



Reconstruction of *Tazkiyatun Nafs* as an Emancipatory Paradigm: A Critique of the Reductionism of Transcendental Values in Social Transformation

Nurus Sobah¹, Ulvi Nurul Aini², Nurul Mufidah³, Ali Hasan Siswanto⁴

¹ *Bimbingan Konseling Islam, Fakultas Dakwah, Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haj Achmad Siddiq Jember, INegara*

² *Bimbingan Konseling Islam, Fakultas Dakwah, Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, INegara*

³ *Bimbingan Konseling Islam, Fakultas Dakwah, Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, Inegara*

⁴ *Bimbingan Konseling Islam, Fakultas Dakwah, Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember, INegara*

Corresponding author, E-mail: sobahalkhoir94@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

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The epistemological crisis in contemporary Islamic studies is marked by the marginalization of transcendental values due to the dominance of positivistic paradigms, which tend to reduce spirituality to merely ritualistic and individualistic dimensions. This

condition results in a disconnection between personal piety and social transformation, causing the values of tauhid (divine unity) to lose their emancipatory capacity in addressing issues of injustice and dehumanization. Although studies on Sufism and tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul) have developed significantly, a critical research gap remains, particularly in the lack of theoretical formulations that systematically and operationally integrate self-purification with frameworks of social transformation. This article aims to reconstruct tazkiyatun nafs as an emancipatory paradigm grounded in tauhid, capable of bridging the spiritual dimension and social praxis. The theoretical approach employed is Transformative Tazkiyatun Nafs, which integrates the classical Sufi tradition with critical theory within the framework of emancipatory tauhid. This study adopts a qualitative method based on literature review,

epistemology, Sufism, critical theory utilizing critical-hermeneutic analysis and conceptual synthesis. The main argument of this article asserts that tazkiyatun nafs should not be confined to an individual process of spiritual purification, but rather understood as a foundation for developing critical consciousness that drives transformative social action. In this sense, transcendental values can be revitalized as a liberative praxis. The scholarly contribution of this study lies in the development of an integrative epistemological model that connects revelation, reason, and social reality, while also offering an operational framework for applying transcendental values in contemporary contexts.

Kata Kunci:

nilai transendental, tazkiyatun nafs
transformatif, tauhid emansipatoris,
transformasi sosial, epistemologi
Islam, tasawuf, teori kritis

Krisis epistemologis dalam kajian keislaman kontemporer ditandai oleh marginalisasi nilai transendental akibat dominasi paradigma positivistik, yang cenderung mereduksi spiritualitas menjadi aspek ritualistik dan individualistik semata. Kondisi ini mengakibatkan terputusnya relasi antara kesalehan personal dan transformasi sosial, sehingga nilai-nilai tauhid kehilangan daya emansipatorisnya dalam menjawab problem ketidakadilan dan dehumanisasi. Meskipun kajian tentang tasawuf dan tazkiyatun nafs telah berkembang luas, terdapat kesenjangan penelitian yang signifikan, yakni minimnya formulasi teoritis yang mengintegrasikan purifikasi diri dengan kerangka transformasi sosial yang sistematis dan operasional. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk merekonstruksi tazkiyatun nafs sebagai paradigma emansipatoris berbasis tauhid yang mampu menjembatani dimensi spiritual dan praksis sosial. Pendekatan teoritis yang digunakan adalah Tazkiyatun Nafs Transformatif, yang mengintegrasikan tradisi tasawuf dengan teori kritis dalam kerangka tauhid emansipatoris. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi literatur dengan analisis hermeneutik-kritis dan sintesis konseptual. Argumen utama artikel ini menegaskan bahwa tazkiyatun nafs tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai proses penyucian diri secara individual, tetapi juga sebagai basis pembentukan kesadaran kritis yang mendorong aksi transformasi sosial. Dengan demikian, nilai transendental dapat direvitalisasi sebagai kekuatan praksis yang membebaskan. Kontribusi ilmiah penelitian ini terletak pada pengembangan model epistemologi integratif yang menghubungkan wahyu, akal, dan realitas sosial, sekaligus menawarkan kerangka operasional penerapan nilai transendental dalam konteks kontemporer.

