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From Mystical Exegesis to Mental Well-Being: Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's Theory of Dhikr in Light of Q. 2:152 and Its Resonance in the Lived Experiences of Acehnese Dayah Scholars

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Abstract: Although numerous studies have associated *dhikr* with psychological well-being, most explain its benefits either through psychological coping models or normative theological perspectives, leaving the hermeneutical foundations of classical Sufi exegesis largely unexplored. This study asks how Rūzbihān al-Baqlī conceptualizes *dhikr* in his interpretation of Q. 2:152 and whether this hermeneutical framework resonates with the lived experiences of Acehnese *dayah* scholars. Employing a qualitative design, the study combines textual hermeneutics of *ʿArāʾis al-Bayān fī Ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān* with phenomenological inquiry based on semi-structured interviews analyzed within the perspective of lived religion. The findings indicate that Rūzbihān presents *dhikr* as a transformative movement from verbal remembrance toward sustained awareness of divine presence, while participants consistently describe *dhikr* as fostering emotional stability, resilience, gratitude, and inner tranquility through continuous consciousness of God. Rather than establishing direct empirical confirmation of every mystical stage proposed by Rūzbihān, the interview data demonstrate a strong conceptual resonance between his hermeneutical model and contemporary religious experience. The study concludes that psychological well-being is best understood as an emergent consequence of spiritual transformation, offering a Qur'anically grounded model that connects classical Sufi exegesis, lived religion, and contemporary discussions of mental well-being.

Keywords: Dhikr; *Rūzbihān al-Baqlī; Sufi Exegesis; Mental Well-Being; Lived Religion; Islamic Spiritual Psychology.*

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Introduction

In many Muslim communities, collective and individual forms of dhikr remain deeply embedded in educational institutions, religious gatherings, Sufi orders, and local traditions, indicating that remembrance of God is not merely a liturgical act but also a lived social phenomenon.[1] Existing studies generally demonstrate that dhikr contributes to emotional balance, spiritual awareness, and inner peace through mechanisms involving remembrance of God, cognitive focus, and affective regulation.[2] Consequently, the interpretive foundations underlying

[1] Ahmad Yani Nasution, "Analisis Zikir Dan Doa Bersama (Perspektif Empat Madzhab)," *Jurnal Madani : Ilmu Pengetahuan, Teknologi Dan Humaniora* 1, no. 1 (March 2018): 33–54, https://doi.org/10.33753/madani.v1i1.3.

[2] Ahmed Zaranggi Ar Ridho and Safira Malia Hayati, "Konsep Zikir Sufistik Dalam Tafsir Al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm Karya Mullā Ṣadrā," *JOUSIP: Journal of Sufism and Psychotherapy* 2, no. 2 (November 30, 2022): 167–82, https://doi.org/10.28918/jousip.v2i2.6031.

dhikr as a transformative process of consciousness have not received sufficient attention. More specifically, the rich mystical hermeneutics of classical Sufi commentators, particularly Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, remain largely absent from contemporary discussions on religion and mental well-being.[3]

This article aims to reconstruct Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's theory of dhikr as articulated in his mystical Qur'anic exegesis *ʿArāʾis al-Bayān fī Ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān* and to examine how such a theory is reflected, embodied, and experienced within the religious lives of Acehnese dayah scholars. By connecting classical mystical hermeneutics with contemporary lived religious experiences, this study seeks to bridge the gap between textual interpretation and practical spirituality. Furthermore, it intends to contribute to current discussions on religion and mental well-being by offering a Qur'anically grounded model of spiritual transformation derived from the Sufi interpretive tradition. [4]

Rūzbihān's interpretation emphasizes inner consciousness, spiritual unveiling (*kashf*), divine love (*mahabbah*), and experiential proximity to God. The article further argues that this mystical framework continues to operate within the lived experiences of Acehnese dayah scholars, where dhikr functions as a mechanism for cultivating resilience, emotional stability, existential meaning, and mental well-being. Consequently, Rūzbihān's theory offers a significant conceptual bridge between classical Sufi exegesis and contemporary discussions concerning spiritual psychology.[5]

The term dhikr derives from the Arabic root *dh-k-r*, which fundamentally denotes remembering, mentioning, recollecting, and maintaining awareness.[6] Lexically, dhikr refers to the act of recalling something after forgetfulness, while in Islamic terminology it signifies conscious remembrance of God through words, thoughts, and spiritual awareness. [7] Classical Muslim scholars define dhikr not merely as verbal repetition but as the continuous orientation of the heart toward divine reality. Al-Nawawi, al-Ghazali, and Ibn 'Ata'illah regard dhikr as a spiritual discipline through which the heart becomes purified from heedlessness and directed toward divine presence. [8]

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[3] Musharraf Maryam, "A Study on the Sufi Interpretation of Qur'ān and The Theory of Hermeneutic," *AL-BAYAN JOURNAL* 11, no. 1 (2013): 33–47, https://doi.org/10.11136/jqh.1311.01.03.

