

The Semantic Field of *Tazkiyah al-Nafs* in the Qur'an: A Psychospiritual Framework for Islamic Psychology

*Medan Semantik Tazkiyah al-Nafs dalam Al-Qur'an: Kerangka Psikospiritual
untuk Psikologi Islam*

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Abstract

This article reconstructs the semantic field of *tazkiyah al-nafs* in the Qur'an as a conceptual foundation for Islamic psychology. It addresses a methodological problem in contemporary Islamic psychological discourse: *tazkiyah* is often used as a normative or therapeutic concept before its Qur'anic semantic structure has been carefully mapped. Combining thematic exegesis (*tafsir mauḍū'i*) with semantic-field analysis, the article examines the root *z-k-w*, its morphological distribution, contextual anchor loci, oppositional relations, and exegetical corroboration. It identifies QS al-Syams (91):7–10 as the primary structural locus of the field, where *nafs*, *taqwā-fujūr*, *tazkiyah-tadsiyah*, and *falāḥ-khaibah* are arranged in a layered moral structure. The study argues that *tazkiyah* cannot be reduced to purification alone. While *taṭhīr* primarily denotes the removal of impurity, *tazkiyah* includes purification and exceeds it through cultivation, growth, moral elevation, and teleological orientation toward *falāḥ*. By distinguishing *tazkiyah* from related concepts such as *taṭhīr*, *taubah*, and *islāḥ*, the article offers a more precise Qur'anic account of moral formation. Its contribution is therefore pre-clinical and conceptual: it provides a Qur'anic semantic foundation for Islamic psychology without claiming to establish a finalized therapeutic model.

Keywords: *tazkiyah al-nafs*; Islamic psychology; semantic field; semantic analysis; Islamic psychotherapy

Abstrak

Artikel ini merekonstruksi medan semantik *tazkiyah al-nafs* dalam Al-Qur'an sebagai landasan konseptual bagi psikologi Islam. Artikel ini membahas masalah metodologis dalam diskursus psikologi Islam kontemporer: *tazkiyah* kerap digunakan sebagai konsep normatif atau terapeutik sebelum struktur semantiknya dalam Al-Qur'an dipetakan secara cermat. Dengan menggabungkan metode tafsir tematik (*tafsir mauḍū'i*) dengan analisis medan semantik, penelitian ini mengkaji akar kata *z-k-w*, distribusi morfologisnya, lokus-lokus jangkar kontekstualnya, relasi oposisinya, dan konfirmasi melalui kajian tafsir. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi QS al-Syams (91):7–10 sebagai lokus struktural utama medan semantik tersebut, di mana konsep *nafs*, *taqwā-fujūr*, *tazkiyah-tadsiyah*, dan *falāḥ-khaibah* tersusun dalam struktur moral berlapis. Kajian ini berargumen bahwa *tazkiyah* tidak dapat direduksi hanya pada pemurnian semata. Jika *taṭhīr* pada dasarnya menunjuk pada proses menghilangkan kotoran, maka *tazkiyah* mencakup penyucian dan melampauinya melalui proses pembinaan, pertumbuhan, peningkatan moral, dan orientasi teleologis menuju *falāḥ*. Dengan membedakan *tazkiyah* dari konsep-konsep terkait seperti *taṭhīr*, *taubah*, dan *islāḥ*, artikel ini menawarkan gambaran Al-Qur'an yang lebih presisi mengenai pembentukan moral. Oleh karena itu, kontribusi penelitian ini bersifat pra-klinis dan konseptual: artikel ini menyediakan landasan semantik Al-Qur'an untuk psikologi Islam tanpa



mengklaim telah membangun model terapeutik yang final.

Kata kunci: *tazkiyah al-nafs*; psikologi Islam; medan semantik; analisis semantik; psikoterapi Islam

Introduction

Over the last two decades, Islamic psychology has gradually moved beyond an apologetic discourse toward a more serious agenda of theory-building. The central question is no longer simply whether Islamic concepts can be aligned with modern psychology, but how theories of the human person, the soul, suffering, and healing can be developed from within Islamic ontology and epistemology themselves.¹ This shift has become increasingly visible in the growing body of research on Islamic psychotherapy, Muslim mental health, and the integration of clinical intervention with religious concepts.² Yet this development still leaves a significant methodological problem: many theoretical models in Islamic psychology are built through a combination of Sufi traditions, modern psychological literature, and selected exegetical readings, without always being reconstructed rigorously from the semantic network of the Qur'an itself.

One of the most central concepts in this discussion is *tazkiyah al-nafs*. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, *tazkiyah* is commonly understood as a process of purification, growth, and self-formation through which the human being moves closer to divine pleasure. The concept has deep roots in the literature of *akhlāq*, Sufism, and spiritual formation. At the same time, *tazkiyah al-nafs* is increasingly

- 1 Abdallah Rothman and Adrian Coyle, "Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Soul," *Journal of Religion and Health* 57 (June 15, 2018): 1731–44, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0651-x>; Carrie York Al-Karam, "Islamic Psychology: Towards a 21st Century Definition and Conceptual Framework," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 2, no. 1–2 (November 15, 2018): 97–109, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-12340020>; Rasjid Skinner, "Traditions, Paradigms and Basic Concepts in Islamic Psychology," *Journal of Religion and Health* 58, no. 4 (March 23, 2019): 1087–94, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0595-1>; Nur Afifah Abas, "A Qur'anic Concept of Sadness: Implication for CBT-Q Content Supplement (Part 1)," *Ulumuna* 25, no. 1 (July 27, 2021): 162–98, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v25i1.438>.
- 2 Abdallah Rothman and Adrian Coyle, "Conceptualizing an Islamic Psychotherapy: A Grounded Theory Study," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 7, no. 3 (September 2020): 197–213, <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000219>; Khalid Elzamzamy, Rasha K Bader, and Fikriye Bilge Bircan, "Contemporary Scholarship on Classical Islamic Psychology: A Scoping Review," *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 18, no. 1 (August 2, 2024): 3–45, <https://doi.org/10.3998/jmmh.6025>; Imran Khan et al., "The Integration of Islamic Psychology with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 49, no. 4 (2025): 1067–86, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-025-09924-5>; Saloumeh Bozorgzadeh and Lana Ruvolo Grasser, "The Integration of the Heart-Centered Paradigm of Sufi Psychology in Contemporary Psychotherapy Practice," *Psychotherapy* 59, no. 3 (September 2022): 405–14, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pst0000414>; Ghena Ismail, Craig Shealy, and Ziad Nahas, "Psychotherapy Through a Sufi Islamic Lens: A Dialectic of Transcendence and Acceptance," *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 10, no. 3 (September 2023): 200–218, <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000274>.

used in contemporary discussions of self-regulation, psychological well-being, moral resilience, and faith-sensitive therapy.³ However, modern studies tend to approach the concept in two main ways. Some discuss it normatively and descriptively through the stages of the soul and moral cultivation, while others move directly to practical applications such as *ẓikr*, *murāqabah*, *muḥāsabah*, or Islamic counseling.

Both tendencies are important, but they do not fully answer a more basic question: how is the meaning of *tazkiyah al-nafs* actually constructed in the Qur'an? Many studies have used the concept as an ethical or therapeutic foundation, but relatively few have reconstructed its semantic structure directly from the Qur'anic corpus. As a result, *tazkiyah al-nafs* remains conceptually prominent but textually under-examined. It is often treated as a key term in Islamic psychology, yet it has not been sufficiently mapped as a Qur'anic network of meaning that shows the relationship between purification, growth, self-discipline, moral orientation, divine guidance, and spiritual success.

