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An Integrative Model of Sufistic Coping and Spiritual Adaptation in Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*

Yunita Furi Aristyasari^{1*}, Sukiman¹, Sibawaihi¹, and Akhmad Liana Amrul Haq²

¹ Islamic Teaching Doctoral Program, Tarbiyah Faculty, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

² Social Science, Faculty of Education, Social Science, and Islamic Studies, Universiti Muhammadiyah Malaysia, Malaysia

* Corresponding author: 20304012002@student.uin-suka.ac.id

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Abstract: Adversity, such as illness, loss, suffering, and awareness of death, disrupts assumptions about the self, life's purpose, justice, and the world's predictability. This study develops a conceptual model of Sufistic coping and spiritual adaptation based on Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*. Using a qualitative interpretive design, the study analyzes selected passages from the *Risale-i Nur* and places them in dialogue with contemporary scholarship on religious coping and meaning-making. The analysis identifies five interrelated mechanisms: theological reappraisal of adversity, Qur'anic reflection and meaning reconstruction, investigative faith, divine reliance combined with positive action, and text-based communal reinforcement. These mechanisms facilitate meaning reconstruction, emotional reorientation, moral agency, hope, and strengthened relationships with God and community. The findings suggest that Nursi conceptualizes spiritual adaptation not as eliminating suffering, but as actively transforming its meaning while sustaining trust in God, ethical responsibility, purposeful action, and relational connection.

Contribution: This study provides a theoretical framework for further textual, empirical, and psychoeducational research on Islamic spiritual coping based on Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*.

Keywords: Said Nursi; *Risale-i Nur*; Sufistic coping; spiritual adaptation; religious coping

Introduction

Adversity is not experienced solely as an external event. Illness, loss, suffering, isolation, uncertainty, and the awareness of death can disrupt assumptions about the self, the purpose of life, justice, and the predictability of the world. Coping therefore involves not only managing external demands but also interpreting what an adverse experience means. Contemporary meaning-making research suggests that distress may intensify when situational experiences conflict with an individual's broader beliefs, values, and life goals.¹ Religious and spiritual traditions are particularly relevant to this interpretive process because they locate human vulnerability within broader accounts of meaning, purpose, transcendence, and ultimate concern. Religious coping may support hope, resilience, and meaning, although maladaptive religious interpretations can also intensify distress.^{2 2}

Islamic spirituality provides a distinctive framework for understanding such responses to adversity. Concepts such as *iman* (faith), *tawakkul* (trustful reliance on God), *sabr* (patient perseverance), *du'a* (supplication), *dhikr* (remembrance of God), gratitude, and reliance on divine grace connect cognition, emotion, moral conduct, and the believer's relationship with God. A systematic review of Islamic-Sufi spirituality and mental wellbeing identified 49 studies published between 2007 and 2022, many of which reported beneficial associations or outcomes. However, the overall evidence was largely of poor or moderate methodological quality.³ Research among Muslim populations similarly indicates that religiosity can be associated with happiness and

¹ Florin Dolcos et al., "Religiosity and Resilience: Cognitive Reappraisal and Coping Self-Efficacy Mediate the Link between Religious Coping and Well-Being," *Journal of Religion and Health* 60, no. 4 (August 2021): 2892–2905, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01160-y>; Mira Elise Glaser Holthe and Kerstin Söderström, "Adversarial Growth among Refugees: A Scoping Review," *Social Sciences* 13, no. 1 (January 2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13010046>.

² Sameer Ansari and Naved Iqbal, "Contributions of Muslim Medieval Scholars to Psychology," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 45, no. 3 (2023): 308–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00846724231197238>; Narayanan Annalakshmi and Mohammed Abeer, "Islamic Worldview, Religious Personality and Resilience Among Muslim Adolescent Students in India," *Europe's Journal of Psychology* 7, no. 4 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v7i4.161>.

³ 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 (November 2023): 1065–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2023.2256265>.

wellbeing, although the strength and meaning of these associations vary according to cultural context, population characteristics, and forms of religious involvement.⁴ These findings indicate an important conceptual problem: demonstrating that spirituality is associated with wellbeing is not the same as explaining how particular religious ideas, interpretations, and practices may operate as coping processes.

Within this broader discussion, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi offers a significant but conceptually complex case. The *Risale-i Nur* was developed in circumstances marked by confinement and political pressure and was intended to explain and strengthen the fundamental truths of faith and the Qur'an for modern readers.⁵ Nursi did not formulate a psychological theory of coping. His project was primarily Qur'an-centred and theological, directed toward strengthening faith, moral responsibility, and constructive action. Nevertheless, the conditions under which his writings emerged and the themes they repeatedly address—suffering, fear, mortality, uncertainty, faith, hope, and responsible action—make them relevant to the study of religious coping.

Existing scholarship has already identified several psychological and spiritual dimensions of Nursi's thought. Yucel argues that Nursi's treatment of positive emotions and constructive action developed in close relation to his prolonged experiences of persecution, detention, exile, and surveillance rather than as purely abstract speculation.⁶ Thomas demonstrates that metaphorical and persuasive forms in the *Risale-i Nur* can orient readers toward positive emotions, spiritual wellbeing, and constructive behaviour.⁷ These studies suggest that Nursi's writings contain resources that may be interpreted in coping-related terms. However, their categories remain fundamentally theological, spiritual, and ethical and should therefore not be treated as equivalent to clinical constructs without careful conceptual mediation.

