

The Nūr-Zulmah Framework in Islamic Psychology: A Conceptual Reconstruction of Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh as-Sakandarī's Thought

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Abstract

This article examines the concepts of nūr (light) and zulmah (darkness) in the thought of Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh as-Sakandarī and their implications for Islamic psychology. While historical studies of the Islamic soul (nafs) frequently emphasize ontological descriptions and normative ethics, they rarely articulate the functional dynamics through which spiritual components produce moral behavior. Addressing this gap, this study conceptually reconstructs the operational roles of nūr and zulmah in relation to the 'aql (intellect), baṣīrah (spiritual insight), and qalb (heart). Employing qualitative content analysis, the study systematically unitizes, categorizes, and synthesizes primary textual data from al-Ḥikam and its authoritative classical commentaries. The findings indicate that the human psyche is structured by internal faculties interacting with transcendental epistemic inputs (nūr) and egoistic distortions (zulmah). Nūr manifests in graduated forms (intibāh, iqbāl, wiṣāl) that progressively enhance moral cognition and activate the baṣīrah. Conversely, zulmah operates through base desires that obscure ethical orientation. Rather than positioning this framework in binary opposition to contemporary psychology, the study places as-Sakandarī in constructive dialogue with psychoanalysis and positive psychology, highlighting how Islamic psychology introduces a theocentric dimension to internal conflict and human flourishing. Ultimately, this study offers a conceptual reconstruction that bridges classical Shadhiliyyah thought with modern discourse on moral development, providing a theoretical foundation relevant to contemporary Islamic educational and therapeutic settings.

Keywords: *Islamic Psychology; Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh as-Sakandarī; Nūr-Zulmah Framework; Conceptual Reconstruction; Moral Development.*

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Introduction

The discourse on human psychology in Islamic thought has long been centered on the purification of the soul (*taṣkīyat al-nafs*). In Islamic intellectual history, the study of the soul (*al-nafs*) is not merely a philosophical endeavor but a fundamental spiritual necessity. Classical scholars have extensively debated the nature and components of the human psyche, often categorizing them into *ruh* (spirit), *qalb* (heart), *‘aql* (intellect), and *nafs* (soul/desire). Classical contributions like those of Ibn Zakaria Al-Razi have also laid the foundation for understanding mental health through a combination of medicine and ethics, where the soul is treated as a dynamic entity requiring constant care.¹ Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh as-Sakandarī (d. 1309), a prominent figure in the Shadhiliyyah Sufi order, provides a unique psychological lens through his magnum opus, *al-Hikam*, which delves into the subtle movements of the heart and the constant struggle between spiritual enlightenment and material distraction.

Properly understanding Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh as-Sakandarī's psychospiritual framework requires situating him within his historical and intellectual milieu. As the third shaykh of the Shadhiliyyah order — succeeding Abū al-Ḥasan ash-Shādhilī (d. 1258) and Abū al-'Abbās al-Mursī (d. 1287) — Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh operated at the intersection of Alexandrian and Cairene scholarly culture in the late seventh and early eighth centuries of the Islamic calendar. The Shadhiliyyah distinguished itself from other Sufi orders of its era through a distinctive epistemological orientation: rather than mandating physical withdrawal from society or elaborate ritual asceticism, it emphasized the integration of inward spiritual refinement (*taṣkīyat al-bāṭin*) with active participation in scholarly and communal life.² This sociologically grounded Sufism — practised amid the intellectual ferment of Mamluk Egypt, where Islamic jurisprudence, Ash'arite theology, and Sufi spirituality coexisted and contested — provided the formative context in which *al-Hikam* was composed. Crucially, the Shadhiliyyan insistence that spiritual psychology must be lived, not merely theorized, means that Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh's concepts of *nūr* and *zulmah* are not esoteric abstractions but practical mechanisms for moral formation during worldly engagement. It is this embeddedness in lived experience that renders his framework particularly relevant for contemporary Islamic psychology and Muslim communities navigating the tensions of spiritual and material life.

However, most classical and contemporary literature focuses more on the ontological nature of the soul rather than its operational dynamics in everyday moral decision-making. Existing scholarship has approached this subject from multiple directions: neuroscientific analyses of the *'aql* and its developmental dimensions,³ psycho-ontological reconstructions of Islamic selfhood in clinical contexts,⁴ philosophical explorations of the soul's metaphysical components and stages of ethical

¹ Rizkia Amalia Rahmawati and Achmad Khudori Soleh, “Konsep Jiwa, Kesehatan Mental Dan Psikoterapi Ibn Zakaria Al-Razi,” *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Agama Dan Ilmu Pengetahuan* 21, no. 1 (2024): 123–33, [https://doi.org/10.25299/al-hikmah:jaip.2024.vol21\(1\).14330](https://doi.org/10.25299/al-hikmah:jaip.2024.vol21(1).14330).

² I. R. Nasryov, “Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah Al-Iskandari and His Sufi Aphorisms (Kitab Al-Hikam),” *Islam in the Modern World* 14, no. 3 (2018): 73–92, <https://doi.org/10.22311/2074-1529-2018-14-3-73-92>; John Spencer Trimingham and John O. Voll, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 2nd ed (Oxford University Press, 1998).

³ Suyadi, “Learning Taxonomy of Islamic Education: The Development of Aql and the Brain in Quran from a Neuroscience Perspective,” *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies*, July 14, 2022, 361–410, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol21.iss2.art3>.

