhibit according to their values. The action that can be taken for a value is evaluated according to whether it serves this value in a particular context. An example would be an individual's decision to undergo surgery to achieve a health value (Bilgen, 2021). Once values have been identified and clarified, rules that determine the relevant goals and the behavior necessary to achieve them can be formulated and followed. Changes in overt behavior play an important role in ACT, provided they are linked to and driven by values (Zettle, 2007).

Unfortunately, clients' feelings of guilt, shame, or embarrassment prevent them from participating in valuable spiritual/religious activities, such as religious ceremonies, confession, or reconciliation. In addition, some clients' emotional bonds towards spiritual/religious practices may weaken or move away from them. Here, it is most effective for an ACT counselor to pay attention to the process of building values, encourage value-oriented action related to spiritual/religious values, and take into account the client's experiences and current context. In this way, counselors learn how clients have previously conceptualized their spiritual/religious values and whether they currently have any spiritual/religious practices that they think will reflect their values. ACT also uses the step-by-step principle and concretization to help identify repeatable action steps. Many spiritual/religious traditions also have similar practices (Farnsworth, 2016).

In Islam, after faith itself, an individual's most important duty is to perform committed actions in accordance with their values (Tanhan, 2019). Islam also encourages adherence to values, as seen in verses in the Qur'an encouraging Muslims in this direction (Qur'an, 3:57). This verse illustrates how the principles of believing

and doing righteous deeds often coexist in the Qur'an. Indeed, performing righteous deeds is mentioned over a hundred times, covering all areas of human life (Tanhan, 2019). Another issue is to perform value-oriented actions step by step. For example, the Qur'an says that "Allah does not burden a nafs with anything but its capacity" (Qur'an, 2:286). It is a principle in Islam to plan actions by starting with the easy ones before gradually focusing on meaningful actions. That is, it is important to take action in small steps at the right time and place. Furthermore, the Qur'an emphasizes permanent values over temporary goals: "*good deeds that are permanent are better for reward and more worthy of hope in the sight of your Lord." (Qur'an, 18:46*). These principles coincide with ACT's philosophy of creating committed action patterns (Yavuz, 2016).

Spiritual/Religiously Oriented Methods and Techniques in ACT Applications:

Methods and Techniques of Cognitive Defusion

ACT suggests three main methods of defusion: noticing, naming, and neutralizing. Noticing is the first step of dissociation. We can observe how often and in what way we immerse ourselves in our thoughts during the day. This will enable us to identigfy the kinds of thoughts we are stuck with and what kinds of events trigger them. These triggers can be a failure, rejection, good news, bad news, an approaching deadline, or failure to fulfill spiritual/religious duties. ACT offers many activities in response, such as naming a thought, writing that name somewhere, and repeating it to put a distance between us and the thought. When a bothersome thought, emotion, or memory arises, we can first notice it before naming it. For example, we can say, "Here! It appeared again as the story that I am a sinner." Noticing thoughts and giving them names is often effective for dissociation. However, in these cases, inactivation techniques are also used to increase the effectiveness. These thoughts can be neutralized by using various techniques, such as drawing or painting a thought, writing in different colors, sculpting a thought with clay, or voicing a thought through the mouths of characters (Harris, 2018, 2020). Here, the techniques of realizing the thought that I am a sinner, naming it, and neutralizing it can be applied. Clients can practice drawing a picture of the thought, writing a story about it, or repeating the thought. Finally, the experiences of the thought can be observed using the technique of watching leaves and thoughts passing in a stream (Stoddard & Afari, 2014; Törneke, 2017; Yavuz, 2022).

Acceptance Techniques

In order for the client to understand acceptance initially, the therapist or consultant should make the definition clear and understandable. It should be emphasized here that acceptance is not passive resignation or submission but an active choice. It should also

be explained that acceptance is not an emotion but an action. Finally, the client needs to understand that although experiential avoidance strategies work in the short term, they lead to problems in the long term (Harris, 2018; Hayes et al., 2012; Hayes, 2016).

