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Revisiting Hedonism in QS. Al-Hadid Verse 20: Integrating Tafsir and Neuroscience on Reward, Self-Control, and Spiritual Awareness

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Abstract

This study departs from the question of how the mechanism of self-regulation failure in hedonistic behavior can be explained through the integration of the spiritual message of QS. Al-Hadid verse 20 and the neurobiological functions of the brain. The aim is to dissect the roots of the hedonistic lifestyle and synchronize brain function with spiritual awareness in dealing with attachment to instant gratification. Using a descriptive-analytical qualitative method with normative-empirical integration techniques, this study connects classical and contemporary interpretive data with neuroscience findings. The research findings show that the stages of worldly pleasures in the verse (*la'ib, labw, zinah, tafakhur, takāthur*) correlate directly with a surge of dopamine in the brain's addictive and deceptive reward system, which can physically weaken the function of the prefrontal cortex as the center of executive function. The theoretical contribution of this research lies in strengthening the exegesis literature through empirical neuroscience evidence and repositioning the concept of mujahadatun nafs not merely as a moral doctrine, but as a process of strengthening the brain's cognitive functions to moderate human biological impulses.

Keywords: *Hedonism; Neuroscience; QS. Al-Hadid: 20; Dopamine; Mujahadatun Nafs.*

INTRODUCTION

Humans generally seek goodness and happiness in life, with the goal of feeling at peace. However, the definition of happiness itself varies from person to person. These differences are influenced not only by personal factors, but also by the social and cultural conditions surrounding the individual. In the current era of globalization, one of the tangible effects of these changes is the emergence of hedonism as a social phenomenon that is becoming increasingly widespread in modern society.¹ However, hedonism is not merely a social issue, but also an ethical and cognitive one. In ethical hedonism, it is stated that absolutely all pleasures are positive and all discomforts are negative. This intrinsic meaning is understood in a non-instrumental way, regardless

¹ Vionnalita Jennyya, Maria Heny Pratikno, and Selvie Rumampuk, "Gaya Hidup Hedonisme Di Kalangan Mahasiswa Universitas Sam Ratulangi," *Jurnal Holistik* 14, no. 3 (2021): 2, <https://ejournal.unsrat.ac.id/index.php/holistik/article/view/34482>.

of what causes pleasure and discomfort. It takes the form of ignoring moral obligations such as justice, which are not always pleasant. Its selfish form even allows the exploitation of others for personal satisfaction.² Cognitively, hedonism encourages confirmation bias through the pursuit of hedonistic goals that often distort human rationalism, whereby individuals actively select data that supports personal pleasure and ignores uncomfortable facts. As a result, the cognitive system fails to predict happiness objectively, mistakenly believing that the satisfaction of material desires can bring permanent satisfaction.³

Philosophical hedonism holds that the primary goal of life is the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Epistemologically, something is considered good if it provides a pleasant sensation.⁴ This contradicts the theocentric ethics of the Qur'an. The Qur'an emphasizes that human perception is limited and often deceived by worldly pleasures. The Qur'an separates pleasure from truth, stating in Surah al-Baqarah: 216 that what humans dislike may be good for them, and what they like may be bad. Something that is considered painful, which is called bad and avoided by hedonism, may actually be a true good.⁵ It is also mentioned that worldly life is a deceptive pleasure and the ultimate goal of life is the hereafter, so the world is only a place to seek provisions for the hereafter. Here, the Qur'an serves as a corrector of the limitations of human cognition.

According to Yusuf Al-Qardawi, due to increasing market demand, from an economic expert's perspective, this not only drives an increase in the production of goods in large quantities and high quality, but also triggers an unhealthy obsession with consumption among the public. This increase in production becomes a challenge in itself when consumers are not equipped with the proper understanding and guidance regarding healthy and wise consumption. As a result, this hedonistic lifestyle develops without any clear brakes or limitations. Unlike capitalism, the hedonistic nature of capitalism is considered normal and even an important part of the market mechanism. In part, this is also in line with the theory of *desire satisfaction*, which emphasizes that a person's happiness or satisfaction is highly dependent on the fulfillment of their desires. According to this theory, the more desires are fulfilled, the happier a person will be. Meanwhile, in Islam, a hedonistic lifestyle is considered despicable because it has the potential to distract individuals from their true purpose in life. Islam teaches consumption that is in accordance with the rules of halal and thayyib, and emphasizes the importance of moderation, not being excessive, and being responsible for everything that is consumed.⁶

² Edward N. Zalta et al., "Hedonism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019, 8, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/hedonism/>.

³ Matthew Jiwa et al., "Hedonism as a Motive for Information Search : Biased Information - Seeking Leads to Biased Beliefs," *Scientific Reports* 13 (2023): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-29429-8>.

⁴ Ninil Elfira et al., "HEDONISME BERDASARKAN PERSPEKTIF AGAMA ISLAM," *IKHTISAR: Jurnal Pengetahuan Islam* 4, no. 2 (2024): 462, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.55062/2021/IJPI>.

⁵ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbab, Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2005), 460–61.

⁶ Ramadhan Razali, "Perilaku Konsumen: Hedonisme Dalam Perspektif Islam," *Jurnal Ekonomi Syariah, Akuntansi Dan Perbankan (JESKaPe)* 4, no. 1 (2020): 116–17, <https://doi.org/10.52490/jeskape.v4i1.774>.

