

Received	20 January 2026	Accepted	17 April 2026
Revised	14 May 2026	Published	30 June 2026
Volume	8	Pages	102-111

**THE HEALING EFFECT OF DHIKR IN SUFI PSYCHOTHERAPY: AN
EXAMINATION OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST DEPRESSION,
STRESS, AND MENTAL DISEASES**

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ABSTRACT

Today, mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and stress have reached the level of a social epidemic. The study investigates, in the light of verses from the Qur'an and the noble hadiths, the idea that the roots of these illnesses lie in the afat(s) (vices) that settle in the heart of the nafs (soul), and that purification from these afat(s) (vices) is possible only through the purification of the nafs (soul). It highlights that dhikr (repetition of the name of Allah) cleanses the ailments of the nafs (soul) by bringing down the lights of Allah's rahma (mercy) and fazl (virtue) into the heart, leading a person to happiness in both this world and the Hereafter. This study examines the healing impact of dhikr (repetition of the name of Allah)—one of the essential devotional practices of the Islamic spiritual tradition—on the psychological and spiritual ailments that have become widespread in modern times. It explains the wisdom behind dhikr (repetition of the name of Allah) being regarded as the most exalted of acts of worship by noting its role in illuminating the heart and diminishing the influence of Satan. The research suggests that stress is a subconscious accumulation arising from unresolved feelings of vengeance, and that conflicts experienced in human relationships are a result of the afat(s) (vices) of the nafs (soul). The study concludes that wishing to reach Allah, dhikr and pledging allegiance to a murshid (spiritual guide), and maintaining a regular practice of dhikr (through repetition of the name of Allah) may be regarded as an effective and alternative method for addressing modern psychological disorders.

Keywords: Dhikr, Depression, Stress, Sufi Healing, Islamic Psychotherapy

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, mental health problems have become one of the most significant issues affecting human life. According to data from the World Health Organization, depression and anxiety disorders affect millions of people worldwide. (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023) Although modern medicine and the science of psychology have developed various treatment methods for these conditions, the length of treatment processes, their side effects, and the difficulty of achieving complete recovery have increased interest in alternative therapeutic approaches. (Akib et al., 2025; Çetinkaya & Billings, 2024).

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In recent years, empirical studies have shown that religious and spiritual interventions grounded in Islamic and Sufi traditions—such as dhikr, Qur'an recitation, and repentance—can contribute to reductions in anxiety and depressive symptoms and to improvements in subjective well-being when used together with conventional treatments (Anwar et al., 2024; Maslahat & Laila, 2022; Subandi et al., 2022; Zahraa & Sulistyarini, 2023).

The primary sources of Islam, the Holy Qur'an and the noble hadiths, contain profound insights regarding mental health and spiritual healing. In particular, practices such as the purification of the nafs (cleansing the soul) and dhikr within the Sufi tradition have been used for centuries by Muslims as means for both spiritual development and the attainment of psychological balance. (Al-Ghazālī, 2004).

The aim of this study is to examine the therapeutic impact of dhikr, as presented in Islamic sources, within the context of modern psychological disorders, and to explore the role of the purification of the nafs in the treatment of depression, stress, and other mental illnesses. By evaluating classical Islamic texts alongside contemporary psycho-spiritual approaches, the research seeks to present the therapeutic effects of dhikr from an academic perspective. (Subandi et al., 2022).

THE CONCEPTS OF ILLNESS AND HEALING IN THE QUR'AN

The Holy Qur'an is described as a divine guide revealed for the healing of the human nafs. In verse 57 of Surah Yunus, it is stated: "O mankind! There has come to you indeed an admonition from your Lord and a healing for what is in your breasts (vices in your soul's hearts) and Return (submission of spirit, physical body, soul and free will to Allah) and Mercy (light) for the believers." (Qur'ān 10:57) This verse indicates that the Qur'an possesses not only physical but also spiritual shifa (healing) qualities.

