



Constructing the Virtuous Self: Sufi Solutions to Spiritual Pathology in al-Sulamī's (325/937-412/1021) *'Uyūb al-Nafs wa Mudāwātuhā*

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Abstract: The Sufi tradition addresses human beings holistically, encompassing both their physical (*ẓāhir*) and non-physical (*bāṭin*) dimensions. Central to this discourse is *al-nafs*. This study examines the conceptualization of *al-nafs* within the thought of the early Sufi figure Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī. Using qualitative document analysis and close reading, this study focuses on al-Sulamī's primary treatise, *'Uyūb al-Nafs wa Mudāwātuhā*, supported by classical texts by earlier Sufis such as al-Muḥāsibī, al-Tustarī, al-Tirmidhī, and others, as well as contemporary scholarly literature on al-Sulamī and the Sufi tradition. The findings of this study indicate: (1) The structure of the text *'Uyūb* is highly practical and pragmatic, akin to a technical guide intended for the general populace in transforming their *al-nafs* from a negative condition (*'uyūb*) to a positive one (*mudāwāh*). (2) The text contains al-Sulamī's core therapeutic ideas, which are systematically categorized into three core categories, namely thought control, action control, and integrated control. Each of these three categories operates in two directions: vertically, between an individual and his God, and horizontally, between an individual and his fellow human beings.

Contribution: This study offers a novel three-control framework for understanding al-Sulamī's concept of *al-nafs* transformation. By systematically conceptualizing this early Sufi framework, it bridges classical Islamic spiritual literature and Islamic psychology, as well as character education, based on the Sufi tradition.

Keywords: al-Sulamī; *'Uyūb al-Nafs wa Mudāwātuhā*; *al-nafs*; transformation; Sufi psychology

Introduction

Sufism is a tradition of Islamic spirituality that addresses human beings in a holistic manner, encompassing both their physical (*ẓāhir*) and non-physical (*bāṭin*) dimensions.¹ This approach is grounded in the fact that Islamic teachings, as the primary inspiration for this tradition, indeed view humanity in this light.² Within this tradition, one of the most widely discussed non-physical aspects of the human being is *al-naḥs*/the soul. Chittick states that *al-naḥs* is an "invisible" force, the discussion of which constitutes a distinct theme within the Sufi tradition, akin to an endeavor to attain the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*). The Sufis discuss *al-naḥs* with an awareness of its intimate role in governing the body, which constitutes the physical aspect of the human being.³

In general, and sharing the same essential substance, *al-naḥs* in Sufism is sometimes understood as the ego within the human being, whose organic inclination is "negative" and has the potential to distance the individual from the true center [God].⁴ It is also termed the "lower soul",⁵ associated with bestial or

¹ Meis Al-Kaisi, 'Rethinking Conceptual Sufism: A Synthesis of Islamic Spirituality, Asceticism, and Mysticism', '169-193', *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 11, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2021.11.2.169-193>; Wael Hegazy, 'The Salience of Saintliness in Islam: A Sufi Perspective', *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 11, no. 1 (2021): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2021.11.1.1-19>; Nevine Nasser, 'Beyond the Veil of Form: Developing a Transformative Approach toward Islamic Sacred Architecture through Designing a Contemporary Sufi Centre', *Religions* 13, no. 3 (2022): 1–35, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030190>; Sacyd Rashed Hasan Chowdury, 'Sufism in Contemporary Contexts: Spirituality, Subjectivity, and the Limits of Modern Rationality', *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 50, no. 1 (2026): 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v50i1.1566>.

² Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, 'The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul: A Brief Outline and Framework for Islamic Psychology and Epistemology', in *Psychology of Personality: Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Amber Haque, Yasien Mohamed, and Abdallah Rothman (Seattle: International Association of Islamic Psychology, 2022), 121.

³ William C. Chittick, 'The Spirituality of the Sufi Path', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Islamic Spirituality*, ed. Vincent J. Cornell and Bruce B. Lawrence (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2023), 317.

⁴ John Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 100.

⁵ Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, *Sufism: The Transformation of the Heart* (Chicago: The Golden Sufi Center, 2012), 80. From this point forward, I intentionally use the term "*al-naḥs*" directly without translating it as "soul" to maintain terminological consistency as a keyword throughout this article.

satanic traits within the human being,⁶ or, in the context of modern Sufi psychology, referred to by Frager as a "tyrannical" inclination within the self.⁷

Specifically, this study attempts to discuss *al-naḥs* within the thought of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021). This is significant because he is recognized as a Sufi figure who played a major role in establishing Sufism as an authoritative branch of knowledge within the Islamic tradition.⁸ The complexity of his works – such as his Sufi hagiography, *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfīyyah* and *Dhikr al-Niswah*, which meticulously outline the lineage of this tradition's practices, and his *Ḥaqā'iq al-Taḥsīn*, a compendium of mystical exegesis – serves as concrete evidence of his pivotal role. These works remain primary sources for investigating early Sufi history, doctrine, and thought up to the present day.⁹ In his Sufi hagiography, for instance, al-Sulamī meticulously organizes each entry on a particular Sufi through stories or sayings, employing a format commonly found in the Ḥadīth tradition where each figure is provided with a complete chain of transmission.¹⁰ Even al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), a prominent Sufi figure who came after him, utilized al-Sulamī's works as a principal reference in composing his own seminal text, *al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*.¹¹

Thus far, serious studies on al-Sulamī have been quite numerous. I categorize them into two groups: Qur'anic exegesis and specific ideas explored in his works. Within the first category, studies by Böwering discuss the sources referenced by al-Sulamī in his Qur'anic exegesis and its influence among contemporary and subsequent orthodox scholars,¹² while Rustom specifically

⁶ G. Hussein Rassool, *Islamic Psychology: The Basics* (S.l.: Routledge, 2023), 119.