Hedonism essentially reflects a failure of self-regulation in two main ways. *First*, poor regulation due to a lack of clear standards, weak self-monitoring, or a lack of mental strength. *Second*, misguided regulation, caused by false assumptions or prioritizing momentary emotions over long-term interests. Based on the strength model, the human capacity for self-control is viewed as a limited resource. When modern culture continuously triggers hedonistic urges, this mental strength is depleted to the point of exhaustion. The central point in this process is attention control. Effective self-regulation requires individuals to be able to transcend immediate situations in order to consider long-term consequences. However, when attention is completely tied to present gratification, this ability weakens. An initial small loss of control often leads to a total abandonment of control, as the self-defense system tends to give in to impulsive urges when the energy for internal control has been exhausted. Unfortunately, modern cultures such as today's hedonism tend to exacerbate this condition by creating an environment that weakens self-control.⁷

Previous literature studies have mapped the phenomenon of hedonism from various perspectives, including through the interpretation of QS. Al-Ḥadīd verse 20, which warns of the dangers of worldly pleasures and emphasizes the importance of self-awareness for Gen-Z in facing the spiritual trials of the world.⁸ Meanwhile, social reviews identify the dominant influence of social media and the environment on contemporary hedonistic behavior.⁹ In addition, from a neuroscience perspective, it offers an integrative framework through the utilization of brain neuroplasticity in Islamic education to shape relevant behavior patterns.¹⁰ However, these studies have not explained the mechanism of self-regulation failure that causes understanding of sacred verses to often lose out to momentary impulsive urges. There is a theoretical gap regarding how the synchronization between brain function and spiritual awareness works in practice to overcome attachment to instant gratification. This study attempts to fill this gap by integrating the reward and self-control systems in the brain with spiritual awareness in the perspective of QS. Al-Ḥadīd verse 20.

Although the term hedonism is not explicitly mentioned in the text of the Qur'an, a search through the *Al-Mu'jam Al-Maudhu'i* dictionary shows that there are 13 verses that are relevant to this concept. Of this group of verses with similar themes, Al-Ḥadīd verse 20 is considered the most comprehensive representation in analyzing the phenomenon of hedonism compared to the other 12 verses because it contains key terminology such as *la'ibun*, *lahwun*, *ẓinah*, *tafākbur*, and *takāthur*.¹¹

⁷ Roy F. Baumeister and Todd F. Heatherton, "Self-Regulation Failure: An Overview," *Psychological Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (1996): 13.

⁸ Fara Andini and Adenan Adenan, "Hedonisme Dan Implikasinya Pada Gen-Z : Telaah QS . Al-Hadid Ayat 20," *JRTI (Jurnal Riset Tindakan Indonesia)* 9, no. 1 (2024): 87–96, <https://doi.org/10.29210/30034558000>.

⁹ Nur Ainun Ghoisani Ritonga, Cantika Zahara, and Afwan Syahril Manurung, "Gaya Hidup Hedonis Pada Remaja Masa Kini (Pengaruh Media Sosial Dan Lingkungan Sosial)," *WISSEN* 3, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.62383/wissen.v3i3.1065>.

¹⁰ Zulkifli et al., "Mekanisme Kerja Otak Dan Sistem Saraf: Perspektif Neurosains Pendidikan Islam," *Menara Ilmu: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Kajian Ilmiah* 19, no. 1 (2025): 118–30, <https://doi.org/10.31869/mi.v19i1.6138>.

¹¹ Subhi Abdul al-Ra'uf Asar, *Al Mu'jam Al-Maudhu'i Li Ayati Al-Qur'ani Al-Karimi* (Kairo: Dar Al-Fadhilah, 1990), 736.

This study uses a descriptive-analytical qualitative method with normative-empirical integration analysis techniques.¹² The primary data consists of QS. Al-Ḥadīd verse 20 and classical and contemporary interpretations, while secondary data is obtained from scientific publications related to hedonism and neuroscience. The integration framework was carried out in three steps: (1) normative interpretation to dissect the terminology of hedonism in QS. Al-Ḥadīd verse 20 (*la'ib, lahwun, zīnah, tafākbur, takāthur*), (2) empirical exploration of neuroscience data on the dopamine system and prefrontal cortex, and (3) comparative synthesis to connect the Qur'an's warning about false pleasures with the biological mechanisms of the brain. In interpreting this verse, the author uses the classical interpretation of Al-Qurṭhubī because of its deep fiqh style, so that the explanation remains disciplined and clear.¹³ Meanwhile, contemporary interpretations use Tafsir Al-Mishbah because of its distinctive contextual nature with modern society, allowing the phenomenon of hedonism to be discussed more realistically.¹⁴

Neuroscience provides an empirical understanding of QS. Al-Ḥadīd: 20 that cannot be explained by classical and contemporary interpretations of the Qur'an, particularly the specific biological mechanisms behind *la'ib, lahwun, zīnah, tafākbur, takāthur*. Classical and contemporary interpretations are limited to textual and moral interpretations, which emphasize the temporary nature of pleasure and encourage an orientation towards the hereafter without touching on neurobiological processes. Neuroscience proves that deception causes a surge of dopamine in which the brain constantly demands greater pleasure to feel satisfied, trapping humans in a cycle of never being satisfied. In addition, excessive physical pursuit of worldly pleasures weakens the prefrontal cortex.¹⁵ Neurobiologically, this explains why humans can lose the ability to think clearly about the afterlife. Through a neuroscience approach, the process behind the Qur'an's warning can be scientifically proven through biological mechanisms that are beyond the reach of classical and contemporary interpretations.