This is where Qur'anic semantic analysis becomes important. Qur'anic semantics should not stop at dictionary definitions or broad thematic groupings of verses. It needs to move further into the analysis of conceptual relations, contextual distribution, semantic opposition, and the worldview of the text.⁴ Recent studies on concepts such as *marād* and *al-futūr al-rūḥī* also show that Qur'anic psychospiritual vocabulary can be understood more clearly when it is mapped as a relational, contextual, and oppositional network of meaning.⁵ For this reason, this

3 G. Hussein Rassool, "Critical Reflections on Current Status of Scholarship in Islamic Psychology – Challenges and Solutions," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 3 (December 31, 2023): 37–54, <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v8i3.641>; Nazila Isgandarova, "Muraqaba as a Mindfulness-Based Therapy in Islamic Psychotherapy," *Journal of Religion and Health* 58, no. 4 (August 8, 2019): 1146–60, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0695-y>; Benaouda Bensaid, Salah Ben Tahar Machouche, and Mustafa Tekke, "An Islamic Spiritual Alternative to Addiction Treatment and Recovery," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 59, no. 1 (June 15, 2021): 127–62, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2021.591.127-162>; Nita Trimulyaningsih, M.A. Subandi, and Kwartarini W. Yuniarti, "The Process of Spiritual Transformation to Attain Nafs Al-Muṭma'innah in Islamic Psychology," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (May 21, 2024): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.8526>; Nor Asliza Mohd Zin et al., "Validity and Reliability of the Spiritual Counselling Intervention Module (MIKS)," *Qubahan Academic Journal* 4, no. 2 (June 30, 2024): 454–76, <https://doi.org/10.48161/qaj.v4n2a592>; Muhammad Akmansyah et al., "The Essence of Mursyid Teachers in Sufism Spiritual Education in the Framework of Maqāṣid Al-Syarī'ah: The Perspectives of Indonesian Scholars," *El-Ussrah* 8, no. 1 (2025): 50–71, <https://doi.org/10.22373/6m127a63>; M. Saiful Amri Zainal Abidin et al., "The Practice of Islamic Psychospiritual Therapy in the Treatment of Drug Addiction at Rehabilitation Centres in Malaysia," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 24, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 143–68, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol24no2.4>.

4 Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of The Qur'anic Weltanschauung*, 2nd ed. (Petaling Jaya: Islamic Book Trust, 2008); Halil Rahman Açar, "Some Remarks on Studying The Qur'an as Revealed Knowledge," *Al-Bayan Journal* 11, no. 2 (December 2013): 93–105, <https://doi.org/10.11136/jqh.1311.02.06>; Mark Durie, "Semantic Decomposition of Four Quranic Words," *Russian Journal of Linguistics* 26, no. 4 (2022): 937–69, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2687-0088-30779>.

5 Ziyad Ravaṣdeh et al., "Semantic Analysis of the Conceptual Structure of 'Disease' in the Qur'anic Context,"

article contributes to the field in three ways. First, it moves beyond a concordance-based inventory of the root *z-k-w* by reconstructing *tazkiyah al-nafs* as a layered semantic field. Second, it differentiates the internal relations that structure this field: resemblance, opposition, and correspondence. Third, it argues that *tazkiyah* is not simply equivalent to purification. Unlike *taṭhīr*, which primarily denotes the removal of impurity, *tazkiyah* includes purification but also adds the dimension of cultivation, growth, and moral elevation. The semantic field of *tazkiyah* therefore presents the self not merely as something to be cleansed, but as something to be cultivated toward *falāḥ*.

To achieve this aim, the article employs an integrative approach that combines *tafsīr mauḍūʿī*⁶ with Qurʾanic semantic-field analysis. The analysis proceeds in six stages. First, it conducts a lexical analysis of the root *z-k-w* and its related terms by consulting classical Arabic lexicons, especially *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, *al-Mufradāt fī Garīb al-Qurʾān*, *Kitāb al-ʿAin*, and *Lisān al-ʿArab*.⁷ Second, it undertakes a morphological analysis to identify the derivative forms of the root and their distribution in the Qurʾan. Third, it applies contextual analysis to examine the semantic function of *tazkiyah* in key verses. Fourth, it uses intertextual analysis to map the relationship between verses and surahs, particularly where one passage clarifies, narrows, or expands the semantic scope of another. Fifth, it employs oppositional analysis to trace the terms that explicitly or implicitly form the semantic boundaries of *tazkiyah*. Sixth, it conducts exegetical corroboration, namely the testing of the semantic reconstruction through selected classical and modern *tafsīr* works.

In the stage of exegetical corroboration, this article draws on al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kaṣīr, Ibn ʿĀsyūr, and al-Saʿdī.⁸ These four sources are selected because they represent different explanatory horizons within the *tafsīr* tradition. Al-Ṭabarī is important for

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6 Abdul Hayy Al-Farmāwī, *Al-Bidāyah Fī Al-Tafsīr Al-Mauḍūʿī* (Dār al-Maṭābiʿ wa al-Nasyr al-Islāmiyyah, 2005).

7 Abū al-Ḥusain Aḥmad Ibn Fāris, *Muʿjam Maqāyīs Al-Lughah*, 2nd ed. (Mesir: Syirkah Maktabah wa Maṭbaʿah Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Aulādih, 1972); Ḥusain al-Rāḡib Al-Aṣḡahānī, *Al-Mufradāt Fī Garīb Al-Qurʾān*, 1st ed. (Damaskus: Dār al-Qalam, 1992); Khalīl ibn Aḥmad Al-Farāhīdī, *Al-ʿAin*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2003); Muḥammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-ʿArab*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1994).

8 Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ Al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy Al-Qurʾān* (Kairo: Dār al-Ḥadīṣ, 2010); Ismāʿīl Ibn Kaṣīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qurʾān Al-ʿAẓīm*, ed. Sāmī As-Salāmah, 2nd ed. (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaibah, 1999); Muḥammad Ṭāhir Ibn ʿĀsyūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa Al-Tanwīr* (Tunisia: al-Dar al-Tunisiyyah li al-Nasyr, 1984); ʿAbdurrahmān ibn Naṣīr al-Saʿdī, *Taisīr Al-Karīm Al-Raḥmān Fī Tafsīr Kalām Al-Mannān*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Muʿassasah al-Risālah, 2002).

his *riwāyah*-based orientation and early exegetical formulations; Ibn Kaṣīr provides a widely received synthetic reading of earlier interpretive materials; Ibn ‘Āsyūr is especially valuable for his conceptual precision and attention to the internal coherence of Qur’anic discourse; and al-Sa’dī offers a pedagogical-practical elaboration that becomes particularly relevant when the article turns to the psychospiritual implications of *tazkiyah al-nafs*. Through this layered procedure, the study maintains a clear hierarchy of evidence: the Qur’an functions as the primary corpus, lexical and morphological analyses serve as the basis for semantic reconstruction, tafsir operates as interpretive corroboration, and Islamic psychology provides the field of theoretical implication.

The analysis shows that *tazkiyah al-nafs* in the Qur’an functions as a comprehensive framework of psychospiritual transformation, rather than as a simple synonym for purification. Its semantic field brings together purification, growth, reorientation of the self, prophetic pedagogy, ethical discipline, and divine guidance within a coherent Qur’anic account of human moral agency. Therefore, *tazkiyah al-nafs* cannot be reduced to an individual act of “self-cleansing.” It describes a dynamic process in which the human self is educated, disciplined, redirected, and oriented toward *falāḥ*, while being protected from patterns of psychospiritual failure. This reconstruction contributes to Islamic psychology by grounding its theory of the self in the semantic logic of the Qur’an itself. It therefore provides a conceptual foundation for future construct development, assessment, and therapeutic application, without claiming to offer a finalized clinical model.

Lexicological and Morphological Profile of *Tazkiyah*

The Basic Meaning of the Root z-k-w

Reconstructing the semantic field of *tazkiyah* must begin from the basic meaning of the root *z-k-w*, namely the conceptual content inherently attached to this root, independent of its contexts of use. An examination of four classical Arabic dictionaries shows that this root revolves around two interlocking semantic axes: growth and increase (*al-namā’ wa al-ziyādah*) on the one hand, and purity (*al-ṭahārah*) on the other.

Ibn Fāris affirms that the root *z-k-w* is grounded in the meaning of *al-namā’ wa al-ziyādah*.⁹ It is from here that, etymologically, alms are called *zakāh*, because it grows and increases the blessing of wealth rather than diminishing it. On the face of it, this presents a paradox that in fact underscores the core meaning of growth in the root *z-k-w*. Al-Rāḡib al-Aṣḡḥānī clarifies that *al-zakāh* originally means *al-*

9 Ibn Fāris, *Muʿjam Maqāyīs Al-Lughah*, vol. 3, pp. 17–18.

numuww al-ḥāṣil ‘an barakat Allāh (growth that arises from the blessing of God), and that this meaning applies to both worldly and otherworldly matters.¹⁰ Khalīl al-Farāhīdī and Ibn Manẓūr reinforce these two axes, linking *zakkā al-zar‘* (the crop grew) to the axis of growth, and *rajuḥ taqīyy zakiyy* (a person who becomes good and pure) to the axis of goodness and purity.¹¹

This lexical finding carries a conceptual consequence that is decisive for the entire reconstruction. The basic meaning of *z-k-w* is not identical to mere “cleansing” or “purification from filth.” The “growth” component is additive, pointing to the addition and development of a positive element, not merely the removal of a negative one. *Tazkiyah al-naḥs*, within its lexical horizon, is closer to the idea of fertilizing and cultivating the soul so that it develops toward goodness than to the mere cleansing of the soul from disease and filth. This distinction will become the basis for differentiating *tazkiyah* from *taḥīr* in the relational analysis that follows.