⁷ Robert Frager, *Heart, Self, and Soul: The Sufi Psychology of Growth, Balance, and Harmony* (Newburyport: Quest Books, 1999), 48.

⁸ Christopher Melchert, 'Ṣūfī Apologist of Nishāpūr: The Life and Thought of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī By S. Z. CHOWDHURY', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 32, no. 2 (2021): 257–59, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/etab005>; Muḥammad Aḥmad, 'Early Islamic Sufism and Sharī'ah Sciences: Status and Inter-Relationships', *Bulletin of The Faculty of Languages & Translation* 18, no. 2 (2020): 301–18, <https://doi.org/10.21608/bflt.2020.166240>.

⁹ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 63.

¹⁰ Kenneth S. Avery, *A Psychology of Early Sufi Samā': Listening and Altered States* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 30.

¹¹ A. J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1956), 74.

¹² Gerhard Böwering, 'The Major Sources of Sulamī's Minor Qur'ān Commentary', *Oriens* 35, no. 1 (1996): 35–56, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18778372-03501003>; Gerhard Böwering, 'Early Sufism Between Persecution and Heresy', in *Islamic Mysticism Contested:*

examines the interpretation of Q. al-Fātiḥāh: 1-7 in his exegetical work.¹³ In the second category, studies include Colby's discussion of the Prophet Muḥammad's *Isrā' Mi'rāj* from al-Sulamī's perspective,¹⁴ Avery's analysis of the concepts of *samā'* and *wajd* in his texts,¹⁵ Honerkamp's examination of *Darājāt al-Ṣādiqīn*,¹⁶ Ridgeon's exploration of his Sufi social concept (*al-futuwwah*),¹⁷ and Yazaki, who includes a discussion of his Sufi morality alongside other Sufis, with a focus on his work *Ādāb al-Ṣuḥbah*.¹⁸ Furthermore, recent scholarship has highlighted his socio-historical impact, Abdel-Latif's analysis of the influence of his exegesis and hagiography in establishing Sufi authority¹⁹ and the mechanism of gendering in his female Sufi hagiography,²⁰ Hidayati's study on female Sufi knowledge,²¹ Welle's discussion of Sufi ethics of friendship,²² as well as my own work with Riyanto's exploration of female Sufi authority.²³

Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics, ed. Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke, Islamic History and Civilization 29 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999).

¹³ Mohammed Rustom, 'Forms of Gnosis in Sulamī's Sufi Exegesis of the Fātiḥa', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 16, no. 4 (2005): 327–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410500252509>.

¹⁴ Frederick S. Colby, 'The Subtleties of the Ascension: Al-Sulamī on the Mi'rāj of the Prophet Muhammad', *Studia Islamica*, no. 94 (2002): 167, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1596216>.

¹⁵ Avery, *A Psychology of Early Sufi Samā': Listening and Altered States*, 28–35.

¹⁶ Kenneth Honerkamp, 'A Sufi Itinerary of Tenth Century Nishapur Based on a Treatise by Abū 'Abd Al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17, no. 1 (2006): 43–67, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/eti176>.

¹⁷ Lloyd V. J. Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-Futuwwat in Iran* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 28–60.

¹⁸ Sacko Yazaki, 'Morality in Early Sufi Literature', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sufism*, ed. Lloyd V. J. Ridgeon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 74–97.

¹⁹ Sara Abdel-Latif, 'The Development of a Sufi Anti-Curriculum: Politics of Knowledge and Authority in Classical Islamic Education', in *Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther (Leiden Boston: Brill, 2020), 637–67.

²⁰ Sara Abdel-Latif, 'Narrativizing Early Mystic and Sufi Women: Mechanisms of Gendering in Sufi Hagiographies', in *Routledge Handbook on Sufism*, ed. Lloyd Vincent John Ridgeon, Routledge Handbooks (New York: Routledge, 2021), 132–45.

²¹ Dahlia Hidayati, Rekognisi Pengetahuan Spiritual Perempuan dalam Hagiografi Sufi: Kajian Sufistik Abu' Abd Al Rahman Al Sulami (325-412/937-1021) (PhD Thesis, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2023).

²² Jason Welle, *Companionship and Virtue in Classical Sufism: The Contribution of Al-Sulamī* (London: I. B. Tauris & Company, Limited, 2024).

²³ Muhammad Ihza Fazrian and Waryani Fajar Riyanto, 'Female Sufi Authority: Sufi Ideas in Ṣikr an-Niswah al-Muta'abbidāt Aṣ-Ṣūfiyyāt by as-Sulamī', *DINIKA: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2025, 157–84, <https://doi.org/10.22515/dinika.v10i2.11377>.

Based on the studies concerning al-Sulamī, it is evident that they generally revolve around the fields of exegesis, hagiography, and social morality. However, a critical research gap emerges: his specific psychological framework, particularly within his dedicated treatise *‘Uyūb al-Nafs wa Mudāwātuhā* [The Defects of the Soul and Their Remedies], remains marginally explored. This gap is particularly pressing because in recent years, contemporary scholarship has increasingly drawn upon early Sufi discourses regarding *al-nafs* to construct foundational frameworks for modern Islamic psychology and character education.²⁴ The problem statement of this study is that without a structured conceptualization of this specific text, the modern understanding of early Sufi spiritual-moral frameworks remains fragmentary, often bypassing the explicit diagnostic formulations he developed. Grounded in this literature, this study formulates a temporary hypothesis that *‘Uyūb al-Nafs wa Mudāwātuhā* functions not merely as a collection of passive moral exhortations, but as a systematic diagnostic manual and practical blueprint for spiritual transformation, where internal moral correction operates across individual and relational dimensions.