DISCUSSION

Hedonism

Hedonism derived from the Greek word *hedone* or pleasure, is a way of life that places material and sensual enjoyment as the main purpose of human existence.¹⁶

¹² Zuchri Abdussamad, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, Cet. 1 (Makassar: Syakir Media Press, 2021), 110.

¹³ Irham Muhammad Azama and Havidz Cahya Pratama, "Pandangan Ushul Fikih Al-Qurṭhubī Dalam Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Jual Beli Al-Qurṭhubī 's View on Ushul Fikih in The Interpretation of the Buying and Selling Verses," *Alhamra* 4, no. 2 (2023): 127, <https://jurnalnasional.ump.ac.id/index.php/Alhamra/article/view/18413>.

¹⁴ Faliach Saiful Khawash et al., "Penafsiran Ayat-Ayat Toleransi Dalam Tafsir Al-Azhar Dan Al-Mishbah Serta Implementasinya Terhadap Masyarakat Indonesia," *Al-Fahmu* 3, no. 1 (2024): 3, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.58363/alfahmu.v3i1.74>.

¹⁵ Riryn Novianty et al., "Increasing Youth Productivity Through Dopamine Detox with Barisan Muda Riau," *DINAMISIA: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 8, no. 1 (2024): 42, <https://doi.org/10.31849/dinamisia.v8i1.15676>.

¹⁶ Nabilatul Muhtarisah and Wahidul Anam, "Fenomena Hedonisme: Kajian Tafsir Dan Hermeneutika Paul Ricoeur Terhadap QS. Al-Isra' Ayat 27 Bagi Gaya Hidup Mahasiswa Masa Kini," *An-Natiq Jurnal Kajian Islam Interdisipliner* 4, no. 2 (2024): 196, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/an-natiq.v4i2.22103>.

Historically, this school of thought developed from the ideas of Aristippus, who emphasized physical pleasure, to Epicurus, who pursued ataraxia, or peace of mind.¹⁷ However, in the modern context, the meaning of hedonism has narrowed to simply the unlimited gratification of desires, luxury, and a consumptive lifestyle. This is highly relevant to the warning in the Qur'an in Surah Al-Hadīd verse 20, which describes the world as a game, a distraction, an adornment, and excessive boasting about wealth and pride, which often distracts humans from the essence of their creation.¹⁸

There are two factors underlying hedonism: internal and external factors. Internal factors, such as low self-control and the basic human tendency to never be satisfied, create impulsive and materialistic behavior.¹⁹ Meanwhile, external factors stem from the influence of parenting styles that seem to spoil children, as well as pressure from social and media environments that force individuals to keep up with trends so as not to be considered outdated.²⁰ From the perspective of QS. Al-Hadīd: 20, these factors are forms of *zīnah* (adornment) and *tafākḥur* (boasting) that trigger humans to continuously pursue excessive worldly recognition.²¹

The impact of a hedonistic lifestyle not only damages finances through wasteful behavior, but also damages the individual's mentality, making them selfish and irresponsible.²² Hedonism creates a cycle of overproduction and consumption for the sake of pleasure that must constantly be increased, until eventually that false pleasure becomes confusing and boring.²³ In addition, it increases promiscuity, because if someone is trapped in pleasure alone, it is not impossible for that person to become entangled in promiscuity.²⁴ The hedonistic lifestyle also triggers someone to try to appear perfect in the eyes of others and do whatever it takes to gain recognition.²⁵ This phenomenon provides clear evidence of the term *matā'ul-ghurūr* or deceptive pleasures, as explained by Sa'id bin Jabir, that the world of misleading pleasures makes one neglectful of remembering the hereafter.²⁶

Interpretation of QS. Al-Hadīd Verse 20 on Hedonism

¹⁷ JB. Suharjo B. Cahyono, *Refleksi Dan Transformasi Diri: Meraih Kesembuhan Dan Kebahagiaan* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pusat Utama, 2018), 26.

¹⁸ Muhammad Al Fikri, Muhammad Azizan, and Ahmad Mustaniruddin, "Tafsir Ma'nā-Cum-Maghzā Pada Q.S. Al-Hadid Ayat 20: Signifikansinya Dalam Mengatasi Perilaku Hedonisme," *TAZKIR: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Dan Keislaman* 10, no. 2 (2024): 227, <https://doi.org/10.24952/tazkir.v10.i2.13483>.

¹⁹ Formadiksi UM, *Mengurai Dimensi Jiwa Dalam Dialog Pena* (Yogyakarta: Stiletto Book, 2024), 58.

²⁰ Jufri A. P., Misnah Mannahali, and Wahyu Kurniati Asri, *Berbagai Ideologi Dalam Filsafat Ilmu* (Yogyakarta: Ananta Vidya, 2024), 156.