⁴ Aishath Shahama et al., "The Pursuit of Happiness within Islam: A Systematic Review of Two Decades of Research on Religiosity and Happiness in Islamic Groups," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 25, no. 7 (August 2022): 629–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674676.2022.2028748>.

⁵ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *The Highway of The Practices of The Prophet* (Istanbul: Sözlür Neşriyat, 2012), 9.

⁶ S Yucel, "The Metaphysics of Emotion: Said Nursi's Contribution to Positive Psychology," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 1 (2026), <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v11i1.1255>.

⁷ Nur Sakinah Thomas, "The Role of Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* in Psychological Wellbeing," *Malaysian Journal of Medicine and Health Sciences* 15 (2019): 37–44.

Nursi's relationship with Sufism adds another layer of complexity. He explicitly stated that he was not a Sufi in the institutional sense and did not establish a formal Sufi order.⁸ Nursi describes the aim of the Sufi path as "knowledge of God and the unfolding of the truths of faith," pursued through a spiritual journey of the heart.⁹ This primary formulation supports the present study's use of substantive Sufism while also showing that, for Nursi, Sufi practice remains subordinate to the strengthening of faith.

The *Risale-i Nur* also gives sustained attention to purification of self, spiritual maturity, inner transformation, experiential certainty, divine proximity, and ethical struggle. These features allow Nursi's approach to be examined in terms of selective or substantive Sufism, provided that such terminology does not obscure his criticisms of particular institutional doctrines and practices. His emphasis on spiritually grounded but socially responsible action also parallels modern formulations of engaged spirituality in which inner transformation is expected to generate service, restraint, compassion, and constructive participation rather than withdrawal from ordinary life.¹⁰

Previous research has illuminated important components that are relevant to such a coping framework, but these components remain analytically dispersed. Thomas highlights the role of metaphor and persuasive discourse in psychological wellbeing.¹¹ Yucel shows how Qur'anic and trans-empirical reflection may foster investigative faith, positive outlook, and constructive action, while his work on emotion further clarifies how Nursi relates spiritual interpretation to the redirection of affective life.¹² Mujani demonstrates that Nursi's engagement with history privileges moral lessons, divine sovereignty, and the strengthening of faith rather than chronological description.¹³ Taken together, these studies identify several potentially adaptive elements—reflection, metaphor, faith verification, emotional reorientation, moral action,

⁸ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Al-Lama'at* (Tangerang Selatan: Risalah Nur Press, 2018), 257.

⁹ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *The Letters 1928-1932*, 2nd ed., 2008, 507.

¹⁰ Fathor Rahim and Hasnan Bachtiar, "Hamka's Neo-Sufism in the Context Modern Society," *Journal of Social Studies* 19, no. 1 SE-Articles (April 2023): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.21831/jss.v19i1.57513>.

¹¹ Thomas, "The Role of Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* in Psychological Wellbeing."

¹² Salih Yucel, "An Islamic Therapy: A Fear Reducing Holistic Approach (FERHA)," *Journal of Religion and Health* 61, no. 5 (2022): 3840–51, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01286-7>.

¹³ Wan Kamal Mujani, "History in the Quran According to the *Risale-i Nur*," *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 6, no. 6 (2012): 966–72.

and meaning—but they do not yet explain how these elements interact as a coherent process through which adversity is interpreted, emotionally negotiated, translated into ethical agency, and sustained within a religious community.

This is the principal conceptual gap addressed in the present study. Rather than assuming a direct equivalence between established psychological constructs and Islamic theological concepts, this study adopts an emic starting point grounded in the theological and anthropological assumptions of the *Risale-i Nur*. Comparative research on religious coping indicates that religious traditions can shape coping in different ways, underscoring the importance of attending to tradition-specific beliefs and practices.¹⁴ Accordingly, the analysis begins with Nursi's own conceptual grammar: the world as meaningful creation, the Qur'an as an interpretive guide, faith as something to be personally verified and internalized, adversity as potentially instructive, and human agency as morally accountable yet ultimately limited. Psychological concepts such as meaning reconstruction, emotion regulation, or resilience are therefore used as interpretive lenses for clarifying possible functions of these ideas, not as categories retrospectively attributed to Nursi himself.

The integrative character of the proposed model operates at three interconnected levels. First, it links theological interpretation with psychological processes of meaning, emotion, and agency. Second, it connects individual spiritual transformation with textual and communal reinforcement. Third, it organizes concepts that have previously been discussed separately in Nursi studies into a dynamic process extending from adversity to spiritual adaptation. In this study, spiritual adaptation refers to the capacity to sustain meaning, hope, moral agency, emotional orientation, relational connection, and reliance on God while continuing to respond responsibly to adversity. It does not imply the complete elimination of distress.