INTRODUCTION

The crisis of values in modern society is not only socio-economic in nature, but also touches upon the ontological and epistemological dimensions of human existence, namely the loss of transcendental orientation in life and knowledge. The dominance of the positivistic paradigm has led to a reduction of reality to merely empirical-rational aspects, thereby marginalizing spiritual and metaphysical dimensions from contemporary scientific discourse. In this context, transcendental values rooted in *tauhid* are no longer positioned as ethical foundations and orientations for social praxis, but are instead reduced to individual rituals detached from social reality. This phenomenon gives rise to what may be termed a *meaning crisis*, in which modern individuals experience existential emptiness amidst material advancement. A number of recent studies indicate that modernity has produced moral disorientation, spiritual alienation, and identity fragmentation, which in turn call for the reconstruction of a more integrative paradigm of knowledge that bridges spiritual and social dimensions. (Mustamik, 2025) Within the Islamic tradition, the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) inherently holds great potential as a basis for such reconstruction, as it encompasses integrated ethical, spiritual, and social dimensions. However, in practice, this

concept is often narrowly understood as an individual process detached from broader social dynamics.

The development of literature over the past five years demonstrates efforts to revitalize the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* across various fields, particularly Islamic education, spiritual psychology, and character development. Contemporary studies affirm that *tazkiyatun nafs* holds significant relevance in addressing the moral and spiritual crises of modern society, especially through the internalization of values such as *muhasabah* (self-reflection), *muraqabah* (awareness of divine presence), and self-control (Ahmad Zainal Anbiya, 2023). Recent comparative research also shows that thinkers such as Hamka and Said Nursi position *tazkiyatun nafs* as a foundation for character formation and spiritual well-being in confronting modern materialism (Diinu Tsabitul Azmi, Syifa Nur Azzizah, 2025). Furthermore, thematic studies of the Qur'an confirm that the values of *tazkiyah* are not merely ethical and individual, but also carry broader social implications in shaping collective moral consciousness (Ahmad Ali Syauqi Fathan, Fathur Rohim, 2025). Nevertheless, most of these studies remain focused on normative, pedagogical, and psychological aspects, without developing a theoretical framework capable of systematically bridging spirituality and social transformation. In other words, the state of the art of current research remains confined to descriptive-applicative approaches and has not yet reached the level of paradigmatic conceptualization that positions *tazkiyatun nafs* as a foundation for contemporary Islamic social theory.

Based on this literature review, a significant research gap can be identified, namely the absence of a conceptual formulation that integrates *tazkiyatun nafs* with an emancipatory paradigm within the framework of social transformation. Most studies still position *tazkiyatun nafs* as an instrument for individual moral development or character education, without elaborating its potential as a basis for critical awareness of unjust social structures. In fact, from the perspective of *tauhid*, spirituality cannot be separated from the dimension of liberation, as *tauhid* carries not only theological but also socio-political implications that reject all forms of domination and injustice. The absence of such a theoretical framework causes transcendental values to lose their transformative power, rendering them ineffective as drivers of social change. Therefore, the research questions of this article are: (1) how to critique the reductionism of transcendental values in contemporary scientific discourse; (2) how to reconstruct *tazkiyatun nafs* as an emancipatory paradigm based on *tauhid*; and (3) how to formulate a conceptual model that connects self-purification with the praxis of social transformation.

This article argues that *tazkiyatun nafs* must be reconstructed from an ascetic-individual paradigm into a transformative-emancipatory paradigm based on *tauhid*. Within this framework, purification of the soul is no longer understood as a purely personal end, but as a process of

developing *tauhid*-based consciousness that fosters a commitment to social justice. The main thesis proposed is that transcendental values can only function effectively in social transformation when integrated with critical awareness of structural realities, thereby producing just social praxis. The theoretical contribution of this article lies in the development of the Transformative *Tazkiyatun Nafs* paradigm, an epistemological framework that integrates revelation, reason, and social reality into a unified dialectical whole. The novelty of this research lies in the conceptualization of *tauhid* as an emancipatory principle that connects spirituality with critical social theory, thereby opening new horizons in Islamic studies, theology, and Sufism as disciplines that are not only normative, but also transformative and contextual.