⁴ Taha Burak Toprak, “Rethinking Psycho-Ontology in the Context of Ilm an-Nafs (the Study of Self by Muslim Scholars) and Clinical Applications,” *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 12, no. 2 (2025): 238–66, <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000390>.

ascent,⁵ cross-traditional studies of psycho-spirituality within Sufi and broader Islamic frameworks,⁶ comparative inquiries between Freudian psychoanalysis and Islamic conceptions of the *nafs*,⁷ examinations of the soul's moral implications across specific scholarly traditions,⁸ investigations into the perfection of the *nafs* toward divine vicegerency (*khilāfah*),⁹ and analyses of the integration of reason and revelation in Islamic philosophical discourse.¹⁰ While these studies offer rich foundational insights, the persistent modern psychological crises among emerging adults highlight a pressing need to translate these normative principles into practical, accessible psychospiritual frameworks rooted in Islamic traditions.¹¹

Despite these contributions, a significant gap remains: existing research rarely dissects the precise dynamics through which spiritual illumination (*nūr*) interacts with the cognitive and moral decision-making faculties of the soul. Most studies operate at the level of ontological description or normative ethics, rather than mapping how these spiritual inputs affect internal psychological components to produce moral behavior. This article addresses this gap by conceptually reconstructing *zulmah* as active variables affecting both the affective and cognitive dimensions of moral formation within Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh as-Sakandarī's thought.

This study holds particular significance for understanding living traditions in the Global South, where Shadhiliyyah-affiliated practices remain deeply embedded in the curriculum of thousands of Southeast Asian pesantren and African *zāwiyah* networks, shaping the moral formation of millions of students.¹² Despite its widespread lived application, this psychospiritual tradition has rarely been subjected to systematic academic formalization within contemporary psychology. By organizing the *nūr-zulmah* framework into a cohesive conceptual model, this study provides a scholarly articulation of an indigenous framework that has long operated underrepresented in broader academic literature. Consequently, this reconstruction contributes to the decolonial turn in Islamic studies by demonstrating

⁵ Mahmoud Nazari et al., "A Comparative Study on Soul and Life in the Philosophy of Aristotle and Ibn Sina (with an Emphasis on the Book De Anima and Kitāb al-Nafs from al-Šifa')," *Philosophy Journal*, 2021, 113–25, <https://doi.org/10.21146/2072-0726-2021-14-4-113-125>; Mohd Manawi Mohd Akib and Sharifah Basirah Syed Muhsin, "Perbahasan Potensi Jiwa Menurut Ibn Sina Dan Al-Ghazali," *Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 21, no. 1 (2019): 85–110, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol21no1.3>.

⁶ Emilio Tornero Poveda, "En Los Límites Del Islam. La Naturaleza Del Hombre a La Luz Del Espíritu, Rūh, Coránico, Según Algazel," *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes*, November 14, 2024, 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.5209/ange.96009>.

⁷ Hanna-e-Kalbi and Dr. Tahira Basharat, "A Comparative Study of the Personality Formulates of Ghazali and Freud," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 10, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.102.13>.

⁸ Asiye Aykit, "Şehrezûrî Düşüncesinde Nefsin Kuvvelerinin Ahlâkî Tekâmüle Tesiri," *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 26, no. 3 (2022): 1161–79, <https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.1156721>; İbrahim Gül, "Alevî İnancında Can, Ruh Kavramı ve Nefsin Eğitimi," *Uluslararası Kıbrıs Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi*, January 1, 2021, 105, <https://doi.org/10.22559/folklor.1328>.

⁹ Fahad Khan and Asma Nisa, "Psychospiritual Conceptualization of Nafs from the Perspectives of Muhammad Iqbal," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 18, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3998/jmmh.6029>.

¹⁰ Achmad Khudori Soleh and Erik Sabti Rahmawati, "The Strength of Ibn Rushd's Integration of Religion and Philosophy: An Islamic Historical Discourse," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 18, no. 2 (2023): 173–87.

¹¹ Siti Mahmudah et al., "The Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy Training to Increase Psychological Wellbeing of Santri," in *Proceedings of the First Conference of Psychology and Flourishing Humanity (PFH 2022)*, vol. 728, ed. Abdul Fattah et al., Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (Atlantis Press SARL, 2023), https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-032-9_20.

¹² Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi pesantren: studi pandangan hidup kyai dan visinya mengenai masa depan Indonesia*, Cet. 8 rev (LP3ES, 2011).

that classical Sufi thought is not merely a historical artifact, but a living source of theoretical innovation capable of expanding contemporary discourses on human psychology.¹³

Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach grounded in library research, a methodological tradition well-established in Islamic intellectual studies for examining classical textual sources. This approach is suited to interpreting the internal logic and conceptual structures of classical Sufi psychological concepts, enabling rigorous engagement with the nuances of the primary texts.¹⁴

The primary data source of this study is al-Ḥikam by Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh as-Sakandarī, using the edition prepared by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān as-Syaghūl (al-Maktabah al-Azhariyah li al-Turāth, 2012), selected for its philological reliability and wide scholarly acceptance within the Azhari tradition. Supporting primary data are drawn from as-Sakandarī's Tāj al-'Arūs al-Ḥawī li-Tahdhīb al-Nufūs (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005). Secondary sources consist of four authoritative classical and modern commentaries (*syarah*) on al-Ḥikam, selected based on three criteria: (1) their recognized authority within the Shadhiliyyah intellectual lineage; (2) their thematic emphasis on the psychospiritual dimensions of the text, particularly concepts related to qalb, 'aql, and baṣīrah; and (3) their representativeness of diverse periods and scholarly traditions — namely, al-Ḥikam al-'Aṭā'iyyah Sharḥ wa Taḥlīl by al-Bouti (modern Syrian-Egyptian tradition), Ib'ād al-Ghumām 'an Iqāz al-Himam by Ibn 'Ajibah (classical Moroccan-Shadhili tradition), Sharḥ al-Ḥikam al-'Aṭā'iyyah by as-Syarwani (classical Syrian tradition), and Shifā' as-Saqām wa Fath Khazā'in al-Kalim by al-Kindi.