[4] Abū Muḥammad Rūzbihān ibn Abī Naṣr al-Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-Bayān fī Ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān*, 1 ed., vol. 1 (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 2008), 5.

[5] Carl W. Ernst, *Rūzbihān Baqlī: Mysticism and The Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism*, (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996), 1.

[6] Ahmad Warson Munawir, *Kamus Al-Munawir, Surabaya: Pustaka Progresif, 1997*, vol. 1408 (Surabaya: Pustaka Progresif, 1997).

[7] Taufik Abdullah, *Ensiklopedi Tematis Dunia Islam*, 5 (Jakarta: Ichtiar Baru van Hoeve, 2002), 61.

[8] Ibn 'Ata'illah al-Iskandari, *Miftāḥ al-Fallāḥ wa al-Miṣbāh al-Arwāḥ,* (Mesir: Musṭafa al-Babī al-Halabī, 1381 H), 4.

Scholars generally classify dhikr into several manifestations, including verbal dhikr (*dhikr al-lisān*), contemplative dhikr (*dhikr al-fikr*), and spiritual dhikr (*dhikr al-qalb*).[9] Qur'anic discourse further presents dhikr as both individual and collective practice, performed silently or aloud depending on context and spiritual purpose. Within Sufi traditions, dhikr evolves into a structured spiritual method involving repetition, concentration, purification of consciousness, and cultivation of divine intimacy. Such practices are institutionalized in various *ṭarīqah traditions* including Qādiriyyah, Naqshbandiyyah, Shādhiliyyah, and Qādiriyyah wa Naqshbandiyyah, where dhikr serves as a vehicle of spiritual transformation rather than a mere devotional ritual.[10]

Mental well-being refers to a condition in which individuals experience psychological stability, emotional balance, meaningfulness, and the capacity to respond constructively to life challenges. Within Islamic thought, mental well-being is often associated with concepts such as *ṭuma'nīnah* (tranquility), *sakīnah* (serenity), and spiritual equilibrium achieved through remembrance of God.[11] Unlike modern psychological models that frequently emphasize subjective happiness or cognitive functioning, Islamic perspectives integrate spiritual consciousness as an essential dimension of psychological health. Consequently, well-being is understood not only as the absence of distress but also as the presence of spiritual harmony and existential orientation toward God.[12] Classical exegetes such as al-Qurṭubī interpret these verses as evidence that genuine peace emerges when the heart becomes connected to divine reality rather than material contingencies.[13] Accordingly, mental well-being in Islamic thought constitutes an integrated state involving cognitive, emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions.

Tafsīr Sufi represents a distinctive exegetical tradition that seeks to uncover the inward, symbolic, and spiritual dimensions of Qur'anic revelation beyond its literal meaning.[14] This approach emerged from broader developments within Islamic mysticism and emphasizes experiential knowledge (*ma'rifah*), spiritual unveiling (*kashf*), and divine intimacy as legitimate modes of understanding scripture.[15] Among the most influential representatives of this tradition is Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 1209), whose *ʿArāʾis al-Bayān* is widely recognized as a major

[9] Baidi Bukhori, *Zikir Al-Asma' Al-Husna*, 1 ed. (Semarang: Syiar Media Publishing, 2008), 52.
[10] Martin Van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsabandiyah di Indonesia*, (Bandung: Mizan, 1992), 80.
[11] Burhanuddin Burhanuddin, "Zikir Dan Ketenangan Jiwa (Solusi Islam Mengatasi Kegelisahan Dan Kegalauan Jiwa)," *Jurnal Mimbar: Media Intelektual Muslim Dan Bimbingan Rohani* 6, no. 1 (April 30, 2020): 1–25, https://doi.org/10.47435/mimbar.v6i1.371.
[12] Ellen Goodwin and Kathryn Kraft, "Mental Health and Spiritual Well-Being in Humanitarian Crises: The Role of Faith Communities Providing Spiritual and Psychosocial Support during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 7, no. 1 (December 18, 2022): 21, https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-022-00127-w.
[13] Abū 'Abdillah Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abū Bakr al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān*, 9, (Beirut: al-Risalah, 2006), 174-181.
[14] Ghozi, *Pengantar Tafsir Sufi*, (Lamongan: Academia Publication, 2022), 1.
[15] Abu Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma'*, Abd al-Halīm Mahmūd dan Tahā 'Abd al-Baqī Surūr (ed.) (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Hadīthah, 1960), 43.

