

MINIMALIST LIFESTYLE IN THE VIEW OF THE CONCEPTS OF ZUHUD AND QANA'AH IN THE QUR'AN

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Abstract

Amid the rise of consumerism, the minimalist lifestyle has gained prominence as a contemporary alternative advocating simplicity and meaningful living. This study critically examines minimalism through the lens of two fundamental Islamic ethical concepts: asceticism (*zuhud*) and contentment (*rida*), with the Qur'an serving as the normative foundation. Employing a qualitative literature review and *tafsir mawdu'i* (thematic exegesis) methodology, the research compares the convergences and divergences between minimalism and these Islamic principles. The analysis reveals that while both minimalism and Islamic asceticism advocate reducing possessions and avoiding waste, they differ fundamentally in philosophy, motivation, and ultimate purpose. Modern minimalism is predominantly anthropocentric, prioritizing individual happiness and worldly freedom, whereas asceticism and contentment are grounded in a theocentric framework aimed at attaining divine pleasure and eternal joy in the hereafter. The study concludes that integrating the values of asceticism and contentment provides a holistic and spiritually transformative paradigm capable of addressing materialism more comprehensively.

Keywords: Minimalism; Lifestyle; Zuhud; Contentment; Qur'an

INTRODUCTION

The era of modernity, which is marked by technological progress and the hegemony of market capitalism, has given birth to a culture of society that likes to consume excessively (Susanti & Sulaiman, 2022). Fueled by massive advertising and the ease of digital transactions, a consumerist lifestyle has shifted the logic of needs to the logic of desires, trapping individuals in a cycle of fulfilling false needs that never satisfy. This phenomenon not only results in resource waste and environmental damage but also significantly impacts mental health, making individuals more susceptible to stress, anxiety, and depression when they feel they don't have enough (Chin et al., 2025).

A counter-movement known as the minimalist lifestyle emerged as a reaction and form of resistance to these excesses. Minimalism emerged as an alternative living concept that offers a way out of the shackles of materialism. This movement, which is gaining popularity, especially among millennials and Gen Z, is spreading rapidly through social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, which ironically are the same platforms that promote consumerism. Minimalism encourages individuals to live more consciously (intentionally) by reducing the ownership of non-essential items and focusing more on experiences, relationships, and happiness not tied to material things (Hakim, 2022).

The rise of minimalism raises interesting theological and philosophical questions compared to the Islamic intellectual heritage. Islam, through the Qur'an and Sunnah, has long offered principles of life that emphasise simplicity, the rejection of excessive luxury, and self-control. Concepts such as *zuhud* (non-attachment to the world) and *qana'ah* (contentment and contentment with God's gifts) at first glance seem similar to minimalist practices (Rizak, 2021).

Several other studies state that asceticism and contentment in the Qur'an refer to a lifestyle that emphasises simplicity, self-control, and inner peace by not attaching oneself excessively to the worldly. *Zuhud* linguistically means turning away and abandoning something that is considered lowly or worthless. At the same time, in terms of terminology in the Qur'an, asceticism means abandoning worldly desires to hope for the pleasure of Allah SWT and happiness in the hereafter (Q.S. Al-Hadid: 20) (Triana, 2024). The quality of *qana'ah*, an integral part of asceticism, is interpreted as a feeling of sufficiency and satisfaction with Allah's gifts, thus preventing individuals from being greedy and having excessive material ambitions (Munawir, 2024). From the perspective of Sufism and Islamic teachings,

these two concepts form a paradigm of life ethics that guides people to maintain a balance between this world and the hereafter, and to build purity of soul through controlling lust and strengthening faith (Kurniawan, 2022). Therefore, asceticism and contentment are not just attitudes of material minimalism, but also contain deep spiritual and normative dimensions to achieve true happiness.

The main research question raised in this study is: how can a minimalist lifestyle, rooted in secular and humanistic philosophy, be understood and compared with the concepts of asceticism and contentment based on revelation (the Qur'an)? Furthermore, this study also questions whether minimalism is simply a "modern version" or "rebranding" of asceticism and contentment in contemporary terminology, or whether there are fundamental and irreducible paradigmatic differences between the two, especially regarding the foundation, motivation, and ultimate goals of each way of life.