The analytical method employed is qualitative content analysis, which involves systematic reading, categorization, and interpretation of textual data to identify underlying conceptual structures and their relational dynamics.¹⁵ The analytical procedure is operationalized in four sequential stages. *First*, unitizing: relevant textual passages containing the key concepts — *nūr*, *zulmah*, *qalb*, *baṣīrah*, and *'aql* — are identified and extracted from the primary and secondary sources as raw textual codes. *Second*, categorizing: these codes are systematically grouped using open and axial coding based on their conceptual functions. This distinguishes between definitional passages (nature of the faculties), dynamic-functional passages (how inputs alter cognitive states), and normative-prescriptive passages (behavioral outcomes). *Third*, inferencing: relational patterns between categories are analyzed to reconstruct the internal logic of as- framework — specifically, how *nūr* and *zulmah* interact with the soul's internal components to produce moral behavior. *Fourth*, synthesis: the final codes are integrated into a cohesive conceptual reconstruction that maps the interaction between transcendental inputs and internal faculties.¹⁶

¹³ Abdullah Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006); Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, nos. 7–8 (2009): 159–81, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275>.

¹⁴ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*, Fourth edition (SAGE, 2018).

¹⁵ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, Fourth Edition (SAGE, 2018); Satu Elo et al., "Qualitative Content Analysis: A Focus on Trustworthiness," *Sage Open* 4, no. 1 (2014): 2158244014522633, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014522633>.

¹⁶ Kimberly A. Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, Second edition (SAGE, 2017); Philipp Mayring, "Qualitative Content Analysis," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* Vol 1 (June 2000): No 2 (2000): Qualitative Methods in Various Disciplines I: Psychology, <https://doi.org/10.17169/FQS-1.2.1089>.

To ensure interpretive validity and guard against misrepresentation of the primary text, triangulation is applied across the four selected commentaries. Where interpretations converge across multiple commentators, the reading is treated as having strong textual warrant. Where divergences emerge, the researcher explicitly notes the range of interpretation and privileges the reading most consistent with as-Sakandarī's own explicit statements in al-Ḥikam and Tāj al-'Arūs. This intra-traditional triangulation is especially important given the layered, aphoristic nature of al-Ḥikam, where individual passages are susceptible to varying degrees of esoteric interpretation.¹⁷

Finally, a comparative analysis is also conducted with Freud's psychoanalytic framework and Seligman's Positive Psychology, using the mechanism of moral behavior formation as the tertium comparationis — not to reduce Islamic psychology to Western categories, but to locate as-Sakandarī's conceptual reconstruction within a broader contemporary conversation.¹⁸

Result

The Concept of Nūr and Zulmah in as-Sakandarī's Thought

In as-Sakandarī's psychological framework, *nūr* and *zulmah* are not merely metaphorical terms but represent transcendental epistemic inputs and psychological distortions that actively condition the psyche. *Nūr* is specifically defined as divine knowledge (*'ilm*) bestowed by Allah upon the human intellect (*'aql*) to enable true understanding — distinguishing it from rational or sensory knowledge in that it serves exclusively as divine guidance to discern good from evil.¹⁹ This *nūr* is also referred to as *wārid* (spiritual arrival), received and held by the *'aql*.²⁰ Recent empirical studies confirm that high spiritual intensity strengthens the heart's resilience against worldly stress,²¹ corroborating as-Sakandarī's assertion that the presence of *nūr* compels the individual toward God. As-Sakandarī categorizes *nūr* into three graduated forms: *Nūr al-Intibāḥ* (Light of Awakening), which transitions the soul from negligence (*ghaflah*) to repentance; *Nūr al-Iqbāl* (Light of Orientation), which reorients the soul toward God by sidelining worldly attachments (*aghyyār*); and *Nūr al-Wiṣāl* (Light of Union), which opens the soul's direct connection with God, enabling the individual to experience the transience of all things beside Him.²²

Conversely, *zulmah* represents ego-centered desires (*hawā al-naḥs*) and satanic influences that obscure the heart's vision. As-Sakandarī uses the mirror analogy: the heart reflects divine light when pure, but becomes covered by the rust of worldly attachment, clouding the *'aql* and disorienting the moral compass.²³ *Zulmah* manifests in multiple forms — weak conviction, ignorance of the self, egoism, blind fanaticism, and satanic whispers — and functions as the antithetical army to *nūr* within the psychic system.

¹⁷ Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *Qur'an and Its Interpreters*, vol. 1 (State University of New York Press, 1984).

¹⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Routledge History of World Philosophies, v. 1 (Routledge, 1996); Hanna-e-Kalbi and Dr. Tahira Basharat, "A Comparative Study of the Personality Formulates of Ghazali and Freud."