In Islamic literature, the concept of the heart is not merely a physical organ but also the spiritual and emotional center of the human being. (Qur'an 7:179) The illnesses that settle in the heart of the nafs include negative emotions, behaviors, and thoughts such as resentment, hatred, envy, anger, and arrogance. (Cebecioğlu, 2009; Özköse, 2007) The treatment of these illnesses takes place through the process of purification known as the purification of the nafs, which refers to the spiritual cleansing of the nafs. (Al-Ghazālī, 2004; Boran, 2025).

In verse 9 of Surah Ash-Shams, it is stated, "Whoever had cleansed it (half of the vices of his soul's heart) had reached Salvation," (Qur'ān 91:9–10), emphasizing that the purification of the nafs is a fundamental prerequisite for salvation. In the light of such verses, it becomes clear that Islam's approach to psychological illnesses is essentially a project of the purification of the nafs. (Al-Ghazālī, 2004, Boran, 2025)

THE SOURCE OF STRESS: AFAT(S) (VICES) OF THE NAFS AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

In modern psychology, stress is defined as a reaction that an individual exhibits in response to internal and external demands. (Selye, 1956) From an Islamic perspective, however, the root of

stress lies in unresolved feelings of vengeance and the subconscious accumulations that arise from the *afat(s)* of the *nafs*. (Boran, 2025)

The Three Fundamental Sources of Stress

There are three fundamental sources of the stress and inner disturbances experienced by a person:

1. **Inner struggle between the *nafs* and the *ruh* (spirit).**
The conflict between the commands of the *nafs* and the guidance of the *ruh* (spirit) keeps a person under constant tension. tension (Al-Ghazālī, 2004; Boran, 2025).
2. **Disagreements and conflicts that occur with other people in the external world.**
When individuals do not engage in the purification of the soul, the vices within their souls drive them into conflicts with others. Whenever a person behaves wrongly toward someone, such behavior inevitably stems from the soul and from Satan. The one who is subjected to this wrongful act, however, cannot tolerate it within his own soul and feels a need for revenge. This creates a vicious cycle that leads to an increase in stress and inner unrest (Boran, 2025).
3. **The attitude a person displays toward the commands and prohibitions of Allah.**
When individuals do not engage in the purification of the *nafs*, the *afat(s)* within their *nafs(s)* drive them into conflicts with others. Whenever a person behaves wrongly toward someone, such behavior inevitably stems from the *nafs* and from Satan. The one who is subjected to this wrongful act, however, cannot tolerate it within his own *nafs* and feels a need for revenge. This creates a vicious cycle that leads to an increase in stress and inner unrest. (Boran, 2025).

Unfulfilled Revenge and Its Transformation into a Grudge

The desire for revenge does not bring peace even when it is carried out, for it results in the committing of a sin. When revenge cannot be taken, however, the situation becomes even more complicated. The unfulfilled desire for revenge gradually turns into resentment. Grudge is a form of chronic stress, and it negatively affects both a person's spiritual and physical well-being. This state of stress and negative thinking transforms into depression or masked depression, eventually manifesting itself in physical illnesses. (Al-Ghazālī).

The Relationship with Allah and Spiritual Tranquility

In one's relationship with Allah, a person initially does not experience inner happiness because he does not fulfill the commands of Allah. Inevitably, both the *ruh* and Allah will subject the person to a form of distress that he does not recognize. Without even realizing it, he begins to ask himself, "Why am I feeling anxious?" and "Why am I uncomfortable?" In reality, because he does not fulfill the commands and prohibitions of Allah, Allah Almighty and the *ruh* impose this inner discomfort upon him. (Al-Ghazālī, 2004, Boran,2025).

Allah Almighty has established all His commands so that people may experience the joy, peace, and happiness that come from fulfilling them. Likewise, He has prohibited certain actions so

that by refraining from them, people may taste the satisfaction and happiness of loyalty and obedience to Allah. What Islam expects from human beings is that they attain an enduring state of happiness—within their inner world, in their interactions with others, and in their relationship with Allah through His commands. (Boran, 2025).

