

# The Concept of Tazkiyatunnafs in the Book of Ihya 'Ulumuddin and Its Implications in Sufistic Counseling

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**Abstract** : *The moral and spiritual crisis has triggered a degradation of human morals in modern times, leading counselors to seek a more holistic approach that not only addresses behavior but also delves into the deepest aspect of human beings, namely the soul (nafs). Therefore, Al-Ghazali's thoughts on soul purification, which focus on morals, are increasingly relevant. His holistic approach, which combines cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects, offers a comprehensive solution to address complex moral problems. This study aims to formulate the concept of tazkiyatunnafs in Imam Al-Ghazali's book Ihya Ulumuddin and to simulate the implications of the concept of tazkiyatunnafs if applied in Sufi counseling that focuses on moral guidance. This research uses a qualitative method, with data collection techniques using a literature study approach (library research), observation, and content analysis of guidance messages in the book that focuses on qualitative data analysis. The research paradigm is built with the grand theory of tazkiyatunnafs, Sufi counseling, and moral guidance. Based on the research results, it is concluded that the concept of tazkiyatunnafs from the perspective of Imam Al-Ghazali focuses on moral development that is oriented towards mujahadah and riyadhoh. The stages of tazkiyatunnafs proposed by him consist of three stages, namely takhalli (purifying oneself from bad character), tahalli (filling the soul with good character), and tajalli (the manifestation of God in the human self through the reflection of divine attributes in the human self). And the implications of tazkiyatunnafs, developing human potential as creatures of God whose task is to lead themselves fully to worship only God, and to base all their behavior on the basis of achieving His pleasure.*

**Keywords:** : Tazkiyatunnafs; Sufi Counseling; and Moral Guidance..

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## 1. Pendahuluan

The increasingly complex level of social interaction in this era of globalization and modernization can trigger the emergence of various pressures and challenges that can disrupt the psychological balance of individuals. As a result, unhealthy mindsets and behaviors can arise and potentially lead to mental disorders. Sa'id Hawwa, argues that *tazkiyatunnafs* has a significant therapeutic impact on the human psyche, such as reducing stress, improving behavior, and improving the overall quality of life. (Salsabila, 2023). This shows the urgency of *tazkiyatunnafs* in the process of guidance and counseling.

The success of a Muslim's guidance cannot be achieved completely without care of the heart and soul, to attain a level of holiness, elevation, and virtue. The process of reaching heights begins with climbing each stage of soul purification, known as *tazkiyatunnafs*. *Tazkiyatunnafs* aims to purify the soul from all the impurities of sin and reprehensible qualities. The more a person engages in this process, the more he will understand his essence as a servant of Allah SWT and the closer his relationship with the Creator. Thus, he will reach a higher level of faith and become a better person (Sari, 2019).

*Tazkiyatunnafs* serves as a continuous process of self-transformation, in which a person will gradually experience an improvement in moral and spiritual qualities. By doing *Tazkiyatunnafs* regularly, one will strive to improve oneself and perform the best he can. The quality of human actions is greatly influenced by the condition of his soul. A clean soul will give birth to good and commendable behavior, while a dirty soul will tend to produce bad actions. Therefore, the effort to achieve true happiness must begin with the purification of the soul. *Tazkiyatunnafs* is a process that aims to cleanse the soul from all impurities of sin and reprehensible qualities, so that a person can reach a level of spiritual perfection and experience true happiness (Zaman, 2016). A person who chooses a clean path means that he chooses the right path and succeeds in fulfilling his role as a servant who always carries out Allah's commands and shuns all His prohibitions.

The spiritual crisis that is currently plaguing modern society is marked by an increasing number of individuals who experience inner emptiness and loss of meaning in life. Religion, which was supposed to be a source of inspiration and guideline for life, was abandoned because it was considered irrelevant to the demands of the times. As a result, many people look for other alternatives outside of religion to fill their inner void. This phenomenon has become a serious problem that threatens the noble values of humanity, as it has happened in some countries in Europe (Uqbatul Khoir, 2020).

The loss of religious values in Europe is a warning for Muslims. Islam, as the perfect religion, has provided a complete guide to maintaining the faith and improving the quality of spirituality. Through the process of *tazkiyatunnafs*, Muslims can cleanse the soul from all impurities of sin and reprehensible traits, so that they can attain a higher level of spiritual purity. Thus, Muslims can avoid spiritual emptiness and always be close to Allah.