contribution to esoteric Qur'anic interpretation. For Rūzbihān, dhikr is not merely remembrance but a transformative encounter through which divine beauty manifests within the purified heart of the seeker.[16]

Rūzbihān's mystical theory of dhikr can be categorized into several interrelated dimensions. First, dhikr functions as purification from forgetfulness (*ghaflah*). Second, it operates as a pathway toward unveiling (*kashf*) and spiritual knowledge. Third, dhikr serves as the medium through which divine love (*mahabbah*) is experienced. Fourth, it culminates in existential proximity to God through continuous awareness of divine presence.[17] These dimensions reveal that dhikr, in Rūzbihān's framework, is fundamentally transformative rather than merely ritualistic. The goal is not repetition itself but the emergence of a spiritually awakened consciousness capable of perceiving divine reality within every aspect of existence.[18]

Existing scholarship on dhikr remains largely dominated by studies of general Sufi hermeneutics,[19] mappings of mystical Qur'anic commentaries,[20] and comparative explorations of esoteric exegetical traditions across religious contexts.[21] Likewise, research on Rūzbihān al-Baqlī has focused predominantly on sainthood, mystical experience, and Sufi spirituality,[22] while paying comparatively little attention to his theory of dhikr as an integrated framework of spiritual transformation. In contrast, studies on religion and mental health frequently conceptualize religion as a measurable coping mechanism,[23] reflecting a rapidly expanding field of inquiry,[24] within the broader religion-and-health literature that remains largely non-specific to Islamic intellectual traditions.[25] Recent studies on Sufi spirituality and well-being,[26] Islamic spiritual

[16] Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *Tafsīr 'Arā'Is Al-Bayān Fī Ḥaqā'iq Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1999), 5.

[17] Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, 12-14.

[18] Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, 14.

[19] Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī and Annabel Keeler, "Hirminūtīk-i Ṣūfiyānah: Dar Tafsīr-i Kashf Al-Asrār-i Maybudī," in *Hirminūtīk-i Ṣūfiyānah* (Brill, 2019).

[20] Kristin Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam* (Routledge, 2006), 8.

[21] Pieter Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur'an Commentaries: Crossings between This World and the Otherworld* (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 16.

[22] Carl W Ernst, *Ruzbihan Baqli: Mysticism and the Rhetoric of Sainthood in Persian Sufism* (Routledge, 2013).

[23] Masataka Takeshita, "Continuity and Change in The Tradition of Shirazi Love Mysticism," *Orient* 23 (1987): 113–31, https://doi.org/10.5356/orient1960.23.113.

[24] William R Miller and Carl E Thoresen, "Spirituality, Religion, and Health: An Emerging Research Field.," *American Psychologist* 58, no. 1 (2003): 24.

[25] Harold George Koenig, Dana King, and Verna B Carson, *Handbook of Religion and Health* (Oup Usa, 2012), 22.

[26] Merve Cetinkaya and Jo Billings, "Systematic Review of the Relationship between Islamic-Sufi Spirituality and Practice and Mental Well-Being," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 26, no. 10 (2023): 1065–80.

meditation,[27] perioperative meta-analyses,[28] and Sufi rehabilitation case studies consistently report positive psychological outcomes.[29]

These bodies of scholarship converge on a single unaddressed problem, elaborated below. The theories of dhikr articulated in *ʿArāʾis al-Bayān* and *Mashrab al-Arwāḥ* have not yet been reconstructed into a hermeneutic-operational model capable of connecting *isyārī* meanings with contemporary conceptions of mental well-being. Moreover, dhikr is frequently reduced to a coping technique, whereas the perspectives of lived religion[30] and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)[31] enable its examination as a multilayered ontological and experiential reality. At the same time, the Acehnese dayah context has more often been treated as a socio-religious background than as an empirical field for rigorous, longitudinal, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary investigation.[32]

