

# Bagus Riyono, Tazkiya Therapy in Islāmic Psychotherapy

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Tazkiya therapy, developed by Bagus Riyono, is presented as a Qur'ānic-rooted, multidimensional psychotherapeutic approach that centres on purification (*tazkiya*) — articulated in early Islamic epistemology as a continuous practice of purifying the heart — as the basis for psychological well-being.<sup>1</sup> At its core, it defines therapeutic change as a knowledge-driven process in which cognitive reorientation toward Divine signs and moral purpose precedes and reshapes emotion, behavior, and the health of the soul. The model conceptualizes the human being as an integrated whole whose flourishing depends on restoring and cultivating the heart (*qalb*), conscience, and the innate disposition toward God. His structured yet flexible framework provides a spiritually grounded alternative to secular therapies, is primarily theoretical and practice-oriented, and also lays the foundation for future empirical refinement.

The book, consisting of seven chapters and recently translated into Russian, offers a concise yet conceptually rich presentation of a holistic, therapeutic approach grounded in Qur'ānic guidance and an Islamic understanding of the human being as a multidimensional creature encompassing the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual domains. The text outlines the purpose, scope, mechanisms, and boundaries of tazkiya as a therapeutic method and demonstrates how it integrates diverse theoretical frameworks to promote the growth of the soul, cognition, emotion, and behavior. The author also

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1 Bagus Riyono, *Tazkiya Therapy in Islāmic Psychotherapy* (London: Routledge Focus, 2024).

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includes case vignettes, practical guidelines, and a brief exploration of training pathways for future directions. The work's inclusion in the Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy focus series edited by G. Hussein Rassool underscores its relevance to ongoing developments in the field.

This publication is particularly remarkable for placing the spiritual relationship with Allah — transcendent is He — at the core of psychological change, a feature that is likely to resonate with Muslim clinicians and clients seeking an explicitly Islamic therapeutic paradigm. Dr. Bagus Riyono, a psychologist and senior lecturer at Universitas Gadjah Mada and President of the International Association of Muslim Psychologists, brings both academic expertise and a long-standing engagement with Islamic psychology to the volume. He is known for advancing integrative approaches that connect spiritual principles with contemporary motivational psychology. The book represents a meaningful contribution to Islamic psychotherapy by articulating a framework that coherently links Qur'anic and some Prophetic teachings with contemporary psychological theory and clinical practice.

Riyono begins with the proposition that “knowledge is the fundamental aspect of healing.”<sup>2</sup> From this starting point, he introduces seven theoretical frameworks that together form a multidimensional conception of psychological well-being and human development. Therapeutic aims are not merely symptom reduction but teleological; human beings exist with a divinely ordained purpose, and worldly life functions as the context for moral, psychological, and spiritual refinement. Psychological health, within this perspective, is oriented toward cultivating preparedness for the Hereafter (*falāh*) while nurturing resilience, optimism, hope, and patience. The therapeutic sequence proposed by the author begins with cognitive shifts, which then influence emotional states and ultimately spiritual functioning.

In the therapeutic relationship, the tazkiya therapist's responsibility is to guide clients toward recognizing and understanding Allah's signs through Qur'anic verses, natural phenomena, and reflective understanding of the soul, using an approach grounded in empathy, reason, and spiritual pedagogy. Knowledge acquisition is presented as the primary route to wisdom, and the therapist's role is to equip clients with the resources needed for sustained self-regulation and relapse prevention. The author outlines a general therapeutic protocol framed as “empathetic directives,”<sup>3</sup> which provide structure for session processes and therapist conduct.

<sup>2</sup> Riyono, *Tazkiya Therapy*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Riyono, *Tazkiya Therapy*, 5.