Morphological Profile and the Distribution of Derived Forms

At the morphological level, the root *z-k-w* is realized in several derived forms, each bearing a distinctive semantic load with implications for semantic analysis. The three forms most relevant to reconstructing this field are the causative verbal form, the reflexive verbal form, and the nominal form.

The causative form *zakkā* (*wazn* “*fa‘ala*”). This form places the subject of purification outside the object being purified. In the Qur’an, this form frequently appears as a divine or prophetic act: God who purifies (*Allāhu yuzakkī man yasyā’* in QS al-Nisā’ 4:49) and the Messenger who purifies his community (*wa yuzakkīhim/ wa yuzakkikum* in QS al-Baqarah 2:129 and 151; Āli ‘Imrān 3:164; al-Jumu‘ah 62:2). This causative pattern carries a theological implication: in a number of contexts, the purification of the soul is an act that originates from outside the human being.

The reflexive form *tazakkā/yatazakkā* (*wazn* “*tafa‘ala*”). This form places the subject and object of purification within the same self, namely the human being who purifies himself. This form appears, among other places, in QS al-A‘lā (87):14 (*qad aḥḥaḥa man tazakkā*), QS al-Lail (92):18 (*allaḥī yu’tī mālahu yatazakkā*), QS Fāṭir (35):18 (*wa man tazakkā fa-innamā yatazakkā li-naḥsih*), and QS Ṭāhā (20):76. This reflexive pattern carries an implication concerning human responsibility and effort in self-purification.

The tension between the causative form (God/the Messenger as subject) and the reflexive form (the human being as subject) is not a contradiction; rather, the

10 Al-Aṣḥānī, *Al-Mufradāt Fi Garīb Al-Qur’ān*, 380–81.

11 Al-Farāhīdī, *Al-Ain*, vol. 2, p. 189; Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-‘Arab*, vol. 14, p. 358.

two forms constitute a complementary structure. Through its morphological choices, the Qur'an articulates *tazkiyah* as a process that is at once a divine gift and a human endeavor. This is an articulation parallel to the theocentric structure of the Qur'an, in which no major concept stands apart from the concept of God. This article therefore reads the distribution of these forms according to their grammatical subject and semantic context.

The nominal form *zakāh* and the comparative *azkā*. The nominal form *zakāh* displays an extension of the root's meaning into the domain of purifying wealth through obligatory almsgiving which, as affirmed in the lexical analysis, still proceeds from the meaning of growth and blessing rather than diminution. The comparative form *azkā* (QS al-Baqarah 2:232; al-Nūr 24:28, 30; al-Kahf 18:19) indicates a gradation of "more pure" or "more conducive to the growth of goodness." The distribution of the form *azkā*, which often stands alone (without being paired with another root) as well as paired with *aṭhar* (QS 2:232), will become important data for the relational analysis in the following section.

One important distributional note is that the densest and structurally richest presence of the root *z-k-w* is in fact concentrated in the short Makkan surahs, especially al-A'lā (87), al-Syams (91), and al-Lail (92), which are adjacent in the arrangement of the *muṣḥaf*. This concentration signals that the conceptual articulation of *tazkiyah* as a process of the soul has a textual foundation in the early Makkan layer of revelation, which will be elaborated in the contextual analysis.

Related Terms: A Preliminary Lexical Mapping

As a bridge toward the relational analysis, the lexical profile of the root *z-k-w* needs to be completed with a preliminary mapping of the basic meanings of terms that may potentially form its semantic field. This mapping is lexical-preliminary, while the verification of membership in the semantic field of *tazkiyah* is carried out at the stage of contextual, intertextual, and oppositional analysis.

Based on a survey of the classical lexicons, a number of roots show proximity or opposition in meaning to *z-k-w*. On the axis of semantic proximity, the root *ṭ-h-r* (*taṭhīr*) shares the component of purity with *z-k-w*, although—as will be explained below—the two differ in their basic orientation: *z-k-w* is additive (cultivating), whereas *ṭ-h-r* is subtractive (removing filth). On the axis of opposition, the root *d-s-w/d-s-s* (*tadsiyah*) shows a sharp opposition: if *z-k-w* means to cultivate and elevate, *d-s-s* means *al-ikhfā' wa al-tadsīs* (to conceal and to bury),¹² thereby forming a spatial contrast between "cultivating upward" and "concealing/burying downward."

12 Ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyis Al-Lughah*, vol. 2, p. 256; Al-Aṣḥānī, *Al-Mufradāt Fī Garīb Al-Qur'ān*, 314.

This preliminary lexical mapping prepares the ground for the relational reconstruction. It must be emphasized, however, that proximity or opposition in meaning at the level of the lexicon does not by itself establish membership in the semantic field of *tazkiyah*. Such membership demands proof through syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations within the text of the Qur'an, which is the focus of the following section.

Contextual Analysis: The Anchor Loci of the *Tazkiyah* Field

QS al-Syams (91):7–10 as the Primary Anchor Locus

The reconstruction of the semantic field of *tazkiyah* finds its densest textual fulcrum in QS al-Syams (91):7–10. These four verses are not merely one of the places where the root *z-k-w* occurs, but a pericope within which the concept of *tazkiyah* is articulated together with most of the conceptual elements surrounding it in a single, integrated rhetorical unity.

This pericope functions as the primary anchor locus for three reasons. First, it holds the highest concentration of the field's conceptual elements within a single unity: the object of purification (*nafs*), its two innate inclinations (*fujūr* and *taqwā*), the actions performed upon it (*zakkā* and *dassā*), and the consequences of those actions (*aflāḥa* and *khāba*). Second, this pericope arranges these elements within a tight structure of *ṭibāq* and *muqābalah* (antithetical parallelism), so that the relations among the concepts need not be inferred from outside but are displayed by the structure of the verses themselves. Third, the arrangement of the verses moves according to a coherent logic—from the creation of the soul, to the bestowal of two potentials, then to the two paths of action together with their consequences—so that this pericope at once presents the framework within which *tazkiyah* acquires its meaning.

In this context, *tazkiyah* (through the form *zakkāhā*) functions as a transformative action upon the soul that leads to felicity. Its meaning here cannot be understood in isolation. *Tazkiyah* derives its content precisely from its position directly facing *dassāhā* and from its connection to *falāḥ* as its consequence. The context of the verse shows that *zakkā* is not merely cleansing the soul but developing it in an elevating direction, which is a contextual confirmation of the lexical finding regarding the component *al-namā'* in this root. The soul that undergoes the process of *tazkiyah* is a soul that is cultivated and raised, in contrast to the soul that undergoes the process of *tadsiyah*, that is buried and concealed.

What is contextually noteworthy is that *fujūr* and *taqwā* in verse eight are placed as two potentials inspired into the soul, both present prior to the action

of *tazkiyah/tadsiyah* as innate conditions, not as consequences. This placement is important because it determines the structural position of *taqwā* and *fujūr* as potentials, not as outcomes. This distinction will become the basis for mapping the structure of the semantic field of *tazkiyah* in the following section, while at the same time preventing a reading of *tazkiyah* as a linear sequence of stages.

Reinforcing Loci and Their Distinctive Contributions

If QS al-Syams presents the structural framework of the field, there are a number of other loci that reinforce and broaden the understanding of the function of *tazkiyah* by contributing dimensions not visible in the primary anchor. The following four reinforcing loci are selected because each displays a specific relation or dimension of *tazkiyah*.