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative design that integrates textual hermeneutics with thematic analysis within the perspective of lived religion. The textual component reconstructs Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's conception of dhikr through selected passages in *ʿArāʾis al-Bayān fī Ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān*, particularly those concerning remembrance, spiritual consciousness, divine proximity, and inner purification. The empirical component explores how these hermeneutical concepts are reflected in the lived experiences of Acehnese dayah scholars through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Secondary sources include classical and contemporary scholarship on Sufism, Qur'anic exegesis, Islamic spirituality, and religion–mental health studies. By bringing textual interpretation into dialogue with contemporary religious practice, the study seeks to examine the continuity between classical mystical exegesis and lived religious experience.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: formal training in traditional Islamic educational institutions, active involvement in teaching or guiding religious activities within dayah institutions, and sustained engagement in dhikr-oriented

[27] Farah R Zahir and M Walid Qoronfleh, "Traditional Islamic Spiritual Meditative Practices: Powerful Psychotherapies for Mental Wellbeing," *Frontiers in Psychology* 16 (May 16, 2025): 1538865, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1538865.

[28] Vahideh Zarea Gavgani et al., "Effects of Listening to Quran Recitation on Anxiety Reduction in Elective Surgeries: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 44, no. 2 (July 22, 2022): 111–26, https://doi.org/10.1177/00846724221102198.

[29] M A Subandi, Lu'luatul Chizanah, and S Subhan, "Psychotheraputic Dimensions of an Islamic-Sufi-Based Rehabilitation Center: A Case Study," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 46, no. 2 (June 4, 2022): 582–601, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-021-09738-1.

[30] Meredith B McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 43.

[31] Jonathan A Smith, Michael Larkin, and Paul Flowers, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research," 2021.

[32] Jaqueline Aquino Siapno, *Gender, Islam, Nationalism and the State in Aceh: The Paradox of Power, Co-Optation and Resistance* (Routledge, 2013).

devotional practices. These criteria were intended to ensure that participants possessed both practical experience and interpretive authority regarding the spiritual dimensions of dhikr. A total of seven male dayah teachers from Dayah Ulumuddin, Uteunkot Cunda, Lhokseumawe, Aceh, Indonesia, participated in the study.

The profile of the seven Acehnese dayah scholars participating in this study is presented below.

Pseudonym/Name	**Age**	**Qualification**	**Years Teaching**	**Subjects Taught**	**Years at Dayah Ulumuddin**
Informant 1	41	M.Pd (S2 MPI)	21	Arabic, Tauhid, Fiqh, Hadith	21
Informant 2	43	Lc., M.Pd (S2 MPI)	18	Arabic, Qur'an, Islamic Education	19
Informant 3	48	M.Kom.I (S2 Communication)	22	Fiqh	22
Informant 4	48	M.Pd (S2 MPI)	25	Tauhid, Fiqh, Sufism	25
Informant 5	27	M.Pd (S2 MPI)	6	Arabic, Hadith, Tafsir	6
Informant 6	37	M.Pd (S2 Islamic Education)	15	Islamic Education, Sufism	15
Informant 7	43	Dr., Lc., M.Kom.I (S3 Communication)	18	Arabic	18

Source: Author's fieldwork data, 2026.

Data were collected through close textual reading of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's exegesis and semi-structured interviews. The textual analysis identified key hermeneutical concepts related to dhikr, including divine remembrance, spiritual awareness, *mushāhadah*, *fanāʾ*, and *baqāʾ*. These themes were subsequently interpreted alongside the hermeneutical categories reconstructed from *ʿArāʾis al-Bayān*. Convergences between textual interpretation and lived experience were treated as evidence of continuity between classical mystical exegesis and contemporary religious practice, whereas divergences were retained as analytically significant rather than reconciled. The final stage synthesized both textual and empirical findings into an interpretive model explaining how Rūzbihān's mystical understanding of dhikr continues to inform contemporary Acehnese religious life and contributes to mental well-being.

Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's Theory of Dhikr as Spiritual Transformation

The textual analysis of *ʿArāʾis al-Bayān fī Ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān* demonstrates that dhikr occupies a central position within Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's mystical epistemology. Rather than defining dhikr merely as verbal repetition, Rūzbihān presents it as a transformative spiritual process through which the seeker advances toward direct awareness of divine presence. Across multiple exegetical passages, dhikr is closely linked to gratitude (*shukr*), repentance (*istighfār*), contemplation (*tafakkur*), spiritual unveiling (*kashf*), witnessing (*mushāhadah*), annihilation (*fanāʾ*), and subsistence in God (*baqāʾ*).[1] These concepts function as interconnected stages within a broader path of spiritual transformation.