Against this background, the study addresses three questions. First, how are suffering, illness, persecution, and uncertainty interpreted within the Qur'an-centred and selectively Sufi framework of the *Risale-i Nur*? Second, what interrelated coping mechanisms can be conceptually derived from Nursi's writings and the scholarship that interprets them? Third, how might these mechanisms contribute to spiritual adaptation through meaning reconstruction, emotional reorientation, moral action, hope, and communal reinforcement?

¹⁴ Hisham Abu-Raiya and Kenneth I. Pargament, "Religious Coping among Diverse Religions: Commonalities and Divergences," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 7, no. 1 (2019): 24–33, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037652>.

The study proposes that spiritual adaptation in the *Risale-i Nur* emerges through a dynamic and recursive process in which adversity is theologically reappraised, reconstructed through Qur'anic reflection, stabilized through investigative faith (*iman tahqiqi*), translated into *tawakkul*-informed responsible action, and sustained through textual and communal reinforcement. The article thus contributes to Nursi studies by integrating previously dispersed concepts into a process model; to the psychology of religion by proposing an emically grounded and theocentric account of coping; and to Sufism studies by showing how coping-related spiritual transformation may operate through substantive Sufi orientations without requiring formal affiliation with a Sufi order.

Literature Review

Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur*, and Selective Sufism

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1876–1960) was a prominent Muslim scholar who lived through the final decades of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Turkish Republic. Born in the village of Nurs in eastern Anatolia, he received a traditional Islamic education while also developing an interest in modern fields of knowledge. His concern over the growing separation between religious learning and modern science later shaped his proposal for *Madrasat al-Zahra*, an institution intended to integrate both traditions. Scholars often describe his intellectual development in terms of the 'Old Said,' 'New Said,' and later 'Third Said' phases, with the later periods increasingly centred on strengthening faith through Qur'anic reflection and teaching.¹⁵ The *Risale-i Nur* emerged as the main expression of this later project. Nursi wrote much of it in exile, imprisonment, under political pressure, and under surveillance. Yucel notes that these experiences lasted about thirty-five years and shaped Nursi's emphasis on *nazar* (positive outlook), *müspet hareket* (positive action), and the disciplined direction of emotion.¹⁶ His understanding of spirituality remained closely tied to religious practice, ethical discipline, and inner formation.¹⁷

Nursi's relationship with Sufism cannot be captured by a simple distinction between acceptance and rejection. Godlas argues that the "Nine Allusions"

¹⁵ M. Kholid Muslih, Chandra Dwisetyo Widodo, and Abdulvahap Zeydan, "Exploring Bediuzzaman Said Nursi's Thought On Nature From The Perspective Of Kalām Jadid," *Afkar* 28, no. 1 (2026): 47–82, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol28no1.2>.

¹⁶ Yucel, "The Metaphysics of Emotion: Said Nursi's Contribution to Positive Psychology."

¹⁷ Huseyin Çaksen, Khalid Hussain, and Salih Yahya Inan, "Said Nursi's Perspective of Islamic Spirituality," *Al-Shajarah* 31, no. 1 (2026): 149–67, <https://doi.org/10.31436/shajarah.v31i1.2123>.

constitute a systematic and differentiated engagement with Sufi thought.¹⁸ Nursi accepted dimensions of the Sufi path that strengthen faith, purify intention, deepen experiential knowledge, and direct the believer toward God, while criticizing doctrines or practices that he regarded as excessive, potentially misleading, or unsuitable for the religious needs of his time.¹⁹ His position was therefore selective: He evaluated Sufi concepts and practices by their capacity to strengthen Qur'anic faith rather than treating them as an autonomous institutional program.

This selective engagement provides a basis for using the concept of substantive Sufism in the present study. Substantive Sufism refers here to a mode of spiritual formation that embodies characteristic Sufi aims—such as purification of the self, deepened awareness of God, ethical transformation, and disciplined spiritual practice—without requiring formal initiation into a Sufi order. This distinction is important because the adaptive significance of Sufi spirituality cannot be reduced to institutional affiliation. Mitha similarly argues that Sufi approaches to healing involve sacred meaning, ethical transformation, embodied practice, and a relational understanding of the self rather than symptom management alone.²⁰ In the Nursian context, the analytical question is therefore not whether the *Risale-i Nur* reproduces the institutional structure of a conventional Sufi order, but how its spiritual anthropology reshapes the believer's relationship to suffering, desire, responsibility, and divine purpose.

This orientation is also consistent with reformist expressions of Sufism that connect inner transformation with active participation in social life. Rahim and Bachtiar describe neo-Sufism as an orientation that seeks spiritual depth without requiring withdrawal from changing social realities.²¹ Nursi's emphasis on constructive or positive action follows a comparable logic. Faith is expected to be expressed through patience, service, restraint, compassion, moral discipline, and responsible behaviour. This combination of inward transformation and outward responsibility is especially relevant to the present study because it

¹⁸ Alan Godlas, "A Religiological Analysis of Nursi's View of Sufism Expressed in the 'Nine Allusions' (Telvihât-i Tis'a) of the *Risale-i Nur*," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 19, no. 1 (2008): 39–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340701770279>.

¹⁹ Nursi, *Al-Lama'at*.