QS al-Lail (92):17–18 reinforces the relation of *tazkiyah* with *taqwā* while also displaying one of the paths through which it is realized. This verse describes *al-atqā* (the most God-conscious) as one who spends his wealth in order to purify himself. Here the root *w-q-y* (*atqā*) and the root *z-k-w* (*yatazakkā*) are not only adjacent but predicated of the same subject, namely that the most God-conscious person is the one who purifies himself through his wealth. This context shows that *tazkiyah* can be realized through the giving of wealth, which links the purification of the soul with an act of social worship.

QS Maryam (19):13 reinforces the relation of *tazkiyah* with *taqwā* from a distinctive angle. Within the series of qualities bestowed upon Yaḥyā, the root *z-k-w* (*zakāh*) and the root *w-q-y* (*taqiyy*) appear side by side as inner qualities predicated of one and the same figure. Unlike the anchor locus, which presents *z-k-w* in the form of an action (*zakkā/tazakkā*), here *zakāh* emerges as a quality of purity of the soul bestowed by Allah, alongside *ḥanān* (compassion) and *taqwā*. This context extends the evidence of the *tazkiyah-taqwā* relation into the prophetic-narrative domain, while at the same time affirming the additive character of *z-k-w* as goodness cultivated within the self, not mere cleansing.

QS al-A'lā (87):14–15 reinforces the relation of *tazkiyah* with *falāḥ* through a formula nearly identical to QS al-Syams. The repetition of the formula “*qad aflaḥa man...*” that links *tazkiyah* with *falāḥ* in two different surahs shows that this relation is not a contextual coincidence but a mutually reinforcing—indeed well-established—pattern. Further, the context of verse 15 adds a new dimension: here *tazkiyah* is linked to *ẓikr* and *ṣalāt*, which are ritual acts of worship. A comparison of QS al-Lail and QS al-A'lā shows that *tazkiyah* is realized through various paths, whether through wealth or through worship, all of which affirm the additive-constructive character of

the root *z-k-w*: purification through the cultivation of the soul by means of works, not merely passive cleansing.

QS al-Taubah (9):103 presents *tazkiyah* in a direct coordinative relation with *taṭhīr*. The pairing of the two roots through the *wāw* ‘*aṭf*, with the same subject and object, makes this verse the principal locus for analyzing the *tazkiyah-taṭhīr* relation that will be elaborated in the following section. Contextually, this verse once again confirms the connection of *tazkiyah* with almsgiving from wealth, which also appears in QS al-Lail.

QS al-Baqarah (2):232 reinforces the same relation through a comparative construction: *zālikum azkā lakum wa aṭhar*. The pairing of *azkā* with *aṭhar* in a context different from QS al-Taubah—here concerning the ethics of family relations rather than almsgiving as in the context of QS al-Taubah—provides evidence that the relation of *z-k-w* and *ṭ-h-r* is cross-contextual and not bound to one particular situation.

The mapping of the anchor loci above gives rise to two contextual implications for the reconstruction of the field. First, the three structurally densest loci—al-A’lā (87), al-Syams (91), and al-Lail (92)—are short Makkan surahs that are adjacent in the arrangement of the *muṣḥaf* and belong to the early period of revelation. This concentration signals that the articulation of *tazkiyah* as a process of the soul had already taken shape from the early Makkan layer of revelation, with al-Syams as the most dominant point of articulation. Second, the key relations of *tazkiyah* with *taqwā*, *falāḥ*, and *taṭhīr* are each supported by more than one locus across differing contexts. This cross-contextual evidence reinforces the finding that the relations that emerge are not derived from a single verse but form a repeatedly confirmed pattern.

It is important, however, to attend to the relational meaning that becomes clearly evident in QS al-Najm (53):32. Although this verse displays the root *z-k-w* (*tuzakkū*) and *w-q-y* (*ittaqā*) as in the anchor loci, the meaning of *z-k-w* here shifts: *tuzakkū anfusakum* does not mean the praiseworthy act of purifying the soul, but rather the blameworthy claim or presumption of purity over oneself. This shift affirms that the membership of a term in the field is determined not by the mere occurrence of the root, but by its relational meaning in context. Further, this verse confirms the duality of the subject of purification: the prohibition against claiming one’s own purity, accompanied by the affirmation that only God knows who is truly God-conscious, situates *tazkiyah* as a process that must not be reduced to self-praise but rests upon a divine role that transcends human claims.

With the contextual function of *tazkiyah* and its anchor loci now established, the subsequent analysis shifts from “how *tazkiyah* means in context” toward “how

tazkiyah relates to the terms around it”, namely the reconstruction of the intertextual and oppositional relations that form the structure of the field.

Relational Reconstruction: The Layered Structure of the *Tazkiyah* Field

After the contextual function of *tazkiyah* has been established, the next step is to map its relations with the terms that form its semantic field. This mapping requires a relational framework that is not narrowly fixed on the syntagmatic-paradigmatic dichotomy. Following a principle formulated by Jules Marouzeau and adopted by Izutsu as a basis for contextual analysis—“to bring together, compare, and put in relation all the terms that resemble, oppose, and correspond with each other”—the semantic field of *tazkiyah* is mapped through three kinds of relations that complement one another: the relation of resemblance, which displays partial synonymy; the relation of opposition, which displays antonymy; and the relation of correspondence, which displays consecutive as well as complementary connections between terms.¹³

Distinguishing these three kinds of relations is important because not every membership in the field is built through the same mechanism. A term such as *taṭhīr* enters the field through the relation of resemblance (partial synonym of *tazkiyah*), *tadsiyah* through the relation of opposition (direct antonym), whereas *falāḥ*, *taqwā*, and *fujūr* enter through the relation of correspondence in its various aspects (consecutive, complementary, or mediated). By mapping these three kinds of relations distinctly, the structure of the field is read not as a flat list of seven terms, but as a configuration in which each member occupies its own functional position.

The Relation of Resemblance: Tazkiyah and Taṭhīr in a Relation of Inclusion

On the axis of resemblance, *taṭhīr* is the term closest to *tazkiyah*. This is shown through the pairing of the two using the *wāw atf* in QS al-Taubah (9):103 with the same subject and object. A second piece of evidence comes through the comparative construction *azkā wa aṭhar* in QS al-Baqarah (2):232 in a different context. Two different contexts—almsgiving from wealth and the ethics of family relations—reinforce that the relation between the two does not stop at a single situation but is a systemic pattern.

The two are not perfect synonyms, however, but near-synonyms that can be tested through substitution. Can *ṭahhara* replace *zakkā* in QS al-Syams (91):9 without a change in meaning? The resulting substitution would certainly not be

¹³ Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, 36.

smooth if the verse were read as *qad aflaha man ṭabharahā*, because it would eliminate the “cultivating” dimension that is inherent only in *zakkā*, leaving only the “cleansing” dimension. This shows that the two differ at the level of basic orientation. This distinction of orientation is reinforced by QS al-Aḥzāb (33):33, which explains *taṭhīr* with the expression *li-yuṣḥiba ‘ankum al-rijs* (to remove filth from you). The verb *aḏhaba* (to remove) is purely subtractive, without any element of addition.¹⁴

Yet the *tazkiyah-taṭhīr* relation is more accurately formulated not as two equal and separate movements, but as a relation of inclusion. *Tazkiyah*, as the center of the field, is the broader concept: it encompasses the dimension of cleansing that constitutes the core of *taṭhīr*, and then adds the dimension of cultivation that is not contained in *taṭhīr* alone. It is precisely this inclusion that explains the pairing of the two in QS 9:103: *taṭhīr* names the cleansing component explicitly (almsgiving cleanses the soul of the disease of stinginess and excessive love of the world—*ḥubb al-dunyā*), while *tazkiyah* adds the cultivating component (almsgiving cultivates generosity and blessing within the soul). The pairing of the two is therefore not rhetorical repetition but structural completion: one word names what is discarded, the other names what is cultivated, and together the two depict a single, integral process of purification.

The Relation of Opposition: Tazkiyah and Tadsiyah in a Spatial-Metaphorical Contrast

On the axis of opposition, *tadsiyah* is the direct antonym of *tazkiyah*. The decisive evidence is the structure of *muqābalah* in QS al-Syams (91):9–10, in which the four elements are paired oppositionally with precision: *qad aflaha* facing *qad khāba*, *man* with *man*, and *zakkāhā* with *dassāhā*. Because the pair *aflaha-khāba* is already standard as an antonym in the Qur’an, and the two occupy the same parallel position as *zakkā-dassā*, *zakkā-dassā* can also be understood structurally as an antonymic pair. It is the text itself that places them so, such that this relation is not inferred from outside but displayed by the structure of the verse.

