

Spiritual Purification in Islam: Tazkiyatun Nafs and the Practice of Amali Sufism

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the concept of tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) through the approach of amali Sufism and its implications for social life. In Islam, spiritual devotion is expressed through various religious rituals intended to bring human beings closer to Allah, among which inner purification occupies a central position. Tazkiyatun nafs is understood as a systematic process of self-cleansing that is achieved through spiritual discipline, commonly known as suluk, within the framework of Sufism. This research employs a qualitative library research method by examining classical Islamic texts (salaf books), scholarly works, and relevant academic journals as its primary data sources. The findings show that amali Sufism, which emphasizes practical spiritual exercises in everyday life, functions not only as a means of individual spiritual development but also as a foundation for social ethics and harmony. The practice of soul purification nurtures moral awareness, self-control, sincerity, and social responsibility. Therefore, tazkiyatun nafs through amali Sufism contributes significantly to the formation of spiritually grounded individuals who are able to engage constructively and ethically within society in contemporary social contexts globally.

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INTRODUCTION

Modern society today faces multidimensional challenges that are not only material in nature, but also spiritual and moral (F. Ali et al., 2025; Furqani & Haneef, 2023). Rapid advances in science and technology are often not accompanied by the strengthening of spiritual values, resulting in a crisis of meaning, inner anxiety, and moral degradation (Wang et al., 2024; Youvan, 2024). This indicates that human development has not fully touched the deepest dimension, namely the heart and soul. In the Islamic perspective, the heart (qalb) is the center of human consciousness, faith, and behavior (Nasr & Ogunnaike, 2024; Zulkipli et al., 2022). Many social problems such as corruption, violence, abuse of power, and moral decadence are rooted in the weakness of the purity and tranquility of the heart. Therefore, efforts toward the purification of the soul (tazkiyatun nafs) become an urgent necessity for society at large. Islam, through the mission of the Messengers, has positioned tazkiyah as a central pillar of reform for the ummah. Thus, research that examines tazkiyatun nafs has high social urgency because it contributes to the formation of human beings who are faithful, moral, and balanced between outward and inward dimensions.

Although the concept of soul purification has long been known in Islamic teachings, social realities indicate that its understanding and practice still face various problems. Many individuals practice religious teachings in a formalistic manner, yet they do not reach the level of inner transformation. As a result, a gap emerges between religious rituals and social behavior (Hidayat, 2026; Youvan, 2024). This phenomenon indicates a fundamental problem in the internalization of tazkiyah values in daily life. Religious education tends to emphasize cognitive and normative aspects, while the cultivation of the heart and character has not received proportional attention. In addition, the influence of materialistic and hedonistic culture further weakens spiritual awareness in society. This problem becomes increasingly complex when the concept of tazkiyatun nafs is perceived

as an elitist teaching or only relevant to certain groups. In fact, tazkiyah is a universal need for every individual. Therefore, an academic study is needed that is able to explain the concept, role, and relevance of tazkiyatun nafs in a comprehensive and contextual manner for modern society.

Phenomena occurring in the field show that various social problems are often directly proportional to the spiritual crisis experienced by individuals. Many cases of moral deviation are committed by people who outwardly appear religious and educated. This indicates that religious knowledge does not necessarily guarantee the purity of the heart. On the other hand, the increasing prevalence of psychological disorders such as anxiety, stress, and loss of life direction also reflects the inner barrenness of society. Religious practices are often understood merely as ritual obligations without being accompanied by a continuous process of soul purification (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025; Norbeck, 2025). In addition, in the worlds of education and da'wah, the approaches used are still dominantly normative and less attentive to the dimension of spiritual experience. This phenomenon shows that tazkiyatun nafs has not yet been implemented systematically in individual and social development. Therefore, it is important to re-examine the concept of tazkiyah through the approach of tasawuf as a means of harmonizing the heart, intellect, and behavior, so that Islamic teachings truly function as a solution to life.