²⁰ Karim Mitha, "Sufism and Healing," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 21, no. 3 (2019): 194–205, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2018.1464423>.

²¹ Rahim and Bachtiar, "Hamka's Neo-Sufism in the Context Modern Society."

provides a conceptual basis for understanding coping not as passive surrender, but as a spiritually grounded form of ethical agency.

Accordingly, the Sufi dimension of the *Risale-i Nur* is best understood as selective spiritual grammar rather than a formal institutional identity. This grammar links the purification of perception, the reorientation of emotion, the strengthening of faith, and responsible action. These elements provide the theological foundation for examining how Nursi's thought may be reconstructed as a model of Sufistic coping.

Religious and Sufistic Coping: Meaning, Emotion, Faith, and Spiritual Adaptation

Religious coping is closely related to the way individuals interpret adversity. Meaning-making theory provides a useful conceptual bridge between spiritual interpretation and psychological adaptation. Park distinguishes between global meaning, which includes deeply held beliefs about the world, justice, identity, and purpose, and situational meaning, which refers to the meaning assigned to a specific event.²² Distress may intensify when threatening experiences conflict with a person's broader assumptions and commitments. Coping can therefore involve reappraising the event, revising broader assumptions, or integrating both into a more coherent framework.

Empirical research supports the relevance of meaning in religious coping. Krok found that global and situational meaning partially mediated the relationship between religiosity, spirituality, and coping among late adolescents.²³ Such findings do not validate Nursi's theological claims in psychological terms. They do, however, support the conceptual possibility that religious interpretations can function as part of the coping process rather than merely as beliefs added after adaptation has already occurred.

The *Risale-i Nur* repeatedly places illness, mortality, uncertainty, and human limitation within a broader theological framework. Adversity can be

²² Crystal L Park, "Religiousness and Meaning Making Following Stressful Life Events," in *The Science of Religion, Spirituality, and Existentialism*, ed. Kenneth E Vail and Clay Routledge (Academic Press, 2020), 273–85, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-817204-9.00020-2>.

²³ Dariusz Krok, "Religiousness, Spirituality, and Coping with Stress among Late Adolescents: A Meaning-Making Perspective," *Journal of Adolescence* 45, no. 1 (December 2015): 196–203, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.10.004>.

interpreted as a reminder of dependence, a stimulus for reflection, an occasion for purification, or an invitation to recognize divine mercy and wisdom. Within such a framework, the meaning of suffering is not restricted to its immediate negative consequences. Instead, adversity is situated within beliefs concerning creation, accountability, divine purpose, and the afterlife. This theological reframing may therefore contribute to what can be described conceptually as spiritual coherence or ontological security.

Meaning reconstruction is closely connected to emotion regulation. Religious coping can influence attention, appraisal, emotional responses, behaviour, and social relationships. Graça and Brandão report associations between religious/spiritual coping, emotion regulation, psychological wellbeing, and life satisfaction.²⁴ Surzykiewicz et al. further demonstrate that positive and negative religious coping have different relationships with resilience and mental wellbeing.²⁵ These findings are important because they indicate that religion is not inherently adaptive. Its effects depend partly on how divine agency, suffering, responsibility, and the self are interpreted.

Nursi's account of emotion is particularly relevant to this distinction. Yucel explains that Nursi treats emotions as faculties that can be directed toward different objects and purposes.²⁶ Fear, love, hope, anxiety, and desire are therefore not simply suppressed but reoriented within a God-centred understanding of reality. The concept of *nazar*, or positive outlook, concerns the way circumstances are perceived, while *müspet hareket*, or positive action, concerns the translation of spiritually reoriented emotions into constructive behaviour.

Within this framework, *tawakkul* and *sabr* should not be understood as passivity or emotional disengagement. *Tawakkul* involves trustful reliance on God while maintaining responsible effort, whereas *sabr* entails patient perseverance under conditions of difficulty. Hope may emerge as one possible

²⁴ Lídia Graça and Tânia Brandão, "Religious/Spiritual Coping, Emotion Regulation, Psychological Well-Being, and Life Satisfaction among University Students," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 52, no. 3 (2024): 342–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00916471231223920>.

²⁵ Janusz Surzykiewicz et al., "Exploring the Mediating Effects of Negative and Positive Religious Coping between Resilience and Mental Well-Being," *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 16 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2022.954382>.

²⁶ Yucel, "The Metaphysics of Emotion: Said Nursi's Contribution to Positive Psychology."

outcome of such coping processes, particularly in situations characterized by vulnerability and uncertainty. Counted et al. show that religious coping can be associated with hope and wellbeing in vulnerable contexts.²⁷ Nevertheless, spiritual adaptation should not be equated with the immediate disappearance of fear, grief, or doubt. A religious coping model must remain capable of acknowledging spiritual struggle as well as spiritual reassurance.