METHOD

The data are organized into three layers, each with an explicit selection criterion and analytical role (Table 1). The first layer consists of primary normative sources. Qur’anic verses were identified by tracing the root *z-k-y* (*zakkā, tazakkā, yuzakkī*) and its semantic field (*tahārah, qalb, nafs*), and by including verses that explicitly connect inner states with social conduct, justice (*qist*), and the rejection of *tāghūt*. Hadith were limited to reports in the canonical collections that are graded *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḥasan* and that link the condition of the heart with social action (al-Bukhārī, 2001; Muslim, n.d.; Abū Dāwūd, n.d.; al-Tirmidhī, 1975; Ibn Mājah, n.d.). This procedure yielded ten verse clusters and five hadith, which were analyzed thematically (*mawḍū‘ī*). The second layer consists of classical works, limited to two authors who offer a systematic theory of soul purification and explicitly relate it to social obligations: al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*—especially *Kitāb Sharḥ ‘Ajā’ib al-Qalb, Kitāb Riyāḍat al-Nafs, Kitāb Ādāb al-‘Uzlah*, and *Kitāb al-Amr bi al-Ma’rūf wa al-Nahy ‘an al-Munkar* (al-Ghazālī, n.d., 1995)—and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah’s *Madārij al-Sālikīn* and *Ighāthat al-Lahfān* (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1975, 1996). The third layer comprises contemporary sources: foundational works of critical theory (Freire, 2000; Habermas, 1984) and recent journal articles on *tazkiyatun nafs*, Islamic studies methodology, and social transformation (Erlyn Ermawati, Siti Baimunah, Eko Nursalim, 2025).

Table 1. Research corpus, selection criteria, and analytical role

Layer	Sources	Selection criteria	Analytical role
Primary normative	Qur’an: 10 verse clusters (V1–V10); Hadith: 5 reports (H1–H5)	Root <i>z-k-y</i> and its semantic field; explicit link between inner state and social conduct; hadith graded <i>ṣaḥīḥ/ḥasan</i> in canonical collections	Normative foundation; thematic (<i>mawḍū‘ī</i>) coding (Table 2)
Classical	al-Ghazālī, <i>Iḥyā’</i> (four books); Ibn Qayyim, <i>Madārij al-Sālikīn</i> , <i>Ighāthat al-Lahfān</i>	Systematic theory of <i>tazkiyah</i> ; explicit treatment of social obligations	Mechanisms of purification; textual bridge to social action (Table 3)
Critical theory	Freire (2000); Habermas (1984)	Foundational works on critical consciousness and communicative action	Analytical lens for structural critique and dialogical praxis

Layer	Sources	Selection criteria	Analytical role
Contemporary studies	Peer-reviewed articles, 2020–2025	Thematic relevance; peer-reviewed; English or Indonesian	State of the art; positioning of findings

Source: Author's compilation.

Contemporary literature was located through keyword-guided searches in Google Scholar using combinations such as “*tazkiyatun nafs*” OR “*tazkiyah al-nafs*”, “Sufism” AND “social transformation”, and “*tauhid*” AND “liberation”. Inclusion criteria were: (a) publication between 2020 and 2025, except for classical and foundational theoretical works; (b) direct thematic relevance to *tazkiyatun nafs*, transcendental values, or religion and social transformation; and (c) publication in peer-reviewed journals or by academic publishers. Studies that treat *tazkiyah* solely as a clinical-therapeutic technique without reference to ethics or society were excluded, because they fall outside the focus of this article.

Data analysis employs a critical hermeneutic approach conducted in three stages. (1) *Textual analysis*: each verse and hadith was read with attention to its key term, its immediate textual context (*siyāq*), and its classical interpretation, and was coded into two dimensions—individual (inner) and social (outer) (Table 2). (2) *Contextual-critical analysis*: the codes were read against the classical works to identify where the tradition supports, or has historically narrowed, the social reach of *tazkiyah* (Table 3). (3) *Conceptual synthesis*: recurring patterns were abstracted into stages and linked to correlates in critical theory, producing the conceptual model in Figure 1 and its operationalization in Table 4. To guard against projecting modern categories onto the texts, every element of the model is required to have an explicit textual basis in Table 2 or Table 3. This procedure is consistent with contemporary methodology that bridges text and context through hermeneutics and critical analysis (Putri Salsabila Azkya et al., 2025).

