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Tazkiyah al-Nafs in the Islamic Counseling Process from al-Ghazali's Perspective

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Abstract

Discussions about the counseling process typically revolve around structuring, building rapport, exploring, implementing strategies, terminating and following up. Eventually, many researchers began to recognize the need for religious elements to be implemented in counseling because the religious approach can solve the client's problems effectively. Nevertheless, the question remains at what level it is appropriate to implement Islamic teachings in counseling. Accordingly, this research tried to identify the method of applying *tazkiyah al-nafs* in the process of Islamic counseling according to al-Ghazali's perspective. The research methodology used was content analysis. The results of the study The results of the study found that there are five stages that need to be undergone in al-Ghazali's perspective counseling process; the first stage involves building rapport, the second stage involves knowing oneself and identifying the cause of the problem, the third stage involves implementing the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach with *mujahadah al-nafs (takhalli)*, the fourth stage includes the implementation of the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach with the *riyadah al-nafs (tahalli)*. The fifth stage involves evaluation (*muhasabah*) and happiness (*al-sa'adah*). This process can guide counselors in using the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach for the well-being of the client's life and the empowerment of Islamic counseling services.
Keywords : process, Islamic counseling, *tazkiyah al-nafs, mujahadah al-nafs, riyadah al-nafs*

Introduction

The counseling process is an important matter that needs to be mastered by every counselor to demonstrate their competence in this field. This process enables the counselor to realise the current stage of the counseling session and check what needs to be done. A process is a series of actions performed to produce or achieve something. The process takes time and cannot happen in a short time or spontaneously. In counseling, the process starts when a client comes to see the counselor until the last session (Muhd. Mansur & Siti Nordinar 1996). The counseling process is a systematic method where a counselor involves himself in a client's life with the sole drive of helping the client. Both parties have agreed to the engagement, aiming to obtain satisfactory results and eventually achieve the targeted objectives (Muhd. Mansur 2000).

Generally, the counseling process from a conventional perspective can be divided into several phases. Phase One is the phase before the counseling process or known as the Pre-Preparation Stage. Phase Two is the current phase of the counseling process, which covers the stages of preparation, structuring, communication, exploring, strengthening and planning. Phase Three is the phase after the counseling process, which is at the termination stage (Sapora et al., 2002). Maznah & Zainol (2003) proposed that the counseling process involves two-way interaction between a counselor and a client through specific developmental stages. This process begins with pre-session, building rapport and structuring, then problem exploration and establishing counseling goals. Subsequently, the discussion will concentrate on strategy selection, problem-solving and action plans. The process concludes with ending the session and follow-up. In short, the counseling process generally holds phases and stages that need to be undergone. It usually begins with pre-session, rapport building, structuring, problem exploration, goal building, strategy selection, problem-solving and action plans, and termination and follow-up.

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Along with the rapid development of knowledge in this globalization era, counseling also experiences swift advancement. Scholars have devised various techniques and approaches in counseling to make it more efficacious and in line with current needs. In this context, Muslim scholars also contribute to applying Islamic teachings in counseling. One of the intended methods is the application of *tazkiyah al-nafs* in counseling, which empowers the client to become a better person so that he can overcome his problems effectively.

The Method of Applying *Tazkiyah al-Nafs* in Counseling from al-Ghazali's Perspective

The Islamic counseling process from al-Ghazali's perspective needs to be explored first before applying *tazkiyah al-nafs* in counseling. This Islamic counseling process was built based on a literature review of the views of Western figures on the conventional counseling process and integrated with al-Ghazali's views on the solution to spiritual problems (al-Ghazali, 1983; al-Ghazali, 1994; al-Ghazali, 2000; Umaruddin, 1977; Sa'id Hawa, 2002; Masyhur, 1995; George & Therese, 1981; Ivey & Ivey, 2003). This process is as follows;

1. First Stage: Building Rapport
2. Second Stage: Knowing Oneself and Identifying the cause of the problem
3. Third Stage: Implementation of the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach with the *mujahadah al-nafs (takhalli)*
4. Fourth Stage: Implementation of the *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach with ri*yadah al-nafs (tahalli)*
5. Fifth Stage: Evaluation (*Muhasabah*) and Happiness (*al-Sa'adah*)