THE THERAPEUTIC EFFECT OF DHĪKR

In Islam, dhikr (repetition of the Name of Allah) refers to the invocation and glorification of Allah. However, it must be emphasized that dhikr is not merely the repetition of words; it is a profound spiritual process. (Boran, 2025). In verse 28 of Surah Ar-Ra'd, it is stated: "Those who became amenu (wished spirit to reach Allah before death) and their hearts have been satisfied with the praise (dhikr) of Allah. Now surely with the praise of Allah the hearts find satisfaction, do they not?" (Qur'ān 13:28). This verse indicates that the state of inner tranquility is directly related to dhikr.

The Cipher-Like Nature of the Word "Allah"

The word "Allah," through the arrangement of its letters and the distinct vibrational frequency of each letter, forms a divine code. (Boran, 2025) This code becomes a means for at least two types of light to descend from Allah into the heart: the light of rahma (mercy) and the light of fazl (virtue). These lights lead to the reduction of the ailments (afat) within the nafs and replace the inner conflicts a person experiences with peace and happiness. (Al-Ghazālī, 2004)

In modern science, a growing body of research has examined the effects of sound, rhythm, and vibration on human physiology and psychology. Studies on sound-based interventions and vibrational therapies suggest that specific frequencies and rhythmic patterns can influence autonomic nervous system activity, stress responses, and perceived well-being (Bartel & Mosabbir, 2021; McCraty & Zayas, 2014) The emphasis on vibration and frequency in the Islamic tradition's practice of dhikr reflects a dimension that aligns with contemporary scientific findings. even though the spiritual meaning of dhikr goes far beyond a purely physiological explanation.

The Place of Dhikr Among Acts of Worship

In verse 45 of Surah Al-Ankabut, it is stated: "Recite (read and explain to others) that which has been revealed to you of the Book and keep up the Prayer. Surely the Prayer keeps away from Al-Fahsh (to do what Allah prohibits) and from Al-Munkar (from to deny what Allah commands). And certainly, the Praise (the repetition of the Name) of Allah is the greatest". (Qur'ān 29:45) This verse highlights that dhikr is regarded as the most exalted of acts of worship.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said in a noble hadith: "Do not engage in excessive speech without the remembrance (dhikr) of Allah. Excessive speech without the remembrance (dhikr) of Allah hardens the heart, and there is no doubt that those with hardened hearts are the farthest from Allah." (Al-Tirmidhī, 2001, Kitāb al-Zuhd). This hadith points to the function of dhikr in softening the heart and bringing a person closer to Allah. The hardness of the heart refers to the

nafs' heart being enslaved by the nineteen afat(s) (vices). The only means of deliverance from these afat(s) is dhikr. (Al-Ghazālī, 2004; Boran, 2025)

In another hadith, it is stated: "Whenever a group gathers to remember Allah, the angels surround them, Allah's rahma (mercy) envelops them, tranquility descends upon them, and Allah Almighty mentions them among those who are near to Him." (Al-Ḥākim, 1990) This hadith demonstrates that dhikr serves as a means of healing both on an individual and a communal level.

The Influence of the Heart on the Body

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) states in a noble hadith: "There is a piece of flesh in the body; if it is sound, the entire body becomes healthy, and if it is corrupted, the entire body becomes corrupted. Indeed, it is the heart." (Bukhari, Īmān 39; Muslim, Musāqāt 107) This hadith is also in harmony with the principles of modern psychosomatic medicine, which emphasize the relationship between emotional states, stress, and physical health (McCraty & Zayas, 2014). The health of the heart—meaning the spiritual center—directly influences physical well-being.

For this very reason, Allah Almighty has made dhikr, remembrance (dhikr) Allah a lot (more than half the day), and continuous dhikr obligatory for us—solely for our shifa (healing).

73 / Al-Muzzammil-8: "And remember (repeat) the Name of your Lord and return Him by detaching yourself from everything."

33/Al-Ahzab-41: "O you who believe (who are Amenû, who wish their spirits to reach Allah while they are living)! Repeat the Name of Allah a lot (more than half of the day)."

4/An-Nisa-103: "And when you have completed the prayer, repeat the Name of Allah standing, sitting, or lying (down) on your sides (with a continuous repetition)!"