Riyono's conceptual model is coherent, well-integrated, and successful in weaving together Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) and other classical Islamic constructs — such as repentance (*tawbah*) and vicegerency (*khalifa*) — with modern psychological theories, including his own Anchor Personality Theory.<sup>4</sup> There are notable resonances with Muslim classical works, particularly Imam Al-Ghazali's *Minhaj al-'Abidin*,<sup>5</sup> especially in the emphasis on knowledge and repentance as prerequisites for spiritual progress. Riyono operationalizes many of these Islamic classical insights into clinically applicable principles. Still, the bridge between Qur'anic messages and specific clinical procedures would benefit from more explicit methodological clarification. For instance, the book would be strengthened by demonstrating how individual Qur'anic verses directly translate into concrete therapeutic interventions. Additionally, the sections summarizing Qur'anic messages would carry greater scholarly weight if supported by precise citations and engagement with primary exegetical sources.

Methodologically, the text offers illustrative cases rather than controlled empirical data. As a result, questions concerning empirical validation, outcome measurement, and long-term effectiveness remain open. Riyono defines therapeutic success in normative Islamic terms such as *falāh* (improved well-being), but the book would benefit from clearer operational definitions and proposals for empirical measurement using validated psychological instruments. Readers with a research orientation will likely need to supplement this book with Riyono's theoretical groundwork in relevant articles and await future studies.<sup>6</sup> His reference to Barrett's work as an accomplished empirical study in emotion construction is used to support the theoretical grounding of the soul's existence, contrasting contemporary neuroscience positions that deny the soul.<sup>7</sup> This serves as an important distinguishing feature of the model as it emphasizes the heart (*qalb*) and soul (*rūh*), or psyche (*nafs*), as primary loci of dysfunction and healing, diverging from mainstream models that center on the brain.

4 Bagus Riyono and F. Himam, "In Search for Anchors: The Fundamental Motivational Force in Compensating for Human Vulnerability," *Gadjah Mada International Journal of Business* 14, no. 3 (2012): 229–52, <https://doi.org/10.22146/gamaijib.5475>

5 Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Minhaj al-'Ābidīn ilā Jannat Rabb al-'Ālamīn*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī Maḥmūd Bahri (Damascus: Maktabat Ibn al-Qayyim, 2002).

6 Bagus Riyono, "Constructing the Theory of Human Basic Potential Based on Quranic Messages: Study with Maqasid Methodology," *Minbar Islamic Studies* 16, no. 2 (2023): 449–75, <https://doi.org/10.31162/2618-9569-2023-16-2-449-475>

7 Lisa F. Barrett, *How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017).

Several strengths distinguish this work. Its clarity and organization allow for ease of comprehension, with the sevenfold structure and visual figures providing intuitive entry points for clinicians and students. Its integration of Islamic epistemology with contemporary psychology is particularly commendable, grounding therapeutic goals in Qur'anic aims while engaging major psychological theorists from Freud to Maslow. The practical orientation of the case vignettes and empathetic directives offer concrete examples of how the model is implemented in real-life scenarios. The text's language is accessible without oversimplifying theoretical content, and the author's engagement with existential psychology, including comparisons to theories such as Frankl's logotherapy and Riyono's "theory of meaning" (Figure 2.4, Theory 4), expands its interdisciplinary relevance.

The book's integration of Qur'anic aims with psychological constructs makes it practical for Muslim therapists. While its use of hadith and examples from the Companions (*ṣaḥābah*; may Allah be pleased with them) is noteworthy, the analysis would benefit from deeper engagement with the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and with Muslim classical scholars, such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, al-Ghazālī,<sup>8</sup> and Zarruq.<sup>9</sup> Its inclusive framing, "that all human beings are Allāh's creatures who will live forever beyond this worldly life,"<sup>10</sup> gives the model broader applicability.