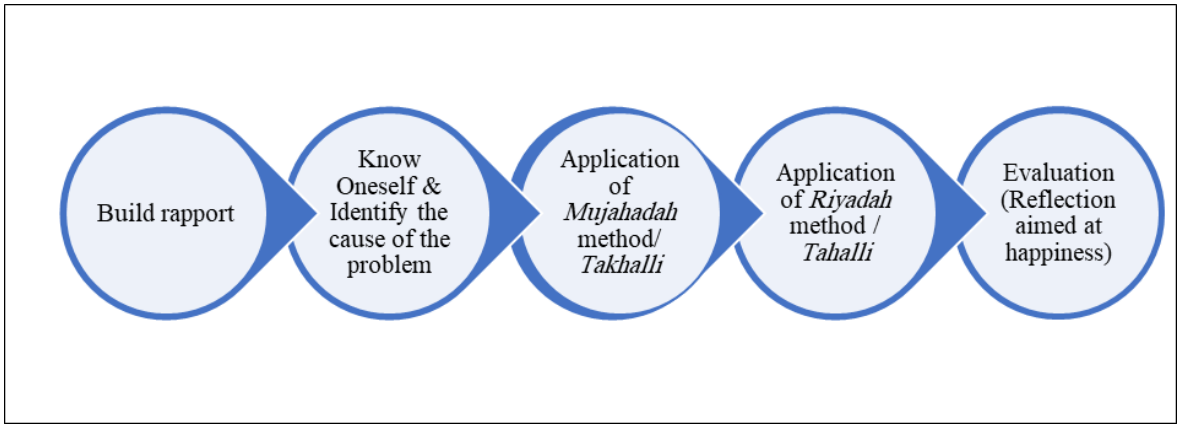

Figure 1: Islamic Counseling Process from al-Ghazali's Perspective

First Stage: Building Rapport with the Client

Building rapport with the client is crucial to initiate a counseling session. At this stage, all methods of building rapport from a western perspective can be implemented except for elements that are against the limits of Islamic Sharia, especially if the counselor and client are of opposite genders such as maintaining eye contact, maintaining distance and closed rooms to avoid defamation. At this stage, the confidentiality aspect needs to be emphasized to build the client's trust in the counselor and this trust will encourage the client to share stories and problems throughout the counseling session. This confidentiality is in line with the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH;

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّه عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ مَنْ نَفَّسَ عَنْ مُسْلِمٍ كُرْبَةً مِنْ كُرَبِ الدُّنْيَا
نَفَّسَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ كُرْبَةً مِنْ كُرَبِ يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ وَمَنْ يَسَّرَ عَلَى مُعْسِرٍ فِي الدُّنْيَا يَسَّرَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ فِي الدُّنْيَا

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وَالآخِرَةِ وَمَنْ سَتَرَ عَلَى مُسْلِمٍ فِي الدُّنْيَا سَتَرَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالآخِرَةِ وَاللَّهُ فِي عَوْنِ الْعَبْدِ مَا كَانَ الْعَبْدُ فِي عَوْنِ أَخِيه

> Narrated by Abu Hurairah, the Prophet Muhammad PBUH said: Whoever removes one of the hardships of a Muslim from the hardships of the world, Allah will surely remove for him one hardship from the hardships of the Day of Resurrection. Whoever makes things easier for people suffering in this world, Allah will surely make things easier for him in this world and the hereafter. Whoever covers the shame of a Muslim in this world, then Allah will cover his shame in this world and the hereafter. Indeed, Allah always helps His servant as long as His servant tries to help his brother (Hadith Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, Kitab al-Bir wa al-Sillah)

In building rapport, counselors need to show inquisitiveness in helping. At this stage, the counselor must try to get to know the client's background and personality. Counselors must also show a caring attitude to develop a sense of brotherhood and love for fellow Muslims. It agrees with the word of Allah SWT, which encourages the practice of helping to help (al-Maidah 5:2)

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَى وَلا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

> Cooperate with one another in goodness and righteousness, and do not cooperate in sin and transgression. And be mindful of Allah. Surely Allah is severe in punishment.