This perspective is most explicitly articulated in Rūzbihān's interpretation of Q. 2:152 *(fa-dhkurūnī adhkurkum)*. A fuller reconstruction of Rūzbihān's theory would require setting this reading alongside his treatment of other dhikr-related verses (e.g., Q. 13:28) and passages in *Mashrab al-Arwāḥ, which fall outside* the textual evidence analyzed here. He explains,

فاذكروني بلسان الأسرار أذكركم بكشف الأنوار

> "Remember Me with the tongue of secrets, and I will remember you through the unveiling of lights"[33]

Indicating that dhikr is not merely an act of remembrance but a means of attaining divine illumination and proximity. He further associates remembrance with gratitude, self-purification, and detachment from worldly distractions, portraying dhikr as a process that transforms the inner self rather than a purely ritual practice.

Rūzbihān also emphasizes that human remembrance is preceded by God's remembrance of humanity, a view that shifts the focus of dhikr from human effort to divine initiative. At the same time, he stresses the limits of human knowledge before the divine reality, arguing that true gratitude lies in recognizing one's inability to fully know, praise, or remember God. Consequently, dhikr becomes an expression of humility, dependence, and spiritual awareness.

A closer examination reveals that Rūzbihān interprets dhikr as a progressive movement from outward remembrance to inward realization. At the initial level, remembrance is performed through verbal recitation and conscious obedience. At a deeper level, dhikr becomes a condition of perpetual awareness in which the heart remains continuously attentive to God. Ultimately, dhikr culminates in a state where the distinction between remembering and being remembered by God becomes spiritually transcended.[34] In this sense, remembrance functions not merely as ritual devotion but as an epistemological mechanism through which divine knowledge becomes

[33] Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *Tafsīr 'Arā'Is Al-Bayān Fī Ḥaqā'iq Al-Qur'ān,* 67.
[34] Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, 196.

accessible to the seeker. This mystical framework is closely connected to Rūzbihān's understanding of spiritual psychology. He repeatedly associates dhikr with purification of the heart, liberation from egocentric attachments, and cultivation of inner tranquility.[35] Through sustained remembrance, worldly anxieties gradually lose their dominance, allowing the seeker to experience deeper states of trust, serenity, and existential meaning. Such a formulation suggests that mental well-being is not treated as an independent psychological outcome but as a natural consequence of spiritual proximity to God.

The textual evidence further indicates that Rūzbihān's theory establishes a direct relationship between remembrance, spiritual awareness, and psychological stability. The progression from dhikr to mushāhadah, from *fanā'* to *baqā'*, reflects a process whereby the fragmented self is reorganized around divine consciousness.[36] Consequently, emotional disturbances emerge not primarily from external circumstances but from spiritual forgetfulness (*ghaflah*), whereas inner peace results from sustained remembrance and conscious orientation toward God. This relationship forms the conceptual foundation through which Rūzbihān's mystical theory can be examined in relation to contemporary discussions of mental well-being.

Lived Experiences of Dhikr among Acehnese Dayah Scholars

Interview data reveal a remarkable degree of consistency among Acehnese dayah scholars regarding the meaning and function of dhikr. All participants described dhikr as more than verbal recitation and emphasized its role in cultivating awareness of God. Informant 3 explained:

> "Dhikr is the activity of remembering God through utterance, heart, and action. Its aim is to strengthen one's connection with God and to bring about calmness and tranquility in the heart."[37]

In his own account, this understanding is not abstract; he described dhikr as having shifted over time from mere mechanical, verbal repetition toward a deeper, internalized realization; dhikr practice generally undergoes a shift in understanding: from mere rigid verbal routine to profound inward realization.

Similarly, Informant 7 stated, "Dhikr encompasses recitation together with heartfelt internalization; it consists of dhikr of the tongue and dhikr of the heart."[38]Informant 5 likewise emphasized:

> "Dhikr is remembering God with the tongue and the heart; it is also essential for preserving sincerity, tranquility, and closeness to God."[39]

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[35] Abū Muḥammad Rūzbihān ibn Abī Naṣr Al-Baqlī, *Mashrab Al-Arwāḥ: Alf Maqām Wa Maqām Min Maqāmāt Al-ʿĀrifīn Billāh Taʿālā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyah, 2005), 208.

[36] Muhammad Saleh Cahyadi Mohan, "The Concept of Fana and Its Relevance Deep Prevention of Religious Radicalism," *Jurnal Studi Agama* 7, no. 1 (2023): 13–19.