According to the opinion of G. Husein Rassool (Rassool, Health and Psychology: An Islamic Perspective, 2020) "*Islamic Psychology is the study of the soul, mental processes and behaviour according to the principles of psychology and Islamic sciences*" From this understanding, it is known that Islamic psychology discusses human beings holistically, starting from the "*soul*" or soul and then mental processes to producing behavior as an implementation of the results of the form and movement of the soul which becomes a unit, namely morality in Islam.

Therefore, it is necessary to find a solution based on Islamic values to overcome the condition of stagnation and emptiness of the human mind, namely through the path of

Sufism, such as *tazkiyatunnafs* or purification of the soul which is often implemented in sufistic activities (Hadziq, 2004) One of them is Sufistic counseling which contains moral guidance.

*Tazkiyatunnafs* is a sufistic counseling concept that aims to improve or educate character or morals (Taufik, 2011). Meanwhile, one of the Muslim scholars who discusses *tazkiyatunnafs* clearly and in detail is Al-Ghazali in one of his books, namely *Ihya Ulumuddin* in which there are concepts relevant to the concept of Sufistic counseling, especially in the guidance of Islamic morals, with the hope that they can find an image of moral education through Sufistic counseling that provides practical solutions and contributes to overcoming various problems that occur today.

The book *Ihya 'Ulumuddin* itself is a very familiar book among Muslims and Muslim scholars. Quthbil Auliya As-Sayyid Abdullah Al-Aydrus gave a message to all Muslims to always adhere to the Qur'an and Sunnah, and to study the content of both according to him there is already one package in this book. Even in one of the journals, it is mentioned that there is a controversial phrase "*almost the position of ihya 'ulumuddin is comparable to the Qur'an*" (Nisa, 2016), with the explanation that because there are so many who study and read this book, and this praise is conveyed by none other than one of the figures, namely the great Islamic scholar Abu Zakariya Muhyiddin An-Nawawi or better known as "Imam Nawawi *Shahibul-Majmu*", who lived two centuries after Imam Al-Ghazali. This proves the quality and magnitude of the benefits and blessings of this book by Imam Al-Ghazali.

## 2. Results

The results of the description of the data of this study discuss the concept of *tazkiyatunnafs* in the book *Ihya 'Ulumuddin* by Al-Ghazali, which focuses on the process of purification of the soul to achieve purity of heart and closeness to Allah. This process involves three main stages, namely *mujahadatunnafs* (*takhalli*): Emptying the soul from bad qualities; *riyadhatunnafs* (*tahalli*): Filling the soul with good qualities through practice and worship; and *tajalli*: Attaining a higher spiritual state, in which the manifestation of God's attributes is seen in one.

This concept can be integrated with conventional counseling guidance theories to provide a holistic approach to supporting clients, both spiritually and psychologically. Integration with Conventional Counseling Guidance Theory including humanistic theory (Carl Rogers): This theory emphasizes the importance of individual experience and self-actualization. Rogers believes that every individual has the potential to thrive and become the best version of themselves, provided they are in a supportive environment (Rogers, 1961). In the context of *tazkiyatunnafs*, a humanistic approach can be used to help clients recognize the potential for positivity in themselves and develop good qualities, such as patience, sincerity, and compassion. Counselors act as facilitators who provide a safe and supportive environment for clients to share their experiences and explore their feelings openly.

Psychoanalytic Theory (Sigmund Freud): This theory highlights the importance of awareness of the subconscious and internal conflicts. According to Freud, many emotional and psychological problems stem from unconscious conflicts within the subconscious mind (Freud, 1923). In *tazkiyatunnafs*, the process of *mujahadatunnafs* involves awareness of bad traits that are often hidden in the subconscious, such as pride or envy. Through Sufistic guidance and introspection techniques (*muhasabah*), clients are invited to realize and overcome the inner conflicts that hinder their spiritual development.

Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT - *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*): CBT emphasizes the identification and change of negative mindsets that lead to maladaptive behavior (Beck, 1976). This theory focuses on how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are interconnected, and how changes in mindsets can result in changes in behavior and emotional well-being. In the *tazkiyatunnafs* approach, this concept is applied by helping the client identify negative thoughts that come from bad traits, then replace them with a more positive and spiritual mindset through *riyadhatunnafs* and worship practices.

Theory of Moral Development (Lawrence Kohlberg): This theory discusses the stages of individual moral development, from the basic level where moral decisions are based on punishment and reward, to the highest level where decisions are based on universal ethical principles (Kohlberg, 1981). *Tazkiyatunnafs* emphasizes moral and moral improvement as the main goal. Sufistic counseling can help clients progress through the moral stages, from simply obeying social rules to achieving a higher moral consciousness based on sincerity and closeness to God.