Second Stage: Know Oneself and Identify the Cause of the Problem

At this stage, the counselor tries to explore the client's concerns. While examining it, the counselor will actively think about how to relate the problem communicated by the client to the client's strength (*syarf al-nafs*) and personal weakness (*'uyub al-nafs*). Addressing the client's strengths can help them to believe in one's ability to overcome problems while knowing their weaknesses will be a lesson so that one does not repeat them to solve problems. Among the methods recommended by al-Ghazali (2000) to recognise personal weaknesses are as follows;

1. Ask the teacher and follow up by trying to submit to the teacher's recommendations to improve the weaknesses earnestly.
2. Ask honest friends who constantly remind one to stay away from bad deeds.
3. Ask the enemy because they know more about his enemy's weaknesses.
4. Socialize with the community so that every weakness that happens to others should be a lesson. Hence, one should see the shortcomings of others as a way of seeing one's shortcomings.

Also, at this stage, while identifying the authentic cause of the client's problem, the counselor can concentrate on recognizing the signs of spiritual issues and discuss with the client whether the characteristics are present in him as follows;

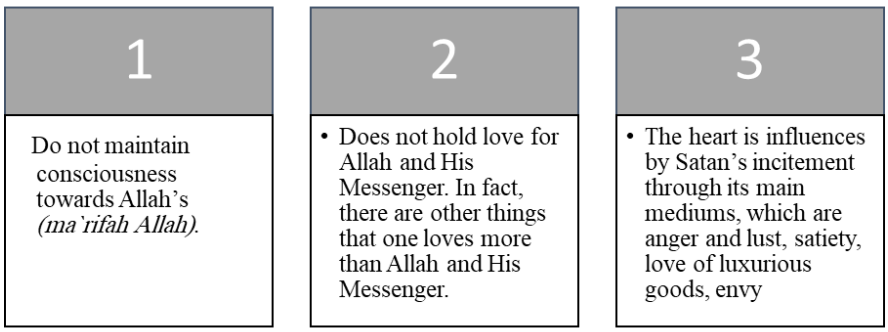

Figure 2: Recognising the Signs of Spiritual Issues according to al-Ghazali

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Third Stage: *Tazkiyah al-Nafs* with *Mujahadah al-Nafs* (*Takhalli)*

The *tazkiyah al-nafs* approach can be specifically applied in the third and fourth stages. The word *tazkiyah* in *Al-Mawrid* Dictionary (1997) indicates purifying or cleansing. While the word *nafs*, as per al-Ghazali, has two meanings: lust or the human self. Therefore, *tazkiyah al-nafs* denotes the purification of the human self or the purification of the soul from all reprehensible traits (*al-takhalli*). *Tazkiyah al-nafs* is a process of cleansing the soul of a person's bad qualities or morals. It also signifies purifying the soul from impurity caused by reprehensible morals (al-Ghazali 2000). *Tazkiyah al-nafs* has two processes, namely *al-takhalli* and *al-tahalli*, as stated by al-Ghazali in *al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*;

> After studying those sciences, with complete determination, I also studied Sufism. I realised that Sufism would be perfect with knowledge and practice. The purpose of practice is to liberate the soul from lust and purify it from vile morals until they reach the stage of *takhalliyah al-qalb* (freeing the heart) from other than Allah SWT and nourishing it (*tahalliyah*) by remembering Allah SWT. (Al-Ghazali 1994; Salasiah 2016)

In short, *tazkiyah al-nafs* is a process of purifying the soul from all the bad qualities or morals that exist in a person through the process of *mujahadah al-nafs (al-takhalli)* and then nourishing it with pure qualities through the process of *riyadah al-nafs (al- tahalli)* which demands patience because this process requires nonstop action and takes a long time (al-Ghazali 2000; Salasiah, 2008; Salasiah, 2016).

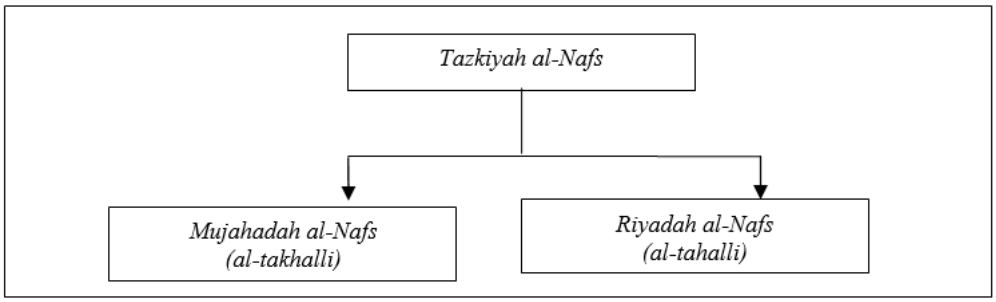

Figure 3: Components of *tazkiyah al-nafs* according to al-Ghazali

In this third stage, the counselor identifies the client's problem, relates it to one of the spiritual problems, and suggests a method to overcome it. Removing all the reprehensible qualities in oneself can be done through a specific method advised by al-Ghazali. Among these qualities are overcoming the problem of harshness, telling lies, backbiting, bad thoughts, anger issues, hatred, envy, worldly love, miserliness, arrogance, sadness and disappointment, stress and anxiety problems.