For the present study, spiritual adaptation therefore refers to a multidimensional process rather than a single psychological outcome. It includes the reconstruction of meaning, the reorientation of emotion, the strengthening of faith, sustained moral agency, relational support, and a deepened relationship with God. This understanding provides a conceptual framework for examining coping in the *Risale-i Nur* without reducing theological concepts to techniques for symptom relief

Method

This study employs a qualitative conceptual design combining interpretive textual synthesis and theory-building analysis. It aims to identify recurring concepts and functional relationships in Said Nursi's writings and organize them into a tentative model of Sufistic coping and spiritual adaptation. Contemporary research on religious coping, meaning-making, emotion regulation, resilience, and wellbeing is used as a comparative interpretive framework rather than as the primary source of the model.

The primary conceptual corpus consists of translated texts from the *Risale-i Nur* collection, with particular attention to passages addressing illness, hardship, human limitation, faith, divine reliance, Sufism, ethical action, and communal relations.²⁸ The unit of analysis is the textual proposition or passage describing adversity, meaning, the human–divine relationship, faith formation, emotional orientation, ethical responsibility, positive action, or communal support. Peer-reviewed studies on Nursi's Qur'anic interpretation, Sufi

²⁷ Victor Counted et al., “Hope and Well-Being in Vulnerable Contexts during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Does Religious Coping Matter?,” *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 17, no. 1 (January 2022): 70–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2020.1832247>.

²⁸ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Risalah Nur Collection (Külliyât Risale-i Nur)* (Sözler Publications, n.d.).

orientation, metaphorical discourse, emotion, and psychological wellbeing were used as secondary interpretive sources.²⁹

Relevant passages were collected through purposive textual selection based on their correspondence with the analytical domains of adversity, interpretation, faith, regulation and agency, as well as community. The selected texts were examined through repeated reading and coded according to both their conceptual content and their apparent function within Nursi's account of responding to adversity.

The analysis proceeded in five stages. First, the research questions were translated into preliminary analytical domains. Second, relevant passages were coded according to conceptual content and function. Third, related codes were clustered into five mechanisms: theological reappraisal of adversity, Qur'anic reflection and meaning reconstruction, investigative faith, divine reliance combined with positive action, and text-based communal reinforcement. Fourth, these mechanisms were compared with contemporary research on meaning-making and religious coping to clarify their possible psychological functions. Fifth, the mechanisms were organized into a dynamic and recursive model of spiritual adaptation. Psychological concepts are used as interpretive descriptors rather than as constructs retrospectively attributed to Nursi.

Because the study involved no human participants, identifiable personal data, clinical measures, or interventions, ethical approval and informed consent were not applicable. The study is conceptual and interpretive and therefore does not establish causal effects or clinical efficacy; the proposed relationships should be treated as theoretical propositions for future textual and empirical research. Its contribution is limited to the construction of a theoretically informed framework derived from interpretive synthesis:

Table 1. Analytical Domains used in the Conceptual Synthesis

Analytical Domain	Guiding Question	Primary Conceptual Indicators
Adversity	How is the stressor constructed?	Illness, loss, persecution, uncertainty, transience, mortality
Interpretation	How is meaning reconstructed?	Qur'anic reflection, metaphor, theological reappraisal, divine attributes
Faith	How is conviction stabilized?	<i>Iman tahqiqi</i> , rational reflection, spiritual witnessing, coherence

²⁹ Salih Yucel, "Rereading of the Quran in Light of Nursi's Risale-i Nur Collection: Shuhudi Exegesis," *Religions*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12121088>.

Analytical Domain	Guiding Question	Primary Conceptual Indicators
Regulation and agency	How are emotion and action reorganized?	<i>Tawakkul</i> , <i>sabr</i> , positive outlook, positive action, ethical discipline
Community	How is adaptation reinforced?	Shared reading, belonging, service, compassion, collective identity

Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis based on the selected *Risale-i Nur* corpus and analytical procedure described above.

Results and Discussion

The analysis identifies five interrelated mechanisms of Nursian Sufistic coping: theological reappraisal of adversity, Qur'anic reflection and meaning reconstruction, investigative faith, divine reliance with positive action, and text-based communal reinforcement. These mechanisms are analytically distinguishable but dynamically interconnected; spiritual adaptation is therefore conceptualized as a recursive rather than strictly linear process.

Theological Reappraisal of Adversity

The first mechanism concerns how adversity is interpreted. Illness, loss, persecution, uncertainty, and mortality may disrupt assumptions about control, justice, identity, and the future. In *Al-Lama'at*, Nursi reflects on the experience of Prophet Yunus (Jonah) in the belly of the whale, where ordinary human means of escape were no longer available.³⁰ The Prophet's prayer is presented as an acknowledgement of limitation, repentance, and glorification of God.³¹ Nursi emphasizes that in Yunus's condition "there was no refuge other than the Causer of Causes," thereby relocating human helplessness within an affirmation of divine unity rather than within the expectation of complete human control.³²

Nursi situates such vulnerability within a theological understanding of creation and divine providence. Adversity is not denied or treated as insignificant; rather, its meaning is relocated within a wider framework of human dependence, divine wisdom, mercy, accountability, and the transience of worldly life.³³ Hardship may therefore become an occasion for reflection, spiritual instruction, purification, or reconsideration of one's relationship with God.

This process can be placed in conceptual dialogue with meaning reconstruction. Park argues that distress may intensify when threatening

³⁰ Nursi, *Al-Lama'at*.