A number of spiritual/religiously oriented techniques coincide with ACT's acceptance philosophy, such as trust, consent, patience, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation with uncertainty, and emotion regulation (Isgandarova, 2019; Kara, 2020; Tanhan, 2019; Yavuz, 2016). Herewe focus on the technique of realizing our limited control capacity. This technique can be applied by considering trust, consent, patience, reconciliation with uncertainty, and emotion regulation. The counselor/therapist asks the client to draw two nested circles on an empty space, which may be A4 paper or a blackboard. The inner circle represents the area that we can control while the outer circle represents the area that we cannot. Next, the clients are provided with sticky papers on which they write down what they can and cannot control before sticking into the relevant circles. The consultant then asks the client if there is anything they want to change when they look at it right now before pointing out how limited our control can be and focuses on what this limited area is related to. Afterwards, the counselor/therapist shows a video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lLjov8a76dA) to clarify what we can control. Finally, the therapist can emphasize the use of trust, consent, and patience in situations that we cannot control.

Methods and Techniques for Being Present

ACT techniques, such as the raisin exercise, awareness of sounds, thoughts, and feelings, breath monitoring, eating awareness, body scanning, and awareness of pure consciousness, can be conducted together with the therapist and as home exercises (Atalay, 2020; Kabat-zınn, 2019). Other possible techniques used in spiritual/religious teachings include keeping a gratitude journal, prayer ties, prayer circles, contemplation with questions, visiting spiritual/religious places, basic, guided, or zen meditation, and charitable service activities. The rest day in the three monotheistic religions (e.g., the Jewish Sabbath) can also be used as a mindfulness-raising method since all work is stopped so that people can focus on their relationships with themselves, their environment (especially the family), and their Creator (Rosmarin, 2021).

Here is a brief introduction to the prayer circle technique. The following eight areas are specified, each of which requires five minutes of practice: "*To realize and thank for the blessings that you have, to sing hymns, to ask for protection and guidance, to forgive themselves and others, to take care of the needs of yourself and others, to be filled with love and inspiration, to listen, to surrender."* This technique ensures that the client focuses on different types of prayers, is motivated to pray, and uses different dynamics to enrich the prayers' content (Rossiter-Thornton, 2002). When the stages of this technique are fully implemented, the client will experience being in the moment.

Methods and Techniques for Self as Context

The first stage in moving towards self as context is to create a metaphor that will allow the client to see themselves without interfering with their inner experience. The frequently used sky/weather metaphor emphasizes that the sky always remains constant although weather condition can change constantly. That is, the sky is always the same sky even if rain, storms, dark clouds, etc. pass by. The sky is used here instead of the self as context. The aim of using the metaphor is to help the client establish a relationship with their inner experiences through the metaphor and begin to develop a separation between the thinker and the thought. This activity allows the therapist to help the client observe and label the content of their thoughts, their relationship with this content, and the impact of this relationship on taking valuable actions.

In the second stage, the client is helped to gain deictic flexibility by looking around with concepts like "I am here and now" to acquire new perspectives. This also strengthens the client's framing relationship. For example, when a client says, "The story I tell myself about me is just a part of me", it indicates that they have not integrated themselves with a concept like shyness. That is, they consider shyness to be only a part of their personality. Otherwise, many people around them will have distanced themselves from the environment and the event. By controlling the behavior, the client also sees how much the content has affected their life.

In the last stage, the client is helped to distinguish between behaviors created with internal content and value-oriented behaviors (Bennett & Oliver, 2019; Harris, 2018). Using Islamic murakabe techniques (observation, imagination, contemplation, reflection, and accounting), together with ACT methods, can lead to self as context (Isgandarova, 2019). In addition, six-M model can also improve the contextual self (Keshavarzi & Nsour, 2021).