Upon closer examination, this hypothesis is supported by the text's premise. Al-Sulamī states that he composed this text in response to requests to compile the discussions on the defects of *al-nafs* (*ajma ‘fuṣūlan fī ‘uyūb al-nafs*). He cites Q. Yūsuf: 53, al-Nāzi‘āt: 40, and al-Jāthiyah: 23 as his primary scriptural foundations, asserting that *al-nafs* possesses an inclination toward negative orientations (*hādhā min al-āyāt mā yadullu ‘alā shurūr al-nafs, wa qillah rughbatihā fī al-khayr*).²⁵ Indeed, at the outset of his text, he justifies this inherent tendency, stating that its primary defects include the propensity to shun the truth (*annahā la ta ‘luf al-ḥaqq*), foster evil thoughts (*ta ‘luf al-khawāṭir al-radī‘ah*), and engage in heedlessness and procrastination (*al-ghaflah wa al-tawānī*).²⁶

Thus, as a Sufi figure who also engaged in Qur’anic exegesis, al-Sulamī sought to excavate the esoteric meanings pertaining to *al-nafs*. As noted by Burckhardt, in Q. al-Anfāl: 45, the word "troops" is understood by Sufis not merely literally, but as "*al-nafs* that directs a person toward wrongdoing (*al-nafs*

²⁴ Abdallah Rothman and A. Coyle, 'Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Soul', *Journal of Religion and Health* 57 (2018): 1731–44, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0651-x>; G. Rassool and Zuleyha Keskin, 'Positioning the Self (Nafs) in Islāmic Psycho-Spirituality', *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 27 (2023): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2023.2264848>.

²⁵ Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *‘Uyūb Al-Nafs Wa Mudāwātuhā*, ed. Muḥammad Faṭḥī Sayyid (Egypt: Dār al-Ṣaḥābah li al-Turāth, 1993), 5.

²⁶ al-Sulamī, 10–11.

al-‘ammārah)," demonstrating a transposition of meaning from the minor holy war (*al-jihād al-aṣghar*) to the greater holy war (*al-jihād al-akbar*).²⁷ This indicates that Sufism, as introduced by al-Sulamī, originates from an idea that prioritizes "character education" oriented toward the inner, spiritual aspects.²⁸

Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to systematically reconstruct and examine al-Sulamī's psychological framework regarding *al-naḥs* through his text *‘Uyūb al-Naḥs wa Mudāwātuhā*. Two fundamental questions guide this inquiry. First, what is the narrative structure and pattern concerning *al-naḥs* in al-Sulamī's text? And second, what key ideas are contained within it? This inquiry is essential for attaining a comprehensive understanding of *al-naḥs* within the early Sufi tradition. As exemplified by Picken, who seriously reconstructs the ideas of *tazkiyyat al-naḥs* from al-Muḥāsibī's (d. 243/857) perspective by coherently assembling his arguments,²⁹ a similar systematic approach is needed for al-Sulamī's work.

Literature Review

The discourse concerning *al-naḥs* leads Sufis to believe that denying it (*mukhālafah*) is one of their primary obligations.³⁰ Schimmel states that this is because the Qur’ān itself warns believers to be wary of the negative tendencies arising from *al-naḥs* – its potential to commit reprehensible acts and bring forth base traits.³¹ Denying *al-naḥs* is considered the fundamental basis of worship and the starting point for anyone who wishes to delve into Sufism, an endeavor that continues throughout one's lifetime.³² This demonstrates that although *al-naḥs*

²⁷ Titus Burekhardt, *Introduction to Sufi Doctrine* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2008), 91.

²⁸ Abdel-Latif, 'The Development of a Sufi Anti-Curriculum: Politics of Knowledge and Authority in Classical Islamic Education', 653.

²⁹ Gavin N. Picken, *Spiritual Purification and Islam: The Life and Works of al-Muḥāsibī* (London: Routledge, 2011). Picken acknowledges that summarizing al-Muḥāsibī's ideas on this matter was not easy because of the complexity of his knowledge of *al-naḥs*. See Picken, 204.

³⁰ Nita Trimulyaningsih, M. Subandi, and K. Yuniarti, 'The Process of Spiritual Transformation to Attain Naḥs Al-Muḥāsibī' in Islamic Psychology', *HTS Theologisc Studies/Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2024): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.8526>.

³¹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 112.

³² Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2002), 29–30; Sa’diyya Shaikh, 'Spirituality and Gender in Islam', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Islamic Spirituality*, ed. Vincent J. Cornell and Bruce B. Lawrence (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2023), 221; Rassool and Keskin, 'Positioning the Self (Naḥs)

organically tends toward the negative, it can be transformed into a positive state, ultimately becoming purified and perfected.³³ Thus, this comprehensive effort to transform *al-nafs* justifies Sufism being called "the spiritual revolution in Islam" (*al-thawrah al-rūhiyyah fi al-Islām*).³⁴

Upon closer examination, the discussion concerning *al-nafs* was already evident in early Sufi tradition. As noted by Nicholson, the Sufis gradually constructed a system of "ascetic practice" and a "moral culture" based on the conviction of a negative element within the human being,³⁵ making this discourse a distinctive hallmark of Sufi ethical literature.³⁶ Early figures diagnosed *al-nafs* as an entity driven by ignorant desires (*al-hawā*) and worldly attachments. For instance, al-Muḥāsibī identified the primary inclination of a defective *al-nafs* as egotism and selfishness – seeking concessions for oneself while harshly judging others (*wa huwa yaṭlub al-‘udhr li nafsihi, wa lā yaṭlubhu li ghayrihi*).³⁷ Sahl b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) further categorized the organic, destructive nature of *al-nafs* (*al-nafs al-‘ammārah*) into four base traits, namely the bestial [lust for food and sex], the satanic [reckless/*al-la‘ab wa al-lahw*], the sorcerer's deceit (*al-makr wa al-khidā*), and the devilish arrogance.³⁸

This pathology was extensively mapped by al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932) and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 368/996). Al-Makkī characterized *al-nafs* as an entity plagued by inherent deficiency (*al-shaḥḥ*), perpetually thirsty for worldly desires.³⁹ To illustrate this internal conflict, al-Tirmidhī famously likened *al-nafs* to two great cities (*madīnatān ‘aẓīmatān*). The inner side is a place of war (*dār*

in Islāmic Psycho-Spirituality'; M. Applebaum, 'Dhikr as Mindfulness: Meditative Remembrance in Sufism', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 65, no. 2 (2023): 409–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221678231206901>; Nur Ardiansyah K. Ibrahim et al., 'The Semantic Field of Tazkiyah Al-Nafs in the Qur'an: A Psychospiritual Framework for Islamic Psychology', *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 27, no. 2 (2026): 430–57, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v27i1.7542>.