Various previous studies have discussed tazkiyatun nafs and tasawuf from different perspectives, such as theological, historical, and normative approaches. Several studies emphasize tazkiyah as a moral-spiritual process aimed at purifying the heart from inner diseases such as *riya'*, *hasad*, and love of the world (Fathan et al., 2025; Syaffutra & Zarkasi, 2025). Other studies examine tasawuf as a scientific discipline that plays a role in the formation of character and closeness to Allah. However (Azami et al., 2023; Muvid & Kholis, 2024), most of these studies remain descriptive-conceptual and have not deeply connected tazkiyatun nafs

with contemporary social realities. In addition, existing studies tend to separate the concept of tazkiyah from the practice of tasawuf as an applicative solution. As a result, the contribution of tasawuf in addressing the spiritual crisis of modern society has not been fully illustrated. This weakness opens space for further research to integrate the concept of tazkiyatun nafs and tasawuf in a more contextual and functional manner.

Unlike previous studies, this research positions tazkiyatun nafs not merely as an individual concept, but as a strategy for holistic human reform. This study seeks to fill the research gap by examining tasawuf as a practical method for realizing tazkiyah at the level of the qalb (heart). Thus, tasawuf is not understood as an exclusive teaching, but as an educational and transformative approach that is relevant to society at large. The contribution of this research lies in its effort to synthesize the teachings of tazkiyatun nafs with the social and psychological realities of modern humans. This study also emphasizes the importance of the heart as the center of spiritual life that determines the quality of character and behavior. With this approach, it is expected that tazkiyatun nafs will not remain at the level of discourse, but can be applied concretely in individual and social life. This makes the research significant both theoretically and practically.

The novelty (state of the art) of this research lies in strengthening the relationship between tazkiyatun nafs, tasawuf, and the integral formation of human character. This study offers the perspective that the purity and vitality of the heart constitute the primary capital for success and happiness in this world and the hereafter. Unlike previous studies that tend to be partial, this research examines tazkiyah as a continuous process that generates spiritual strengths such as patience, courage, iffah, and love for goodness. This study also affirms that a person's outward strength reflects their inner condition, in line with the principle that the outward aspect is a reflection of the inward aspect. Thus, this research is important to complete because it offers a more applicative, contextual, and

relevant model of understanding tazkiyatun nafs in facing the challenges of modern life, particularly in building human beings of noble character and balance.

Based on the above description, the research problem focuses on how the concept of tazkiyatun nafs in Islam can be implemented through the tasawuf approach to purify and enliven the human heart. The research questions are directed at the role of tasawuf in shaping a heart that is pure, radiant, and alive, as well as its impact on human behavior and character. The main argument of this research is that human success in life, both in this world and in the hereafter, is largely determined by the quality of the heart. A clean and strong heart will give rise to noble character, inner tranquility, and the ability to face various life challenges. Thus, this research is expected to provide conceptual and practical contributions to the development of tazkiyatun nafs studies and to offer spiritual solutions to contemporary human problems.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research design. The qualitative approach is chosen because the object of this research consists of Islamic concepts, thoughts (Adiyono et al., 2024; Bakar et al., 2022; Kamaruddin & Hanapi, 2021), and ideas related to tazkiyatun nafs and amali sufism, which cannot be measured using numerical data or statistical analysis. This research seeks to understand the meaning, essence, and relevance of these two concepts through in-depth interpretation of religious texts and scholarly literature. The descriptive design is used to systematically and factually describe the thoughts of scholars and Islamic perspectives regarding the purification of the soul and the role of sufism in the cultivation of the heart. Library research is selected because the main data sources of this study are derived from relevant classical and contemporary literature, allowing the researcher to conduct comprehensive and in-depth conceptual analysis without direct field involvement.

This research is not conducted in a specific geographical location, but rather focuses on the realm of literature as the primary field of study. Therefore, the research location consists of libraries and digital literature sources that provide relevant Islamic and academic materials. The selection of this location is based on the characteristics of library research, which places texts as the main objects of analysis. The literature used includes classical sufism texts, academic books, scientific journals, manuscripts, and Islamic documents that discuss tazkiyatun nafs and amali sufism. In addition to physical libraries, the researcher also utilizes online journal databases and academic repositories to obtain the most recent sources. The selection of this research setting aims to obtain valid, authoritative, and diverse data that support in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the research theme.