³¹ Nursi.

³² Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *The Flashes Collection*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat A.Ş., 2009), 18.

³³ Nursi, *Al-Lama'at*.

experiences conflict with a person's broader system of meaning.³⁴ Within Nursi's framework, the threatening event is reconnected with theological convictions concerning divine wisdom, mercy, responsibility, and the temporary nature of worldly existence. The function of reappraisal is therefore not to eliminate suffering immediately but to reduce the disjunction between adverse experience and the believer's theological worldview.

From a Sufistic perspective, adversity consequently becomes a context in which attachment, fear, claims of self-sufficiency, and human limitation can be re-examined. This theological reappraisal should not, however, be understood as simple positive thinking. Severe adversity may also provoke doubt, protest, grief, and spiritual struggle. The model therefore conceptualizes reappraisal as a gradual interpretive process rather than an automatic positive response.

Qur'anic Reflection and Meaning Reconstruction

The second mechanism involves Qur'anic reflection through scripture, creation, metaphor, and prophetic narratives. In *Al-Lama'at*, this interpretive lens situates suffering within divine wisdom, human limitation, and spiritual responsibility.³⁵ Metaphors and parables further translate theological propositions into cognitively and emotionally accessible images, allowing adversity to be interpreted within broader meanings of transience, hope, and responsibility. Yucel describes Nursi's approach as reading the Qur'an and the created world relationally, with creation functioning as a field of signs.³⁶

Nursi's treatment of Prophet Ayyub (Job) illustrates this movement from asking why suffering occurs toward considering the moral and spiritual response it requires.³⁷ This theological reconstruction resonates conceptually with research showing that meaning can mediate the relationship between religiosity and coping.³⁸ The comparison is heuristic rather than historical: Nursi is not presented as anticipating contemporary meaning-making theory.

Nursi's interpretation of Prophet Ayyub further distinguishes bodily suffering from spiritual loss. Ayyub's concern is presented not simply as relief

³⁴ Park, "Religiousness and Meaning Making Following Stressful Life Events."

³⁵ Nursi, *Al-Lama'at*.

³⁶ Yucel, "Rereading of the Quran in Light of Nursi's Risale-i Nur Collection: Shuhudi Exegesis."

³⁷ Nursi, *The Flashes Collection*.

³⁸ Krok, "Religiousness, Spirituality, and Coping with Stress among Late Adolescents: A Meaning-Making Perspective."

from pain but as fear that “*my remembrance of You with my tongue and my worship of You with my heart will suffer.*”³⁹ This shifts the meaning of adversity from symptom elimination toward the preservation of spiritual orientation.

Investigative Faith and Epistemic Stabilisation

The third mechanism is investigative faith (*iman tahqiqi*), understood as faith strengthened through reflection, rational inquiry, Qur’anic interpretation, and spiritual experience. This emphasis has a direct textual basis. In *The Rays*, Nursi refers to “certain, verified belief” as a mode through which human existence is understood in relation to both this world and the hereafter.⁴⁰ Elsewhere in the same treatise, he responds to old age, exile, illness, and defeat by urging himself to “look through the telescope of belief.”⁴¹ These formulations support interpreting *iman tahqiqi* not merely as assent but as an epistemic orientation through which adversity is re-read.

Alqodsi and Bidin describe Nursi’s method as integrating Qur’anic text, reason, spiritual insight, and moral purpose.⁴² Nursi likewise suggests that separation, mortality, and death are encountered differently when interpreted through faith.⁴³ Its proposed coping function is epistemic stabilisation: maintaining a coherent orientation toward God, suffering, mortality, and human responsibility when ordinary assumptions are disrupted. This does not imply the elimination of doubt or distress. Nursi further presents belief as a relation connecting the human being to the Creator and as a source of strength through which human vulnerability acquires a wider meaning.⁴⁴

³⁹ Nursi, *The Flashes Collection*.

⁴⁰ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *The Rays Collection*, Trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat A.Ş., 2007), 77.

⁴¹ Nursi, *The Rays Collection*, Trans. Şükran Vahide.

⁴² Ahmed S.A Alqodsi and Sharifah Norshah Bani Syed Bidin, “Reform-Oriented Exegesis in the Thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi: Methodological Insights from the Risale-I Nur,” *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 3 (May 2026): e104, <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v11i3.1099>.

⁴³ Nursi, *Al-Lama’at*.

⁴⁴ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *The Words: On the Nature and Purposes of Man, Life, and All Things*, Trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Publications A.Ş., 2008), 319.

Divine Reliance, Emotional Reorientation, and Positive Action

The fourth mechanism integrates *tawakkul*, *sabr*, emotional reorientation, and positive action. *Tawakkul* denotes trustful reliance on God, while *sabr* refers to patient perseverance; neither negates responsible effort. This balance preserves agency while acknowledging the limits of human control.