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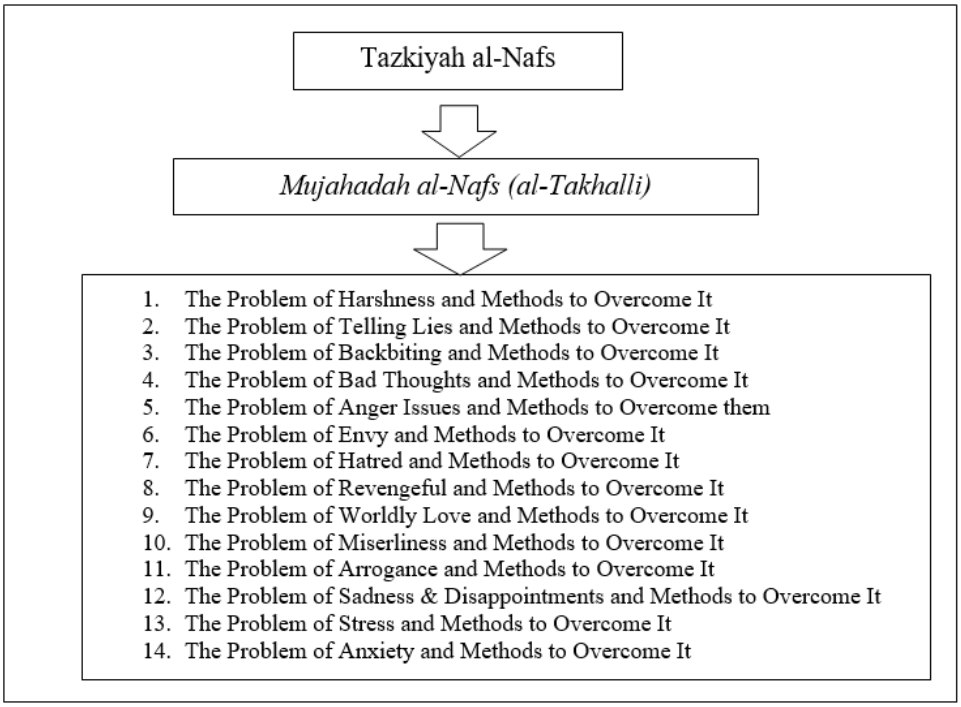

Figure 4 : Mujahadah al-nafs according to al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali (2000), in his book *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, explains the method to remove the nature of *mazmumah* so that a person's soul becomes pure. A summary of the method is as in Figure 5;

1. Harshness 1. Mujahadah: use polite words than harsh words 2. Realise: immoral 3. Be aware of Allah SWT's prohibition 4. Do not socialise with harsh people.	**2. Telling Lies** 1. *Mujahadah*: Tells the truth 2. Realise: one will be labelled as a liar if one always lie 3. Realise: one will be labelled as a truthful person if one always tells the truth 4. Repent: It reflects the characteristics of a hypocrite 5. Lying destroys the trust of others 6. Use figurative language to avoid lying
3. Backbiting 1. *Mujahadah:* Get rid of envy, arrogance and anger 2. Realise: the wrath of Allah SWT 3. Examine one's shortcomings 4. The practice of good deeds becomes useless - becomes bankrupt in the hereafter.	**4. Bad Thoughts** 1. *Mujahadah*: Transform it into good thoughts and prayers 2. One holds no right to believe badness in people unless one sees/hears by oneself. 3. One must investigate first. 4. Realise: the ruling is haram 5. Advise the proven wrongdoer in secret 6. Please get rid of evil thoughts as soon as possible so that it does not initiate *al-tajassus.*
5. Anger Issues	**6. Envious**

