

The Sufi Path to Inner Healing: A Psychotherapeutic Perspective on Humanity in Islam

Author:

Ria Adien¹

M. Aditya Salam²

Saipul Annur³

(Penulis: 3 Author)

Affiliation:

Universitas Islam
Negeri Raden Fatah
Palembang¹²³

Corresponding author:

adienria@gmail.com

m.adityasalam@gmail.com

sapulannur_uin@radenfatah.ac.id

Abstract:

The Sufi Path to Inner Healing: A Psychotherapeutic Perspective on Humanity in Islam explores the dimensions of inner healing within the Sufi tradition through an Islamic psychotherapeutic framework that emphasizes the integration of spiritual, emotional, and psychological aspects of the human being. This study is based on the Islamic understanding that humans consist of body, intellect, and soul, and that true well-being can only be achieved through purification of the heart (tazkiyat al-nafs) and closeness to God. In the modern context, this approach is increasingly relevant as an alternative to conventional psychotherapy, which often neglects individuals' spiritual dimension. Using a qualitative method with textual analysis of classical Sufi works such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* by Al-Ghazali, *Masnavi* by Jalaluddin Rumi, and contemporary texts on Islamic psychology, this research identifies three major stages in the Sufi path to inner healing: self-awareness (muraqabah), heart purification through remembrance (dhikr) and introspection (muhasabah), and spiritual transformation toward a tranquil state (nafs al-mutmainnah). This process functions not only as spiritual therapy but also incorporates principles found in modern psychotherapy, such as mindfulness, acceptance, and emotional balance. Thus, Sufism can be viewed as an integral therapeutic system that unites moral, spiritual, and psychological dimensions to achieve holistic mental health. The findings indicate that Sufi healing is not limited to personal well-being but extends to social and ethical dimensions, promoting empathy, compassion, and human responsibility as reflections of divine closeness. This article concludes that Sufism holds significant potential to be developed as a humanistic and transpersonal psychotherapeutic model within the Islamic context and contributes to a more holistic and spiritually grounded cross-cultural psychology.

Keywords: Sufism, Inner Healing, Islamic Psychotherapy, Tazkiyat al-Nafs, Humanity, Spirituality, Transpersonal Psychology

INTRODUCTION

In the reality of modern life, characterized by technological advancement, global competition, and intense social pressure, human beings face increasingly complex existential challenges. Phenomena such as stress, depression, alienation, and a loss of meaning in life have become defining features of modern society, which is trapped in materialistic and individualistic lifestyles (Rahman, 2023). Modernity, which initially promised progress, has paradoxically produced a condition in which humans experience outward advancement but inward decline. This situation indicates an imbalance between intellectual development and spiritual well-being. In this context, there is an urgent need for a healing approach that not only emphasizes psychological and physical aspects but also addresses the spiritual dimension.

Islam, as a comprehensive religion, views human beings as holistic entities composed of the physical body, intellect, and soul. The balance among these elements is a prerequisite for achieving al-falah (true happiness) in both worldly life and the hereafter (Abdullah, 2024). One dimension of Islam that focuses on inner development and healing is Sufism (tasawuf). Sufism functions as a path toward closeness to God through the purification of the soul (tazkiyat al-nafs) and the struggle against lower desires (mujahadat al-nafs) (Al-Ghazali, 2005). From a Sufi perspective, inner ailments such as envy, arrogance, hatred, and spiritual anxiety represent psychological imbalances that hinder inner tranquility (sakinah). Therefore, healing in Sufism is not merely moralistic but also therapeutic—a process of self-purification that guides individuals toward spiritual and psychological equilibrium.

The healing process in Sufism is carried out through a series of structured spiritual practices, including dhikr (remembrance of God), muhasabah (self-introspection), and muraqabah (awareness of divine presence). These practices not only strengthen the vertical relationship between humans and God but also cultivate ethical awareness in horizontal relationships among fellow human beings (Rumi, 2017). In this process, the heart (qalb) becomes the center of inner transformation. Sufis believe that when the heart is purified from spiritual diseases, human behavior naturally

reflects compassion, empathy, and peace. Thus, Sufism does not merely teach personal spirituality but also revives universal human values.