This article argues that while the minimalist lifestyle and the concept of asceticism and contentment show apparent convergence on a practical level—such as reducing possessions, living simply, and avoiding waste—they depart from fundamentally different ontological foundations and ultimate goals. In many manifestations, modern minimalism is anthropocentric in orientation, with the ultimate goal being individual happiness, freedom, and serenity in this world (self-actualisation). In contrast, asceticism and contentment are grounded in a theocentric paradigm, in which the practice of simplicity is not the primary goal, but rather an instrument in the process of purifying the soul (*tazkiyatun nafs*), attaining the pleasure of Allah SWT, and attaining eternal, true happiness in the afterlife (*falah*). Thus, the Islamic ethical framework offers a more comprehensive paradigm for consumption and lifestyle, systemically integrated with the pillars of worship and morality, and spiritually transformative.

METHODS

The researcher used a qualitative method with a library research approach (Satori & Komariah, 2017). Primary data consisted of verses from the Qur'an relevant to the themes of simplicity, prohibition of excess, gratitude, and orientation to the afterlife. Meanwhile, secondary data included classical and contemporary tafsir books, such as the Tafsir of al-Tabari, al-Razi, and al-Misbah, works by Sufi scholars such as al-Ghazali, Junaid al-Baghdadi,

and Hamka, as well as modern academic sources in the form of scientific journals, theses, and dissertations related to the concepts of minimalism, asceticism, and contentment.

The data analysis process used two main approaches (Suwendra, 2018). First, the *tafsir mawdu'iy* (thematic exegesis) approach systematically collects, classifies, and interprets Quranic verses to formulate a coherent concept of lifestyle ethics in Islam. Second, a comparative analysis was conducted to critically examine the concepts of minimalism, asceticism, and contentment by identifying points of convergence and divergence between the three. These improvements include a more formal and systematic sentence structure, standardised use of method terms, and logical ordering of information according to quality scientific writing standards (Moleong, 2015).

RESULTS

Deconstructing the Minimalist Lifestyle: Philosophy, Practice, and Modern Manifestations

Minimalism, as a lifestyle, did not emerge in a vacuum. Its roots can be traced back to a movement in the visual arts of the mid-20th century, which later expanded its influence into architecture, music, and design (Munir et al., 2025). This art movement emphasised simplicity of form, the use of essential elements, and the rejection of excessive ornamentation. However, its transformation into a contemporary philosophy of life was heavily influenced by Eastern traditions of thought, notably Zen Buddhism. In his influential work, *Goodbye, Things*, modern minimalist figures such as Fumio Sasaki openly acknowledged how Zen principles of detachment and mindfulness shaped his approach to reducing possessions to achieve inner freedom and peace. This evolution demonstrates a shift from external aesthetics to an internal ethic that governs how individuals interact with the material world (Jalil, 2013).

The modern minimalist lifestyle is about intentional living. It's not simply about owning fewer things, but about consciously and intentionally keeping only those items that truly add value or serve a vital role in one's life. Its core principle is that individuals should be in control of their possessions, not the other way around. By eliminating physical clutter, minimalists aim to create more space, time, energy, and freedom to focus on more meaningful pursuits, such as relationships, health, and self-development (Hausen, 2020).

To achieve this goal, various practical methods have been popularised. In her book, *The Art of Minimalist Living*, Francine Jay introduces the "STREAMLINE" method as a step-by-step guide to decluttering. This method includes steps such as Start over, Trash, treasure, or transfer, and Reason for each item (Girindra, 2021). Additionally, another approach suggests categorising items into three categories: functional (those used daily), decorative (those that provide beauty), and emotional (those that have sentimental value). A rigorous process of selecting these three categories is key to starting a minimalist life. The ultimate goal of these practices is to achieve more authentic happiness and a clearer mind, free from stress and the shackles of materialism.

Beyond individual practice, minimalism has become a significant sociological phenomenon, particularly as an alternative lifestyle for millennials and Gen Z. In modern society that normalises excessive consumption, minimalism is interpreted as "resistance to modernity." It becomes a conceptual tool that helps individuals rediscover balance in life through their reflective capacity to question, consider, and define for themselves the values they wish to uphold, which often contradict dominant social norms.

Sociological analysis shows that minimalism cannot be separated from the socio-economic context in which it emerged. It is a dialectical response to the excesses of consumer capitalism. Ironically, this movement critiques consumerism and is disseminated and popularised through the same social media platforms that are the primary drivers of consumer culture (Tansen et al., 2022). It suggests modern minimalism is not simply an isolated personal choice but a highly mediated social construct. It is part of the project of "self-construction" in the modern era, in which individuals actively choose and display their "minimalist" identities, often for digital audiences, as a marker of distinct values and status.