From Knowledge Perspective 1. Think of the values of Islam, teaching its followers to forgive 2. Remember Allah's punishment 3. Think about the consequences of bringing hostility 4. Imagine the ugly face 5. Think one will be considered defeated by the syaitan **From Practices Perspective (*Mujahadah*)** 1. Recites *Isti'azah* 2. Sit down 3. Ablution 4. Silence	**From Knowledge Perspective** 1. Think it harms oneself 2. Repent: the reward of goodness will disappear 3. Realise: It triggers sin 4. Realise: Allah is just (does not take away favours from those who are envied) 5. Repent: the person who is envied gets a reward **From Practices Perspective (*Mujahadah*)** 1. Replace backbiting with praising 2. Be humble and apologise 3. Show joy over the blessings of the envied 4. Get rid of pride
7. Hatred Identify the reason : Anger issues: same treatment with Anger issues Envious: same treatment with envious	**8. Revengeful** (Same as anger treatment)
9. Worldly Love 1. *Mujahadah*: *Qanaah* 2. Repent: Living in a temporary world 3. Remember death 4. Realise: Of being the target of people's malice 5. Realise: The soul is not at peace 6. Do a lot of *zikr* and *tafakkur* 7. Emulating the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and companions 8. Using Allah's favours as a necessity, not as a luxury 9. Repent: causes discord 10. Migrate / *uzlah* 11. Observe less fortunate people	**10. Miserly** 1. *Mujahadah*: Train oneself to be generous 2. Remember Allah's punishment 3. Repent: Others hate miser people 4. Repent: Wealth should work as a tool to get closer to Allah
11. *Takabbur* 1. *Mujahadah* : train oneself to practive *tawadu'* Method : • Talk with friends - See how well one can accept other people's views • Sit with the general public at a party • Fulfil the invitation of the poor • Buy family necessities at the market and bring them home oneself • Wear inexpensive clothes. 2. Think of the cause • Lineage: Realise: created from a drop of semen • Beauty: Realise: fade with time • Strength: Realise: weaken when Allah	**12. Sadness and disappointments** 1. If it is caused by envy: the treatment is the same as the treatment of envy. 2. If one finds it difficult to accept the *qada and qadr* of Allah SWT, the treatment is: 1. *Mujahadah*: Acceptance of the fate 2. Confident of getting a reward from Allah SWT 3. Repent: Acceptance as a sign of love for Allah SWT 4. Confident: whatever happens, there is wisdom behind it

tests with sickness. • Wealth: Realise: everything belongs to Allah SWT • Knowledge: Realise: Allah disapproves. 3. Know oneself and compare it with the power of Allah SWT	3. If one is sad because of things related to the world, the treatment is the same as the treatment of worldly love.
13. Stress The treatment depends on the cause of the stress. 1 If it is caused by too much pursuit of worldly elements, the treatment is the same as the treatment of worldly love. 2 If it is due to failure in any circumstance, the treatment is the same as the treatment of disappointment. 3 If it is caused by envy, the treatment is the same as the treatment of envy.	**14. Anxiety** Treatment depends on the cause. 1. If anxiety is caused by fear of death and old age i. Repent: death is certain. ii. Prepare oneself with good deeds in the afterlife. iii. If anxiety is caused by fear of becoming poor, losing a job; i. Never give up ii. Feel confident about the sustenance from Allah SWT iii. Similar to the method of treating frustration. 2. If the anxiety is caused by fear of losing property or positions, the treatment is the same as the treatment for worldly love.

Figure 5: Methods of Overcoming Spiritual Problems according to al-Ghazali (Salasiah, 2008)

Fourth Stage: Application of the *Tazkiyah al-Nafs* Method through *Riyadah al-Nafs (Tahalli)*

At this stage, the counselor will explain that when a person has freed his soul of bad qualities, the soul needs to be filled with good qualities through *riyadah al-nafs (al-tahalli).* This method incorporates aspects of strengthening faith (*aqidah*), improving worship and applying the qualities of *mahmudah* (morality) in the soul, which are the three essential components of Islamic teachings (Zaydan, 2000; al-Bagha 1997; Sabiq, 1985; Salasiah & Noor Shakirah, 2014)

Faith is quintessential as a driving force for goodness and peace of mind, which is also the primary mechanism that people need to find strength in solving problems in their lives. The process of strengthening faith involves efforts to strengthen confidence in the six pillars of faith, including faith in Allah, angels, messengers, the book, the Day of Judgment and Qada' Qadr of Allah SWT (Salasiah, 2016; Salasiah, 2017). At this stage, the counselor will usually support the client's belief in the qada' and qadar and that Allah's provisions are the best for everyone.