The choice of method rests on the consideration that transcendental values and *tazkiyatun nafs* cannot be adequately understood through a positivistic and reductionist approach; an interpretative approach is required to capture dimensions of meaning and value that cannot be measured quantitatively. Critical hermeneutics allows the study to avoid two extremes—rigid textualism and excessive relativism—so that the resulting framework is faithful to the text while remaining responsive to social reality, in line with the multidisciplinary orientation of contemporary Islamic studies (Mawaddah Warohmah, 2025).

RESULTS

The results are presented in three parts: (1) a thematic analysis of the Qur'an and hadith; (2) an analysis of the classical sources; and (3) the conceptual model synthesized from both.

Thematic Analysis of the Qur'an and Hadith

The central verse on soul purification states:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا (٩) وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا (١٠)

“Truly successful is the one who purifies it, and truly failed is the one who corrupts it” (QS. al-Shams [91]: 9–10). The verse is preceded by the statement that the soul has been inspired with both its depravity (*fujūr*) and its God-consciousness (*taqwā*) (91: 8), so that *tazkiyah* is framed as the moral choice of a responsible agent. Significantly, the verses that immediately follow (91: 11–15) narrate the collective destruction of Thamūd because of their transgression (*tughyān*). Read within its *siyāq*, therefore, the verse does not isolate the individual soul; it places personal corruption and collective ruin on a single continuum. The same pattern recurs across the corpus, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Thematic coding of Qur’anic verses and hadith on *tazkiyah*

Code	Text	Key term	Individual dimension	Social dimension
V1	QS. al-Shams [91]: 7–10 (cf. 11–15)	<i>zakkāhā / dassāhā</i>	Moral agency; choice between <i>fujūr</i> and <i>taqwā</i>	Personal corruption linked to the collective ruin of Thamūd (<i>tughyān</i>)
V2	QS. al-A‘lā [87]: 14–17	<i>tazakkā</i>	Purification through remembrance and prayer	Critique of preferring worldly life over what is lasting
V3	QS. al-Jumu‘ah [62]: 2; cf. al-Baqarah [2]: 129, 151; Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 164	<i>yuzakkīhim</i>	Purification as part of spiritual formation	<i>Tazkiyah</i> as a prophetic, communal, and educational mission, paired with recitation, the Book, and wisdom
V4	QS. al-Tawbah [9]: 103	<i>tuṭahhiruhum wa tuzakkīhim</i>	Purification of the giver from greed	Purification realized through redistribution of wealth
V5	QS. al-Layl [92]: 17–18	<i>yatazakkā</i>	Giving wealth in order to purify oneself	Purity measured by economic sacrifice for others
V6	QS. al-Ra‘d [13]: 11	<i>mā bi-anfusihim</i>	Inner change of the self	Inner change as a condition for change in the condition of a people (<i>qawm</i>)
V7	QS. al-Mā‘ūn [107]: 1–7	<i>yukadhdhibu bi al-dīn</i>	Heedless and ostentatious prayer is censured	Neglect of orphans and the poor defined as denial of religion: critique of ritual reductionism
V8	QS. al-Nahl [16]: 36; al-Furqān [25]: 43	<i>ijtanibū al-tāghūt; ilāhahu hawāhu</i>	Liberation from enslavement to desire (<i>hawā</i>)	<i>Tauhid</i> as rejection of <i>tāghūt</i> , i.e., every domination other than God
V9	QS. al-Ḥadīd [57]: 25; al-Nisā’ [4]: 135	<i>bi al-qist</i>	Integrity, even against oneself and one’s kin	Upholding justice as a purpose of revelation
V10	QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]: 104, 110	<i>al-amr bi al-ma‘rūf</i>	Moral commitment of the believer	An organized community that enjoins good and forbids wrong
H1	al-Bukhārī no. 52; Muslim no. 1599	<i>al-qalb (muḍghah)</i>	The heart as the center whose soundness governs the whole body	Soundness of conduct, including in transactions (context of <i>ḥalāl/ḥarām</i>), flows from the heart
H2	al-Tirmidhī no. 1621	<i>al-mujāhid man jāhada nafsahu</i>	Struggle against the self as true <i>jihād</i>	Self-struggle as the foundation of social struggle
H3	al-Bukhārī no. 13; Muslim no. 45	<i>ḥatā yuḥibba li-akhīhi</i>	Faith incomplete without overcoming egoism	Faith measured by solidarity and reciprocity