¹⁹ Ibnu Athaillah as-Sakandarī, *al-Hikam*, 1st ed., ed. Muhammad Abdurrahman as-Syaghul (al-Maktabah al-Azhariyah li At-Turats, 2012); Ahmad bin Muhammad Ibnu Ajibah, *Ib'ad al-Ghumam an Iqadḥ al-Himam*, 1st ed. (Dar Kutub Ilmiah, 2015).

²⁰ Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Bouti, *al-Hikam al-Athaiyah Syarah wa Tablīl*, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Dār al-Fikr al-Mu'āṣir, 2003).

²¹ M. Ahim Sulthan Nuruddaroini et al., "The Effect of Religiosity on Psychological Well-Being with Intensity of Taklim Assembly Recitation as a Mediator," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 35, no. 2 (2024): 263–80, <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v35i2.5495>.

²² Ibnu Ajibah, *Ib'ad al-Ghumam an Iqadḥ al-Himam*.

²³ as-Sakandarī, *al-Hikam*.

Within this framework, *baṣīrah* serves as the faculty of spiritual decision-making, activated only in the presence of *nūr* — just as the physical eye cannot function without light.²⁴ The *qalb* (heart), in turn, functions as the projector of *baṣīrah*'s decisions into external behavior, perpetually oscillating between *iqbāl* (inclination toward good) and *idbār* (inclination toward evil) depending on whether *nūr* or *zulmah* holds dominance at a given moment.²⁵ Thus *nūr* serves as the energetic vehicle for both *baṣīrah* and *qalb* — enabling the former to see and the latter to act morally.

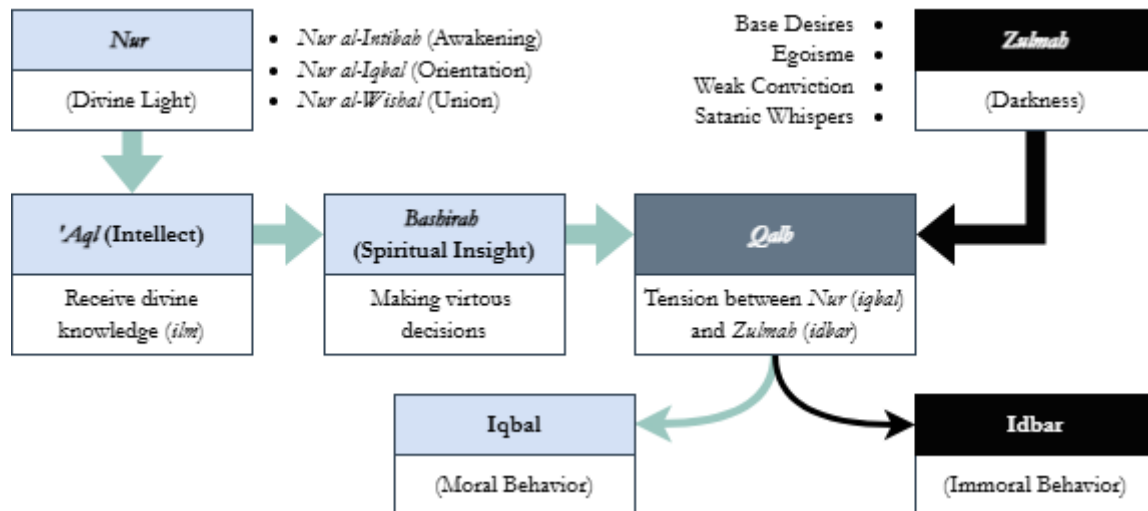


Figure 1. The Nur-Zulmah Framework

The Operational Mechanism of Nūr and Baṣīrah

First, the mechanism of *nūr*. As-Sakandarī posits that divine assistance (*nūr*) is not dispensed arbitrarily, but is contingent upon human preparation — as suggested in Surah al-A'raf verse 56: "Indeed, Allah's mercy is near to those who do good."²⁶ This preparation operates on two dimensions. Psychologically, it requires cultivating *iftiqār*—the profound sense of absolute need for God—alongside *uṣṭāḥ* (solitude) for *tafakkur* (contemplation), a thirst for goodness, and sincerity (*taḥaqquq*).²⁷ Practically, it is reinforced through prayer, recitation of the Quran, and invocation of blessings.²⁸

Crucially, as-Sakandarī clarifies that *uṣṭāḥ* does not necessitate physical isolation, but rather a psychological and mental distancing from worldly distractions: "Nothing is more beneficial to the heart than *uṣṭāḥ*, which enters the realm of contemplation."²⁹ This inward orientation — cultivated through *tafakkur* — functions as the condition of receptivity through which divine *nūr* enters and activates the *baṣīrah*. This process seeks to immerse the self in obscurity and simplicity (*khuml*), strengthening the roots of consciousness before venturing into social life. By embracing *khuml*, the individual

²⁴ al-Bouti, *al-Hikam al-Aṭṭaiyah Syarah wa Tablil*, vol. 2; Abdul Majid as-Syarwani, *Syarah Hikam al-Aṭṭaiyah*, 2nd ed. (Dar Ibnu Katsir, 1989).

²⁵ al-Bouti, *al-Hikam al-Aṭṭaiyah Syarah wa Tablil*, vol. 2; as-Syarwani, *Syarah Hikam al-Aṭṭaiyah*.