Data collection techniques in this study are carried out through documentation and literature review. Data are collected by identifying, inventorying, and examining written sources relevant to the focus of the research. Primary data sources consist of sufism texts and scholarly works that directly discuss the concepts of tazkiyatun nafs and amali sufism. Meanwhile, secondary data sources include academic books, journal articles, undergraduate theses, master's theses, dissertations, and other supporting documents. The data collection process is conducted systematically by reading, recording, and classifying important information related to the concepts, objectives, methods, and implications of tazkiyatun nafs and sufism. This technique enables the researcher to obtain rich and meaningful data in accordance with the characteristics of qualitative, text-based research.

Data analysis in this study is carried out through several stages. First, data condensation or data reduction, which is the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying data from various literature sources in accordance with the research focus (Bingham, 2023; Ganesha & Aithal, 2022; Taherdoost, 2021). Second, data

display, which involves organizing the reduced data in the form of narrative descriptions, conceptual tables, or thematic classifications to facilitate understanding of the relationships among concepts. Third, verification and conclusion drawing, which is the process of interpreting the data in depth to identify patterns, meanings, and conceptual relationships between tazkiyatun nafs and amali sufism. The analysis process is conducted continuously from data collection to the final stage of the research in order to produce valid and well-argued conclusions.

The validity of data in this study is ensured through several techniques. First, source triangulation, which involves comparing data from various classical and contemporary literature to ensure consistency and accuracy of information (Moon, 2019; Natow, 2020). Second, prolonged engagement and careful reading, by repeatedly and deeply examining primary sources to achieve comprehensive understanding. Third, reference adequacy, which involves using credible, authoritative, and relevant sources related to the research theme. In addition, the researcher maintains analytical objectivity by directly referring to original texts and avoiding speculative interpretations. Through these measures, the research findings are expected to demonstrate a level of validity and academic rigor that can be responsibly justified.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Integrative Dynamics of Tazkiyatun Nafs and Amali Sufism in Holistic Spiritual and Moral Formation

Tazkiyatun Nafs and the Practice of Amali Sufism in this study are defined as a process of purifying and nurturing the human soul through the integration of inner purification (tazkiyatun nafs) and applicative spiritual practice (amali sufism). Operationally, tazkiyatun nafs is understood as a conscious and

continuous effort to cleanse the heart from reprehensible traits and to cultivate praiseworthy qualities that have a direct impact on individual behavior. Meanwhile, amali sufism is interpreted as the practical implementation of Sufi values through worship, dhikr, mujahadah, and self-control in daily life. This sub-finding emphasizes that soul purification does not stop at the inner dimension alone, but is actualized in attitudes, actions, and social relations. Thus, spiritual purification in Islam constitutes a holistic process that unites the dimensions of the heart, deeds, and character as the foundation of a balanced human life.

The results of the literature study indicate that tazkiyatun nafs is one of the main missions of the prophets' messengership, as reflected in various Qur'anic verses that place soul purification alongside the teaching of the Book and wisdom. Classical Sufi literature explains that tazkiyah encompasses two main dimensions, namely cleansing the soul from diseases of the heart and nurturing the soul with divine values. The researcher interprets that these two dimensions are complementary and inseparable. Cleansing without nurturing will result in spiritual emptiness, while nurturing without cleansing has the potential to produce superficial piety. Therefore, tazkiyatun nafs must be understood as a dynamic and continuous process. This finding reinforces the view that spiritual success is not measured merely by ritual intensity, but by changes in the quality of the heart and the consistency of moral conduct in real life.