Code	Text	Key term	Individual dimension	Social dimension
H4	Muslim no. 49	<i>fa-l-yughayyirhu</i>	Rejection of wrong in the heart as the minimum	Graded praxis: action (hand), speech (tongue), heart
H5	Abū Dāwūd no. 4344; al-Tirmidhī no. 2174; Ibn Mājah no. 4011	<i>kalimat 'adl 'inda sultān jā'ir</i>	Courage born of inner freedom from fear	Speaking justice before unjust power as the best <i>jihād</i>

Source: Author's analysis. Translations adapted from Kementerian Agama RI (2019); hadith numbering follows the editions listed in the References.

Three patterns emerge from Table 2. First, *tazkiyah* is relational rather than solitary: the Qur'an presents it as part of the prophetic mission to a community (V3) and realizes it through the transfer of wealth to others (V4, V5). Second, the texts explicitly reject a religiosity that is ritually observant but socially indifferent: al-Mā'ūn equates neglect of orphans and the poor with denial of religion (V7), and the hadith measure faith by solidarity (H3). Third, the texts describe a causal and graded movement from the inner to the outer: the heart governs conduct (H1), inner change precedes collective change (V6), and the response to wrong moves through the heart, speech, and action (H4), culminating in speaking justice before unjust power (H5). The key text for this third pattern reads:

مَنْ رَأَى مِنْكُمْ مُنْكَرًا فَلْيُغَيِّرْهُ بِيَدِهِ، فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِلِسَانِهِ، فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِقَلْبِهِ، وَذَلِكَ أضعفُ الإيمانِ

“Whoever among you sees a wrong, let him change it with his hand; if he is unable, then with his tongue; and if he is unable, then with his heart—and that is the weakest of faith” (Muslim, n.d., no. 49). Combined with the definition of *tauhid* as the rejection of *tāghūt* (V8) and the purpose of revelation as justice (V9), these patterns show that the social dimension is not an external addition to *tazkiyah*; it is already embedded in its normative sources.

***Tazkiyah* in the Classical Sources: al-Ghazālī and Ibn Qayyim**

The classical sources confirm the inner mechanism of *tazkiyah* while also revealing why it has often been read individualistically. In *Kitāb Sharh 'Ajā'ib al-Qalb*, al-Ghazālī describes the heart as the ruler of the body, with the limbs as its servants, and in *Kitāb Riyāḍat al-Nafs* he sets out the disciplining of the soul through the removal of blameworthy traits and the acquisition of praiseworthy ones (al-Ghazālī, n.d., 1995). Yet the *Iḥyā'* does not confine piety to inner life: an entire book is devoted to enjoining good and forbidding wrong, including the admonition of those in power, and *Kitāb Ādāb al-'Uzlah* weighs the benefits and harms of seclusion rather than prescribing it absolutely (al-Ghazālī, n.d.). Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, for his part, insists that the purification of souls must follow the path of the prophets rather than self-devised spiritual techniques, and elaborates self-accounting (*muḥāsabah*) as a continuous discipline (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, 1975, 1996). Table 3 contrasts the ascetic-individual reading of these concepts with the emancipatory reading developed in this study.