²⁶ Ibnu Athaillah as-Sakandari, *Taj Al-Arus al-Hawi Li Tabdzib an-Nufus* (Dar Kutub Ilmiah, 2005); al-Bouti, *al-Hikam al-Aṭṭaiyah Syarah wa Tablil*, vol. 2.

²⁷ al-Bouti, *al-Hikam al-Aṭṭaiyah Syarah wa Tablil*, vol. 2.

²⁸ al-Bouti, *al-Hikam al-Aṭṭaiyah Syarah wa Tablil*, vol. 2.

²⁹ as-Sakandari, *al-Hikam*.

focuses on the unseen cultivation of the spirit, ensuring that moral actions are rooted in genuine conviction rather than social performance. *Tafakkur* during this phase acts as the transformative process that converts divine *nūr* into actionable wisdom, allowing the *baṣīrah* to see clearly through the darkness of the ego. Without this deep-rooted inwardness, outward moral behavior remains fragile and susceptible to *zulmah*.

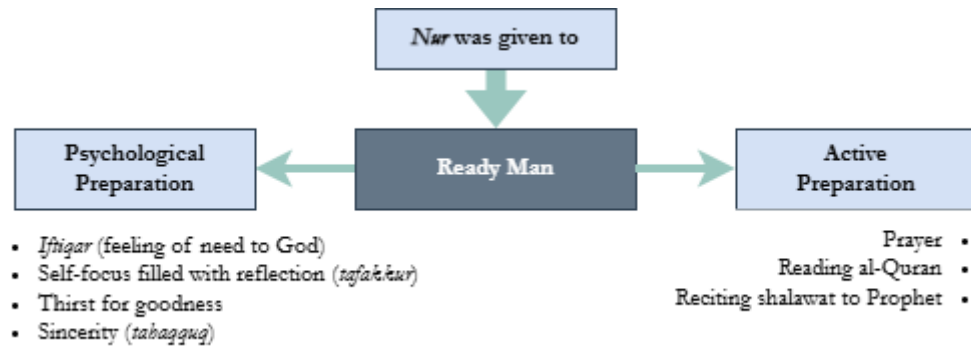


Figure 2. The Mechanism of Nūr

Second, the mechanism for suppressing *zulmah*. Even when *baṣīrah* arrives at a virtuous decision, the *qalb* does not automatically project it into behavior, as it remains contested by the base impulses of the lower self (*hawā al-nafs*) and satanic whispers. The lower self is described as breath upon a mirror—its persistent influence gradually obscures the heart's clarity.³⁰ Against *hawā al-nafs*, as-Sakandari prescribes three deliberate resistance strategies: detecting signs of ego-domination, actively opposing its apparent choices, and cultivating a dual relationship with God through fear (*khanf*) and longing (*shawq*).³¹ As-Sakandari notes a specific sign of ego-domination: "One sign that you follow your base desires is your haste in performing recommended (*sunnah*) good deeds while being sluggish in performing obligatory ones."³² To counteract this, one must choose the path that feels heavier or more difficult for the ego. This internal discipline is sustained through divine awe, as he notes: "Nothing can control the desires within the heart except a great fear of God and a powerful longing for God."³³

Regarding the whispers of Satan, the primary defense is to constantly seek refuge in God. As-Sakandari advises, "If you know that Satan will not forget you, then do not forget the One who holds your reins."³⁴ Al-Fasi interprets this refuge as a form of trust and faith. Satan is unable to disturb those who possess strong trust and faith in God, based on Surah An-Nahl verse 99: "Indeed, there is no authority for him over those who have believed and rely upon their Lord."³⁵ Furthermore, as-Sakandari views the presence of Satan not merely as a source of destruction, but as a divine instrument for spiritual acceleration. When a servant feels the pressure of satanic whispers, it triggers an immediate psychological shift from self-reliance to absolute dependence on the Creator (*iftiqar*). As the heart

³⁰ al-Bouti, *al-Hikam al-Aṭhaiyah Syarah wa Tablīl*, vol. 2; as-Sakandari, *Taj Al-Arus al-Hawi Li Tahdiz an-Nufus*.

³¹ as-Sakandari, *al-Hikam*.

³² as-Sakandari, *al-Hikam*.

³³ as-Sakandari, *al-Hikam*.

³⁴ as-Sakandari, *al-Hikam*.

³⁵ Ibnu Ajjabah, *Ib'ad al-Ghumam an Iqadz al-Himam*.

becomes saturated with the awareness of God's presence, the cognitive resonance of these distractions fades, allowing the *baṣīrah* to maintain its focus on the divine light.