## **2.1. The Concept of Tazkiyatunnafs in the Book of Ihya 'Ulumuddin**

*Tazkiyatunnafs* adalah konsep penyucian jiwa yang menjadi inti dari ajaran sufistik dalam Islam. Al-Ghazali dalam kitabnya "*Ihya 'Ulumuddin*" merinci proses penyucian jiwa ini menjadi tiga tahapan utama: *takhalli*, *tahalli*, dan *tajalli*. Setiap tahapan ini memiliki peran penting dalam membimbing seseorang menuju kedekatan dengan Allah dan pencapaian kesejahteraan spiritual yang lebih tinggi. Berikut adalah penjelasan ketiga tahapan tersebut beserta contohnya dalam praktik konseling sufistik.

### **2.1.1. Takhalli**

Takhalli (Emptying Yourself from Bad Traits) is the first stage in the process of *tazkiyatunnafs* which focuses on emptying oneself from bad or negative traits that defile the heart, such as pride, envy, anger, and other despicable traits. This stage involves recognizing and acknowledging the weaknesses and sins that exist in a person, as well as striving to let go and distance oneself from behavior that is not in accordance with the teachings of Islam.

In the practice of sufistic counseling, *takhalli* can be applied by helping clients identify negative traits that are causing them emotional or spiritual difficulties. For example, a client who often feels angry and irritable may be directed to reflect on the cause of the anger, whether it is due to ego, a desire to always be right, or an inability to accept the weaknesses of others. Counselors can use *muhasabah* (self-introspection) techniques to help clients recognize destructive anger and find ways to control it, such as by fasting or doing *dhikr* to calm the heart.

### **2.1.2. Tahalli**

Tahalli (Filling Yourself with Good Qualities). After emptying oneself from bad qualities, the next stage is Tahalli, which is the process of filling oneself with good and noble qualities that are in line with Islamic teachings, such as patience, humility, sincerity, and compassion. This stage involves an active effort to replace the negative traits that have been cleansed of virtue and kindness.

At the *tahalli* stage, the sufistic counselor will help the client to build positive qualities. For example, clients who have overcome anger tendencies (through *takhalli*) are now directed to develop patience. Counselors may suggest spiritual practices such as *dhikr* by focusing on the names of Allah that reflect patience and mercy, or by reading the stories of the Prophet and companions that exemplify patience in the face of trials. The practice of evening prayer can also be used to increase closeness to God, which in turn will strengthen positive qualities in the client.

### 2.1.3. Tajalli

*Tajalli* (Manifestation of Divine Light in the Self). *Tajalli* is the final stage in *tazkiyatunnafs*, where a person reaches a high level of spiritual awareness so that the attributes of Allah begin to be reflected in him. At this stage, the heart has been purified and filled with Divine light, and the individual exhibits behavior and attitudes in accordance with God's will. This stage is the highest spiritual attainment in which one feels deep peace and a close bond with God.

In the *tajalli* stage, a client who has successfully gone through the process of *takhalli* and *tahalli* will begin to show signs of deep closeness to Allah. Sufistic counselors may help clients to deepen their relationship with Allah through *tafakur* (reflective meditation) and *muraqabah* (intense self-monitoring), where clients always feel watched over and guided by Allah in their every action. Clients can also be directed to engage in social and worship activities that show compassion and concern for others, reflecting the attributes of the Most Merciful and Merciful God. This will help the client to stay on the right path and achieve higher spiritual enlightenment.

The three stages of *tazkiyatunnafs* i.e. *takhalli*, *tahalli*, and *tajalli* provide a systematic framework to assist individuals in their spiritual journey towards closeness to God. In the practice of Sufistic counseling, these three stages can be used to guide the client in recognizing and overcoming negative traits, developing positive qualities, and attaining higher spiritual enlightenment. This approach not only assists clients in overcoming emotional and psychological issues, but also supports them in achieving higher spiritual balance and well-being.

## 2.2. Implications in Sufistic Counseling

The concept of *tazkiyatunnafs* in Sufistic counseling has several important implications in helping clients achieve spiritual and emotional balance. This approach not only focuses on the psychological aspect, but also includes a deep spiritual dimension, which aims to purify the heart and draw closer to God. Some of the implications in sufistic counseling are as follows:

### 2.2.1. Pendekatan Holistik dalam Konseling

Sufistic counseling uses a holistic approach that blends psychological and spiritual healing. Counselors not only help clients to overcome emotional and psychological problems, but also direct them in achieving spiritual cleansing (*tazkiyatunnafs*) through various spiritual practices and religious rituals.