³³ Abdallah Rothman, *Developing a Model of Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: Islamic Theology and Contemporary Understandings of Psychology* (New York; London: Routledge; Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 36.

³⁴ Abū ‘Alā’ al-‘Afīfī, *Al-Taṣawwuf Al-Thawrah Al-Rūhiyyah Fī al-Islām* (United Kingdom: Hindāwī, 2020), 9.

³⁵ Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 28–29.

³⁶ Yazaki, 'Morality in Early Sufi Literature', 78.

³⁷ Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Ādāb al-Nufūs*, ed. ‘Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ‘Aṭā’ (Beirut: Mu’asasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1991), 60.

³⁸ Sahl b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr Al-Tustarī*, ed. Muḥammad Bāsil ‘Uyūn al-Sūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2002), 81–92; 186.

³⁹ Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt Al-Qulūb*, I, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Maḥmūd al-Riḍwānī (Egypt: Maktabah Dār al-Turāth, 2001), 226; 232.

ḥarb), while its physical side manifests as doubt (*al-waswās*) generated by *al-khannās*, which must be vigilantly guarded against.⁴⁰

To cure these defects and construct a virtuous *al-nafs* [the therapeutic solution], early Sufis developed rigorous systems of ascetic practice.⁴¹ Al-Muḥāsibī proposed the method of strict self-examination (*muḥāsabah*) and self-restraint (*al-ṣiyām*) to render *al-nafs* tranquil and vigilant of God's presence.⁴² Al-Tustarī formulated specific antidotes, such as combating the satanic nature through glorifying God (*tasbīḥ*), the sorcerer's nature through truthfulness and generosity (*al-ṣidq*, *al-tafaḍḍul*), and the devilish nature by humbling oneself (*bi al-taḍārru*).⁴³

Meanwhile, Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz (d. 286/899) emphasized that recognizing one's own defects is the first step toward a virtuous *al-nafs*, quoting a sage: "Sufficient is it as a sin for a person to know that within himself lies a defect he does not rectify" (*Qad 'alimtu anna min ṣalāḥī nafsī 'ilmī bi fasādiḥā. Wa kafā bi al-mar'ī ithman an ya 'rif min nafsihi 'ayban la yuṣliḥuhu, wa laysa muntaqilan min dhālika ilā tawba*).⁴⁴ The gradual nature of this transformation was beautifully analogized by al-Tirmidhī, by linking the training of *al-nafs* to a mother weaning her child; through discipline, *al-nafs* is gradually shifted from its negative orientation until it finds comfort solely in closeness to God (*rūḥ al-qurb-Allāh*).⁴⁵

It is within this established yet fragmented intellectual milieu that al-Sulamī emerged. Al-Sulamī, or Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. Khālīd b. Sālim b. Zāwiyyah b. Sa'īd b. Qabīṣah b. Sarraq al-Azdī al-Sulamī al-Naysābūrī was born in 325/937 in Nayshābūr, a city in Persia, and died in the same region in 412/1021. He was the son of a Sufi from the *Malāmatiyyah* order, a controversial movement within Sufism that practiced extreme asceticism, tending to deviate from generally agreed-upon norms by

⁴⁰ al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Ghawr Al-Umūr*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyih and Aḥmad 'Abduḥ 'Awaḍ (Egypt: Maktab al-Thāqāfah al-Dīniyyah, 2002), 130; al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Ādāb Al-Nafs*, ed. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyih (Egypt: Dār al-Maṣriyyah al-Lubnāniyyah, 1993), 20–21.

⁴¹ Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, 28–29.

⁴² Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, 5; Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Bad' u Man Anāba Ilā-Allāh*, ed. Majdī Fathī al-Sayyid (Egypt: Dār al-Salām, 1991), 23–25; 28; Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, *Mu'ātabat al-Nafs*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Aṭā' (Egypt: Dār al-I'tisām, n.d.), 34–36.

⁴³ al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr Al-Tustarī*, 81–92.

⁴⁴ Abū Sa'īd al-Kharrāz, *Kitāb Al-Ṣidq* (Egypt: Dār al-Karmah, 2020), 15–17.

⁴⁵ al-Tirmidhī, *Ādāb Al-Nafs*, 24–25.

transgressing Islamic law.⁴⁶ His massive contributions to Sufi exegesis (*Ḥaqā'iq al-Taḥṣīn*) and hagiography (*Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣūfiyyah*) cemented his authority among classical Muslim intellectuals;⁴⁷ his spiritual-moral framework regarding *al-naḥs* was heavily influenced by the *Malāmīyyah* order. Originating in northeastern Iran, this spiritual movement's fundamental principle was "blaming oneself",⁴⁸ asserting that spiritually lowering one's status and constantly seeking the internal flaws of one's own *al-naḥs* is the highest virtue.