The impact of adopting this lifestyle is multifaceted. On the one hand, it brings positive benefits such as reduced household waste production (in line with the concepts of zero-waste and green living), increased productivity due to a more organised and focused environment, and potential financial savings. On the other hand, minimalists also face challenges, such as confusion in adjusting and negative comments or criticism from social circles that do not yet understand or accept their lifestyle choices (Mokorowu, 2016).

Exploring the Concept of *Zuhud* in the Intellectual Treasury of Islam

The term *zuhud* comes from the Arabic root word *zabada*, which means "to abandon," "to be disinterested in," or "to dislike" something (Zelvia, 2023). However, in Islamic

terminology, particularly in the Sufi tradition, its meaning is much deeper and more nuanced. Scholars consistently emphasise that asceticism is not a physical act of abandoning the world, such as isolating oneself from society or quitting one's job. Rather, asceticism is an inner state, an attitude of the heart (*'amal al-qalb*).

The most essential definition of *zuhud* is to release the attachment of the heart from worldly charms and luxuries (Yulianti, 2021). It is an attempt to "empty the heart of all things other than Allah" or, in a popular expression, "put the world in the hands, not in the heart" (Ilham, 2014). Thus, a *zahid* (a practitioner of asceticism) can be wealthy, as long as his wealth does not shackle his heart and he does not grieve if it is lost. Conversely, a poor person may not be a *zahid* if his heart is filled with dreams and love for a world he does not possess. This crucial distinction between physical renunciation and detachment of the heart is key to avoiding the common misconception that equates asceticism with poverty or passivity (Ilham, 2014).

The *zuhud* attitude has a solid normative foundation in the two primary sources of Islamic teachings: the Qur'an and the Sunnah. The Qur'an, although it does not use the term asceticism explicitly in its terminological sense, is filled with verses that instil the spirit of asceticism. These verses consistently emphasise worldly life's transience and temporaryness compared to the afterlife's eternity and primacy. For example, Allah says in Surah An-Nisa' verse 77: "...Say: 'Pleasure in this world is short-lived and the afterlife is better for those who are pious...'" (Kemenag RI, 2019). Likewise, in Surah Ash-Shura verse 20 and Surah Al-A'la verses 16-17, Allah emphasises that the benefits of the afterlife are much better and more eternal (Kementerian Agama RI, 2013). These verses serve as a constant reminder for a believer not to make the world his final goal.

The most perfect example of asceticism is embodied in the life of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Although he was a national leader with access to wealth, his lifestyle was effortless. His house was small, his furnishings were minimal, and he often distributed the wealth or gifts he received to people experiencing poverty, leaving no room for himself (Ridlo & Hafid, 2025). The Prophet's simplicity was not a result of compulsion but a conscious choice based on a deep faith in the afterlife. He was a living manifestation of the principle of "true minimalism," founded on faith, not merely the pursuit of worldly happiness (Putri & Wasik, 2022).

The understanding and practice of asceticism in Islamic history are not monolithic and static concepts. Instead, they have undergone a dynamic development and dialectic of thought, evolving from a moral-ascetic reaction to a sophisticated and moderate spiritual psychology. Understanding this evolutionary spectrum is crucial to appreciating the relevance of asceticism in the modern context and avoiding its simplistic caricature as an anti-worldly attitude.

This development can be mapped through the thoughts of several key Sufi figures. The early ascetic movement was pioneered by Hasan al-Basri (d. 110 AH) as a moral reaction to the luxurious lifestyle that was beginning to spread among the rulers and society of his time (Puteri et al., 2023). His concept of asceticism was deeply colored by feelings of *khauf* (fear of Allah's punishment) and *raja'* (hope for His mercy). He viewed this world as nothing more than a bridge to be crossed, not to be built magnificently.

Next, Imam Al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) made a significant conceptual leap by internalising asceticism into a mature inner state. For Al-Ghazali, true asceticism was no longer synonymous with external conditions (wealth or poverty), but rather an attitude of the heart unaffected by wealth's presence or absence (Wanova, 2024). He outlined three main signs of a *zahid*: (1) not rejoicing over something that comes and not being sad over something that is lost, (2) being the same for him between those who praise and those who criticise, and (3) feeling the delight of obedience and togetherness with Allah Swt.