²¹ Fikri, Azizan, and Mustaniruddin, "Tafsir Ma'nā-Cum-Maghzā Pada Q.S. Al-Hadid Ayat 20: Signifikansinya Dalam Mengatasi Perilaku Hedonisme," 231–32.

²² Nuraini Kemalasar Istiqamah and Saimara Sebayang, *Teori Pengambilan Keputusan: Pengambilan Keputusan Dalam Fungsi Manajemen* (Medan: Cattleya Darmaya Fortuna, 2022), 37.

²³ P., Mannahali, and Asri, *Berbagai Ideologi Dalam Filsafat Ilmu*, 156.

²⁴ Andini and Adenan, "Hedonisme Dan Implikasinya Pada Gen-Z : Telaah QS . Al-Hadid Ayat 20," 91.

²⁵ Rifky Alfiansyah et al., "Etika Hukum Dan Keadilan Dalam Cyrenaics," *FORIKAMI (Forum Riset Ilmiah Kajian Masyarakat Indonesia)* 1, no. 2 (2024): 25, <https://doi.org/10.11111/praxis.xxxxxxx>.

²⁶ Ahmad Mustafa Al-Maraghi, *Tafsir Al Maraghi*, trans. Anshori Umar Sitanggal, Bahrūn Abubakar, and Hery Noer Aly, Jilid 9 (Semarang: Toha Putra, 1993), 311–12.

Al- Ḥadīd is a surah in the Qur'an, the 57th in the mushaf, consisting of 29 verses and included in juz 27. The word Al-Hadid is taken from verse 25, which means iron. The timing of the revelation of this surah is disputed. The accounts of Ibn Abbas and Anas bin Malik ra say that this surah is Madaniyyah. However, according to the narrations of Muslim, An-Nasa'i, and Ibn Majah, this surah is considered Makkiyyah. The main theme of this surah is to remember the greatness of Allah SWT, emphasizing the importance of giving charity and avoiding hardness of heart, as exemplified by the Jews.²⁷ The verse that discusses hedonism is found in verse 20.²⁸

إِغْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهُمْ زِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاهُهُ ثُمَّ يَهْبِجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُمْصَقًا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَامًا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٌ يَوْمَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعَ الْغُرُورِ

Translation: “Know that worldly life is only a game, a distraction, an adornment, and a competition among you for wealth and children. (Its likeness is) like rain whose vegetation delights the farmers, then it dries up and you see it turning yellow, then it crumbles. In the Hereafter there is severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and His pleasure. The life of this world (for those who are heedless) is only a deceiving enjoyment.”²⁹

Hedonism In this verse, the initial stage of hedonism appears in the form of *la'ib*, where human desires are still manifested as a search for sensory pleasures without purpose. Desires at this stage are still very pure in terms of momentary physical satisfaction, like a baby who just wants to play.³⁰ As reason develops, increased desire begins to involve emotions and simple cognition, becoming *lahwun*, which is interpreted as negligence. Here, reason begins to function, even though it is not yet mature. This phase is no longer just physical movement, but an activity that begins to involve the mind while still neglecting the true purpose.³¹ In modern society, this desire is reflected in a culture of escapism through endless entertainment such as scrolling through social media or excessive gaming, which only aims to satisfy short-term pleasures without considering the meaning of life.³²

As one ages and matures intellectually, these hedonistic urges shift into a desire to build an image and status through *ẓinah* and *tafākbur*. At this stage, a person's desires are no longer satisfied by mere play, but by the recognition of others. A person becomes obsessed with outward appearances, such as adornment, and begins to compare personal achievements, such as strength, beauty, or social position, in order to feel superior. Hedonism here has changed from simply seeking physical pleasure to an attempt to satisfy the ego and prestige in the eyes of society. At its peak, human

²⁷ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah, Pesan, Kesan, Dan Kekeragaman Al-Qur'an*, Vol. 14 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2005), 2–4.

²⁸ Fikri, Azizan, and Mustaniruddin, “Tafsir Ma'nā-Cum-Maghzā Pada Q.S. Al-Hadid Ayat 20: Signifikansinya Dalam Mengatasi Perilaku Hedonisme,” 231.

²⁹ Lajnah Pentashihan mushaf Al-Qur'an, “Al-Qur'an Kemenag,” Lajnah Pentashihan mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2022, <https://quran.kemenag.go.id/quran/per-ayat/surah/57?from=1&to=29>.

³⁰ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah, Pesan, Kesan, Dan Kekeragaman Al-Qur'an*, 2005, 40.

³¹ Al-Qurthubi Abi Abdillah Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Abu Bakar, *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, Juz XX (Beirut: Ar-Resalah, 2006), 259–60.