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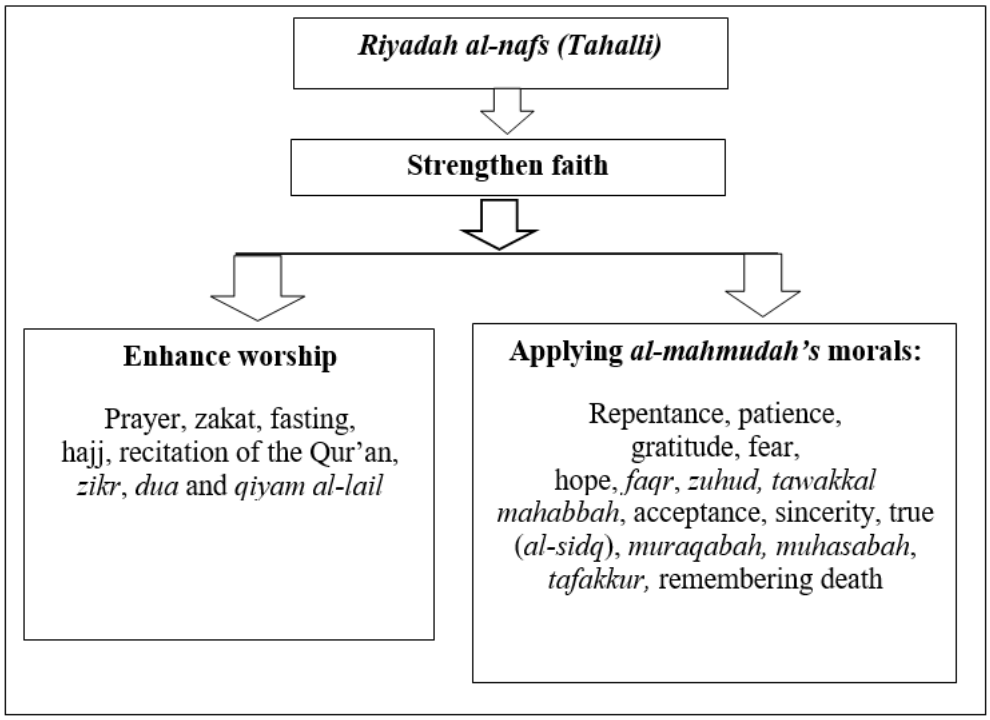

Figure 6: *Riyadah al-Nafs*, according to al-Ghazali

In addition, improving the worship practice can also be a source of strength for clients facing trials in life. The worship that is meant in the process of *riyadah al-nafs* is all types of worship that include the meaning of obedience to Allah's commands SWT and abandoning all His prohibitions, whether specific worship or general worship (al-Qaradawi 1993; Salasiah et al., 2017). In counseling, the counselor can suggest the client perform the night prayer (*qiyam al-lail*) so that the client can find peace by monologuing to His Almighty Creator. The Prophet Muhammad PBUH remarked that many advantages would be obtained by those who perform *qiyam al-lail*; sins will be removed, and one can draw himself closer to Allah SWT;

عَنْ أَبِي أُمَامَةَ عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَنَّهُ قَالَ عَلَيْكُمْ بِقِيَامِ اللَّيْلِ فَإِنَّهُ دَأْبُ الصَّالِحِينَ قَبْلَكُمْ وَهُوَ قُرْبَةٌ إِلَى رَبِّكُمْ وَمَكْفَرَةٌ لِلسَّيِّئَاتِ وَمَنْهَاةٌ لِلإِثْمِ

> Do *qiyam al-lail* because it is the practice (state) of the pious people before you and can bring you closer to your Lord, remove sins and prevent you from committing sins. (Hadith narrated by al-Tirmidhi. Sunan al-Tirmidhi. J.5. Kitab al-Da'awat. Chapter 101-113, hadith 3549)

Practising commendable morals, especially the nature of *mahmudah*, is also one of the paramount things the client needs to do to help solve his problems. In morality, al-Ghazali concentrates on applying *mahmudah* such as repentance, patience, gratitude, fear, hope, *qana'ah*, *zuhud*, *tawakkal*, *mahabbah*, acceptance, sincerity, true (sidq), *muraqabah* and *tafakkur*. These qualities can be used as an element of the client's spiritual strength so that the client has a high motivation to solve his crisis with absolute dependence on Allah SWT.