Imam Junaid al-Baghdadi (d. 298 AH) then formulated a more moderate and applicable synthesis. He explicitly criticised the understanding of asceticism that encourages passivity, laziness, and abandonment of worldly responsibilities. According to Junaid, a Sufi must still work and earn a living. The location of his asceticism lies in his non-attachment to the results of his efforts and his willingness to share when he obtains excess fortune. This moderate view reconciles spiritual demands with socio-economic responsibilities.

It is also important to note that there has always been internal criticism of extreme understandings of *zuhud* in Islamic history. *Ulama* such as al-Muhasibi (d. 243 AH) criticised the Sufis of his time who were lazy under the pretext of committing asceticism. This wrong understanding is often accused of being one of the causes of Muslims' decline because it is considered anti-progressive. This dialectic and internal criticism keep the concept of asceticism dynamic and relevant (Zelvia, 2023).

DISCUSSION

Dissecting the Meaning of *Qana'ah* as the Foundation of Peace of Mind

If asceticism focuses on releasing the heart's attachment to the world, then contentment is a complementary concept that focuses on accepting and feeling content with what Allah has bestowed. Etymologically, contentment means accepting willingly, feeling satisfied, and not being greedy (Meldi et al., 2025). Terminologically, it is a noble morality that reflects the soul's satisfaction with the sustenance received, which protects a person from the humiliation of begging. Contentment is often referred to as "treasure that will never be lost" or "savings that will not disappear," indicating its eternal value and independence from material things (Pratiwi, 2022).

It is essential to distinguish contentment from passive resignation or laziness. The Quran and scholars emphasise that contentment is not an excuse for not striving. Instead, contentment is a mental attitude after a person has made a sincere effort (Meldi et al., 2025). It is the fruit of the awareness that Allah Swt has guaranteed the sustenance of every creature, yet humans are still obliged to "seek His bounty." Thus, contentment is an "endless relationship between endeavour and trust." (Alallah, 2022). A person tries his best, then accepts whatever the results are with an open and contented heart, believing that this is the best decree from Allah for him.

Buya Hamka's thoughts in his work, *Modern Sufism*, offer a highly relevant and applicable framework to understand how contentment can be implemented in modern life. Hamka breaks down contentment into five pillars or interrelated matters:

1. Accepting with willingness what is there is the essence of contentment, being grateful for the blessings already in hand without constantly comparing them with what others have.
2. Asking God for more and continuing to strive demonstrates contentment's dynamic side. It doesn't negate the ambition for improvement, but this ambition is channelled through prayer and legitimate endeavours, not through greed.
3. Patiently accepting what God has determined: It is a spiritual coping mechanism when faced with outcomes that don't meet expectations. Patience balances effort.
4. Always trust God: After maximum effort, a *qana'ah* person confidently submits the final result to Allah.

5. Not being lured by worldly deceptions: It is a mental defence against being easily tempted by the materialistic and consumerist lifestyle offered by the modern world (Pratiwi, 2022).

In Hamka's view, contentment functions like a "fence" that limits the influence of material possessions. Wealth may be within one's grasp, but it must not be allowed to spread to dominate the heart and mind. Contentment is a powerful psychological-spiritual regulatory mechanism within this operational framework with far-reaching implications. Psychologically, contentment is an effective antidote to modern mental illnesses such as stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem, which are often rooted in material dissatisfaction and social comparison. By cultivating contentment, one can avoid greed and avarice, which brings inner peace (Meldi et al., 2025).

Socially, contentment is the foundation for preventing consumptive and hedonistic behaviour that damages social and environmental order. When individuals and families apply the principles of contentment, they tend to make more rational purchasing decisions, prioritise needs over wants, and avoid the debt trap. Furthermore, contentment has been proven to be a solution for reducing household conflict that is often triggered by economic problems, because it fosters a sense of gratitude and shared acceptance of the available sustenance (Andriani & Mz, 2019). Ultimately, contentment is not merely a passive attitude but rather an active spiritual coping strategy to regulate expectations, manage disappointment, and reframe material reality within a framework of theological meaning, which culminates in achieving a good and peaceful life (Rohman, 2023).