This opposition is of a distinctive spatial-metaphorical kind, and it is precisely here that one of the interesting findings of this analysis lies. *Tazkiyah* carries the image of growth upward: the root *z-k-w* is grounded in *al-namā’*, which metaphorically points to upward vertical movement—the soul cultivated and elevated toward goodness. *Tadsiyah* carries the exact opposite image: the root *d-s-s* lexically means *dukhūl al-syai’ taḥta khafā’ wa sirr* (the entry of something into obscurity).¹⁵

14 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-‘Arab*, vol. 1, pp. 393–94.

15 Ibn Fāris, *Mu‘jam Maqāyis Al-Lughah*, vol. 2, p. 256.

Al-Rāḡib al-Aṣḡahānī sharpens this meaning by linking *dassāhā* to the image of a soul buried and concealed beneath disobedience.¹⁶ Thus *tadsiyah* metaphorically points to downward vertical movement—the soul buried, debased, and interred beneath sin.

This spatial contrast reveals that the field of *tazkiyah* is arranged along a morally charged vertical axis. It is no coincidence that the Qur'an chose the root *d-s-s* as the antonym of *z-k-w* in QS al-Syams, even though there are other, more common lexical antonyms (such as *dannasa*, meaning to defile). The choice of *dassā* with its image of burial serves a rhetorical-conceptual function: it makes the *tazkiyah-tadsiyah* contrast not merely “to purify vs. to defile,” but “to elevate vs. to submerge.” The implication is that the soul, in the Qur'anic view, has a position that can rise or fall, and the human being's choice of action (*zakkā* or *dassā*) determines the direction of this vertical movement. This spatial image enriches the understanding of *tazkiyah* far beyond what is captured by an ordinary translation such as “purification.” This analysis captures a dimension of meaning that is disclosed only through a relational analysis of its direct antonym.

The Relation of Correspondence: Tazkiyah and Falāḥ

On the axis of correspondence, the pair *tazkiyah-falāḥ* is a paradigmatic case. *Falāḥ* (root *f-l-ḥ*) stands as the positive consequence of *tazkiyah*, established by the syntactic structure of QS al-Syams (91):9 (*qad aflaḥa man zakkāhā*) and reinforced by the nearly identical formula in QS al-A'lā (87):14 (*qad aflaḥa man tazakkā*). The repetition of the formula “*qad aflaḥa man...*” that links *tazkiyah* with *falāḥ* in two different surahs shows that this relation is not a contextual coincidence but may be said to be an established pattern in the diction of the Qur'an: the action of *tazkiyah* leads its agent to *falāḥ*. Its relation is causal-consecutive and textually manifested: *tazkiyah* is the action and *falāḥ* is its fruit.

Falāḥ, as Ibn Manẓūr expresses it, is grounded in the meaning of *al-fauz wa al-najāḥ wa al-baqā' fi al-na'im wa al-khair* (success, salvation, and permanence in bliss and goodness).¹⁷ What is noteworthy lexically-conceptually is that both roots (*z-k-w* and *f-l-ḥ*) point to a constructive-additive movement toward something: *z-k-w* means to cultivate goodness, *f-l-ḥ* means to attain success and permanence in goodness. This conceptual resonance—both culminating in the addition and continuance of goodness—gives semantic texture to the consecutive relation *tazkiyah-falāḥ*: the additive purification of the soul (*tazkiyah*) bears the fruit of lasting success (*falāḥ*), not fleeting goodness that quickly vanishes. The opposite side completes

16 Al-Aṣḡahānī, *Al-Mufradāt Fi Garīb Al-Qur'an*, 314.

17 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, vol. 2, p. 547.

the picture: *tadsiyah* (the burial of the soul) bears the fruit of *khaibah* (loss and the thwarting of attainment).

On the negative side, *khaibah* (root *kh-y-b*, meaning *al-ḥirmān*, to be barred from what is sought)¹⁸ stands as the antonym of *falāḥ* through the structure *wa qad khāba man dassāhā* (QS al-Syams 91:10). Its membership in the field is mediated: it becomes the negative consequence of *tazkiyah* through a double bridge—as the antonym of *falāḥ* and as the consequence of *tadsiyah*. It is precisely this indirect connection that distinguishes it from *falāḥ*, whose relation is direct-textual, yet its membership remains accountable to the structure of *muqābalah* in QS al-Syams.

The Potential Relation: Taqwā and Fajūr as the Soul's Innate Endowment

The pair *taqwā-fajūr* occupies a distinctive structural position in the field, in which both correspond to *tazkiyah* not as synonym, antonym, or consequence, but as innate potentials that precede the action of purification. The two appear in QS al-Syams (91):8 as the two inclinations inspired into the soul, that is, innate conditions present prior to the action of *tazkiyah/tadsiyah*, not as its consequence. This placement determines their structural position as a layer of potential, and at the same time prevents a reading of the *tazkiyah* field as a linear sequence of stages: *tazkiyah* is not a step toward *taqwā* in sequence, but a response to the potential of *taqwā* already implanted in the soul.

Taqwā (root *w-q-y*, to prevent something from something else)¹⁹ stands on the positive side as a potential which, when actualized through *tazkiyah*, carries the soul toward *falāḥ*. The *tazkiyah-taqwā* relation is reinforced by three independent, converging loci. First, QS al-Lail (92):17–18 predicates *yatazakkā* of *al-atqā*: the most God-conscious person is the one who purifies himself through the giving of wealth. Second, QS Maryam (19):13 pairs the two roots as qualities bestowed upon Yaḥyā: *wa ḥanānan min ladunnā wa zakātan wa kāna taqīyyā*. Here *zakāh* appears not as an action but as an inner quality—purity as a trait inherent in a prophet—alongside *ḥanān* and *taqwā*. This context extends the evidence of the *tazkiyah-taqwā* relation into the prophetic-narrative domain, and affirms that the two qualities resonate with each other as positive dimensions of the soul cultivated by divine grace. Third, this cross-contextual convergence—parenetic (QS al-Lail), legislative-spiritual (QS al-Syams), and narrative (QS Maryam)—shows that the *tazkiyah-taqwā* relation is a systemic pattern in the diction of the Qur'an.

18 Ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs Al-Lughah*, vol. 2, p. 232.

19 Al-Farāhīdī, *Al-Ain*, vol. 4, p. 394; Ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs Al-Lughah*, vol. 6, p. 131.

Fujūr (root *f-j-r*, meaning the self's openness to disobedience)²⁰ stands on the negative side as a potential that must be overcome by *tazkiyah*. What is structurally important to note is that *fujūr* and *taqwā* share the same object as *tazkiyah*, namely the *nafs*. This distinguishes these two terms from concepts that are merely thematically close to the purification of the soul: *fujūr* and *taqwā* are not merely concepts that "relate" to *tazkiyah*, but the contents of the soul that are the target of the action of *tazkiyah*. *Tazkiyah* is the activity that develops the potential of *taqwā* and subdues the potential of *fujūr*; without these two potentials as raw material, *tazkiyah* has no object of operation.

A Methodological Note: Why Co-occurrence Does Not Always Mean the Same Relation

Before synthesizing the structure of the field, one methodological caution needs to be emphasized: not every verse that displays the co-occurrence of two roots automatically reinforces the same relation. Consider QS al-Najm (53):32: *fa-lā tuzakkū anfusakum huwa a'lamu bi-man ittaqā* (so do not consider yourselves pure; He knows best who is God-conscious). This verse displays the root *z-k-w* (*tuzakkū*) and *w-q-y* (*ittaqā*) within a single verse, as in the earlier anchor loci.

Upon examination, however, the meaning of *z-k-w* here shifts fundamentally. *Tuzakkū anfusakum* here does not mean the praiseworthy act of purifying the soul, but rather the blameworthy claim or presumption of purity over oneself. This shift of meaning is a modulation of relational meaning determined by the syntactic and situational context of the verse. The implication for the reconstruction of the field is that the membership of a term in the field is determined not by the mere occurrence of the root, but by the relational meaning it carries in a particular context. This is the principle that distinguishes semantic analysis from a mere concordance search.

Further, QS al-Najm (53):32 in fact reinforces another dimension of the *tazkiyah* field, namely the duality of the agent of purification: the prohibition against claiming one's own purity, accompanied by the affirmation that only God knows who is God-conscious, situates true *tazkiyah* as a process that must not be reduced to self-praise. This verse will be returned to in the discussion of the duality of the agent in the section on exegetical corroboration.