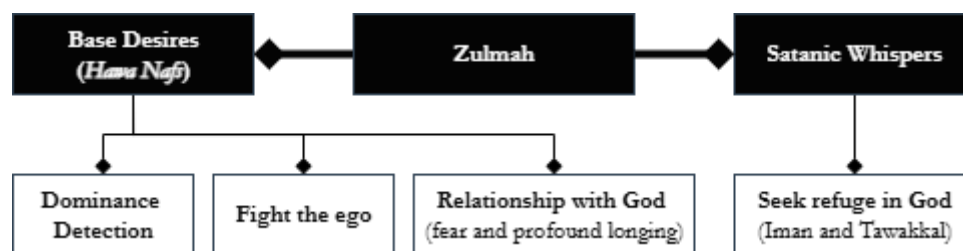


Figure 3. The Mechanism of Dampening *Zulmah*

Operationally, this dual mechanism —the cultivation of receptivity to *nūr* and the suppression of *zulmah*— forms a psychospiritual feedback loop: moral actions generated under *nūr* invite further illumination, refining the heart's mirror for clearer perception, while repeated submission to *zulmah* deposits rust that progressively dims the *baṣīrah*. The resulting model positions *nūr* not merely as a theological concept but as a functional cognitive-spiritual catalyst whose presence or absence materially determines the quality of moral behavior.³⁶

Discussion

Dialogue with Modern Psychology

The conceptualization of the soul in as-Sakandarī's thought presents a generative alternative to the classical psychodynamic model proposed by Sigmund Freud. This dialogue highlights distinct ontological foundations concerning the nature of human existence and the origins of psychic motivation.³⁷ While Freud views the psyche through a deterministic lens of biological instincts and social conditioning, as-Sakandarī emphasizes an existential-spiritual dimension that extends beyond material causality. Freud identifies three primary components: the Id (unconscious drives), the Ego (the rational mind), and the Superego (internalized social standards).³⁸ In Freud's view, the psyche operates as a closed psychological system centered on biological survival and social adaptation.³⁹ Rather than standing in binary opposition, as-Sakandarī's framework expands this structural topography. His framework—consisting of *‘aql* (intellect), *baṣīrah* (spiritual insight), and *qalb* (heart)—functions as an open system receptive to transcendental epistemic inputs (*nūr*). While the Freudian ego relies on pragmatic rational logic to navigate reality, the as-Sakandarīan intellect functions by receiving divine light to discern ontological truth. Here, *baṣīrah* acts as a spiritual decision-maker that evaluates options not merely based on internalized social taboos (like the Superego), but on spiritual reality. Consequently, what Freud terms as irrational unconscious drives (Id) can be understood within this framework as the psychospiritual pressure of *zulmah* (*hawā al-nafsi*). This structural convergence allows Islamic psychology to engage Freud not through wholesale rejection, but by reinterpreting biological drives within a wider cosmological battlefield. This comparison is summarized in the following table:

³⁶ Mahmudah et al., "The Effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy Training to Increase Psychological Wellbeing of Santri."

³⁷ Hanna-e-Kalbi and Dr. Tahira Basharat, "A Comparative Study of the Personality Formulates of Ghazali and Freud."

³⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (Norton, 1977).

³⁹ Yijun Yang, "The Origin of Morality: From Behavioral Synchronization to Moral Norm Internalization," *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences* 8 (February 2023): 256–63, <https://doi.org/10.54097/chss.v8i.4258>.

Table 1. The Comparative Paradigm As-Sakandari and Sigmund Freud

Aspect			As-Sakandari	Sigmund Freud
Primary Components			<i>Aql</i> , <i>baṣīrah</i> , and <i>qalb</i>	<i>Id</i> (instinct), <i>Ego</i> (rational), <i>Superego</i> (morality)
External/Metaphysical Influences			<i>Nūr</i> (Divine Light) and <i>zulmah</i> (Darkness)	No metaphysical or spiritual emphasis
Functional Components	Role	of	<i>Aql</i> receives <i>nūr</i> as truth; <i>baṣīrah</i> chooses based on <i>nūr</i> ; <i>qalb</i> projects behavior.	<i>Id</i> seeks gratification; <i>Ego</i> manages reality; <i>Superego</i> acts as internalized social norms.
External/Dynamic Energy			<i>Nūr</i> guides moral differentiation; <i>zulmah</i> drives vice.	Purely subconscious drives (e.g., libido, thanatos) without spiritual dimension.

Beyond psychoanalysis, the *nūr-zulmah* framework holds significant relevance to the Positive Psychology discourse on human flourishing, particularly Martin Seligman's PERMA model.⁴⁰ Both as-Sakandari and Seligman share a core concern for cultivating human virtues and optimal functioning. However, a major epistemological distinction lies in their directionality. Seligman adopts a bottom-up approach, where character strengths are viewed as inherent human traits developed through autonomous cognitive and behavioral effort.⁴¹ In contrast, as-Sakandari offers a top-down perspective where sustainable virtue (*faḍīlah*) can only be fully realized through the stabilizing catalyst of divine illumination *nūr*. As Rassool argues, the Islamic paradigm of the soul is inherently theocentric, anchoring human well-being to the actualization of the *fiṭrah*.⁴²

From a Global South perspective, this distinction is crucial. Positive Psychology emerged from a Western secular tradition that locates the ultimate source of flourishing within the autonomous self.⁴³ For Muslim communities whose well-being is fundamentally anchored in theocentric meaning-making, relying solely on secular frameworks risks an epistemic limitation—subordinating indigenous ways of knowing to external academic categories.⁴⁴ As-Sakandari's framework offers a balanced counter-position: not a rejection of empirical positive psychology, but a recognition that secular constructs like self-efficacy can be enriched by adding the spiritual dimension.

Concurrently, this dialogue reveals an internal limitation within classical Islamic psychology itself: while textually rich in mapping the metaphysical mechanics of the soul, classical frameworks often lack the standardized, empirical psychometric tools found in modern Positive Psychology to measure these behavioral outcomes. Therefore, articulating this framework is not a retreat from modern science, but a precondition for an equal intellectual exchange where both traditions address the cross-cultural complexities of human flourishing.