The *Malāmīyyah* paradigm fundamentally shapes al-Sulamī's *ʿUyūb al-Naḥs wa Mudāwātuhā*. Honerkamp notes that al-Sulamī meticulously tailored his works for different audiences. Texts like *Darājāt al-Ṣādiqīn* were intended for educated Sufi disciples with a subtle metaphysical tone, whereas *ʿUyūb al-Naḥs* was explicitly crafted as a practical manual targeted at the general populace.⁴⁹ Rather than discussing theoretical doctrines, al-Sulamī synthesized the fragmented early Sufi teachings on the defects of *al-naḥs* into concrete therapeutic formulas.⁵⁰ Through this text, al-Sulamī played a pivotal role in establishing a systematized intellectual lineage for early spiritual-moral tradition,⁵¹ transforming the abstract warnings of his predecessors into a practical blueprint for constructing a virtuous *al-naḥs*.

⁴⁶ Rkia Elaroui Cornell, 'As-Sulamī's Life and Works: Primary Influences', in *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr an-Niswā al-Muta'abbidāt Aṣ-Ṣūfiyyāt* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999), 31.

⁴⁷ 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *Al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah*, ed. Uns Muḥammad 'Adnān al-Sharqāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2017), 21–22; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Risālah al-Ladunniyyah*, ed. Abū Sahl Najāh 'Awaḍ Ṣiyām (Egypt: Dār al-Maqṭam, 2014), 25; 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī, *Nafāḥāt Al-Uns Min Ḥaḍarāt al-Quds* (Al-Azhar al-Sharīf, 1989), 4.

⁴⁸ Rkia Elaroui Cornell, 'As-Sulamī's Life and Works: Primary Influences', in *Early Sufi Women: Dhikr an-Niswā al-Muta'abbidāt Aṣ-Ṣūfiyyāt* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999), 31; Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism*, 197; Melchert, 'Ṣūfī Apologist of Nishāpūr: The Life and Thought of Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī By S. Z. CHOWDHURY'; Fitzroy Morrissey, 'Companionship and Virtue in Classical Sufism: The Contribution of al-Sulamī By JASON WELLE', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 37, no. 1 (2026): 131–34.

⁴⁹ Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, 'Stations of the Righteous & The Stumblings of Those Aspiring', in *Three Early Sufi Texts*, ed. Kenneth L. Honerkamp (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2003), 107; Kenneth Honerkamp, 'A Sufi Itinerary of Tenth Century Nishapur Based on a Treatise by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 17, no. 1 (2006): 47–48, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/cti176>.

⁵⁰ Welle, *Companionship and Virtue in Classical Sufism: The Contribution of Al-Sulamī*, 55.

⁵¹ Abdel-Latif, 'The Development of a Sufi Anti-Curriculum: Politics of Knowledge and Authority in Classical Islamic Education', 644–45.

Method

This study employs qualitative document analysis as its research design. As noted by Bowen, the purpose of this design is to critically and deeply interpret the meanings contained within a textual corpus.⁵² While supporting classical texts from pre-al-Sulamī Sufis – such as those by al-Muḥāsibī, al-Tustarī, al-Makkī, and al-Kharrāz – have been utilized earlier to establish the historical-conceptual contextualization of the discourse, the primary data analyzed for the core findings of this study is strictly al-Sulamī's specific treatise, *ʿUyūb al-Nafs wa Mudāwātuhā* [henceforth referred to as *ʿUyūb*]. Meanwhile, the secondary sources are strictly confined to contemporary academic literature, encompassing authoritative journal articles and monographs that discuss al-Sulamī and early Sufi spiritual-moral frameworks.

The primary source was selected using purposive sampling, driven by its direct relevance to the research topic concerning *al-nafs* in al-Sulamī's thought. Although this study centers on a single primary text, focusing exclusively on *ʿUyūb* is methodologically justified. As a pioneering, dedicated manual on the pathology of *al-nafs*, it demands an intensive, in-depth micro-analysis [close reading] that would be diluted if surveyed alongside multiple other works. Through this method, key quotations containing descriptions and concepts related to *al-nafs* were extracted to support the subsequent analysis. Furthermore, as the chosen analytical method, the data were analyzed by applying Krippendorff's principles of qualitative content analysis. The interpretive procedure was systematically conducted through four stages: (1) identification of relevant passages, (2) coding of specific spiritual-moral concepts, (3) categorization of keywords [particularly *al-nafs* and its related therapeutic terms], and (4) thematic interpretation.⁵³ This rigorous procedure is designed to construct al-Sulamī's framework while simultaneously situating his ideas within the broader early Sufi tradition.

Results and Discussion

Structure of the Text *ʿUyūb* and Its Narrative Pattern

Al-Sulamī's discussion of *al-nafs* centers on the text *ʿUyūb*. As mentioned in the introduction of this study, he cites Q. Yūsuf: 53, al-Nāziʿāt: 40, and al-

⁵² Glenn A. Bowen, 'Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method', *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 28–30, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.

⁵³ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (California: SAGE Publications, 2019), 30–32.

Jāthiyah: 23 at the opening of his discussion as the primary foundation for asserting that *al-nafs* must be controlled.⁵⁴ In his exegetical text, al-Sulamī focuses more on *al-hawā* as another negative inclination within the human being. Regarding Q. al-Jāthiyah: 23, he quotes the commentary of al-Tustarī, who states that *al-hawā* is the trait of arrogance in an individual who is immersed in worldly matters, which he does not confront with caution, and indeed this arrogance has become firmly rooted in his heart (*min ghayr wara' wa lā taqwā wa huwa alladhī yaṭba' 'alā qalbihi*).⁵⁵ Subsequently, concerning Q. al-Nāzi'āt: 40, al-Sulamī also quotes the commentaries of several earlier Sufis regarding *al-hawā*. He cites al-Tustarī, who states that *al-hawā* can overcome sound reason (*yaghlib al-'aql*); Abū Bakr al-Warrāq, who asserts that *al-hawā* is God's worst creation because it can lead humans to reject the truth (*mukhālif li al-ḥaqq*); Fuḍayl, who declares that the best of actions is opposing *al-hawā*; and al-Junayd, who states that the human *al-nafs* can be considered sound when it continually strives against *al-hawā* (*idhā khālafat al-hawā šāra dā'uḥā dawā'ahā*).⁵⁶