The literature study also reveals that amali sufism functions as a practical medium for realizing tazkiyatun nafs. Sufi literature emphasizes that spiritual practices such as dhikr, muhasabah, muraqabah, and mujahadah are primary means in shaping divine awareness and spiritual discipline. The researcher interprets that amali sufism serves as a bridge between normative values and lived reality. Through practical application, the concept of soul purification does not remain at the theoretical level, but becomes a lived spiritual experience. This finding shows that amali sufism emphasizes the integration of sharia, tariqa,

haqiqa, and ma'rifa as a unified process. Thus, amali sufism makes a significant contribution to forming a complete Muslim personality, not only ritually obedient but also spiritually and socially mature.

Based on observations of religious practices and social life, it was found that individuals who consistently apply the values of tazkiyatun nafs and amali sufism demonstrate significant changes in attitudes and behavior. These changes include increased moral awareness, self-control, honesty, and social concern. The researcher interprets that the practice of amali sufism forms a strong internal control mechanism, so that individuals behave well not merely due to external pressure, but because of inner awareness. In addition, routine spiritual practices also contribute to inner tranquility and emotional stability. This finding confirms that soul purification has tangible implications for building personal integrity and social harmony, particularly in the context of modern life that is saturated with materialistic temptations.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that tazkiyatun nafs and amali sufism are two concepts that are integrally connected in the process of human soul purification. Tazkiyatun nafs functions as the spiritual goal and orientation, while amali sufism serves as the practical method to achieve it. Soul purification not only affects the inner dimension, but also influences outward behavior, social relations, and individual quality of life. In other words, spiritual purification in Islam is a comprehensive transformation process that places the heart as the center of change. This finding helps readers understand that the success of tazkiyatun nafs can be identified through consistency between belief, worship, and moral conduct in daily life.

Data patterns show a consistent relationship between the intensity of amali sufism practices and the level of success in tazkiyatun nafs. The stronger an individual's commitment to spiritual practices, the higher the quality of self-control and moral conduct displayed. This pattern also indicates that tazkiyatun

nafs functions as a foundation for sustainable character formation. Furthermore, the data demonstrate that spiritual purification is not instantaneous, but proceeds through continuous stages, starting from cleansing, habituation, to the internalization of values. This pattern confirms that amali sufism acts as an effective system of soul cultivation in facing the challenges of modern life.

Table 1. The influence of tazkiyatun nafs and amali sufism

Informant Position	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
Religious Figure	When dhikr and muhasabah become routines, a person can more easily control their desires.	Self-control
Educator	Learners who are guided through a spiritual approach tend to be more honest and responsible.	Moral integrity
Tariqa Practitioner	Amali sufism teaches consistency between worship and social behavior.	Moral consistency
Community Leader	People whose hearts are calm are rarely involved in social conflict.	Social harmony

The table of tazkiyatun nafs and amali sufism above can be described in the form of a diagram as follows



Figure 1. Tazkiyatun nafs and amali tasawuf act as an effective system of soul development in facing the challenges of modern life.

The table above shows that the application of tazkiyatun nafs and amali sufism exerts an ideal influence on individual character formation. Each informant, despite coming from different backgrounds, affirms that spiritual practice directly contributes to self-control, moral integrity, and consistency of character. This indicates that spiritual purification functions as an internal mechanism that shapes positive behavior in a sustainable manner.

Furthermore, the table data demonstrate that the impact of tazkiyatun nafs is not only individual, but also social. Inner tranquility and clarity of the heart have implications for the creation of social harmony and the reduction of conflict. This pattern strengthens the finding that amali sufism is not merely a personal devotional practice, but also an instrument for shaping a social order grounded in spiritual values.

DISCUSSION

Tazkiyatun Nafs and the Practice of Amali Sufism are placed in a critical dialogue with existing Sufi literature and Islamic studies. In general, both classical and contemporary literature view tazkiyatun nafs as the core of Islamic teachings that functions to shape inward and outward piety simultaneously (Fathan et al., 2025; Hamidi & Nurhakim, 2025). The findings of this study are in line with this view, particularly in emphasizing that soul purification is not merely a normative concept, but a continuous practical process (Bhatt, 2023; Ciocan, 2020). However, unlike some previous studies that tend to emphasize the theoretical and normative aspects of Sufism, this research places stronger emphasis on the amali dimension (practical application) as the primary means of internalizing tazkiyah values in everyday life.