Techniques for Values

Values can be identified using spiritual/religiously oriented techniques, such as clarifying values, and taking action for one's strengths and spiritual values. In the technique of clarifying values, the consultant/therapist draws up a value list form before the session containing spiritual/religious and basic human values. After defining the concept of value and explaining the difference between goals and objectives, the consultant/therapist gives the form to the client to examine the values in the client's value list and identify which are suitable. While there is no limit, the client's list usually includes five to seven values . In addition, the client indicates any missing values that are worth adding. The client then ranks the identified values by their importance. The activity ends with discussing the client's feelings and thoughts about these values. Clients can be given the following post-session home exercise: *"Where do you see yourself at the end of ten years lived in line with these values?*

If you could send a message to yourself ten years from now, what would you like to say? What would you tell your future self to do differently? I want you to write a letter thinking about all this."

In the my strengths technique, the counselor/therapist explains to the client that we are also influenced by our personal characteristics and skills while clarifying our values. The counselor/therapist then gives the client a strength form created before the session. The client is asked to identify the strengths that they think are in them. Here, it is emphasized that the client can specify as many strengths as they want. They can also add other strengths that they think they possess but are not on the list. The client is then asked to identify any relationship between the values they listed before and their own strengths, and discuss these relationships, including what role their strengths play in achieving their values. The therapist then asks, "What could our spiritual/religious resources be?" and emphasizes their role in achieving values. The activity ends with recording the client's feelings and thoughts about it (Yavuz & Ekşi, 2022).

Methods and Techniques for Committed Action

During the action phase, various behavioral approaches can be used, such as goal setting, exposure, behavioral activation, and ability development. Others include negotiation, time management, assertiveness, problem-solving, crisis management without self-suggestion, life-enhancing and enriching skills training (Harris, 2018). ACT protocols almost always include homework assignments linked to short, medium, and long-term behavior change goals in the therapy study. Behavior change efforts in turn lead to contact with psychological barriers that are addressed through other ACT processes (Hayes et al., 2006).

From an ACT perspective, Islam includes various value-oriented acts, especially acts of worship like praying, fasting, hajj and umrah, zakat and charity, and reading the Qur'an. Qur'anic stories often mention the world's transience, emphasizing that we should perform value-oriented actions should so that the afterlife will be beautiful. Conversely, the Qur'an warns about the consequences of deviating from these values, such as the people of Nuh (Qur'an, 11: 25-48), AAD (Qur'an, 11: 50-60), the people of Thamud (Qur'an, 11: 61-68), the people of Lut (Qur'an, 11: 77-83), and the people of Lut (Qur'an, 11: 84-95), the Sabbath (Qur'an, 2: 65-66), Prophet Musa's people (Qur'an, 20: 83-94), and the Battle of Uhud (Qur'an, 3:121-122). There are also many examples of the Prophet Muhammad's devotion to values (Qur'an, 16:89; 33:21; 34:28), being known as al-Amin (reliable) by his people before he became a prophet, the Prophet Ibrahim (Qur'an, 11: 75; 16: 120; 19: 41-58; 37: 84-111), Surah Yusuf, the issue of Talut and Goliath (Qur'an, 2: 247-251), and Ashab al-Kahf (Qur'an, 18: 9-26). Many events in the Qur'an and the characteristics of believers' servants show how important values are for Islam. Thus, counselors/therapists can work with Muslim

clients by evaluating their spiritual/religious backgrounds through Qur'anic verses about taking action. Techniques can be developed based on concepts that coincide with the ACT contained in the teachings of other spiritual/religious traditions.