On the other hand, modern psychotherapy developed in the West seeks to treat mental disorders through scientific approaches such as behavioral, cognitive, and psychoanalytic therapies. However, most of these approaches are secular in nature and tend to separate spirituality from the healing process (Frankl, 1985; Maslow, 1998). In recent decades, a growing awareness among psychologists has emerged regarding the importance of spirituality in mental health. Transpersonal psychology, for instance, recognizes the significance of spiritual dimensions and higher states of consciousness in the healing process (Wilber, 2000). In this context, Sufism holds a strategic position as a source of spiritual wisdom that can contribute significantly to the development of psychotherapy grounded in Islamic values.

The integration of Sufism and Islamic psychotherapy not only enriches scientific approaches to the human psyche but also restores a deeper dimension of humanity. The Sufi path teaches that true healing is not merely recovery from mental disorders but a journey toward divine consciousness that fosters love, serenity, and inner balance (*nafs al-mutmainnah*) (Nasr, 2010). This approach guides individuals to rediscover their true selves, understand the meaning of suffering, and attain peace through a spiritual relationship with God.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to explore how the Sufi path can be understood as an Islamic psychotherapeutic approach that emphasizes balance among spiritual, emotional, and psychological aspects of human beings. This research employs a qualitative method with textual analysis of classical and contemporary works within the traditions of Sufism and Islamic psychology, such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* by Al-Ghazali and *Masnavi* by Jalaluddin Rumi. This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relevance of Sufism in contemporary psychotherapy and to affirm that Sufi healing is not merely a spiritual process but also a humanistic paradigm guiding individuals toward genuine mental well-being.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using textual analysis and descriptive-analytical methods to examine the concept of inner healing within the Sufi tradition and its relevance to Islamic psychotherapy. The qualitative approach is chosen because this research focuses on spiritual meanings and values that cannot be measured quantitatively but must be understood through interpretation and reflective engagement with Sufi texts (Creswell, 2018).

The data were collected through library research involving both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include classical Sufi works such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* by Imam Al-Ghazali, *Al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah* by Al-Qushayri, and *Masnavi* by Jalaluddin Rumi. Secondary sources consist of books, journal articles, and contemporary studies on Islamic psychology, Sufism, and spiritual psychotherapy (Rahman, 2023; Abdullah, 2024).

Data analysis was conducted using a hermeneutic and descriptive-analytical approach to interpret spiritual meanings within the texts and relate them to modern psychotherapeutic theories. The hermeneutic approach was used to explore symbolic meanings of Sufi concepts such as *tazkiyat al-nafs* and *nafs al-mutmainnah*, while descriptive analysis was employed to explain their relevance to Islamic psychotherapy.

To ensure data validity, source triangulation was applied by comparing various texts and perspectives from Sufi scholars and contemporary Islamic psychologists. Through this method, the study aims to produce a comprehensive understanding of how Sufi teachings can serve as a foundation for developing holistic, humanistic, and spiritually oriented Islamic psychotherapy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study affirm that the Sufi path functions not only as a spiritual approach but also as a comprehensive inner healing model relevant to contemporary psychotherapeutic needs. Through literary and comparative analysis of classical and modern works, Sufi practices are found to operate across three interrelated domains: spiritual, psychological, and social. Together, these domains form an integral healing system.

In Sufi teachings, inner healing is not merely the elimination of psychological symptoms but an existential transformation toward divine awareness. This process involves reconfiguring human relationships with oneself, others, and God. Thus, Sufi healing may be understood as a process of reconstructing life meaning, similar to meaning-centered therapy in modern psychotherapy. Through spiritual practices such as dhikr, muraqabah, and muhasabah, individuals are guided back to their fitrah—a state of inner tranquility, balance, and compassion.