Specifically, within the text '*Uyūb*', al-Sulamī differs from the Sufis before him who discussed this issue in general terms. This is evident because, after stating his purpose for writing this text, he immediately presents his idea. Namely, he lists the defects of *al-nafs* and proposes remedies. This indicates a call to the reader to transform the state of his *al-nafs* from defects (*al-'uyūb*) to its cures (*mudāwātuhā*). I state that defect here refers to the "negative condition" of *al-nafs*, while its cure refers to its "positive condition." This transformation of *al-nafs* from a negative to a positive state also demonstrates al-Sulamī's endeavor to ensure that humans are always capable of controlling their *al-nafs*, and it substantiates the argument I have previously mentioned that the pattern of this text resembles a practical and pragmatic technical guide.

It is also apparent that al-Sulamī does not linger by first discussing the definition of *al-nafs* and all matters related to it, such as using the general Qur'anic terms *nafs al-ammārah* [Q. Yūsuf: 53], *nafs lawwāmah* [Q. al-Qiyāmah: 2], and *nafs muṭma'innah* [Q. al-Fajr: 27-28].⁵⁷ In his various narratives, he directly states,

⁵⁴ al-Sulamī, '*Uyūb Al-Nafs Wa Mudāwātuhā*, 5.

⁵⁵ Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq Al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, ed. Sayyid 'Umrān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001), 240.

⁵⁶ al-Sulamī, 371–72.

⁵⁷ These three Qur'anic terms indicate that *al-nafs* within the human being functions according to context. It can act as a rebellious ego (*al-'ammārah*), as a moral compass (*al-lawwāmah*), or a tranquil state (*al-nafs al-muṭma'innah*) for having successfully attained the presence of the divine dimension. Renard, *Historical Dictionary of Sufism*, 289. Al-

"And among the defects of the *al-nafs*... (*wa min 'uyūbihā...*);" "And its remedy...(*wa mudāwātuhā...*)."⁵⁸ I posit that al-Sulamī's narrative concerning the negative condition of *al-nafs* here is closely linked to *nafs al-ammārah* and *nafs al-lawwāmah*, while its remedy, as a form of transformation toward a positive condition, is closely associated with *nafs al-muṭma'innah*. Thus, this confirms Welle's statement that, as a Sufi, al-Sulamī narrates *al-nafs* in a manner that tends to be deprecating, due to the complexity of his focus on *nafs al-ammārah* and *nafs al-lawwāmah*.⁵⁸ It is also important to note that all of al-Sulamī's narratives in this text consistently rely on quotations from Qur'anic verses, Ḥadīth, and various statements of Sufis to strengthen his arguments for transforming *al-nafs* from its negative to its positive condition.

In total, al-Sulamī constructs a comprehensive narrative of spiritual-moral pathology by presenting the thirty-two defects of *al-nafs* and their remedies, and as noted, it is not a mere catalog. Narratively, these thirty-two formulas can be understood through the dimensions of a servant's relationship with God, interactions with others, and internal ego management. Regarding the vertical relationship with God, al-Sulamī identifies severe defects such as doubting divine salvation,⁵⁹ seeking deliverance from entities other than God,⁶⁰ delaying obedience,⁶¹ and performing acts of worship without experiencing their sweetness due to ostentation (*al-riyā'*).⁶²

Furthermore, he warns against a superficial, formalistic approach to religion where one decorates outward devotion while the heart remains heedless (*li tuzayyīn anwār bāṭinihi af'āl zāhirihi*),⁶³ objecting to God's decree (*al-i'tirād 'alā-Allāh*),⁶⁴ and boasting about one's spiritual graces (*al-ightirār bi al-karāmāt*).⁶⁵ The main remedy (*mudāwāh*) for these spiritual pathologies centers on re-

Sulamī extensively addresses *nafs al-lawwāmah* [Q. al-Qiyāmah: 2] and *al-muṭma'innah* [Q. al-Fajr: 27] in his exegetical work by quoting other early Sufis like al-Tustarī, Abū Bakr al-Warrāq, and al-Junayd to elaborate on their spiritual dimensions. Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq Al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, ed. Sayyid 'Umrān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001), 361 & 394.

⁵⁸ Welle, *Companionship and Virtue in Classical Sufism: The Contribution of Al-Sulamī*, 55.

⁵⁹ al-Sulamī, *'Uyūb Al-Nafs Wa Mudāwātuhā*, 5–7.

⁶⁰ al-Sulamī, 7.

⁶¹ al-Sulamī, 8.

⁶² al-Sulamī, 8–9.

⁶³ al-Sulamī, 13.

⁶⁴ al-Sulamī, 18.

⁶⁵ al-Sulamī, 36–37.

evaluating one's sincerity (*al-ikhlāṣ*), returning to absolute faith (*bi al-kulliyyah*), and continuously seeking God's refuge rather than relying on outward appearances.

In the realm of social and interpersonal pathologies, al-Sulamī emphasizes defects arising from the ego's interaction with society. He highlights the destructive habit of seeking out others' faults (*al-ishtighāl bi 'uyūb al-nās*),⁶⁶ utilizing knowledge to seek social power and harboring arrogance (*ṭalab al-ri'āṣah bi al-'ilm wa al-takabbur*),⁶⁷ speaking excessively about useless matters to gain status,⁶⁸ and being easily provoked to anger (*al-ghaḍab*) or lying (*al-kidhb*) for social approval.⁶⁹ Moreover, traits such as stinginess (*al-bukhl*) and envy (*al-ḥasad*)⁷⁰ are criticized for destroying empathy among people. To cure these social diseases, al-Sulamī prescribes cultivating humility (*al-tawāḍu'*), focusing on one's own internal flaws instead of others', observing silence, and realizing that worldly status and wealth are transient illusions that cannot confer true honor.