For instance, counselors can motivate clients to practice trust in Allah SWT. This quality is suitable for facing the problems he faces because the person who trusts will hand over all the affairs of his life to Allah SWT after making efforts (al-Ghazali, 2006; Salasiah, 2016). This is because he believes Allah SWT has the power in all aspects, including knowledge, *qudrah*, *'inayah* and His mercy (al-Ghazali 2000). In

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addition, individuals who trust Allah often feel satisfied with their favours and are confident that Allah always preserves and bestows His Mercy and *Inayah*. This confidence is critical to help a person face any problem in his life. In addition, individuals who trust Allah always think positively about Allah in everything that befalls them and fully acknowledge there is wisdom behind the calamities (al-Ghazali, 2000; Salasiah, 2016). Such feelings and attitudes are momentous to make a person's soul relaxed, persevere and calm down to accept any form of challenge in his life.

Fifth Stage: Evaluation (*Muhasabah al-nafs*) and Happiness *(al-Sa'adah)*

In this final stage, the counselor needs to evaluate the previous stages and whether they have achieved the goal or not, which is moving towards solving the problem. Counselors must also evaluate (reflect) the steps and methods towards achieving *al-sa'adah* (happiness) in the client's life.

In this context, reflection is vital for reassessing all stages starting from building rapport with *mad'u*, getting to know oneself and identifying the cause of the problem, and applying *tazkiyah al-nafs* with *mujahadah al-nafs (takhalli)* and *riyadah al-nafs (tahalli).* If there is any lack, efforts must be intensified to achieve the desired goal. For instance, if *mad'u* fails to get rid of envy and enhance the soul with a feeling of happiness over other people's advantages, then measures need to be increased so that the bad nature can be successfully overcome. On the contrary, if one has successfully overcome any bad qualities in his soul, such as anger, and revenge, then one should be grateful to Allah SWT. Everything transpires with His permission (Salasiah, 2017).

The final goal to be achieved in an Islamic counseling session is happiness (*al-sa'adah*). According to al-Ghazali (1983), happiness lies in knowledge and practice. The knowledge is diverse, but it includes the ones that are beneficial to humans, but the noblest one is the knowledge of knowing Allah SWT. This type of knowledge is imperative, and there is no greater happiness than the happiness of knowing Him. In addition to knowledge, al-Ghazali maintained that achieving happiness is through practice. According to him, an essential practice is to have a noble character, such as eliminating anger and lust under reasoning (Sulayman, 1964). In addition to having a noble character, practice, per al-Ghazali, also signifies worship. It is stated in *Ihya'* which implies that no pure happiness exists except with knowledge and worship. Likewise, al-Ghazali also proposed that happiness can also be achieved by eliminating lust and anger and by purifying the heart from any worldly interests as al-Ghazali (2000) noted:

> Indeed, happiness happens when one eliminates lust and anger.
>
> Indeed, happiness depends on the peacefulness of the heart rather than all the interests of the world.

This is what counselors need to examine with an Islamic approach. Counselors check that their clients have successfully overcome their problems and see if they have achieved happiness by improving Islamic knowledge and continuously putting that knowledge into practice in their lives. For example, if the client successfully overcomes his problem by practising forgiving others, the counselor needs to remind the client to continue those morals so that happiness remains inside themselves in this world and the hereafter. It symbolises the counselor's most significant struggle: to maintain the client's appropriate practice of Islam and stay *istiqamah* (steadfastness) with sound practices taught by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH.

Conclusion

Ergo, according to al-Ghazali's perspective, the discussion above substantiated that the counseling process needs to go through five stages that start with building rapport and end with an evaluation towards happiness. The researcher hopes the brief exposition in this paper can be utilised by Muslim counselors in attending counseling sessions so that the counseling sessions conducted are more practical in assisting clients in solving their situations.

The Islamic counseling process explained briefly can guide Muslim counselors to apply *tazkiyah al-nafs*, which are *mujahadah al-nafs* and *riyadah al-nafs*, in counseling sessions. Further, through this Islamic counseling process, the counselor can motivate the client to execute *tazkiyah al-nafs* in their lives so that the client can finally practice noble morals and get closer to Allah SWT to achieve pure happiness in this world and the hereafter.

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