20 Ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs Al-Lughah*, vol. 4, p. 475.

Synthesis: The Layered Structure of the Tazkiyah Field

The mapping of the three kinds of relations above shows that the semantic field of *tazkiyah* is arranged not as a linear sequence but as a layered structure pivoting on opposition. The field's seven member terms occupy three structural layers, each split into a positive and a negative side:

Table 1. Members of the semantic field of *tazkiyah* and their structural functions

Structural layer	Positive side	Negative side	Anchor locus
Object		<i>nafs</i> (the soul)	QS 91:7
Potential (innate condition)	<i>taqwā</i>	<i>fujūr</i>	QS 91:8
Action (central term + synonym/antonym)	<i>tazkiyah</i> & <i>taṭhīr</i>	<i>tadsiyah</i>	QS 91:9–10; 9:103
Consequence (outcome)	<i>falāḥ</i>	<i>khaibah</i>	QS 91:9–10

Table 2. The kind of relation each term holds with *tazkiyah*

Term	Kind of relation	Decisive evidence
<i>taṭhīr</i>	Resemblance: partial synonym in a relation of inclusion	QS 9:103 (<i>wāw</i> 'atf); QS 2:232
<i>tadsiyah</i>	Opposition: direct antonym (spatial contrast)	QS 91:9–10 (<i>muqābalah</i>)
<i>taqwā</i>	Correspondence: complementary (positive potential)	QS 91:8; QS 92:17–18
<i>fujūr</i>	Correspondence: mediated opposition (negative potential sharing the object <i>nafs</i>)	QS 91:8
<i>falāḥ</i>	Correspondence: positive consecutive	QS 91:9; QS 87:14
<i>khaibah</i>	Correspondence: negative consecutive	QS 91:9–10

This structure is read in two directions. Vertically, it moves from the object (the soul), to its innate potential, to the action performed upon it, then to the consequence of that action, following the logic of the pericope QS al-Syams (91):7–10. Horizontally, each layer is split into a positive-negative axis of opposition, with *tazkiyah* and *tadsiyah* as the axis of action that determines the direction in which the soul develops. The layer of potential (*taqwā/fujūr*) precedes the layer of action, so that this structure is not a ladder of sequence but a relational framework: potential is the raw material, action is the response to it, and consequence is its fruit. The diagram in Figure 1 below visualizes this structure.

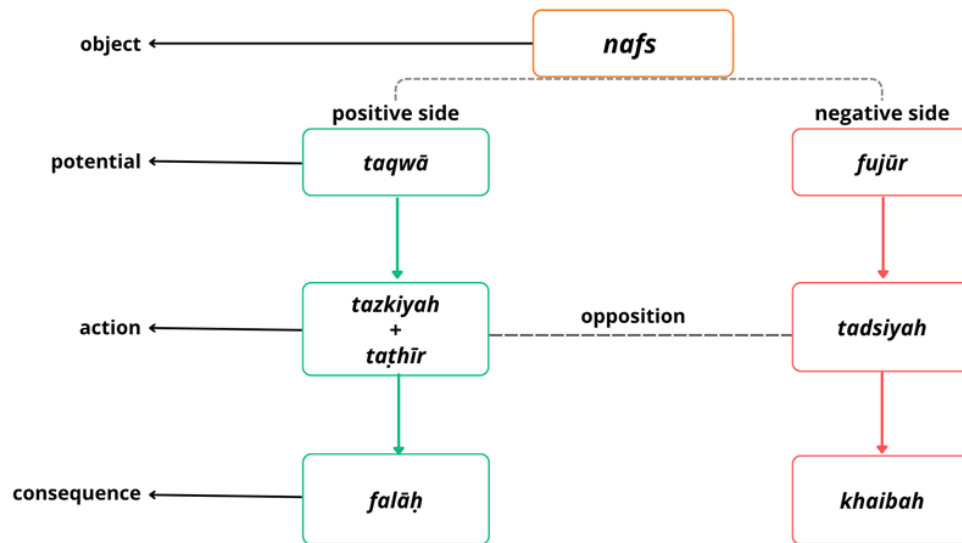


Figure 1. Compiled by the authors from the structural source QS al-Syams (91):7–10 (primary anchor locus) and the reinforcing loci: QS al-Lail (92):17–18, QS al-A'lā (87):14–15, QS al-Taubah (9):103, and QS al-Baqarah (2):232

The mapping of the field is not complete without affirming its boundaries. A number of terms thematically close to the purification of the soul turn out not to be members of the *tazkiyah* field, but rather centers of neighboring fields that only intersect with it at certain points. The root *ṣ-l-ḥ* (*iṣlāḥ/ṣalāḥ*) centers on the axis *ṣalāḥ–fasād* (goodness–corruption) and intersects only thematically. The root *t-w-b* (*taubah*) centers on the axis *taubah–iṣrār* (returning–persisting in sin) and intersects with the *tazkiyah* field at the locus QS al-Taubah (9):102–104, where *taubah* and *tazkiyah* appear within a single flow of spiritual transformation, yet the two remain parts of different fields. This affirmation of boundaries shows that the *tazkiyah* field has a sharp contour: it intersects with the field of rectification (*ṣalāḥ*) and the field of response to sin (*taubah*), but does not dissolve into them. With the structure of the field and its boundaries now reconstructed, the subsequent analysis tests the resilience of this reconstruction through corroboration from the exegetical tradition.

Exegetical Corroboration

The semantic reconstruction in the preceding sections yields three principal claims that need to be tested through the exegetical tradition: first, that *tazkiyah* contains a dimension of growth that goes beyond mere cleansing; second, that the *tazkiyah–taṭhīr* relation is one of inclusion (*tazkiyah* subsumes *taṭhīr* and then adds the dimension of cultivation); and third, that the *tazkiyah* field is arranged as a

layered structure with an axis of opposition centered on QS al-Syams (91):7–10. Four exegetes are selected because they represent different interpretive horizons: al-Ṭabarī (*riwāyah* orientation), Ibn Kašīr (synthesis of the prior exegetical tradition), Ibn ‘Āsyūr (conceptual precision), and al-Sa’dī (pedagogical-practical elaboration). The corroboration is examined at five anchor loci: QS al-Syams as the primary locus, and QS al-Taubah (9):103, al-Lail (92):17–18, al-A’lā (87):14–15, and al-Baqarah (2):232 as the reinforcing loci.

Corroboration of QS al-Syams (91):7–10: Structure and the Additive Character

At the primary locus, the exegetical corroboration strengthens two claims at once: the additive character of *tazkiyah* and the layered structure pivoting on opposition. The additive character receives its most straightforward support from al-Sa’dī, who interprets *zakkāhā* as a series of movements that do not stop at cleansing: he purifies the soul from sins and cleanses it of defects, then elevates it through obedience and raises it through beneficial knowledge and righteous deeds.²¹ The verbs *raqqā* and *‘allā* affirm the upward movement that is additive-constructive. This affirmation is reinforced from the opposite direction: al-Sa’dī explains that the one who performs *tadsiyah* upon his soul is the one who abandons what would perfect and cultivate it.²² The use of *yunammihā*—from the root *n-m-w*, identical with *al-namā’*—shows that the opposite of *tadsiyah*, namely *tazkiyah*, is understood as the *tanmiyah* (cultivation) of the soul.

The interpretations of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kašīr display a complementary dimension: *tazkiyah* is understood not as an additive movement separate from cleansing, but as a concept that encompasses cleansing and then surpasses it. al-Ṭabarī construes *zakkāhā* as multiplying its purification from disbelief and disobedience, and improving it through righteous deeds;²³ Ibn Kašīr construes it as purification through obedience and cleansing from bad character.²⁴ This formulation refines, without nullifying, the additive-subtractive distinction. The *tazkiyah-taḥīr* relation is more accurately formulated as inclusion—*tazkiyah* encompasses the dimension of cleansing and adds the dimension of cultivation—than as two equal, separate movements.

21 al-Sa’dī, *Tafsīr Al-Karīm Al-Raḥmān Fī Tafsīr Kalām Al-Mannān*, 926.

22 al-Sa’dī, 926.

23 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ Al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy Al-Qur’ān*, vol. 11, p. 587.