³² Christophorus Rinovan Prasetyo Widi et al., “Mindless Scrolling Dalam Perspektif Filsafat Sartre Sebagai Wujud Bad Faith,” *Prosiding Seri Filsafat Teologi* 35, no. 34 (2025): 40, <https://doi.org/10.35312/serifilsafat.v35i34.266>.

desire reaches the stage of *takāthur*, which is an obsession with accumulation and quantity.³³ Hedonism at this stage is no longer about enjoying what one has, but rather an insatiable thirst to continue accumulating wealth, assets, and offspring. This behavior resembles the mentality of jahiliyah that measures a person's nobility only by numbers and lineage. Without spiritual orientation, humans will continue to be trapped in the race to accumulate material possessions until death comes, without ever feeling true satisfaction because their desires have lost all boundaries. As the prophet said in a sahih hadith:

أربع في أمتي من أمر الجاهلية: الفخر في الأحساب

Meaning: “There are four things among my people that originate from the practices of the people of ignorance, namely boasting about one's lineage.”³⁴

Detailed comparison table between the perspectives of Tafsir Al-Misbah³⁵ and Tafsir Al-Qurthubi³⁶ on the sequence of human desires in QS. Al- Ḥadīd verse 20:

Terms	Tafsir Al-Misbah	Tafsir Al-Qurthubi	The Escalation of Desire
La'ib (Games)	Infancy: Play without purpose, purely for the sake of playing.	Worldly temptations: Everything desired in the world, obsession with material things.	Desires that are still instinctive and physical in nature.
Lahw (Negligence)	Childhood: Entertainment that began to involve a little thought but was still distracting.	Distractions of the Hereafter: Things that distract humans from matters of the hereafter.	Desires that begin to involve simple emotions and cognition.
Zinah (Jewelry)	Adolescence: The custom of dressing up, the desire to attract attention through physical appearance.	Body Aesthetics: Adorning the body and flaunting worldly luxury.	The desire to obtain validation of physical appearance.
Tafākhur (Pride)	Youth: Pride in one's identity and strengths.	Competition of Attributes: Boasting about strength for men and beauty for women.	The desire to feel personally superior to others.

³³ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah, Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, 2005, 40.

³⁴ Abi Abdillah Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Abu Bakar, *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, 259–60.

³⁵ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah, Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, 2005, 40.

³⁶ Abi Abdillah Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Abu Bakar, *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, 259–60.

Takāthur (Multiply)	Adulthood/Old Age: Focus on increasing wealth and offspring	Jahiliyah Character: Showing off lineage and material accumulation.	Desire that shifts toward the accumulation of quantities and numbers.
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Based on the table above, there are complementary differences in perspective. Tafsir Al-Misbah emphasizes psychological and developmental aspects, showing that as people age, their desires become more complex and abstract. From initially seeking only momentary pleasure (*la'ib* and *lahmun*), it escalates to a search for identity (*ẓīnah* and *tafākhur*), until finally becoming trapped in an obsession with numbers and the amount of wealth and children (*takāthur*). Meanwhile, Tafsir Al-Qurthubi emphasizes the moral-sociological aspect, viewing this sequence as a form of worldly temptation and social behavior, such as the character of jahiliyyah.

Furthermore, the phases of life described above will eventually experience weakness and helplessness. An illustration of worldly life is like a farmer who is happy to see his lush crops being watered by rain, but soon those crops dry up and wither away. Such is the fragile and fleeting nature of worldly pleasures.³⁷ In the context of hedonism, the life of a hedonist only leads to regret because wealth and age are finite, just like unbelievers who day and night only think about the world and forget about the afterlife. A famous poem says, “Your life in this world, O deceived one, is forgetfulness and negligence.”³⁸ There is no prohibition on enjoying the world. This verse does not intend to separate humans from worldly life, but rather warns against becoming negligent and neglecting humanity's duty as caliphs in the world. This verse aims to correct psychological values and warn humans against becoming trapped by the deceitfulness of the world.³⁹

Neuroscience in Hedonistic Behavior

Neuroscience is the study of the nervous system, particularly the brain.⁴⁰ The nervous system, also known as neurons, has a complex and organized structure. There are two parts to the nervous system: *First*, the central part, which includes the brain, spinal cord, and nerves. *Second*, the peripheral part, which includes the ganglia, sensory neurons, and nerves connected to the central nervous system.⁴¹ The brain contains one of the most crucial areas, namely the Prefrontal Cortex (PFC), which is the center of higher cognitive functions, controlling decision-making and impulse control.⁴² In the perspective of the Qur'an, this area is often associated with Nāṣiyati (the crown of the

³⁷ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah, Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, 2005, 37.

³⁸ Buya Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, Jilid 9 (Singapura: Pustaka Nasional PTE LTD, 2007), 7185.

³⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilalil Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Syuruq, 1973), 3491–92.

⁴⁰ Susanto and Ida Royani Munfarohah, “Neurosains Dalam Mengembangkan Kecerdasan Intelektual Peserta Didik Sd Islam Al-Azhar Bumi Serpong Damai,” *Kordinat: Jurnal Komunikasi Antar Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam* 19, no. 2 (2020): 335, <https://doi.org/10.15408/kordinat.v19i2.19000>.

⁴¹ Vivi Indri Asrini and Suyadi Suyadi, “Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Neurosains Pendidikan Islam: Telaah Tafsir Salman Atas Konsep Nashiyah Dalam Surat Al-Alaq,” *Ideguru: Jurnal Karya Ilmiah Guru* 8, no. 3 (2023): 21, <https://doi.org/10.51169/ideguru.v8i3.526>.