An example of a client who experiences chronic anxiety and feels far away from Allah can be directed to do *dhikr* regularly. The counselor guides the client in choosing the appropriate type of *dhikr*, such as repeating the words "*Astaghfirullah*" (asking for forgiveness from Allah) to cleanse the heart from anxiety and sinful feelings, and "*Subhanallah*" (Glory be to Allah) to increase spiritual awareness.

### 2.2.2. Increasing Self-Awareness and Introspection (*Muhasabah*)

Clients are invited to increase their self-awareness through deep *muhasabah* (introspection). This involves regular self-reflection on their thoughts, feelings, and actions in order to recognize bad qualities and replace them with good ones (Al-Ghazali, *Ihya 'Ulumuddin*).

This technique centers on a counselor who teaches clients to do daily *muhasabah* at the end of the day. Clients are asked to reflect on all the actions, thoughts, and intentions that have been done throughout the day, evaluating which ones are in accordance with the teachings of Islam and which need to be improved. This helps clients to always be introspective and maintain purity of heart.

### 2.2.3. The Use of Spiritual Practice and Worship in the Therapy Process

Sufistic counseling involves spiritual practices, such as dhikr (repetition of the names of Allah), night prayers, and sunnah fasting, as part of the therapeutic process to help clients draw closer to Allah and cleanse their hearts from liver diseases such as pride, envy, and hatred (Al-Ghazali, "Ihya 'Ulumuddin"; Badri, 1979).

### 2.2.4. Development of Noble Morals

Sufistic counseling aims to develop noble morals in clients. Counselors help clients identify bad traits that need to be eliminated and guide them in developing good qualities such as patience, sincerity, and compassion, in accordance with Islamic teachings.

In counseling sessions, counselors can use case studies from the lives of Sufi scholars and figures who are known to have noble morals. Clients are invited to discuss how they can emulate the positive behavior of these figures in their own daily lives.

### 2.3. The Role of the Counselor as a Spiritual Advisor

In sufistic counseling, the counselor plays the role of a spiritual guide who not only gives advice, but also serves as an example in daily life. Counselors must have a deep understanding of the science of Sufism and have personal experience in the practice of tazkiyatunnafs to be able to guide clients effectively.

For example, a client who experiences anger and resentment may be directed to do tafakur (reflective meditation) by meditating on God's creation and thinking about God's love and forgiveness. This helps the client shift the focus from negative feelings to more positive and peaceful thinking.

By using an approach that integrates spiritual and psychological aspects, sufistic counseling can help clients achieve a balance between mental and spiritual health, providing more comprehensive and meaningful solutions in the face of life's challenges.

## 3. Conclusion

The concept of tazkiyatunnafs in the book *Ihya 'Ulumuddin* by Al-Ghazali is the core of the teachings of Sufism which emphasizes the process of purification of the soul in order to achieve purity of heart and closeness to Allah. This process includes three main stages, namely mujahadatunnafs or takhalli, which means emptying the soul of bad qualities; riyadhatunnafs or tahalli, which is to fill the soul with good qualities through practice and worship; and tajalli, which is the attainment of a higher spiritual state in which the manifestation of God's attributes is reflected in a person. In the context of Sufistic counseling, tazkiyatunnafs plays an important role as a healing approach that combines psychological and spiritual aspects to help clients achieve emotional balance and closeness to the Creator. This approach is holistic because it integrates psychological therapy with spiritual practices such as dhikr, muhasabah (introspection), and other worship as recommended by Al-Ghazali. Clients are invited to increase self-awareness through deep reflection on their bad qualities, and replace them with good qualities through continuous spiritual practice. Practices such as dhikr, tafakur, and sunnah fasting are used as effective therapeutic means in overcoming emotional and spiritual problems. In addition, the development of noble morals such as patience, sincerity, and compassion is an important part of the counseling process, where the counselor acts as a spiritual guide who not only gives advice, but also becomes an example in carrying out tazkiyatunnafs. Through dhikr, clients who feel anxious or distant from Allah are guided to cleanse their hearts and increase their spiritual awareness. Daily meditation is a means of self-evaluation to improve behavior and intentions, while tafakur helps clients manage negative emotions by reflecting on Allah's creation and His loving qualities. Thus, the integration of

tazkiyatunnafts and conventional counseling theory makes sufistic counseling a well-rounded approach in helping clients achieve psychological and spiritual well-being.

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