24 Ibn Kašīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-‘Aẓīm*, vol. 8, p. 412.

Corroboration of the layered structure comes from Ibn 'Āsyūr, who explicitly points to the presence of muḥassin al-ṭibāq (the rhetorical beauty of antithesis) recurring in the pericope, then himself enumerates the oppositional pairs: al-fujūr-al-taqwā, al-falāḥ-al-khaibah, and al-tazkiyah-al-tadsiyah.²⁵ The three pairs of opposition identified by Ibn 'Āsyūr correspond exactly to the three opposition-pivoting layers in the reconstruction of the field: the layer of potential, the layer of action, and the layer of consequence. The layered structure yielded by the semantic analysis is not a forced construction but a pattern already discerned by balāḡah (rhetorical) sensitivity to the internal coherence of the pericope. Ibn 'Āsyūr also confirms the placement of taqwā and fujūr as potentials that precede the action, interpreting alhamahā as the implanting of a faculty of recognition in the soul as the fruit of perfecting the creation of the human soul.²⁶ This is consistent with a reading of the field's structure as relational-layered, not linear-sequential.

al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kašīr also confirm the duality of the subject identified morphologically by both noting two possible readings of *zakkāhā*: the purification performed by God upon the soul and the purification performed by the human being upon himself,²⁷ with Ibn Kašīr citing the *riwāyah*: *aflaḥat nafsun zakkāhā Allāh*. This duality confirms the complementary divine-human structure in the concept of *tazkiyah* as it appears from the distribution of the causative and reflexive forms.

Corroboration of the Formulation of Inclusion: QS al-Taubah (9):103

The most straightforward confirmation of the formulation of inclusion comes from the interpretation of QS al-Taubah (9):103. Ibn 'Āsyūr explicitly maps the distinction of the two terms onto the technical terminology of the Islamic tradition: *tutahhiruhum* as an indication of *maqām al-takhliyah* (the stage of emptying oneself of evil) and *tuzakkīhim* as an indication of *maqām al-taḥliyah* (the stage of filling oneself with goodness), with *al-takhliyah* preceding *al-taḥliyah* within a single process.²⁸ He also defines *al-tazkiyah* as “making something grow with much goodness.” This definition places the additive component at the core of the meaning of *tazkiyah*, and shows that the formulation of inclusion has already been discerned by exegetical sensitivity with conceptual precision.

A similar confirmation appears in al-Ṭabarī and al-Sa'dī through their choice of verb for *tuzakkīhim*. al-Ṭabarī construes it as cultivating and elevating them from the lowly station of the hypocrites toward the station of the sincere.²⁹ The use of

25 Ibn 'Āsyūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa Al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, pp. 371–72.

26 Ibn 'Āsyūr, vol. 30, p. 370.

27 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy Al-Qur'ān*, vol. 11, p. 587; Ibn Kašīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, vol. 8, p. 412.

28 Ibn 'Āsyūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa Al-Tanwīr*, vol. 11, p. 23.

29 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy Al-Qur'ān*, vol. 6, p. 111.

tunammī gives direct confirmation of the additive character of *tazkiyah*, while *tarfa'ū* activates the vertical-spatial dimension that resonates with the contrast of “elevating upward” versus “burying downward” in the *tazkiyah–tadsiyah* relation. al-Sa’dī broadens this additive understanding into four dimensions predicated of *tuzakkīhim*: the addition of good character, righteous deeds, worldly and otherworldly reward, and the cultivation of wealth.³⁰ Ibn Kašīr, in a more juristically nuanced orientation, directs the discussion of this verse primarily to the jurisprudential dimension of zakat as an obligation rendered to Islamic authority, and clarifies that the reading of the verse is not limited to the context of particular *ṣaḥābah* (The messenger’s companions) but applies generally.³¹

Corroboration of the Tazkiyah–Taḥwā Relation: QS al-Lail (92):17–18

The affirmation of the additive character of *tazkiyah* receives further confirmation in the interpretation of QS al-Lail (92):17–18. Ibn ‘Āsyūr gives a direct definition of *al-tazakkī* as earnestly striving for the growth of goodness.³² The consistency of this definition with the formulation *al-ziyādah min al-khair* that he uses for QS al-Taubah (9):103 shows that the additive understanding of *tazkiyah* is not an occasional interpretation but a systemic distinction he applies consistently. Ibn ‘Āsyūr also explains the syntactic function of *yatazakkā* as a *ḥāl* of the giver of wealth³³—one who gives in a state of hoping for the growth of goodness and reward—clarifying the dimension of intention as a constitutive element of *tazkiyah*, which is relevant to the discussion of the duality of the subject.

al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kašīr, in a more concise orientation, emphasize the dimension of cleansing from sin in *yatazakkā*,³⁴ while al-Sa’dī combines the two dimensions in a single formulation: purifying the soul and cleansing it of sins and defects, with *tazkiyah* preceding *taḥīr*.³⁵ It should be noted honestly that the four exegetes do not explicitly discuss the structural relation between *al-atqā* and *yatazakkā* as two mutually predicating qualities. The exegetical corroboration here is more straightforward for the additive dimension of *tazkiyah* than for the structural *tazkiyah–taḥwā* relation; the latter continues to rest on the textual analysis of the verse’s structure as set out in the earlier contextual analysis.

30 al-Sa’dī, *Tafsīr Al-Karīm Al-Raḥmān Fī Tafsīr Kalām Al-Mannān*, 350.

31 Ibn Kašīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-‘Aẓīm*, vol. 4, p. 207.

32 Ibn ‘Āsyūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa Al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 391.

33 Ibn ‘Āsyūr, vol. 30, p. 391.

34 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ Al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy Al-Qur’ān*, vol. 11, p. 608; Ibn Kašīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-‘Aẓīm*, vol. 8, p. 422.

35 al-Sa’dī, *Tafsīr Al-Karīm Al-Raḥmān Fī Tafsīr Kalām Al-Mannān*, 927.

Corroboration of Tazkiyah as the Beginning of Transformation: QS al-A'lā (87):14–15

The interpretation of QS al-A'lā (87):14–15 confirms that *tazkiyah* can be understood as the foundation that precedes other expressions of religiosity. Ibn 'Āsyūr maps the three qualities mentioned in sequence in the verse (*tazakkā, ḡakara isma rabbih, ṣallā*) as a *tartīb tawallud* (a sequence according to generation): removing the soul's filth, bringing forth knowledge of God, then turning oneself toward obedience.³⁶ *Tazkiyah*, in this mapping, is understood as the root that gives birth to the two subsequent stages.

It should be noted that in this verse Ibn 'Āsyūr emphasizes the dimension of removing filth as the principal component of *tazkiyah*, differing from the additive emphasis in QS al-Tauba (9):103 and QS al-Lail (92):17–18. This variation of emphasis is not an inconsistency but in fact shows clearly why the formulation of inclusion is more accurate. Ibn 'Āsyūr's emphasis is determined by the context of each verse: additive when the verse speaks of the positive quality of *al-atqā* who purifies himself (QS al-Lail), subtractive when the verse presents *tazkiyah* as the initial stage that gives birth to *ḡikr* and *ṣalāt* (QS al-A'lā), and explicitly both when the verse pairs it with *taḥīr* (QS al-Tauba). It is precisely Ibn 'Āsyūr's freedom to foreground a different dimension according to context without contradicting himself that shows that *tazkiyah*, in his understanding, is indeed a concept that subsumes both dimensions at once, so that the exegete can draw out the most relevant dimension without reducing the term.

al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kaṣīr, and al-Sa'dī present a convergent confirmation, construing *tazakkā* as cleansing from disbelief and bad character accompanied by deeds that are pleasing to God.³⁷ What is worth underlining is that the definition of *falāḥ* offered by Ibn 'Āsyūr for this verse—a person's success in what he aspires to—gives exegetical confirmation of the interpretation of *falāḥ* as success and permanence in goodness, as already set out in the earlier lexical analysis.³⁸ Ibn 'Āsyūr also affirms that the meaning of *tazakkā* encompasses monotheism (*tauḥīd*) and readiness for righteous deeds, including *zakāt al-amwāl*, which reinforces the breadth of the meaning of *tazkiyah* across contexts.

36 Ibn 'Āsyūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa Al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 288.