The Method of Metaphorical Expression

Metaphor, which is formed from the Greek words meta (on) and phrein (to transfer), is a mental/linguistic process that expresses one idea using some aspects of another. Metaphorical expression enables difficult concepts to be explained in concrete, surprising, and expressive language though implicit symbolic analogies (Cebeci, 2019). Ancient philosophy used metaphorical expressions, such as Pythagoras's association between seasons and human life, or between sports competition and earthly life, Plato's allegory of the cave, and Aristotle's description of old age as the evening of life. Islamic philosophy has also made much use of metaphor, such as Farabi's comparison of a good state to a healthy body, Gazzali's likening of the human body to a city, and Ibn'ul Arabi's metaphor of all existence as a circle (Keklik, 1990). Likewise, psychological couselors have long used metaphorical expression to communicate thoughts and feelings to ensure client change and development (Martin et al., 1992). For example, Freud and Jung initially gave metaphors an important place in interpreting the client's subconscious while Milton H. Later, Erikson refered to metaphor as a tool that makes it easier to relate to the subconscious (Long & Lepper, 2008). In cognitive behavioral therapies, various metaphors are used to explain the characteristics and concepts of therapy (Piştof & Şanlı, 2013).

ACT often uses metaphor to understand both psychological rigidity and the factors leading to psychological flexibility. The following metaphors are often used to explain cognitive fusion and dissociation: leaves in the stream and fairy-tale grandfather; walking in the swamp for life avoidance and acceptance; hands for being in the moment; sky and weather, and the theater scene for conceptual self and the contextual (observing) self (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSrZ_nmF9_s); compass for values; and alien zorg for value-oriented action (Harris, 2018; Stoddard & Afari, 2014; Törneke, 2017).

Metaphorical spiritual/religious practices could also be integrated into ACT processes (Hayes, 2016). Metaphors are also used extensively in spiritual/religious teachings, apart from philosophy, literary texts, and psychotherapy (Ögke, 2007). Given that spiritual/religious metaphors provide important information about the client's spiritual/religious world, the counselor/therapist needs to understand the client's metaphors (Griffith & Griffith, 2002) and in return can offer metaphors related to the client's spiritual/religious faith during the counseling/therapy process. For example, the sacred Lotus Sutra text, revered for its effective use of metaphor and narration, played an important role in the development of Japanese Buddhism. Its seven parables and metaphorical narratives

provide good examples in terms of their orientation to personal development (Akbay, 2021). The Christian Bible also often uses metaphorical narrative methods when presenting the requirements of the Christian faith while there are examples of metaphors in counseling processes in teaching the connections paradigm, which is important in Judaism (Rosmarin, 2021). For Muslim clients, the metaphorical narratives contained in the Qur'an can also help them reframe their problems (Ahammed, 2010). Likewise, the stories in Mesnevi are some of the best examples of metaphorical expression, particularly the ney metaphor, which depicts a person who is detached from heaven. The metaphor shows that, in order for a person to get to heaven, they must be a Kamil person, and for this, they must go through certain stages. Thus, such metaphors can be used to assist clients in self-realization (Doğan, 2022).

Conclusion

As one of the third-wave therapies, ACT considers the important theoretical foundations ignored by second-wave approaches. These include evaluating the context in which the client has lived, revealing the value in their life, and making mindfulness-based behavioral interventions showing the role of language in shaping our lives. ACT never aims to eliminate symptoms or change feelings and thoughts. Instead, it examines the relationship between a person's feelings and thoughts. By using experiential experiences and metaphors, ACT concretizes many concepts that are abstract for the client and facilitates the therapy's use for clients of all ages. In addition to its use with individuals, as ACT has also been effective for group therapies, especially with children and adolescents. ACT can be used for clinical trials and for everyone to gain a philosophy of life.

As explained in this paper, ACT aligns with various cultures, local practices, and spiritual/religious traditions in emphasizing meaning in life, pain, acceptance, awareness, values, and committed action. These common points enable integration in therapy practices. Accordingly, this study identified the common points shared by ACT processes and spiritual /religious traditions, and considered their joint use. It discussed various methods and techniques that have been applied for millennia and are widely accepted, especially those in spiritual/religious traditions. The work of various experts has inspired the integration of these methods and techniques with ACT (Hayes, 2016; Isgandarova, 2019; Keshavarzi & Nsour, 2021; Rosmarin, 2021; Tanhan, 2019; Yavuz, 2016). Regarding Turkey specifically as a majority Muslim country, this study suggests that new models can be developed that take into account Islamic belief systems, based on the basic philosophy of ACT.

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