Table 3. Ascetic-individual and emancipatory readings of key classical concepts

Concept	Classical source	Ascetic-individual reading	Emancipatory reading (this study)
<i>Qalb</i> as ruler of the limbs	al-Ghazālī, <i>Sharḥ 'Ajā'ib al-Qalb</i>	Inner states matter only for personal salvation	The heart is the root of all conduct, including social and economic conduct (H1)
Removing vices and acquiring virtues	al-Ghazālī, <i>Riyāḍat al-Nafs</i>	Moral self-improvement of the individual	Removing internalized greed, arrogance, and fear that sustain domination; cultivating justice, courage, and compassion as social virtues
' <i>Uzlah</i> (seclusion)	al-Ghazālī, <i>Ādāb al-'Uzlah</i>	Withdrawal from society as the ideal path	Conditional, temporary reflection that serves a return to society
<i>Al-amr bi al-ma'rūf</i>	al-Ghazālī, <i>Kitāb al-Amr bi al-Ma'rūf</i>	A juridical topic separate from Sufism	The social face of a purified soul (V10, H4, H5)
<i>Tazkiyah</i> follows the prophets	Ibn Qayyim, <i>Madārij al-Sālikīn</i>	Correct devotional method	The prophetic model joins worship with justice, community building, and care for the weak (V3, V7)
<i>Muḥāsabah</i>	Ibn Qayyim, <i>Ighāthat al-Lahfān; Madārij al-Sālikīn</i>	Personal accounting for sins	Critical self-examination extended to one's complicity in injustice; the reflective moment of praxis

Source: Author's analysis of al-Ghazālī (n.d., 1995) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (1975, 1996).

Table 3 shows that the individualistic narrowing of *tazkiyah* is less a feature of the classical sources themselves than of a selective reception that foregrounds '*uzlah* and personal salvation while neglecting the social chapters of the same works. The emancipatory reading, therefore, does not import an external agenda into the tradition but reactivates elements already present in it. Where the classical sources are largely silent—namely on the analysis of social structures—critical theory supplies the missing analytical tool. The triad *takhallī–taḥallī–tajallī*, a later systematization in the Sufī tradition, is used below as a heuristic for organizing these findings into stages.

The Transformative *Tazkiyatun Nafs* Model

Synthesizing Tables 2 and 3 produces a three-stage model, visualized in Figure 1 and operationalized in Table 4. The model has *tauḥid* as its axis: the affirmation of God's oneness simultaneously negates every other claim to absolute authority, whether internal (desire, *hawā*) or external (*tāghūt*) (V8).

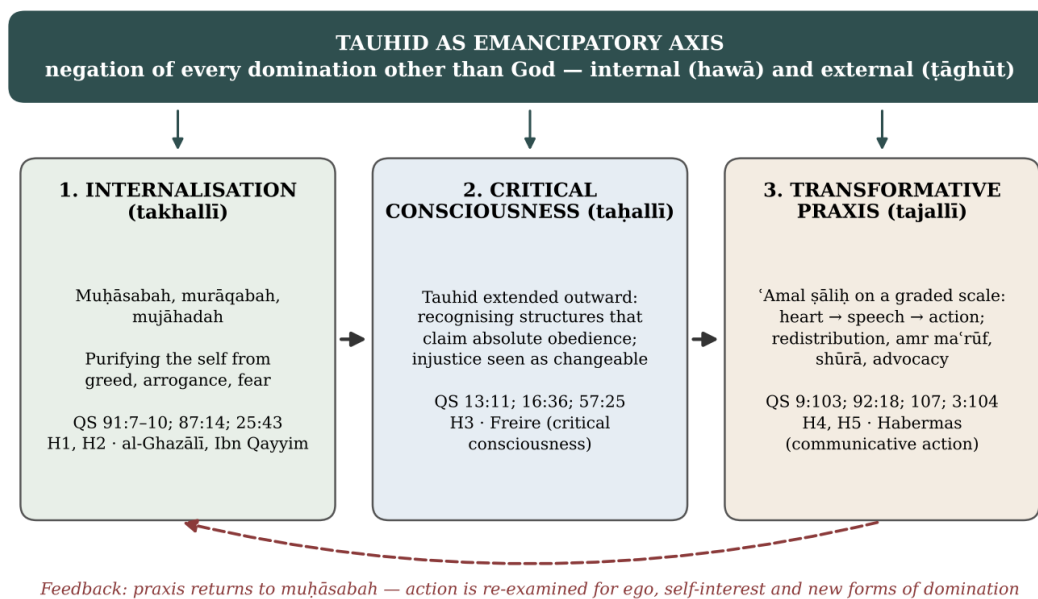


Figure 1. The Transformative *Tazkiyatun Nafs* model

Source: Author's synthesis of Tables 2 and 3.