REACHING ALLAH AND THE MURSHID (SPIRITUAL GUIDE) – MURID (DISCIPLE) RELATIONSHIP

For dhikr to be spiritually effective, certain conditions must be fulfilled. Foremost among these are sincerely wishing to reach Allah from the heart and taking allegiance to a murshid (spiritual guide) appointed by Allah. (Boran, 2025)

Wishing to Reach Allah

In verses 62-64 of Surah Yûnus, it is stated: "Surely no fear comes upon the friends of Allah nor do they grieve, do they? They are the believers (they became âmenû, who wished spirit to reach Allah before death) and became the owners of taqwa (piety). For them are glad tidings in the life of the present world and the Hereafter. "

According to these verses, wishing to reach Allah is the essential condition for becoming one of the awliya (saints) of Allah. (Boran, 2025) A person who makes this wish becomes the recipient of Allah's special protection and assistance. The supplication for wishing to reach Allah is recommended as follows: "O Almighty Allah! I love You deeply. I wish to reach You

while living this worldly life. I, too, desire to be among Your awliya (saints). I seek happiness in both worlds. O Allah, if this wish is on my tongue, let it descend into my heart. Ameen.”

The Murshid (Spiritual Guide) – Murid (Disciple) Relationship and the Purification of the Nafs

A person who wishes to reach Allah performs the special prayer of need (salat-ul hajat) and, in accordance with verse 35 of Surah al-Ma'idah, asks Allah to grant him the murshid who has been appointed for him (Qur'ān 5:35). In the Sufi tradition, the murshid is the one who guides the seeker murid (the disciple) on his spiritual journey, leads him toward Allah, and oversees the process of the purification of the nafs. (Boran, 2025)

According to verse 125 of Surah Al-An'am, Allah opens a path of light from the chest to the heart only for the one who repents and takes allegiance to his murshid. When dhikr is performed, Allah's rahma (mercy) and fazl (virtue) reach the heart through this path of nur (light) and cleanse the darkness within it. As the heart becomes illuminated, the person begins to experience psychological and spiritual healing. (Subandi et al., 2022)

The process of the purification of the nafs is a journey of inner cleansing that continues through dhikr. As the vices within the nafs (such as grudge, hatred, anger, and envy) diminish, the virtues of the ruh (spirit) (such as love, compassion, patience, and gratitude) increase (Al-Ghazālī, 2004; Cebecioğlu, 2009). This process, similar to cognitive-behavioral therapy and other psychotherapeutic methods in modern psychology, aims at transforming patterns of thought and emotion. (Draganović et al., 2025).

DHĪKR AGAINST DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

In modern times, depression—one of the most common psychological disorders—is, from an Islamic perspective, a reflection of the darkness and afat(s) found in the heart of the nafs (Boran, 2025). For a person who falls into depression, from this spiritual viewpoint, one of the first remedies that may be recommended is dhikr to be practiced alongside appropriate professional psychological and medical support rather than as a substitute for it (Anwar et al., 2024; Çetinkaya & Billings, 2024; WHO, 2023).

A person experiencing depression should take ablution, sit on the prayer mat, take the tasbīḥ in their hand, and begin to perform dhikr internally by saying, “Allah, Allah, Allah.” Even five minutes of dhikr can become a means for all inner restlessness to be removed by Allah. This state provides benefits far beyond the mindfulness and meditation practices found in modern psychology. (Subandi et al., 2022; Zahraa & Sulistyarini, 2023).

The effect of dhikr on depression occurs on both biochemical and psychological levels. Studies on dhikr-based interventions and other forms of spiritually oriented meditation show associations with reduced anxiety, improved mood, and better autonomic regulation (Anwar et al., 2024; Maslahat & Laila, 2022; McCraty & Zayas, 2014). Although direct neurochemical mechanisms specific to dhikr require further empirical research, it is plausible by analogy with other contemplative practices—that regular dhikr contributes to healthier stress-hormone

regulation and more adaptive cognitive–emotional patterns (Bartel & Mosabbir, 2021; Çetinkaya & Billings, 2024).