Finally, concerning internal and ascetic pathologies, the text also meticulously outlines the struggle against bodily desires and worldly attachments. Al-Sulamī critiques the laziness that stems from excessive satiation (*al-kasl wa huwa mīrāth al-shab'*),⁷¹ being overly responsive to praise or blame,⁷² excessive worldly ambition (*al-ḥirṣ wa al-takathhur*),⁷³ greed (*al-ṭama'*),⁷⁴ and wasting precious time on frivolous matters (*taḍyī' al-awqāt*).⁷⁵ He also addresses the danger of becoming overly self-satisfied⁷⁶ or, conversely, engaging in extreme self-torment while neglecting the inner self.⁷⁷ The proposed transformation for these internal defects involves rigorous physical and mental training, such as embracing hunger (*al-tawjī'*), practicing self-restraint, avoiding matters of ambiguous permissibility (*al-shubuhāt*), and establishing an acute awareness that time is one's most precious asset, which should not be wasted.⁷⁸

⁶⁶ al-Sulamī, 12.

⁶⁷ al-Sulamī, 15.

⁶⁸ al-Sulamī, 16.

⁶⁹ al-Sulamī, 29.

⁷⁰ al-Sulamī, 30–31.

⁷¹ al-Sulamī, 14.

⁷² al-Sulamī, 20.

⁷³ al-Sulamī, 20.

⁷⁴ al-Sulamī, 19–20.

⁷⁵ al-Sulamī, 28.

⁷⁶ al-Sulamī, 20–21.

⁷⁷ al-Sulamī, 21.

⁷⁸ al-Sulamī, 14; 19–20; 28; 35–36.

The Three Controls as the Core Ideas of al-Sulamī's *al-Nafs Transformation*

It is pertinent to elaborate in this subsection that al-Sulamī's endeavor to provide Sufi guidance concerning the transformation of *al-nafs* from a negative condition (*'uyūb*) to a positive one (*mudāwāh*) encompasses several core ideas. Based on a meticulous reading of his thirty-two therapeutic formulas, I divide these core ideas into three overarching categories, namely thought control, action control, and integrated control [of thought and action simultaneously or vice versa]. This tripartite division demonstrates that the various narratives put forward by al-Sulamī are deeply interconnected. Some remedies are explicitly repeated across different sections, while others implicitly reiterate the same substantive meaning.⁷⁹ This confirms Welle's argument that al-Sulamī indeed strove to address the negative inclination of *al-nafs* systematically, even if he did not map it out with rigid categorization in the original text.⁸⁰ By classifying these therapeutic formulas, the broad ideal in the text *'Uyūb* can be analyzed comprehensively.

The first category, *thought control*, emphasizes the necessity for an individual to rectify their cognition and mindset before manifesting any action. In al-Sulamī's framework, cognitive realignment operates on two dimensions, namely vertical and horizontal. Vertically, al-Sulamī conceptualizes thought control as a demand to improve one's internal perception of God. For instance, when addressing pathologies such as doubting divine salvation or seeking deliverance from entities other than God, he demands that an individual continually maintain a positive mindset in its totality (*bi al-kulliyyah*) regarding faith. One must eliminate any doubt about the certainty that God will surely save him. Furthermore, thought control involves a cognitive shift, liberating the mind from an excessive focus on physical, formalistic, and transient worldly matters, and redirecting it firmly toward otherworldly [transcendental realities].

Horizontally, al-Sulamī directs thought control toward improving one's perception of fellow human beings. Pathologies such as excessive pride, speaking uselessly for status, or being easily provoked to anger stem from a flawed social mindset. To cure this, an individual must foster a profound cognitive awareness that one day he will be held accountable for all his actions. By internalizing this

⁷⁹ For example, al-Sulamī repeatedly states that the defect of *al-nafs* lies in its orientation, which tends toward physical/formal matters, and in its greedy nature.

⁸⁰ Welle, *Companionship and Virtue in Classical Sufism: The Contribution of Al-Sulamī*, 56.

realization, a person does not easily fall into excessive pride or hatred. This mindset makes an individual discerning in seeking righteous companions, wise in controlling emotions, and immune to greed and envy, because genuine empathy forms the basis of their regard for others.

The second category, *action control*, shifts the emphasis directly to praxis. Here, an individual is instructed to perform specific physical or behavioral deeds to curb the dominance of *al-nafs*. Vertically, action control is a mechanism to combat spiritual stagnation. When addressing issues like the delay in performing obedience, superficial devotion, or laziness born of excessive satiation, al-Sulamī demands immediate action. The believer must actively seek help from God to prevent delays in obedience, rigorously practice bodily discipline such as embracing hunger, and persistently engage in private self-examination (*al-muḥāsabah*). It is crucial to note that these actions must be performed continuously until they form a habit, enabling the individual to break free from laziness and anything that may cause heedlessness.

Horizontally, action control manifests as a strict ethical restraint in social interactions. The most prominent example is al-Sulamī's remedy for the destructive habit of seeking out the faults of others. The direct action required here is to immediately divert the focus back to oneself. If a person witnesses the faults of others, the prescribed action is not to gossip or expose them publicly, but to exercise physical restraint by choosing to remain silent while privately praying for that other person. This action control effectively cuts off the social fuel that feeds the arrogant ego.

The third and highest category is *integrated control*, which compels an individual to think and act simultaneously. In this phase, cognitive realization and physical action cannot be separated. Vertically, integrated control is required when dealing with deep-seated spiritual blindness, such as being overly proud of one's acts of obedience. To counter this, an individual must simultaneously act by frequently seeking forgiveness and cognitively foster the awareness not to become easily proud of his acts of obedience. Frequently, building friendships with like-minded people is the action, while creating a collective consciousness to consider matters properly is the thought process. This synchronization leads to eternal happiness both in this world and the Hereafter.