Stage 1, *internalization (takhallī)*, purifies the self from internal forms of domination—greed, arrogance, and fear—through *muḥāsabah*, *murāqabah*, and *mujāhadah* (V1, V2, H1, H2). Stage 2, *critical consciousness (taḥallī)*, extends *tauḥid* outward: having been freed from the rule of *hawā*, the self becomes able to recognize structures that claim the obedience owed only to God, and to perceive injustice as a changeable human construction rather than fate (V6, V8, V9). At this stage the model draws on Freire's notion of critical consciousness, which holds that liberation begins when people understand the structures that oppress them (Freire, 2000). Stage 3, *transformative praxis (tajallī)*, manifests this consciousness in righteous action ('*amal ṣāliḥ*') along a graded scale—heart, speech, and action (H4)—that includes redistribution (V4, V5), organized enjoining of good (V10), and speaking justice before power (H5). Its dialogical form corresponds to Habermas's communicative action and to the Qur'anic principle of consultation (*shūrā*; QS. al-Shūrā [42]: 38) (Habermas, 1984). The model is cyclical: praxis returns to *muḥāsabah*, so that social action is continually examined for ego, self-interest, and new forms of domination.

Table 4. Operationalization of the Transformative *Tazkiyatun Nafs* model

Stage	Core practices	Critical-theory correlate	Textual basis	Indicators of praxis
1. Internalization (<i>takhallī</i>)	<i>Muḥāsabah</i> , <i>murāqabah</i> , <i>mujāhadah</i>	Critique of internalized domination	V1, V2, V8; H1, H2; al-Ghazālī; Ibn Qayyim	Reduced greed and fear; honest self-accounting; integrity in personal dealings
2. Critical consciousness (<i>taḥallī</i>)	Reflection on social reality; <i>tauḥid</i> as rejection of <i>ṭāghūt</i>	Freire: critical consciousness	V6, V8, V9; H3	Ability to name injustice and its causes; solidarity with the marginalized

Stage	Core practices	Critical-theory correlate	Textual basis	Indicators of praxis
3. Transformative praxis (<i>tajallī</i>)	<i>‘Amal ṣāliḥ; al-amr bi al-ma ‘rūf; zakāh/ṣadaqah; shūrā</i>	Habermas: communicative action	V3, V4, V5, V7, V10; H4, H5; QS. 42: 38	Participation in redistribution, advocacy, and community empowerment through dialogical, non-coercive means
Feedback	Return to <i>muḥāsabah</i>	Reflexivity	Ibn Qayyim on <i>muḥāsabah</i>	Periodic evaluation of motives and social impact

Source: Author’s synthesis.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the social dimension of *tazkiyatun nafs* is embedded in its normative sources (Table 2) and partly present in the classical tradition (Table 3), but has been marginalized through selective reception. This extends earlier studies that frame *tazkiyatun nafs* mainly as character education or spiritual well-being (Ahmad Zainal Anbiya, 2023; Diinu Tsabitul Azmi, Syifa Nur Azzizah, 2025), as well as Qur’anic thematic studies that note its social implications without formalizing them (Ahmad Ali Syauqi Fathan, Fathur Rohim, 2025). The contribution of this study is to move from noting implications to specifying a mechanism: the model in Figure 1 explains how purification of the soul becomes social action and identifies the textual basis of each step. It thereby responds to the observation that the meaning crisis in modern society stems from the fragmentation between spirituality and social reality (Mustamik, 2025).

When compared with critical theory, the model both converges with and corrects it. In Freire’s account, social transformation begins with awareness of oppressive structures (Freire, 2000); however, this consciousness is anthropocentric and is not connected with a transcendental dimension. In the model proposed here, critical consciousness is rooted in *tauhid*, so that resistance to domination is also an act of worship and is protected from becoming a new form of domination by the feedback of *muḥāsabah*. Habermas’s theory of communicative action grounds social consensus in rational dialogue (Habermas, 1984) but gives limited space to the spiritual sources of moral motivation. The model incorporates the dialogical ideal through *shūrā* and *al-amr bi al-ma ‘rūf* while supplying a motivational basis in the purified self. Transformative *tazkiyatun nafs* can therefore be read as a synthesis between Islamic spirituality and critical theory within a single dialectical framework.