A Review of the Qur'an: Building an Islamic Ethical Paradigm of Consumption

Analysis of minimalism, asceticism, and contentment must ultimately be returned to Islam's primary normative source, the Qur'an. Through the tafsir mawdu'i approach, a comprehensive paradigm of Qur'anic consumption and lifestyle ethics can be formulated. This paradigm is not merely reactive-negative, forbidding bad behaviour, but also prescriptive-holistic, constructing a positive vision of the good life.

The theological foundation for rejecting consumerism in the Quran is clear and firm. The Quran uses two key terms to condemn this behaviour: *israf* (excess) and *tabdzir* (waste). In Surah Al-A'raf verse 31, Allah says, "...eat and drink, but do not be extravagant (*laa tusrifuu*). Indeed, Allah does not like those who are extravagant." (Kementerian Agama RI,

2013) This verse provides a universal principle to not exceed the limits of reasonableness in all forms of consumption, whether food, drink, or clothing.

Meanwhile, the concept of *tabdzir* is explained in Surah Al-Isra's verses 26-27: "...and do not squander (your wealth) wastefully. (Indeed, the wasters are the brothers of the devil..."(Kementerian Agama RI, 2013). Commentators explain that *tabdzir* is spending one's wealth on something inappropriate or sinful. Together, these two verses form a strong defence against a consumerist mentality, making it an inefficient behaviour and an act hated by Allah.

The Qur'anic paradigm does not stop at prohibitions. He proactively offers an ideal alternative path, namely the principle of balance or moderation (*wasathiyah*). This principle is beautifully summarised in the Qur'an's description of His chosen servants (*Ibadurrahman*). In Surah Al-Furqan verse 67, it is stated, "And those who when they spend (wealth), they are not excessive, and are not (nor) stingy, and are (those spending) in the middle between such things." (Kemenag RI, 2019).

This verse places Islamic consumption ethics squarely in the "middle ground" between two reprehensible extremes: wastefulness (*israf*) and stinginess (*bakbil*). It is the golden principle at the heart of all Islamic economic and lifestyle teachings. The ideal Muslim lifestyle is neither abject poverty nor wasteful wealth, but rather one of sufficiency managed with wisdom, balance, and moderation. The optimistic vision of the Qur'anic paradigm culminates in Allah's promise of a "good life" (*hayatan thayyibatan*). In Surah An-Nahl, verse 97, Allah says, "Whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer, We will surely grant him a good life (*hayatan thayyibatan*)..." (Kementerian Agama RI, 2013).

What is interesting is how classical and contemporary commentators, such as Imam al-Tabari and Wahbah al-Zuhaili, interpret the meaning of "the good life". One of their main interpretations is that life is endowed with *qana'ah* characteristics. It is a compelling theological assertion. He elevates *qana'ah* from simply a moral suggestion to a manifestation of a divine promise. Tranquillity, satisfaction and true happiness (which are sought by adherents of minimalism) in the perspective of the Qur'an are the fruit of faith and pious deeds, which are manifested in the attitude of *qana'ah*.

Synthesis of the verses above creates a comprehensive ethical paradigm for lifestyle. This paradigm begins with an explicit prohibition against *israf* and *tabdzir*, provides an

operational principle of *wasathiyah* (moderation), and promises the ultimate result of a *thayyibatan* life rooted in contentment. Within this framework, the concepts of asceticism and contentment are no longer seen as separate Sufi teachings, but rather as the internalisation and spiritual-psychological manifestation of the normative principles of the Qur'an. The Qur'an provides a roadmap (normative framework), while asceticism (releasing attachments) and contentment (managing hope and acceptance) are the spiritual and psychological vehicles for travelling on that map toward a predetermined final destination.

CONCLUSION

This study has conducted an in-depth comparative analysis between the modern minimalist lifestyle and the Islamic concepts of asceticism and contentment, using the Qur'an as a touchstone. The main findings reaffirm the initial thesis: despite significant convergence at the level of the practice of simplicity, the rejection of consumerism, and the restriction of possessions, these three concepts are fundamentally different in their foundations, motivations, and goals. Modern minimalism is essentially an anthropocentric solution born in reaction to the problems of modernity, with the ultimate goal of individual happiness and freedom in this world. On the other hand, asceticism and contentment are integral parts of a comprehensive theocentric ethical-spiritual system, in which the practice of simplicity is a means to achieve a transcendent goal: the pleasure of God and eternal happiness in the afterlife. This paradigmatic difference (between self-centeredness and God-centeredness) constitutes an irreducible dividing line.

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