The following table summarizes the comparative analysis between as-Sakandari's Psychospiritual Model and Seligman's Positive Psychology:

⁴⁰ Shivangi Pandey and Anubhuti Dubey, "Confluence of Triguna and PERMA Model: An Empirical Validation," *Mind and Society* 10, nos. 03–04 (2020): 43–49, <https://doi.org/10.56011/mind-mri-103-420215>.

⁴¹ Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (American Psychological Association; Oxford University Press, 2004); Julie Butler and Margaret L. Kern, "The PERMA-Profler: A Brief Multidimensional Measure of Flourishing," *International Journal of Wellbeing* 6, no. 3 (2016): 1–48, <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v6i3.526>.

⁴² G. Hussein Rassool, *Islamic Psychology: The Basics*, 1st ed., The Basics (Routledge, 2023).

⁴³ Alan S. Waterman, "The Humanistic Psychology–Positive Psychology Divide: Contrasts in Philosophical Foundations," *American Psychologist* 68, no. 3 (2013): 124–33, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032168>.

⁴⁴ Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom."

Table 2. The Comparative Model between As-Sakandari and Seligman

Comparison Point	as-Sakandari's Psychospiritual Model	Seligman's Positive Psychology
Concept of Flourishing	<i>Sa'adah</i> (Spiritual Felicity) through Divine Connection.	Well-being (Flourishing) through PERMA.
Source of Virtue	<i>Nūr</i> (Divine Light) as a catalyst for moral action.	Character Strengths & Virtues (internal potential).
Human Agency	<i>Iftiqar</i> (Profound need for God) & <i>Tawakkul</i> .	Autonomous Self-Regulation & Self-Efficacy.
The "Goal" of Flow	<i>Mushābahah</i> (Vision of Truth/God).	Engagement in activities matches one's strengths.
View on Suffering/Darkness	<i>Zulmah</i> as a test to return to the Divine.	Negativity as an obstacle to be reframed through optimism.
Epistemology	Theistic-Revelatory (Intuition guided by Light).	Empirical-Humanistic (Scientific study of human potential).

This epistemological divergence becomes highly consequential when examined within the context of Muslim societies, where well-being is inextricably anchored in theocentric meaning-making and communal spiritual practices. Positive Psychology, however empirically robust, emerged from a predominantly Western secular tradition that locates the ultimate source of human flourishing within the autonomous self.⁴⁵ Applying this framework universally without contextual adaptation presents an epistemic limitation—subordinating indigenous ways of knowing to secular academic categories.⁴⁶

As-Sakandari's framework offers a balanced counter-position: not a wholesale rejection of empirical inquiry, but a recognition that secular constructs like self-efficacy can be enriched by integrating transcendental dimensions. By establishing the *fiṭrah* and its relationship to divine *nūr* as foundational categories, this model suggests that Islamic psychology requires its own first principles before it can engage constructively with Western frameworks on equal terms.⁴⁷ Concurrently, this dialogue reveals an internal limitation within classical Islamic frameworks: while textually rich in mapping metaphysical mechanics, they often lack the standardized, empirical psychometric tools found in contemporary Western psychology to measure behavioral outcomes. Therefore, articulating this framework is not a retreat from global scientific dialogue, but a necessary precondition for genuine, symmetrical intellectual exchange—one where Islamic psychology actively contributes theoretical innovations rather than merely absorbing Western paradigms.

Integrative Model of Psycho-Spiritual Dynamics

The dynamics of human personality represent continuous interaction between internal faculties and transcendental inputs. *Nūr* enters through the *'aql* and illuminates the *baṣīrah*, which then guides the *qalb* to produce moral actions.⁴⁸ Conversely, *zulmah* acts as a psychological distortion that dims the intellect's perception. Operationally, this interaction forms a self-

⁴⁵ Waterman, "The Humanistic Psychology–Positive Psychology Divide."

⁴⁶ Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom."

⁴⁷ Rassool, *Islamic Psychology*.

⁴⁸ as-Sakandari, *al-Hikam*.

reinforcing feedback loop: ethical choices made under the clarity of *nūr* refine the heart's mirror, enhancing future spiritual perception.⁴⁹ On the contrary, repeated submission to *zulmah* creates a habituation of ethical desensitization, clouding the *baṣīrah* in subsequent choices.⁵⁰

This predictable psychospiritual momentum provides a solid theoretical foundation for practitioners in Traditional Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy (TIIP). Keshavarzi and Haque emphasize that the TIIP framework requires a multidimensional approach to clinical care.⁵¹ In this context, *nūr-zulmah* shift from abstract concepts into clinical variables: therapeutic intervention is operationalized as *taẓkiyah* (the systematic removal of egoistic distortions from the client's cognitive processes), while the practitioner functions as an active catalyst whose own spiritual grounding helps facilitate the client's transition from cognitive willpower to receptive surrender (*iftiqār*).