⁴² Sharon M. Kolk and Pasko Rakic, “Development of Prefrontal Cortex,” *Neuropsychopharmacology* 47 (2022): 47, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41386-021-01137-9>.

head), which is mentioned in QS. Al-Alaq verses 15-16 as the center of moral control, where Allah refers to it as “the crown of the head of those who deny and disobey.” It determines the moral direction of humans.⁴³

The brain is the control center of the body, containing approximately 86 billion neurons. In order for the body to function properly, neurons release chemical compounds called *neurotransmitters*, which play an important role in communication between neurons and regulate various bodily functions.⁴⁴ One type of *neurotransmitter* that plays a role in regulating motivation, reward, and movement coordination is dopamine.⁴⁵ Dopamine, known as the happy hormone, is a chemical in the brain that can increase pleasurable sensations, such as having sex, listening to your favorite music, eating delicious food, and more.⁴⁶ The parts of the brain involved in this process are located in the midbrain, namely *the ventral tegmental area (VTA)*, *nucleus accumbens*, and prefrontal cortex. The VTA is connected to the nucleus accumbens and prefrontal cortex. This pathway triggers feelings of satisfaction and motivation to repeat behaviors that produce pleasurable sensations. The VTA sends information to these structures via its neurons. VTA neurons contain dopamine, which is released in the nucleus accumbens and prefrontal cortex.⁴⁷

The repeated transmission of information by the VTA to *the nucleus accumbens* and prefrontal cortex is activated by reward stimuli. The concept of reward is defined as addiction. This refers to a state in which a person behaves compulsively even when it is harmful to themselves.⁴⁸ Dopamine has several pathways associated with reward, namely the mesolimbic and mesocortical pathways. These pathways drive dopamine to desire more and anticipate the future. The pathway most involved in reward is the mesolimbic pathway, which is formed by dopamine projections from the VTA to limbic structures, such as the prefrontal cortex.⁴⁹ This explains the phenomenon of hedonism, which is accurately described in QS. Al-Hadid verse 20: “*Know that the life of this world is only a game, a distraction, an adornment, and a contest among you, and a race for more wealth and children...*” In neuroscience terms, this verse reflects how the brain's reward system works. When a person pursues a game or jewelry, the VTA releases dopamine into the nucleus accumbens and prefrontal cortex, creating a temporary feeling of satisfaction.⁵⁰ However, this repeated transmission of information triggers addiction, meaning a compulsive state even when it is harmful to oneself.⁵¹

Dopamine entering the prefrontal cortex causes collective neuron activity there to increase for milliseconds to several minutes, triggering positive responses in various

⁴³ Asrini and Suyadi, “Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Neurosains Pendidikan Islam: Telaah Tafsir Salman Atas Konsep Nashiyah Dalam Surat Al-Alaq,” 366.

⁴⁴ Zulkifli et al., “Mekanisme Kerja Otak Dan Sistem Saraf: Perspektif Neurosains Pendidikan Islam,” 121.

⁴⁵ Ruang Sains, *Neurotransmitter: Gerbang Untuk Memahami Otak* (Semarang: Tiram Media, 2024), 5.

⁴⁶ Muhammad Akil Musi and Nurjannah, *Neurosains: Menjinjai Sistem Saraf Dan Otak* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2021), 101.

⁴⁷ Kris H. Timotius, *Otak Dan Perilaku* (Yogyakarta: ANDI, 2018), 248.

⁴⁸ Timotius, 248.

⁴⁹ Ayi Abdurrahman et al., *Buku Ajar Teori Pembelajaran*, Cet. I (Jambi: Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia, 2021), 162.

⁵⁰ Tresno Saras, *Dopamin: Molekul Kesenangan Dan Kekuatan Motivasi* (Semarang: Tiram Media, 2023), 6.

⁵¹ Timotius, *Otak Dan Perilaku*, 248.

feelings and actions.⁵² When we achieve a goal, the brain responds by releasing dopamine. The release of dopamine actually functions as a measure of the brain's confidence in determining how certain or accurate the information it has received is, which naturally spikes when we encounter something new or an unexpected surprise. Neurophysiologically, dopamine spikes when we encounter something new or an unexpected reward.⁵³ In addition to knowledge about brain circuits, understanding dopamine in this context can be achieved using Pavlov's experiment, in which a dog learns to associate the sound of a bell with the arrival of food. This is a signal from the brain to learn to associate a stimulus with a result.⁵⁴ In the analogy of Al-Hadid verse 20, "rain" is the stimulus that triggers "green plants" as an unexpected result, causing dopamine to surge and creating a sense of wonder in farmers. Dopamine triggers feelings of wonder or excitement to help the brain learn to map uncertainty, once it becomes familiar and no longer surprising. The dopamine signal will fade. As a result, the pleasure will inevitably fade and "dry up" like a withered plant, proving that the dopamine mechanism is designed for temporary learning processes, not for eternal pleasure.

Excessive dopamine release causes uncontrolled activity, affecting brain function in three ways:

1. Triggers increased reward and reward-based learning in *the nucleus accumbens*.
2. Initiating and decision-making in *the ventral and dorsal striatum*.
3. Failure to initiate or stop an action as a *reinforcement* effect of previous behavior and inability to stop an ongoing action in the prefrontal cortex.⁵⁵

The prefrontal cortex, which controls impulses and rational decision-making, requires balanced dopamine levels so that humans do not get caught up in impulsive behavior.⁵⁶ An imbalance in dopamine levels can cause disruption to the function of the prefrontal cortex, causing humans to lose their ability to self-regulate. Excessive dopamine activity triggers a cycle of seeking similar sensations, which over time creates boredom and a dopamine deficit. As a result, the perpetrator will feel empty and continue to seek stimulation in order to feel more alive.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, decreased dopamine levels prevent the brain from sending signals optimally, thereby disrupting cognitive and motor functions.⁵⁸ Abnormalities in the dopaminergic system cause

⁵² Sweyta Lohani et al., "Dopamine Modulation of Prefrontal Cortex Activity Is Manifold and Operates at Multiple Temporal and Spatial Scales," *Cell Reports* 27, no. 1 (2019): 110, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.celrep.2019.03.012>.