37 al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy Al-Qur'ān*, vol. 11, p. 513; Ibn Kaṣīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm*, vol. 8, p. 381; al-Sa'dī, *Taisīr Al-Karīm Al-Raḥmān Fī Tafsīr Kalām Al-Mannān*, 920.

38 Ibn 'Āsyūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa Al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 287.

Corroboration of the Cross-Contextual z-k-w-ṭ-h-r Relation: QS al-Baqarah (2):232

The pairing of *azkā* and *aṭhar* in QS al-Baqarah (2):232 presents the relation of the two roots in a non-ritual context (the ethics of family relations), differing from the earlier verses set in the context of almsgiving or worship. The persistence of the distinction between the two across contexts reinforces the validity of the formulation of inclusion as a systemic pattern. Ibn ‘Āsyūr firmly distinguishes the two terms: *azkā* points to growth and abundance, whereas *aṭhar* points to being cleaner from the sources of enmity and deep-rooted hatred.³⁹ This distinction supports the distinction of orientation consistent with the formulation of the field: *azkā* additive, *aṭhar* subtractive. Ibn ‘Āsyūr, however, offers two possible readings: that the two carry different semantic loads (as explained earlier), or that *azkā* concerns worldly benefit while *aṭhar* relates to safety from sin in the hereafter.⁴⁰ The acknowledgment of these two possibilities is not a confusion but methodological caution, and the semantic analysis may select the first reading on the basis of the evidence of the relational-meaning analysis above and the exegetes’ interpretation of QS al-Taubah (9):103, which distinguishes the meanings of *tuṭahhiruhum* and *tuzakkīhim*.

al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kašīr, and al-Sa’dī convergently construe *aṭhar* in the dimension of cleansing: the purifying of the heart from *al-ribah* (doubt/suspicion) and from family rancor.⁴¹ This convergence reinforces the subtractive character of *taṭhīr* even in a context unconnected with ritual worship—cleansing the heart of suspicion is parallel to cleansing the soul of the disease of stinginess (QS 9:103) or bad character (QS 87:14–15). The universality of this pattern affirms that the distinction of orientation between *z-k-w* and *ṭ-h-r* in the *tazkiyah* field holds across contexts, not limited to one kind of act.

The convergence of the four exegetes, across the five anchor loci examined, yields a robust corroboration of the three principal claims of the reconstruction: the growth dimension of *tazkiyah*, the inclusion formulation of *tazkiyah-taṭhīr*, and the layered, opposition-pivoting structure centered on QS al-Syams. Where the exegesis offers more than one reading, the semantic analysis does not submit to a single choice but presents those readings and provides a textual basis for the one more supported by convergent evidence. Thus, exegesis functions as a dialogue partner and an instrument of quality control over the reconstruction, consistent with a hierarchy of evidence that places the Qur’an as the primary corpus and exegesis as interpretive corroboration.

³⁹ Ibn ‘Āsyūr, vol. 2, p. 428.

⁴⁰ Ibn ‘Āsyūr, vol. 2, p. 428.

⁴¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ Al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy Al-Qur’ān*, vol. 2, p. 572; Ibn Kašīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur’ān Al-‘Aẓīm*, vol. 1, p. 632; al-Sa’dī, *Taisīr Al-Karīm Al-Rahmān Fī Tafsīr Kalām Al-Mannān*, 103–4.

Toward a Qur'anic Anthropology of Moral Formation

The preceding reconstruction shows that *tazkiyah al-nafs* is not only a concept relevant to Islamic psychology, but also a key entry point into a Qur'anic anthropology of moral formation. By "anthropology" this article refers to the Qur'an's account of the human being as a morally addressable creature: a self that receives guidance, struggles with inner potentials, acts upon itself, and moves toward either felicity or loss. The semantic field of *tazkiyah* therefore does more than supply an ethical vocabulary. It discloses a structured account of how the human person is formed within the moral world of the Qur'an. This is consistent with the broader semantic insight that Qur'anic concepts do not stand as isolated lexical units, but form relational networks that disclose a worldview.⁴²

This anthropology is most clearly visible in the layered structure of QS al-Syams (91):7–10. The *nafs* functions as the locus of moral struggle. *Taqwā* and *fujūr* mark the inner potentials of the self, while *tazkiyah* and *tadsiyah* name two divergent actions performed upon it. *Falāḥ* and *khaibah* then identify the teleological outcomes of these opposed movements. This structure shows that *tazkiyah* is not a linear stage in a spiritual ladder, nor merely a private act of self-cleansing. It is a process of moral formation in which the self is cultivated, redirected, and evaluated in relation to divine guidance. The distinction between *tazkiyah* and *tathīr* is crucial here: *tathīr* primarily names the removal of impurity, whereas *tazkiyah* includes purification while also adding the dimension of growth, cultivation, and moral elevation.

This reading also clarifies the article's contribution to Islamic psychology. Existing models of Islamic psychology have rightly emphasized the importance of the soul, moral discipline, spiritual growth, and faith-sensitive therapeutic frameworks.⁴³ The present study does not replace those models, nor does it claim to offer a finalized clinical framework. Its contribution lies at a prior conceptual level: it reconstructs the Qur'anic semantic architecture that should inform later psychological and therapeutic theorization. In this sense, *tazkiyah al-nafs* should first be understood as a Qur'anic

42 Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*; Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of The Qur'anic Weltanschauung*; Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Darrāz, *The Moral World of the Qur'an*, trans. Danielle Robinson and Rebecca Masterton (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008); Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, ed. Ebrahim Moosa, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

43 Rothman and Coyle, "Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Soul"; York Al-Karam, "Islamic Psychology: Towards a 21st Century Definition and Conceptual Framework"; Skinner, "Traditions, Paradigms and Basic Concepts in Islamic Psychology"; Elzamzamy, Bader, and Bilge Bircan, "Contemporary Scholarship on Classical Islamic Psychology: A Scoping Review"; Khan et al., "The Integration of Islamic Psychology with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)"; Bagus Riyono, *Tazkiya Therapy in Islāmic Psychotherapy*, 1st ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781032717340>.

model of moral formation before it is translated into psychospiritual constructs, assessment tools, or clinical interventions.

Conclusion

This article has reconstructed *tazkiyah al-nafs* as a layered Qur'anic semantic field rather than as a simple synonym for purification. The analysis shows that *tazkiyah* is organized around a structured set of relations: *nafs* as the moral object, *taqwā* and *fujūr* as inner potentials, *tazkiyah* and *tadsiyah* as opposed actions upon the self, and *falāḥ* and *khaibah* as divergent outcomes. This structure demonstrates that *tazkiyah* is not a loose ethical term, but part of a relational Qur'anic grammar of moral formation. It names a process in which the self is not only cleansed from corruption, but also cultivated, elevated, and oriented toward *falāḥ*.

The exegetical corroboration strengthens this semantic reconstruction. The selected readings of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kaṣīr, Ibn 'Āsyūr, and al-Sa'dī show that the additive and oppositional dimensions of *tazkiyah* are not imposed externally upon the Qur'anic text. They are already visible within the interpretive tradition. The distinction between *tazkiyah* and *tathīr* is especially important here. *Tathīr* primarily names the removal of impurity, whereas *tazkiyah* includes purification while adding the dimension of cultivation, growth, and moral elevation. Likewise, the opposition between *tazkiyah* and *tadsiyah* reveals a vertical moral movement: the self may be cultivated upward toward felicity, or buried beneath corruption and loss.

The theoretical contribution of this reconstruction is therefore pre-clinical and conceptual. It provides a Qur'anic semantic architecture that may inform Islamic psychology, but it does not claim to offer a finalized therapeutic model. Before *tazkiyah al-nafs* can be translated into clinical constructs, assessment tools, or psychotherapeutic interventions, its Qur'anic structure must first be understood with conceptual precision. Future research may translate this semantic structure into measurable constructs and practical models of Islamic psychotherapy, but such clinical operationalization requires separate empirical validation. The present article thus offers a textual and theoretical foundation for that future work, while keeping its claims within the limits of semantic and exegetical evidence.

Data Availability Statement

All data supporting the findings of this study are contained within the article.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design. Nur Ardhiyansyah K. Ibrahim, Zulfi Fadhlurrahman, Farhani Azkia, and Putri Salsabila Azkya performed material preparation, data collection, and analysis. The first draft of the manuscript was written by Nur Ardhiyansyah K. Ibrahim, and all authors commented on previous versions. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this article.

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