[37] Informant 3, Interview, June, 2026

[38] Informant 7, Interview, June, 2026

[39] Informant 5, Interview, June, 2026

The experiential narratives demonstrate that dhikr functions as a mechanism of emotional regulation and psychological resilience. Participants repeatedly reported feelings of calmness, clarity, patience, and stability after engaging in regular remembrance practices.

Informant 2 explained:

> "[I feel] more rational and calm when I consistently perform dhikr, and more emotional and restless when I neglect it."[40]

He linked this directly to a concrete behavioral change: dhikr helped him control his anger so as not to regret his reactions afterward: "emotions become controlled *when angry, so that one does not later regret it" and recalled* once receiving "*exactly what was asked for*" through prayer accompanying his dhikr practice. Informant 6 similarly observed: "*When practiced regularly, the soul is more stable; conversely, it becomes restless when neglected*."[41] Informant 4 described dhikr as: *"A coolant for the heart that produces tranquility and inner balance."*[42]

These narratives suggest that contemporary dayah scholars continue to embody a spiritual logic remarkably similar to that articulated in Rūzbihān's mystical exegesis. The relationship between remembrance and tranquility identified in the interviews therefore appears not as an isolated psychological phenomenon but as the lived continuation of a classical Sufi epistemology.[43]

Dhikr, Mental Well-Being, and the Continuity of Sufi Hermeneutics.

The findings indicate that dhikr functions not merely as a devotional practice but as a multidimensional process of spiritual, emotional, and existential orientation. Across the interviews, participants consistently associated regular remembrance with emotional stability, gratitude, self-control, resilience, and inner tranquility. These observations resonate with a growing body of research in the fields of religion, spirituality, and mental health, which has reported positive associations between Islamic spiritual practices and psychological well-being, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping. Recent systematic reviews and conceptual studies likewise suggest that spiritual commitment may foster resilience by strengthening meaning-making, emotional regulation, and perceptions of divine support in the face of adversity.[44]

However, the present findings extend beyond these studies in an important way. Whereas most contemporary psychological investigations conceptualize dhikr primarily as a coping strategy or therapeutic intervention, the experiences narrated by dayah scholars indicate that remembrance is understood first as an ontological orientation toward God rather than merely a

[40] Informant 2, Interview, June, 2026
[41] Informant 6, Interview, June, 2026
[42] Informant 4, Interview, June, 2026
[43] Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *Tafsīr 'Arā'Is Al-Bayān Fī Ḥaqā'iq Al-Qur'ān,* 196.
[44] Fera Firdausi Nuzula, "Psychology of Religion: The Relationship Between Islamic Spirituality and Psychological Well-Being," *G-Couns: Jurnal Bimbingan Dan Konseling* 8, no. 2 (April 7, 2024): 1157–67, https://doi.org/10.31316/gcouns.v8i2.5898.

technique for reducing distress. Participants repeatedly described tranquility as emerging from awareness of divine presence, surrender (*tawakkul*), and continuous consciousness of God.

This convergence, however, cuts two ways. Where it runs alongside existing scholarship, it lies in confirming that dhikr correlates with lower anxiety and greater resilience, a pattern independently documented among Acehnese practitioners of a different Sufi order, the MPTT-I congregation's dhikr *rateb siribee*.[45] Marc Applebaum's phenomenological account of dhikr as a form of meditative remembrance similarly corroborates the shift from mechanical repetition to internalized awareness reported here.[46] Where the present findings complicate rather than confirm existing scholarship, it is on the question of mechanism: much of the psychology-of-religion literature explains such outcomes through general-purpose religious coping processes that are not specific to Islam,[47] whereas the informants in this study tie the same outcomes explicitly to a particular exegetical stage-structure (dhikr–*mushāhadah*–*fanāʾ*–*baqāʾ*), a linkage the coping literature does not test for and cannot, on its own terms, confirm or deny.