Practical Implications in Islamic Psychology and Education

The findings of this research have significant practical utility for both Islamic counseling and the broader field of education, introducing what can be termed a **Pedagogy of Light**. Within this framework, education transitions from a mere transfer of cognitive information to the active cultivation of the *baṣīrah* (spiritual intuition). Character building is monitored through an internal spiritual barometer—the clarity of the *qalb*—and behavioral remediation (such as addressing bullying) is treated by diagnosing spiritual negligence (*ghaflah*) rather than relying solely on behaviorist punishments.⁵² Furthermore, the educator's role shifts from a mere instructor to a spiritual guide whose own internal state serves as an exemplary catalyst for students, an approach that strongly aligns with classical Islamic pedagogical foundations such as Abdullah Nashih Ulwan's *Tarbiyatul Aulād fī al-Islām*.⁵³ By integrating contemplative practices like reflection (*tafakkur*) and mindfulness (*muraqabah*) into daily school routines, students are helped to quiet the cognitive noise of *zulmah* to enhance both academic and moral pursuits.

Ultimately, the resonance of this framework is most directly manifested within the Southeast Asian *pesantren* system. This tradition—characterized by structured spiritual discipline (*riyāḍah*), continuous mentorship by the *kiai*, and communal devotion—constitutes a living laboratory where the *nūr-zulmah* dynamic is already operationalized.⁵⁴ The *kiai* figure functions precisely as the integrated spiritual guide described in TIIP literature: an individual whose internal state serves as an exemplary catalyst for the moral development of students. Formalizing this lived tradition provides a systematic vocabulary that bridges classical Shadhiliyyah thought with contemporary psycho-educational counseling. This ensures that Islamic academic institutions can evaluate moral development using frameworks generated from within their own intellectual lineage, rather than

⁴⁹ İsa Yalçın, "Leo Schaya Bağlamında Tasavvuf'ta İçsel Dönüşüm," *TSBS Bildiriler Dergisi*, no. 3 (August 2023), <https://doi.org/10.55709/TSBSBildirilerDergisi.475>.

⁵⁰ Carrie York Al-Karam, *Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy: Uniting Faith and Professional Practice*, Spirituality and Mental Health, v. 3 (Templeton Press, 2018).

⁵¹ Hooman Keshavarzi et al., eds., *Applying Islamic Principles to Clinical Mental Health Care: Introducing Traditional Islamically Integrated Psychotherapy* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2021).

⁵² Ahmadi Ahmadi, "The Implementation of Islamic Character Education in Overcoming Bullying Behavior in Islamic Primary Schools," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 36, no. 2 (2025): 291–306, <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v36i2.6933>.

⁵³ Almuḥajir Almuḥajir, "Concept Analysis of the Tarbiyatul Aulād Fī Al-Islām Abdullah Nashih Ulwan: Children's Social Education Paying Attention to the Rights of Others in Forming Independent Character," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 32, no. 2 (2021): 205–22, <https://doi.org/10.33367/tribakti.v32i2.1590>.

⁵⁴ Dhofier, *Tradisi pesantren*.

relying on models imported wholesale from secular traditions.⁵⁵ Consequently, personal growth and mental recovery are achieved not through isolated cognitive-behavioral modifications, but by strengthening the foundational connection that enlightens the entire human personality.

Conclusion

This study concludes that as-Sakandarī's concept of *nūr* and *zulmah* provides a sophisticated framework for understanding the operational dynamics of the human soul. The primary findings indicate that the interaction between internal faculties (*'aql*, *baṣīrah*, *qalb*) and transcendental influences (*nūr*, *zulmah*) forms the core of Islamic moral psychology. *Nūr* acts as an external cognitive and spiritual catalyst that illuminates the *baṣīrah*, enabling individuals to transcend sensory limitations and choose paths aligned with divine truth. Conversely, *zulmah* represents the internal and external obstacles—base desires and egoistic darkness—that obscure spiritual vision and drive immoral behavior.

The major contribution of this research lies in shifting the discourse of Islamic psychology from a static-ontological description to a dynamic-functional model. By mapping the mechanics of spiritual illumination, this study bridges classical Sufi wisdom with contemporary psychological needs, offering a top-down model of character development that prioritizes spiritual receptivity (*iftiqār*) over mere cognitive willpower. Practically, this contributes to a solid theoretical foundation for a Pedagogy of Light in education and a spiritually integrated approach in psychotherapy (TIIP), where clinical intervention focuses on cleansing the heart to receive guidance.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study responds to a broader epistemological imperative within Global South Islamic scholarship. The *nūr-zulmah* framework is not merely a historical reconstruction of classical Sufi thought—it is a living theoretical resource generated from within the Islamic intellectual tradition, capable of serving as a foundation for an indigenous Islamic psychology that engages modern frameworks from a position of symmetrical autonomy. By articulating this framework in academic terms, the study demonstrates that classical institutions such as the pesantren have long been practicing a sophisticated psychospiritual pedagogy that deserves formal recognition in contemporary psychological and educational discourse. This contribution aligns with the broader decolonial movement in Islamic studies, which seeks not to reject global scientific advancements but to establish that Muslim intellectual heritage constitutes an autonomous source of theoretical innovation.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, as a qualitative content analysis, the findings are primarily theoretical and interpretative, based on classical texts. Second, while it provides a robust conceptual model, the research lacks direct empirical testing through clinical case studies or psychological experiments to measure quantifiable shifts in cognitive behavior following *tazkiyah* practices. Third, the study focuses specifically on as-Sakandarī's thought, which represents only one school of Sufi psychology. Future research should explore empirical applications of this model in diverse clinical and educational settings and conduct comparative studies with other Sufi psychological traditions to further validate and refine this integrative psychospiritual framework.

⁵⁵ Keshavarzi et al., *Applying Islamic Principles to Clinical Mental Health Care*.

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