Several limitations merit attention. The claim that tazkiya therapy is applicable to non-Muslim clients is insufficiently defended, as the model is grounded in theological commitments to monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and eschatological foundations, rendering its adaptation for clients who reject theistic premises unclear. Empirical specifications, such as standardized protocols and outcome measures, require further development to enable research and clinical replication. In addition, the referencing would benefit from more rigorous engagement with classical Islamic scholarship, particularly through the conceptual situating of primordial disposition (*fiṭrah*), interpreted as the natural predisposition toward belief in divine Oneness.<sup>11</sup> Cross-referencing Islamic psychological taxonomies is also

8 Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb Sharḥ Aḡā'ib al-Qalb (Marvels of the Heart)*, in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 3 of 4, Book XXI (Jeddah: Dar al-Minhāj, 1444 AH / 2023 CE, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.).

9 Aḥmad al-Zarrūq al-Fāsī, *Muqaddimat al-tasawwuf wa ḥaqīqatuh wa natijatuh*, ed. Nizār Ḥamadī (Kuwait: Dār al-Diya', 2025).

10 Riyono, *Tazkiya Therapy*, 2.

11 Gowhar Quadir Wani, "Islamic Perspectives on Human Nature: Ibn Āshūr's Fiṭrah-Based Theory of Maqāsīd al-Shari'ah," *Islam and Civilisational Renewal* 8, no. 2 (April 2017): 230–43, <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v8i2.197>

essential for clarifying key constructs, such as spiritual insight (*basīrah*) or conscience (*ḍamīr*). Moreover, systematic analysis of Qur’ānic discourse is vital for understanding tazkiya therapy; therefore, incorporating *tafsīr* sources would enhance the credibility of interpretations of relevant verses and terminology.

The model does not sufficiently address the specific qualification of a tazkiya therapist beyond standard psychological training. Given the spiritually integrated nature of the model, practitioners would ideally possess grounding in Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*, *ḥukm shar’ī*), a creedal primer (*‘aqidah matn*), and balanced Islamic spirituality (*taṣawwuf*). Such grounding is necessary to ethically and safely navigate spiritual concepts — including reliance upon Allah (*tawakkul*), total entrustment to Allah (*tafwīd*) in dealing with uncertainty, and positive expectancy of Allah (*ḥusn al-ẓann billāh*, implicitly reflected in the author’s discussion of hope) — while refraining from issuing religious rulings (*fatāwā*) within the therapeutic setting. Furthermore, although the author briefly acknowledges the necessity of medical intervention in cases of physical illness,<sup>12</sup> the work would be strengthened by outlining collaborative pathways between tazkiya therapy and medical practitioners.

This work contributes significantly to the growing field of Islamic psychology by providing a clinician-facing model that integrates Islamic anthropology with therapeutic practice. It bridges the gap between classical spiritual literature and contemporary therapy manuals, offering practitioners in the Muslim community a theologically resonant and psychologically structured approach. Riyono’s emphasis on empathetic and directive engagement, coupled with his assertion of the soul’s ontological reality, positions this work as an important reference for further dialogue between Islamic and contemporary psychological paradigms, including conventional and state-of-the-art frameworks. Future comparative analyses with other Islamic psychotherapy models, such as the TIIP model,<sup>13</sup> could further clarify the distinctive procedural, empirical, and training-related dimensions of tazkiya therapy.

In conclusion, the book provides a valuable introduction to a Qur’ānic-based therapeutic approach, serving as a theoretical and practical foundation for

12 Riyono, *Tazkiya Therapy*, 41.

13 Hooman Keshavarzi and Bilal Ali, “Foundations of Traditional Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy (TIIP),” in *Applying Islamic Principles to Clinical Mental Health Care: Introducing Traditional Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy*, ed. Hooman Keshavarzi, Farid Khan, Bilal Ali, and Rania Awaad (New York: Routledge, 2020), 25–49, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003043331>

broader training and future empirical development. Its conceptual clarity and applied examples will benefit interdisciplinary researchers, though systematically validated protocols remain pending. The core premise that tazkiya therapy fosters wisdom, spiritual maturity, and closeness to Allah, enabling clients to sustain their own psychological and spiritual growth, is promising when applied by practitioners well-versed in both psychology and Islamic sciences.

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