A similar pattern emerges in recent international scholarship examining the intersection of Islamic spirituality and mental well-being. Systematic reviews and empirical studies consistently report that practices such as dhikr, *muraqabah, contemplation*, and other forms of Sufi devotion are associated with lower levels of anxiety, greater psychological resilience, enhanced emotional regulation, and higher levels of subjective well-being.[48] Recent developments in Islamic psychology further suggest that these benefits cannot be adequately explained through cognitive or behavioral mechanisms alone. Scholars such as Malik Badri,[49] Abdallah Rothman,[50] Hooman Keshavarzi,[51] argue that Islamic conceptions of the self are fundamentally rooted in a theocentric ontology in which psychological health is inseparable from spiritual alignment with God. Within this framework, emotional stability emerges not merely from successful coping strategies but from the restoration of harmony between the heart (*qalb*), the self (*nafs*), and divine

[45] Safrilsyah Safrilsyah et al., "Dhikr Rateeb Siribee and Its Effect in Reducing Anxiety Among the MPTT-I Aceh Congregation Members," *Ulumuna* 28, no. 1 (October 21, 2024): 535–53, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v28i1.1014.

[46] Marc Applebaum, "Dhikr as Mindfulness: Meditative Remembrance in Sufism," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 65, no. 2 (March 16, 2025): 409–30, https://doi.org/10.1177/00221678231206901.

[47] Kenneth I Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice* (Guilford press, 2001).

[48] 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, no. 5 (October 15, 2018): 1731–44, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0651-x.

[49] Malik Badri, *Contemplation: An Islamic Psychospiritual Study (New Edition)* (International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2018).

[50] Rothman and Coyle, "Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Soul."

[51] Hooman Keshavarzi and Amber Haque, "Outlining a Psychotherapy Model for Enhancing Muslim Mental Health Within an Islamic Context," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 23, no. 3 (July 2013): 230–49, https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2012.712000.

consciousness.[52] The present findings strongly resonate with these developments while extending them in a significant way.

Contemporary scholars of lived religion have demonstrated that religious traditions are most fully understood through embodied practices, emotional experiences, moral habits, and everyday processes of meaning-making.[53] From this perspective, the narratives of Acehnese dayah scholars provide compelling evidence that dhikr functions simultaneously as cognition, devotion, ethical formation, and spiritual discipline. Participants consistently portrayed remembrance not as repetitive verbal recitation but as a continuous mode of consciousness shaping perception, emotional responses, interpersonal conduct, and interpretations of life events. Such observations closely parallel phenomenological studies of Sufism showing that spiritual practices acquire transformative psychological significance only when they become internalized as lived realities rather than remaining external ritual performances.[54] Furthermore, the emphasis placed by participants on gratitude, surrender, and divine awareness closely aligns with contemporary meaning-making theory, which argues that enduring well-being emerges when individuals interpret life experiences within a coherent framework of transcendent meaning.[55] In this respect, the present study demonstrates that Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's mystical hermeneutics continues to operate as a living epistemology through which contemporary Muslims construct meaning, regulate emotion, and orient themselves toward transcendence. By connecting classical Qur'anic exegesis, lived religious experience, and contemporary theories of well-being, this study contributes to an emerging global conversation that seeks to move beyond the limitations of both reductionist psychology and purely textual approaches to religion.

One of the most significant contributions of this study lies in its challenge to dominant secular models of mental well-being. Although these dimensions are undoubtedly important, the experiences reported by participants suggest that spiritual well-being cannot be fully reduced to psychological functioning alone. Rather, tranquility emerges from a perceived relationship with transcendent reality. Participants consistently associated peace of mind with awareness of God, surrender to divine will, gratitude, and the conviction that life unfolds within a meaningful spiritual order.[56]

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[52] Rothman and Coyle, "Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Soul."

[53] McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*.

[54] Carl W Ernst, *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Shambhala Publications, 2017).

[55] Raymond F Paloutzian and Crystal L Park, *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (Guilford Publications, 2014).

[56] Zahir and Qoronfleh, "Traditional Islamic Spiritual Meditative Practices: Powerful Psychotherapies for Mental Wellbeing."

As a result, adversity is no longer perceived as meaningless suffering but as part of a larger spiritual narrative. This process appears repeatedly in participants' testimonies concerning patience, emotional control, gratitude, and resilience during hardship. This reading is consistent with Crystal Park's meaning-making model, in which a global system of religious meaning is used to reinterpret situational stressors so that adversity becomes legible within a larger order rather than remaining brute misfortune.[57] It also parallels clinical findings that Islamic devotional practice operates through embodied, psychophysiological channels and not only through cognitive reappraisal.[58]

Interestingly, recent research in Islamic psychology has reached similar conclusions. Studies examining dhikr, prayer, and Islamic mindfulness practices suggest that remembrance promotes emotional regulation by fostering attentional stability, reducing rumination, and strengthening perceptions of meaning and purpose. Nevertheless, the present study suggests that these psychological effects should not be interpreted merely as cognitive outcomes.[59] Rather, they emerge from a deeper spiritual ontology in which the human self is continuously oriented toward God. Rūzbihān's theory therefore contributes a distinctive explanatory framework that complements contemporary psychological models by integrating cognition, spirituality, and metaphysical meaning into a unified account of human well-being.