Anxiety disorders can likewise be addressed through dhikr from an Islamic spiritual perspective. In verses 14–15 of Surah al-Ala, an important principle regarding this is given: “He who purifies his soul has attained salvation. And he (the one who purifies his soul) remembers the Name of his Lord and performs the prayer.” (Qur’ān 87:14–15). These verses demonstrate the direct relationship between the purification of the nafs and dhikr, and they explain the path to attaining salvation, peace, and inner security through dhikr (Boran, 2025).

THE ROLE OF LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

As the heart is illuminated through dhikr and the purification of the nafs, love takes the place of hatred. Loving people and forgiving them is one of the fundamental moral principles of Islam, and it is also a foundation of psychological well-being (Wade et al., 2014).

A person who wishes to be happy must love everyone around them for the sake of Allah. This love is unconditional and expects nothing in return. When a person makes the intention by saying, “O my Lord, I love everyone for Your sake,” this intention creates a transformative change within their inner world (Al-Ghazālī, 2004).

However, it must be emphasised that this love does not arise on its own. No matter how much a person tries, they cannot truly love others unless their inner structure is transformed. This inner transformation becomes possible only through wishing to reach Allah, taking allegiance to a murshid, and engaging in dhikr (Boran, 2025).

As the afat(s) within the nafs diminish through dhikr, it becomes impossible to hold resentment toward others. When someone does wrong to another, understanding and forgiving them becomes a natural response. Forgiveness is, in reality, a kindness a person does to themselves, because refusing to forgive sustains stress and ultimately harms the individual (Xie et al., 2025).

The therapeutic value of forgiveness is also recognized in modern psychology. Forgiveness therapy is used in the treatment of disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic anger. This principle, taught for centuries in the Islamic tradition, is also supported by contemporary scientific research.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that dhikr, as presented in Islamic sources, can be an effective method in the treatment of modern psychological disorders. At the root of common mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress lie the afat(s) within the heart of the nafs. Purification from these afflictions occurs through the purification of the nafs, and dhikr is the most essential means in this process (Al-Ghazālī, 2004; Özköse, 2007).

The healing effect of dhikr (the continuous repetition of the Name of Allah) occurs on both spiritual and biological levels. The descent of Allah’s lights of rahma (mercy) and fazl (virtue) into the heart removes the darkness within the nafs and brings the person to tranquility. The illumination of the heart also has a positive effect on physical health. As the Prophet

Muhammad (PBUH) stated, when the heart is healthy, the entire body becomes healthy (Al-Bukhārī, 2001). Contemporary psychophysiological research on heart–brain coherence and sound-based interventions similarly points to a close link between emotional regulation, autonomic stability, and bodily health (Bartel & Mosabbir, 2021; McCraty & Zayas, 2014).

At the root of stress lie unresolved feelings of revenge and the *afat(s)* of the *nafs*. Interpersonal conflicts are a result of the *nafs* not being purified. Through *dhikr* and the purification of the *nafs*, love replaces hatred, and forgiveness replaces the desire for revenge. This contributes to the establishment of both individual and societal peace (Boran, 2025).

Wishing to reach Allah and repenting (taking allegiance) to the *murshid* appointed for oneself are described as prerequisites for fully benefiting from *dhikr* in the Sufi tradition (Boran, 2025). When these conditions are met, repetition the name of Allah creates radical changes in a person's relationships both in his inner world and in his outer world.

In conclusion, this psycho-spiritual approach presented by Islam can be regarded as an alternative and complementary method of treatment alongside modern medicine and psychology. However, further scientific research—especially controlled clinical and neuropsychological studies—is needed, and the therapeutic effects of remembrance (*dhikr*) should be examined in greater neurological and psychological detail (Anwar et al., 2024; Çetinkaya & Billings, 2024; Maslahat & Laila, 2022).

This study, by examining the healing power of *dhikr* from an academic perspective, presents a framework for how the rich psycho-spiritual heritage of the Islamic tradition can be applied in modern times. It is hoped that future interdisciplinary research will further deepen this field and lead to the development of practical applications.

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