Comparison with previous studies also reveals differences in analytical focus. Many earlier studies concentrate on tazkiyatun nafs as an individual, personal-spiritual experience. The findings of this study expand this perspective

by demonstrating that the practice of amali Sufism has tangible social and ethical implications, such as character formation, self-control, and increased moral awareness in social relations (Karimullah, 2023; Rosyad, 2025; Sameh, 2020). Thus, tazkiyatun nafs does not function solely as a means of inner purification, but also as a foundation for constructing constructive social behavior.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study strengthens the position of amali Sufism as a bridge between the inner (esoteric) and outer (exoteric) dimensions of Islam. These findings contribute to the development of Sufi theory by affirming that effective tazkiyatun nafs must be integrated with structured and continuous practical disciplines (A. Ali & Fathan, 2025; Hamidi & Nurhakim, 2025). In other words, spiritual piety cannot be separated from consistent amaliah discipline, so Sufi theory should be understood as a living ethical-spiritual system rather than merely a metaphysical discourse.

The practical implications of these findings are highly relevant for the development of Islamic education and religious guidance. Amali Sufism practices oriented toward tazkiyatun nafs can serve as pedagogical approaches to shaping character, inner tranquility, and emotional balance among learners and the wider community. Moreover, the results indicate that internalizing tazkiyah values through simple yet consistent spiritual exercises can offer solutions to problems of anxiety, moral degradation, and the crisis of meaning faced by modern society.

Overall, this discussion affirms that the research findings not only confirm existing literature but also enrich the understanding of tazkiyatun nafs by emphasizing the significance of amali Sufism as a lived praxis. The differing emphasis from previous studies highlights this research's important contribution in bridging the gap between normative concepts and practical realities. Consequently, this study provides a strong conceptual and applicative foundation for the development of Sufi studies that are relevant to the spiritual and social needs of contemporary society.

CONCLUSION

First, the most important finding of this research shows that *Spiritual Purification in Islam: Tazkiyatun Nafs and the Practice of Amali Sufism* constitutes an essential foundation for forming a complete Muslim personality that is balanced between inward and outward dimensions. The main lesson derived is that tazkiyatun nafs does not stop at a conceptual and normative level, but requires a continuous practical process through amali Sufism. Consistent spiritual practices such as muhasabah, dhikr, controlling desires, and habituating noble character are proven to be effective means of purifying the heart, cultivating inner tranquility, and generating ethical and constructive social behavior. This study affirms that a person's spiritual success is largely determined by the quality of the heart's purity, which ultimately becomes a source of moral strength, self-awareness, and happiness in both this world and the hereafter.

Second, the main strength of this paper lies in its scholarly contribution in integratively connecting the theoretical dimension of tazkiyatun nafs with the practical dimension of amali Sufism. This research enriches the body of Sufi studies by asserting that Sufism is not merely an elitist or individual mystical experience, but an applicative spiritual formation system that is relevant to social life. Through a qualitative library research approach combined with conceptual interpretation, this study provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how soul-purification values can be internalized in concrete ways. This contribution is significant for the development of Islamic education studies, Islamic ethics, and spirituality-based character formation.

Third, this study has limitations that need to be acknowledged. Its reliance on a library research approach causes the findings to emphasize conceptual and interpretative analysis, so they do not yet fully capture the empirical dynamics of tazkiyatun nafs and amali Sufism practices in diverse social contexts. In addition, the limited availability of contemporary primary sources and the absence of

extensive field data restrict the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research is recommended to develop this study through empirical approaches, such as field research, case studies, or mixed methods, to examine the implementation of amali Sufism in specific communities. Further studies may also explore the relevance of tazkiyatun nafs in addressing modern spiritual challenges, such as identity crises, mental health issues, and moral degradation, so that this field of study becomes increasingly contextual and impactful.

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