The findings open important avenues for future research at the intersection of Qur'anic studies, Sufism, lived religion, and mental health. First, comparative studies involving other major mystical exegetes, particularly Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī and Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ʿArabī. Al-Qushayrī's *own isyārī exegesis* of remembrance already offers a comparable staged reading[60] that a future study could set directly against Rūzbihān's model, while Ibn ʿArabī's ontology of *waḥdat al-wujūd* raises a related but distinct question about whether the informants' descriptions of *self-effacement (fanāʾ)* reflect an experiential monism or remain within a more conventional devotional register.[61] A comparative replication in a different Sufi-order context, such as the

[57] Crystal L Park, "Making Sense of the Meaning Literature: An Integrative Review of Meaning Making and Its Effects on Adjustment to Stressful Life Events.," *Psychological Bulletin* 136, no. 2 (March 2010): 257–301, https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018301.

[58] Arthur Saniotis, "Understanding Mind/Body Medicine from Muslim Religious Practices of Salat and Dhikr," *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 3 (June 23, 2018): 849–57, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-014-9992-2.

[59] Nida Farooq, "The Impact of Salah (Prayer) and Dhikr on Stress Reduction and Emotional Regulation," *International Journal Of Islamic Psychology* 1, no. 2 (2024): 34–44.

[60] William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-ʿArabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (State University of New York Press, 2010).

[61] Haruka Cheifetz, "Al-Shaʿrānī's Defence of Ibn ʿArabī in Context: Interpreting 'the Oneness of Existence' (Waḥdat Al-Wujūd) as Experiential Oneness," *Journal of Sufi Studies* 12, no. 2 (October 10, 2023): 182–215, https://doi.org/10.1163/22105956-bja10033.

Naqshbandiyya,[62] would test whether the *dhikr, mushāhadah, fanā', baqā'* sequence identified here is specific to Rūzbihān's school or a broader Sufi pattern; this may reveal alternative models of spiritual well-being embedded within classical Islamic hermeneutics. Second, cross-cultural investigations among diverse Muslim communities could determine whether the relationship between dhikr and mental well-being observed in Aceh reflects broader patterns across the Islamic world. Third, interdisciplinary collaboration between Qur'anic studies, phenomenology of religion, Islamic psychology, and mental health research may facilitate the development of culturally grounded theories of well-being that move beyond Western psychological paradigms.

Conclusion

This study set out to address a gap between classical Sufi hermeneutics and contemporary discussions of religion and mental well-being by examining whether Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's mystical interpretation of dhikr in Q. 2:152 resonates with the lived experiences of Acehnese dayah scholars. Rather than treating dhikr as either a ritual obligation or a psychological coping strategy, the study demonstrates that Rūzbihān conceptualizes remembrance as a progressive hermeneutic movement from verbal remembrance toward divine awareness, self-effacement, and enduring consciousness of God's sustaining presence. Significantly, participants' experiential narratives display a comparable phenomenological sequence, suggesting that this classical exegetical structure continues to function as a living interpretive framework through which contemporary Muslims understand, experience, and embody remembrance. The principal contribution of the study therefore lies not in showing that dhikr is associated with psychological well-being an observation already established in previous research but in proposing a different explanatory model for that relationship.

These conclusions should nevertheless be interpreted within the study's scope. The empirical analysis is limited to a purposively selected group of Acehnese dayah scholars and a textual reconstruction centered primarily on Rūzbihān's interpretation of Q. 2:152. Future research should therefore extend the textual analysis to a broader corpus of Rūzbihān's writings, compare his hermeneutics with those of other major Sufi exegetes, examine more diverse Muslim communities across cultural settings, and incorporate broader participant profiles and methodological triangulation. Such developments would enable scholars to assess more rigorously whether the hermeneutic sequence identified in this study represents a distinctive feature of Rūzbihān's mystical worldview or reflects a wider pattern within the Islamic tradition of remembrance.

[62] Arthur F Buehler, *Sufi Heirs of the Prophet: The Indian Naqshbandiyya and the Rise of the Mediating Sufi Shaykh* (Univ of South Carolina Press, 1998).

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