Nursi likewise warns against forms of anxiety and inner agitation that may intensify bodily and psychological suffering.⁴⁵ In his discussion of illness, he encourages calmness, acceptance of divine decree, and attention to the wisdom that may be found within illness.⁴⁶ Yucel explains that Nursi understands human emotions not as impulses that must simply be suppressed but as faculties that can be redirected toward appropriate objects and purposes.⁴⁷

Emotional reorientation in this model therefore does not mean denying anxiety, grief, or fear. Rather, it involves changing their direction and interpretive context. Anxiety over uncontrollable outcomes may be redirected toward concern for responsible action. Fear may be situated within awareness of human limitation and divine mercy. Hope may become grounded not in certainty that a desired outcome will occur but in confidence that responsible action remains possible even under conditions of uncertainty.

Positive action translates this orientation into self-restraint, compassion, service, and ethical consistency. Nursi treats reliance on God as compatible with disciplined self-sufficiency and responsible conduct rather than as a withdrawal from action.⁴⁸ This interpretation is compatible with research linking religious coping with emotion regulation and wellbeing,⁴⁹ although in the Nursian model moral agency remains the central concern.

Text-Based and Communal Reinforcement

The fifth mechanism concerns the relationship between religious texts and community. The *Risale-i Nur* was not only read privately but also

⁴⁵ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Nasihât Spiritual* (Tangerang Selatan: Risalah Nur Press, 2021), 95.

⁴⁶ Nursi, *Al-Lama'at*.

⁴⁷ Yucel, "The Metaphysics of Emotion: Said Nursi's Contribution to Positive Psychology."

⁴⁸ Nursi, *The Letters 1928-1932*.

⁴⁹ Graça and Brandão, "Religious/Spiritual Coping, Emotion Regulation, Psychological Well-Being, and Life Satisfaction among University Students."

functioned as a shared interpretive resource among its readers. Practices of reading, copying, circulating, and discussing the texts contributed to a communal environment in which faith, identity, moral responsibility, and interpretations of suffering could be reinforced.

The communal dimension is also grounded in Nursi's explicit understanding of the *Risale-i Nur* community as a form of brotherhood. He states that "our way is brotherhood" and that "brother helps and supports brother; he completes his service."⁵⁰ Such formulations provide a textual basis for conceptualizing community as a mechanism of mutual reinforcement rather than merely as a social context surrounding individual spirituality. This imagery indicates that spiritual formation was not conceived solely as an individual process. Responses to hardship could be sustained through shared interpretation, mutual encouragement, service, and belonging.

From a coping perspective, such practices may reduce isolation, sustain shared meaning, and reinforce constructive behaviour.⁵¹ Their adaptive value is conditional, however: communities may also intensify negative religious coping when they minimize suffering, moralize illness, stigmatize distress, or discourage appropriate treatment. Communal reinforcement is therefore beneficial only insofar as it fosters compassion, responsibility, service, and appropriate support.

Integrated Process and Expected Outcomes

Taken together, the five mechanisms constitute a recursive model of Sufistic coping. Adversity is theologically reappraised, reconstructed through Qur'anic reflection, stabilized through investigative faith, translated into trustful reliance and responsible action, and sustained through communal reinforcement. The sequence is not fixed; individuals may return to earlier mechanisms as circumstances change.

The proposed outcome is spiritual adaptation, defined as the capacity to sustain meaning, hope, moral agency, relational connection, and reliance on God while responding responsibly to adversity. It may coexist with grief,

⁵⁰ Nursi, *The Flashes Collection*.

⁵¹ Juliane Piasseschi de Bernardin Gonçalves et al., "Religious and Spiritual Interventions in Mental Health Care: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Clinical Trials," *Psychological Medicine* 45, no. 14 (2015): 2937–49, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1017/S0033291715001166>.

fear, uncertainty, and unresolved suffering. The model therefore does not claim that faith automatically produces wellbeing; rather, particular forms of theological interpretation, internalized faith, ethical action, and communal support may facilitate adaptation. This qualification is consistent with research indicating that positive and negative forms of religious coping can be associated with different outcomes.⁵²

The distinctive contribution of the proposed model lies in integrating these processes within a specifically Nursian theological framework. Instead of conceptualizing coping primarily as the reduction of distress, the model positions meaning, the divine–human relationship, moral responsibility, and communal belonging at the centre of adaptation. Coping therefore becomes not merely a way of managing adversity but a process of spiritual and ethical formation.

Table 2. Components of the Proposed Nursian Sufistic Coping Model

Mechanism	Immediate function	Proposed process	Expected adaptive outcome
Theological reappraisal	Relocates adversity within divine purpose	Meaning reconstruction	Coherence and reduced meaninglessness
Qur’anic reflection	Expands attention beyond the isolated stressor	Cognitive and affective reorientation	Purpose and spiritual awareness
Investigative faith	Connects belief, reason, and lived experience	Epistemic stabilisation	Ontological security and hope
Divine reliance and positive action	Balances trustful reliance with responsibility	Emotional reorientation and agency	Endurance, constructive behaviour, resilience
Text-based communal reinforcement	Reinforces shared meaning and belonging	Social support and moral accountability	Continuity, connection, collective resilience

Source: Authors’ conceptual synthesis based on the selected *Risale-i Nur* corpus.

⁵² Surzykiewicz et al., “Exploring the Mediating Effects of Negative and Positive Religious Coping between Resilience and Mental Well-Being.”