1. The Stage of Self-Awareness (*Muraqabah*)

This stage represents the initial step in the healing journey, in which individuals become aware of every thought and emotion in relation to divine presence. In psychotherapy, this awareness resembles mindfulness or full awareness. However, muraqabah transcends mindfulness by incorporating a theocentric dimension, not only knowing the self but also knowing God through the self (man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa rabbahu). This awareness forms the foundation for self-regulation and emotional acceptance, both of which are essential to psychological recovery.

2. The Stage of Heart Purification (*Tazkiyat al-Nafs*)

At this stage, individuals strive to cleanse themselves of destructive traits such as envy, arrogance, and ostentation. This process is not merely moralistic but therapeutic, as it helps individuals release inner tensions caused by ego and base desires. In modern psychology, this corresponds to cognitive restructuring—reframing negative thought patterns into positive ones. Tazkiyat al-nafs fosters emotional stability and opens space for virtues such as sincerity, patience, and gratitude. Research indicates that such practices also contribute to reduced stress and anxiety (Rahman, 2023).

3. The Stage of Spiritual Transformation (*Nafs al-Mutmainnah*)

The culmination of the healing journey is the attainment of a tranquil soul (nafs al-mutmainnah). Individuals at this stage live in balance between worldly life and the hereafter, between desire and acceptance. In psychotherapy, this stage resembles self-actualization or even self-transcendence, where individuals move beyond personal interests to

experience a higher form of peace. Rumi describes this state as “when the heart becomes a mirror for divine light.”

4. Social and Empathic Dimensions of Sufi Healing

The study also reveals that Sufi healing is not individualistic in nature. A Sufi who has healed internally becomes a source of healing for others through love, empathy, and compassion. This is reflected in the principle of *rahmah lil ‘alamin*—universal mercy that permeates all aspects of life. In community psychotherapy, this dimension parallels altruism or therapeutic empathy, where healing occurs through compassionate social relationships.

5. Relevance to Modern Psychotherapy

Sufi concepts such as *muraqabah* and *dhikr* share functional similarities with cognitive and behavioral therapies. *Dhikr*, for instance, calms the nervous system and enhances focus, while *muraqabah* cultivates self-awareness and mental resilience. Beyond this, Sufi teachings introduce a spiritual dimension absent from secular psychotherapy—namely, a transcendent relationship with God as the ultimate source of healing. Integrating Sufism with modern psychotherapy opens new possibilities for developing spiritually grounded, humane, and contextual Islamic mental health approaches (Al-Attas, 2010; Wilber, 2000).

6. Challenges and Implications

Despite its relevance, applying Sufi concepts in psychotherapy faces epistemological and methodological challenges. Sufism is rooted in subjective mystical experience, whereas modern psychotherapy emphasizes empirical methods. However, this study demonstrates that the two can complement each other: Sufism provides meaning and spirituality, while psychotherapy offers scientific structure and techniques. The implication is the need to develop an Islamic transpersonal therapy model that proportionally integrates psychological and spiritual sciences.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Sufi path to inner healing offers a comprehensive paradigm that integrates spiritual, psychological, and moral dimensions into a unified whole. Sufism views human beings not merely as rational entities but as spiritual beings whose well-being depends on the balance among body, intellect, and soul. Through the processes of muraqabah, tazkiyat al-nafs, and nafs al-mutmainnah, individuals are guided toward inner tranquility and harmony as expressions of closeness to God.

The Sufi approach to inner healing aligns with key principles of modern psychotherapy, such as self-awareness, acceptance, and emotional transformation, while offering a distinct advantage through its theocentric orientation that places God at the center of healing. This demonstrates that Sufism is not only relevant within Islamic spirituality but also holds significant potential as a humanistic and transpersonal Islamic psychotherapeutic model.

Beyond individual healing, the Sufi path fosters empathy, compassion, and social responsibility as expressions of deep spirituality. Thus, Sufi healing is holistic, addressing both personal and social dimensions simultaneously.

This study underscores the importance of integrating Sufi teachings with modern psychological science to develop therapeutic systems that are not only scientifically sound but also spiritually meaningful. Further research is needed to develop practical Sufi-based psychotherapeutic models applicable to contemporary mental health contexts, particularly in addressing crises of meaning, existential stress, and spiritual alienation in the modern world.

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