Theoretically, the model has implications for contemporary Islamic epistemology, which has often been framed as a dichotomy between revelation (*naql*) and reason (*‘aql*) without adequately integrating social praxis. By treating *tazkiyah* as an epistemic condition, the process of knowing is no longer neutral but is shaped by the spiritual condition of the knower, consistent with the Sufi emphasis on the heart (*qalb*) as an instrument of knowledge (al-Ghazālī, n.d.). The model adds a third element: knowledge is validated not only by text and reason but also by its capacity to generate just action. This aligns with studies that position *tauhid* as an ethical framework for social transformation (Rasyidah Rasyidah dan Ali Akbar, 2025) and with efforts

to integrate *tazkiyah* with modern moral theory (Al, 2024).

At the practical level, the indicators in Table 4 offer a basis for designing and evaluating programs that join spiritual formation with social action. In Islamic education, and particularly in *pesantren*, *tazkiyah*-based curricula that currently stop at Stage 1 (individual discipline and character formation) can be extended to Stages 2 and 3 through structured social reflection and community service, building on character-formation models drawn from Hamka and Said Nursi (Diinu Tsabitul Azmi, Syifa Nur Azzizah, 2025). In community development, *pesantren*-based empowerment and *zakāh* institutions can be read as instances of Stage 3, in which spiritual motivation is channeled into redistribution and solidarity (V4, V5). These applications are propositions to be tested empirically rather than demonstrated outcomes.

It is also important to note that not all forms of spirituality have transformative potential. Spirituality can function as an escape from social reality and thereby reinforce an unjust status quo. The model provides a criterion, grounded in QS. al-Mā'ūn (V7), for distinguishing emancipatory from anesthetizing spirituality: the extent to which it generates critical consciousness and just action. In other words, authentic spirituality liberates rather than sedates. The main challenge ahead lies in operationalizing this criterion and the model as a whole in concrete settings such as education, social movements, and public policy, which calls for empirical research to develop measurable implementation models.

CONCLUSION

This article addresses the main research problem by affirming that the crisis of transcendental values in modern society is rooted in epistemological reductionism that separates spirituality from social praxis. Transcendental values lose their transformative power when reduced to individual and ritualistic religious experiences, detached from broader social structures. Through conceptual reconstruction, this article demonstrates that *tazkiyatun nafs* can be refunctionalized as an emancipatory paradigm based on *tauhid*, one that not only shapes individual spiritual consciousness but also fosters critical awareness of social realities. In this way, *tazkiyatun nafs* serves as a bridge between the inner dimension and social transformation, restoring transcendental values as a living praxis within society.

The main contribution of this study lies in the development of the Transformative *Tazkiyatun Nafs* theoretical framework, which integrates the classical Sufi tradition with contemporary critical social theory. This approach not only expands the scope of Sufism from the domain of personal ethics to that of social transformation, but also offers an integrative epistemological model that connects revelation, reason, and social reality within a unified dialectical framework. The novelty of this article lies in the conceptualization of *tauhid* as an emancipatory principle that functions as an ethical foundation for social change. Thus, this

research makes a significant contribution to enriching global discourse on the relationship between religion and social transformation, while positioning Islamic studies within broader contemporary epistemological debates.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the approach employed is conceptual and literature-based, and therefore has not empirically tested the effectiveness of the transformative *tazkiyatun nafs* paradigm in concrete social contexts.

Second, the focus of this research is primarily on theoretical construction, leaving the operationalization and practical implementation aspects in need of further development. Third, the limited availability of empirical literature explicitly linking Sufism with critical social theory also poses a challenge in expanding the validity of the findings. Therefore, the results of this study should be understood as a preliminary framework that opens avenues for further exploration, rather than as a definitive model.

Based on these limitations, future research should focus on developing implementative models capable of testing the relevance of transformative *tazkiyatun nafs* across various contexts, such as education, community empowerment, and public policy. Empirical research based on case studies or mixed-method approaches is also needed to measure the concrete impact of internalizing transcendental values on social transformation. In addition, interdisciplinary studies integrating perspectives from psychology, sociology, and philosophy are essential to enrich the theoretical framework that has been developed. In this way, *tazkiyatun nafs* will not only remain a normative concept, but will evolve into an applicable and relevant scientific paradigm in addressing contemporary global challenges.

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