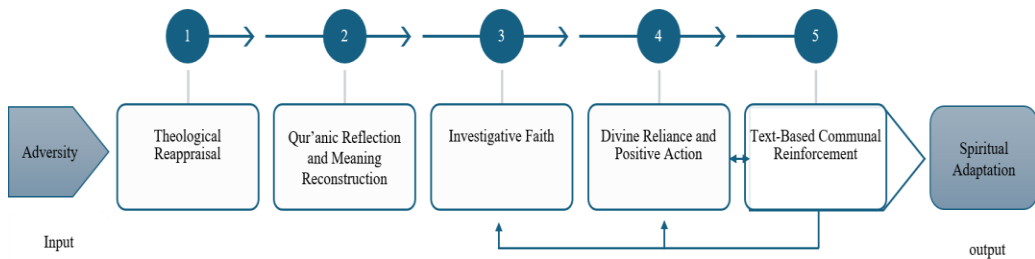


Figure 1. Proposed Process Model of Sufistic Coping and Spiritual Adaptation in the *Risale-i Nur*. Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis

The proposed model contributes to Nursi studies by organizing previously dispersed themes in the *Risale-i Nur*—including theological reappraisal, Qur'anic reflection, investigative faith, divine reliance, positive action, and communal reinforcement—into a coherent process of Sufistic coping. It also contributes to the psychology of religion by proposing an emically grounded and theocentric framework in which theological interpretation shapes the meaning of adversity rather than functioning merely as an additional coping strategy. Finally, it contributes to Sufism studies by showing how self-purification, divine orientation, ethical discipline, and service may operate as substantive Sufi processes without formal affiliation with a Sufi order.

The model may also have implications for culturally and religiously responsive psychoeducation where Qur'anic reflection, trust in God, ethical action, and communal support are meaningful to participants. Research on religious and spiritual interventions indicates that such approaches can be beneficial in some mental health contexts, although findings are heterogeneous and methodological quality varies.⁵³ Studies of Islamic contemplative and psycho-spiritual practices likewise suggest possible benefits related to stress, spirituality, emotional regulation, and behavioral change.⁵⁴ However, no empirical study has yet established the effectiveness of the proposed Nursian coping model.

⁵³ Gonçalves et al., "Religious and Spiritual Interventions in Mental Health Care: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Clinical Trials."

⁵⁴ Nasim Bahadorani, Jerry W. Lee, and Leslie R. Martin, "Implications of Tamarkoz on Stress, Emotion, Spirituality and Heart Rate," *Scientific Reports* 11, no. 1 (2021): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-93470-8>.

Accordingly, the model should not be presented as a clinically validated intervention. Its more defensible contribution is as a conceptual framework that may inform future psychoeducational or spiritually integrated approaches when these are culturally appropriate, voluntarily chosen, and used alongside—not instead of—professional mental health care when such care is needed. Several limitations qualify the model. It is conceptual rather than causal; its primary-text analysis is selective; translating theological concepts into psychological language risks conceptual reduction; and the framework emphasizes positive coping more strongly than spiritual struggle. Its applicability across Muslim populations also remains unknown.

Conclusion

This study develops an integrative model of Sufistic coping derived from Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*. The model comprises five interrelated mechanisms: theological reappraisal of adversity, Qur'anic reflection and meaning reconstruction, investigative faith, divine reliance combined with positive action, and text-based communal reinforcement. Together, these mechanisms describe a dynamic and recursive process through which adversity may be reinterpreted within a Qur'an-centred theological framework, incorporated into a more coherent understanding of faith, translated into responsible action, and sustained through communal relationships.

The Sufistic dimension of the model lies primarily in processes of spiritual formation rather than formal affiliation with a Sufi order. Self-purification, inward transformation, internalized faith, emotional reorientation, trustful reliance on God, and ethical responsibility are treated as interconnected dimensions of spiritual adaptation. Spiritual adaptation therefore does not require the disappearance of grief, fear, uncertainty, or suffering. Rather, it refers to the capacity to preserve meaning, hope, moral agency, relational connection, and dependence on God while continuing to respond responsibly to difficult circumstances.

The study makes three principal contributions. First, it contributes to Nursi studies by integrating concepts that have previously been examined separately into a coherent process model. Second, it contributes to the psychology of religion by proposing an emically grounded and theocentric account of coping in which theological interpretation is constitutive of the coping process rather than merely an additional coping resource. Third, it contributes to Sufism studies by

showing how Sufi-oriented processes of purification, inner transformation, divine orientation, and ethical action may operate outside formal institutional Sufism.

The model remains conceptual and should not be interpreted as evidence of clinical effectiveness. Its proposed mechanisms require further examination through systematic textual analysis, qualitative research with contemporary readers of the *Risale-i Nur*, and empirical studies across diverse Muslim populations. Future research may also examine whether the proposed mechanisms can be operationalized for psychometric or psychoeducational purposes while preserving their theological meanings. Until such evidence is available, the model is best understood as a theoretical framework for studying Nursian Sufistic coping and spiritual adaptation rather than as a clinically validated intervention.

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