⁵³ Karl J Friston et al., "Dopamine, Affordance and Active Inference," *PLoS Computational Biology* 8, no. 1 (2012): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1002327>.

⁵⁴ Paul W. Glimcher, "Understanding Dopamine and Reinforcement Learning: The Dopamine Reward Prediction Error Hypothesis," *PNAS* 108, no. 3 (2011): 2, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.101426910>.

⁵⁵ Abdurrahman et al., *Buku Ajar Teori Pembelajaran*, 163.

⁵⁶ Pukovisa Prawiroharjo et al., "Perbedaan Wilayah Korteks Prefrontalis Pada Remaja Kecanduan Pornografi Dibanding Dengan Remaja Tanpa Kecanduan Pornografi," *Neurona Majalah Kedokteran Neuro Sains Perhimpunan Dokter Spesialis Saraf Indonesia* 39, no. 4 (2022): 154, <https://doi.org/10.52386/neurona.v39i4.417>.

⁵⁷ Robin Sharma, *The Wealth Money Can't Buy: The 8 Hidden Habits to Live Your Richest Life* (London: Penguin Random House, 2024), 84–85.

⁵⁸ Musi and Nurjannah, *Neurosains: Menjivai Sistem Saraf Dan Otak*, 102.

schizophrenia, Parkinson's disease, bipolar disorder, and addiction.⁵⁹ This is where the relevance of the ending of QS. Al-Ḥadīd verse “...*And the life of this world is nothing but a false (deceptive) pleasure.*”⁶⁰ Scientifically, this falsehood is proven by the nature of dopamine, which only provides temporary pleasure, but risks damaging long-term cognitive and motor functions if its levels are not maintained.

In general, based on the explanation above, the flow of the brain's reward system and hedonistic behavior is from the VTA → dopamine → false sense of pleasure → prefrontal cortex → impulse control or release. If the prefrontal cortex is disrupted, impulse control decreases → consumptive behavior and hedonistic attitudes increase.

Integration of Tafsir and Neuroscience in Understanding Hedonism

The integration between the interpretation of the Qur'an and neuroscience begins with a strong theological foundation through QS. Al-Ḥadīd: 20. This verse provides a theoretical framework regarding the nature of the world, which is *la'ib, lahwun, zinah, tafākhur, takāthur*. Theologically, this verse serves as an early warning system for human consciousness that these objects are transient and will never provide true satisfaction. It states that the world is not just a place to play and seek pleasure. On the contrary, the essence of the world is a field of good deeds where each individual is required to carry out their duties by collecting good deeds as provisions for the journey to the afterlife.⁶¹

This theological awareness is then transformed into a moral concept known as mujahadatun nafs or self-control. In Islamic ethics, this concept is an active and sincere effort to regulate inner potential and biological desires so that they do not dominate one's entire life. Mujahadatun nafs does not aim to suppress human nature as creatures with desires, but rather as a process of spiritual maturation to direct desires towards Allah's pleasure. In this context, Islamic morality views that human dignity does not lie in the unlimited satisfaction of desires, but in the inner ability to remain steadfast on the path of goodness even when worldly temptations are strong.⁶²

Scientifically, this moral process is consistent with the human brain mechanism involving complex interactions between the neurotransmitter dopamine and the prefrontal cortex. Neuroscience explains that hedonistic urges are triggered by the release of dopamine in the brain's reward system, particularly in the nucleus accumbens and striatum, which naturally drives humans to continuously seek pleasure and enjoyment. This mechanism explains the human tendency to get caught up in pleasure. In other words, the human brain has a biological nature that makes it susceptible to

⁵⁹ Rindiyan Pangestuti and Riyadhul Janah, “Dopamine Detox: Upaya Pengendalian Kecanduan Gadget Pada Anak Di Era Digital Perspektif Surah Al-Ashr Ayat 1-3,” *Tadribuna: Journal of Islamic Management Education* 3, no. 2 (2023): 20.

⁶⁰ Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, “Al-Qur'an Kemenag,” Lajnah Pentashihan mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2022, <https://quran.kemenag.go.id/quran/per-ayat/surah/45?from=1&to=37>.

⁶¹ Annisa Nabila Zulfa, “Pandangan Al-Qur'an Terhadap Gaya Hidup Hedonism (Studi Analisis Kitab Tafsir Risalah Risalah Al-Nûr Karya Badi' Az-Zamân Sa'îd An-Nûrsî)” (Institut Ilmu Al-Qur'an Jakarta, 2020), 104.