Horizontally, integrated control demands a continuous cycle of social reflection and ethical manifestation. When addressing pathologies like stinginess, greed, and boasting about one's status, an individual is required to continually reflect on the fact that God is always bestowing goodness upon him [thought]

while maintaining humility toward his fellow beings [action]. Consequently, this integrated control makes a person self-restrained. His actions reflect a practice of modesty, while his mind continually avoids ill assumptions about others. When this synchronization becomes a habit, his life is filled with empathy and sensitivity to social issues.

Based on the exposition above, it is evident that while al-Sulamī views *al-nafs* pessimistically, he does not outright disparage the physical body, which is the instrument that forms action. As noted by Welle, his ideas contribute to conceptualizing the relationship between *al-nafs* and the body, framing it as a discourse of regulation,⁸¹ and even mutual support to achieve transformation from a negative to a positive condition. In all categories of control, al-Sulamī consistently emphasizes that an individual must always focus his *al-nafs* on being bound to God. This demonstrates that he centers this idea within the broad concept of *dhikr* [remembrance]. It is not merely about uttering phrases of praise to God – although vocal *dhikr* can be considered an initial effort to control *al-nafs*⁸² – but rather about establishing a disciplined and ethical principle in obeying His teachings.

Thus, al-Sulamī's ideas on *al-nafs*, which are the tangible manifestation of his Sufi thought, are proven to stem from an assumption that emphasizes character education, as stated by Abdel-Latif.⁸³ However, it is essential to understand that although al-Sulamī offers solutions for the defects of *al-nafs*, if they are not implemented consistently, they will assuredly yield no impact whatsoever for an individual. Therefore, consistency is the primary modality for the realization of *al-nafs* transformation. As Sachedina states, positive behavior can only be achieved through habituation, and in truth, God has already provided an explicit

⁸¹ Welle, 56.

⁸² Feyza Akova, 'Returning to God: Constructing Agency through the Practice of Dhikr in Sufi Islam', in *Routledge Handbook of Islamic Ritual and Practice*, ed. Oliver Leaman (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 206; M. Applebaum, 'Dhikr as Mindfulness: Meditative Remembrance in Sufism', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 65 (2023): 409–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221678231206901>; M. Afifi et al., 'Dzikir and Meditation in Tashawwuf: Spiritual Disciplines, Psychological Benefits, and Their Contemporary Relevance', *MIQOT: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 49, no. 2 (2025): 400–422, <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v49i2.1485>; Jafar Jafarov, 'The Effects of Dhikr on Mental Health', *History of Science* 6, no. 2 (2025): 78–93, <https://doi.org/10.33864/2790-0037.2025.v6.i2.78-93>.

⁸³ Abdel-Latif, 'The Development of a Sufi Anti-Curriculum: Politics of Knowledge and Authority in Classical Islamic Education', 653.

vision capable of drawing one closer to Him: namely, through the struggle (*jihād*) of governing *al-nafs*.⁸⁴

As the concluding part, the discussion of non-physical aspects within the human being inevitably intersects with the concept of *rūḥ*, a positive entity bestowed by God upon every human.⁸⁵ The *rūḥ*, associated with angelic attributes and intellectual capacity, is considered the counterpart to *al-nafs*.⁸⁶ Although al-Sulamī does not explicitly elaborate on the dialectic between *rūḥ* and *al-nafs* within the text *ʿUyūb*, his entire therapeutic project essentially aligns with this dialectic. His endeavor to transform *al-nafs* from a state of defects to a state of its cures can be understood as an aim to elevate *al-nafs* toward the state of *al-muṭmaʿinnah* [tranquil]. At this highest stage of transformation, the once-rebellious *al-nafs* is purified, effectively harmonizing and resonating with the divine purity of the *rūḥ*. Thus, al-Sulamī's practical guide substantiates the profound Sufi argument that the human *al-nafs*, despite its negative inclinations, can be purified and perfected.

Conclusion

While the general Sufi perspective often treats *al-nafs* with deprecation, this study demonstrates that al-Sulamī's text *ʿUyūb* addresses its core pathology through a practical and pragmatic approach. Al-Sulamī explicitly lists the defects (*ʿuyūb*) of *al-nafs* as its negative condition and provides specific therapeutic remedies (*mudāwāh*) to transform it into a positive condition. Through a meticulous reading, this study concludes that the text functions as a systematic technical guide – relevant to both the populace of his time and contemporary readers – built upon three core categories of transformation: thought control, action control, and integrated control. Crucially, each of these controls operates bidirectionally: vertically, managing the individual's relationship with God, and horizontally, governing interactions with fellow human beings.

Despite these findings, this study acknowledges its limitations. Because this study is methodologically strictly confined to a micro-level close reading of a single primary text, *ʿUyūb*, it does not broadly map al-Sulamī's complete

⁸⁴ Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Ethics: Fundamental Aspects of Human Conduct* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 31.

⁸⁵ Rothman and Coyle, 'Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy'; J. Abraham and Allan Varghese Meloottu, 'Qur'anic Understanding of Rūḥ', *Pncuma* 48, no. 1 (2026): 89–111, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700747-bja10149>.

⁸⁶ Sa'diyya Shaikh, 'Spirituality and Gender in Islam', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Islamic Spirituality*, ed. Vincent J. Cornell and Bruce B. Lawrence (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2023), 220.

intellectual thought across his other voluminous works. Based on this limitation, several avenues for future research are recommended. Future studies can focus on exploring his more expansive ideas, such as his Sufi ethics and Qur'anic exegesis. Regarding the specific discussion of *al-nafs*, future studies could seek its relevance by constructing a conceptual model for contemporary mental health, psychological counseling, or Islamic psychology based on the early Sufism tradition.

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