⁶² Nanda Nurlina and Bashori, “Konsep ‘Nafs’ Dalam Al-Qur'an: Analisis Semantik Terhadap Dimensi Psikologis Dan Spiritualitas Dalam Proses Pembentukan Karakter,” *Semantik: Jurnal Riset Ilmu Pendidikan, Bahasa Dan Budaya* 3, no. 3 (2025): 201, <https://doi.org/10.61132/semantik.v3i3.1819>.

hedonistic temptations.⁶³ However, humans are endowed with a prefrontal cortex as an executive control center that functions to perform rational evaluation and inhibit such impulses.⁶⁴ So, hedonism is not merely an irrational biological process. There is a significant contribution from cognitive functions and self-awareness that can be honed.⁶⁵ From this perspective, mujahadatun nafs is neurobiologically a process of strengthening the function of the prefrontal cortex so that it is able to balance and moderate dopamine surges, thereby preventing individuals from becoming trapped in harmful impulsive behavior.

The ethical implications resulting from the integration of interpretation and neuroscience are the formation of individuals who are able to enjoy the world proportionally. By harmonizing spiritual awareness from QS. Al-Ḥadīd: 20 and optimizing cognitive brain function, a person will have both intellectual and spiritual intelligence. Self-control or mujahadatun nafs, which is successfully trained in stages, gives rise to an attitude of zuhud. Zuhud is a condition in which a person can balance their life so that they are not enslaved by worldly pleasures and prioritize the hereafter.⁶⁶ Ethically, this frees humans from dependence on instant gratification. By harmonizing intellectual and spiritual intelligence, humans no longer make decisions based solely on impulsive biological urges, but are guided by noble moral values and existential responsibility before God.

Conceptual comparison chart of Qur'an interpretation & neuroscience on hedonisme:

Object of Analysis	Interpretive Perspective (QS. Al-Ḥadīd: 20)	Neuroscience Perspective
Main Trigger	The world as deceptive pleasure, its objects being <i>la'ib, lahwun, ṣīmah, tafākhur, takāthur</i> .	Stimulus Reward causes a temporary spike in dopamine, which quickly returns to baseline levels.
Inner Drive	Humans tend to be negligent and captivated by worldly pleasures, desiring to accumulate wealth and pride.	The release of dopamine in <i>the nucleus accumbens</i> triggers addiction.
Control Mechanism	Mujahadatun Nafs as a spiritual struggle against lust.	Optimization of the prefrontal cortex function to inhibit impulses.

⁶³ Mohammad Jailani et al., *Critical Analysis of 'Aql and Brain in the Paradigm of the Qur'an and Neuroscience and Its Contribution to the Development of Islamic Education*, *Taqaddumi: Journal of Quran and Hadith Studies*, vol. 3, 2023, 104, <https://doi.org/10.12928/taqaddumi.v3i1.8208>.

⁶⁴ Naomi P Friedman and Trevor W Robbins, "The Role of Prefrontal Cortex in Cognitive Control and Executive Function," *Neuropsychopharmacology* 47, no. February (2021): 72, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41386-021-01132-0>.

⁶⁵ M. Arsyad, "Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Neurosains: Telaah Konsep Ulul Albab Dalam Al-Qur'an," *Aktualita: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Dan Keagamaan* 14, no. 1 (2024): 72, www.ejournal.an-nadwah.ac.id.

⁶⁶ Hoirunisa Ma'arifah and Luthfiah Habibah, "Pengendalian Diri Terhadap Perilaku Konsumtif Melalui Pendekatan Tasawuf," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmiah Multidisiplin* 9, no. 6 (2025): 357.

Final Target	Achieving Allah's pleasure and eternal happiness in the hereafter.	The balance between instinctive urges and conscious self-control.

CONCLUSION

This study integrates the spiritual message in QS. Al-Ḥadīd verse 20 with modern scientific findings in a normative and empirical manner between interpretation and neuroscience to dissect the roots of the phenomenon of hedonism. It was found that the stages of worldly pleasure described in the verse begin with seeking distracting games (*la'ib* and *lahwun*), escalate into a search for identity (*ẓīnah* and *tafākhur*), and finally culminate in an obsession with material possessions (*takāthur*), which has a direct correlation with the biological mechanisms of the reward system in the human brain. In neuroscience, a hedonistic lifestyle is triggered by a surge of dopamine in the mesolimbic pathway, which creates a temporary but addictive feeling of pleasure. If left unchecked, it can weaken the function of the prefrontal cortex as the center of moral control and rational decision-making. This proves the truth of the term *matā'ul-ghurūr* (deceptive pleasure), because physiologically, dopamine will fade after the stimulus becomes commonplace, so that worldly pleasures are proven to never provide eternal satisfaction.

Academically, the synchronization between biological functions and spiritual consciousness contributes significantly to enriching interpretive literature through empirical evidence that cannot be reached by textual interpretation. This implies a repositioning of the concept of *mujahadatun nafs* or self-control, not merely as a moral doctrine, but as a process of strengthening the cognitive functions of the brain to moderate biological impulses, which is highly relevant to the development of neuroscience-based Islamic character education. Ultimately, this research offers a new social awareness of the dangers of dependence on instant gratification and the importance of cultivating an attitude of *zuhud* in the modern era. By understanding how the brain works and the message of revelation in tandem, individuals are expected to be able to balance worldly needs with a more authentic spiritual orientation so that they are no longer enslaved by the distractions of fleeting pleasure.

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