

# The Spirituality of Sufism as a Bridge between Emotional Balance and Religious Moderation

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## ABSTRACT

In modern life, humans often experience tension between material needs and inner peace, resulting in emotional imbalance that manifests in extreme religious behavior and a loss of meaning in life. This article aims to examine the role of Sufism as a bridge between emotional balance and a moderate religious attitude. This study employs a qualitative approach based on library research, integrating Sufi and psychological thought with the concept of religious moderation within the context of Islamic studies. Core Sufi values such as *tazkiyat al-nafs* (self-purification), *mahabbah* (divine love), *sabr* (patience), and *tasamuh* (tolerance) are analyzed in relation to the formation of inner balance and compassionate religious behavior. The findings reveal that inner harmony cultivated through Sufi teachings serves as the foundation for authentic and just religious moderation. Therefore, Sufism functions as a form of spiritual therapy that connects personal tranquility with social harmony. The integration of emotional balance and moderate religiosity through Sufi spirituality constitutes an essential basis for strengthening a peaceful, inclusive, and humanistic religious life.

## KEYWORDS:

*Sufi Spirituality*,  
*Emotional Harmony*,  
*Religious Moderation*,  
*Inner Tranquility*,  
*Spiritual Balance*

## Introduction

Modern life, characterized by rapid technological advancement, social pressure, and economic competition, presents both remarkable progress and challenges to the psychological balance of human beings. Amid such swift transformations, many individuals experience mental stress, emotional exhaustion, and even a profound loss of meaning in life (Ryff, 1989). This situation reveals a tension between physical needs and spiritual tranquility, often resulting in inner disharmony. In such conditions, religious expressions sometimes emerge in the form of exclusivism, fanaticism, or extremism as a means of escaping psychological and spiritual instability.

This phenomenon reflects the weakening connection between religious teachings and the emotional well-being of modern humans. Religion is often practiced merely as a formal ritual without deeper spiritual reflection that fosters

self-awareness and emotional regulation (A. Mubarok, 2004). In fact, spirituality plays a crucial role in maintaining psychological and moral balance amid the complexities of modern life. According to Hamka, *tazkiyat al-nafs*—the purification of the soul—is the core of spiritual cultivation that leads individuals toward inner peace and purity of heart (M. Amin, 2025). Therefore, religion should be understood not only as a normative obligation but also as a path of inner healing and character formation, harmonizing the outward and inward dimensions of human existence.

This crisis of spiritual meaning affects not only individuals but also the socio-religious life of a pluralistic society. Amid the growing awareness of religiosity, inclusive and moderate religious practices have yet to be fully realized. (K. Amin, 2023) defines religious moderation as a perspective, attitude, and behavior in practicing religion that avoids extremism while upholding the values of humanity and justice. Religious moderation is not merely a midpoint between two ideological extremes but an effort to cultivate a just, wise, and contextually grounded way of being religious that aligns with social realities (Zayadi, 2025).

Although the concept of religious moderation has been widely promoted, its implementation continues to face various challenges, such as increasing social polarization, the strengthening of exclusive religious identities, and the weakening of awareness of universal human values (Sulton, 2023). Therefore, religious moderation should not be understood merely as a normative policy but must be supported by spirituality that nurtures inner balance, empathy, and openness to diversity. In this context, *tasawwuf* (Sufism) offers a spiritual dimension of Islam that is highly relevant to strengthening religious moderation through teachings such as *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *mahabbah* (divine love), *sabr* (patience), and *tasamuh* (tolerance) as the foundation for a peaceful and compassionate life (Mustang, 2024).

The Sufi values embodied in *tasawwuf* not only cultivate profound spiritual depth but also exert significant therapeutic effects on emotional well-being and psychological stability. Through practices such as *dhikrullah* (remembrance of God), *muhasabah* (self-reflection), and *muraqabah* (spiritual mindfulness), individuals are trained to attain inner peace and clarity of soul, which in turn fosters moderate, just, and tolerant religious attitudes in social life. Studies on religious moderation from a Sufi perspective indicate that Sufi spirituality serves as a foundation for developing a balanced and compassionate religiosity (Mukhlisin, 2023).

In practical terms, the integration of Sufi values such as *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *mahabbah* (divine love or compassion), and *tasamuh* (tolerance) has been shown to enhance empathy, interfaith openness, as well as stress management and emotional stability among individuals (Astuti et al., 2023) (Afiani & Haririe, 2024) Thus, *tasawwuf* functions as a spiritual bridge that unites inner balance with social harmony and religious moderation within a pluralistic society.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. This approach was chosen because the focus of the research is not on field observation but rather on the exploration, interpretation, and conceptual analysis of relevant texts and scholarly works. It aims to examine the concepts of spirituality in *tasawwuf* (Sufism) and their relevance to emotional balance and religious moderation. The research data were drawn from various primary and secondary sources, including classical works in the field of *tasawwuf* as well as relevant contemporary academic studies. The analytical process followed three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing based on the qualitative analysis model of Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, (2016). Each data point was analyzed descriptively and interpretively, emphasizing the understanding of meaning, values, and spiritual relevance to socio-religious life.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Tasawwuf as a Path of Soul Purification and Emotional Balance

In the Islamic tradition, *tasawwuf* is not merely a ritualistic spiritual practice but a transformative inner path aimed at achieving *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) and emotional balance. The teachings of *tasawwuf* focus on cultivating the heart to avoid spiritual diseases such as envy, arrogance, and anger, while nurturing values of compassion and patience. This aligns with the view of Astuti et al., (2023), who emphasize that *tasawwuf* contains both spiritual and social values that can enhance inner tranquility and strengthen openness in interpersonal relationships.

In the realm of education and spiritual therapy, Sufi practices such as *dhikrullah* (remembrance of God), *muhasabah* (self-reflection), and *muraqabah* (divine mindfulness) have been shown to help individuals reorganize their emotional states, reduce inner turmoil, and strengthen psychological resilience. A phenomenological study in Indonesia found that Sufi practices significantly reduce anxiety and improve emotional well-being (Huda & Priyatna, 2024). This indicates that *tasawwuf* is not only a spiritual discipline but also possesses therapeutic functions in human life.

Furthermore, the inner transformation sought through *tasawwuf* enables individuals to transcend destructive emotional patterns such as anger, envy, and despair, and to enter a state of inner peace and balance. Studies on *tazkiyat al-nafs* in the social context affirm that soul purification serves as a foundation for emotional maturity and effective self-management (Mubin, 2019). Once emotional equilibrium is achieved, individuals become more capable of coping with change, adapting to challenges, and demonstrating wise spiritual leadership.

From a social perspective, the inner stability fostered by *tasawwuf* provides a strong basis for openness and empathy toward others, including those of different backgrounds. The Sufi perspective emphasizes that inner peace naturally manifests in compassionate and tolerant human relationships. In Indonesia's plural society,

this is particularly relevant as a prerequisite for religious moderation—namely, a form of religiosity that is inclusive and respectful of pluralism (Fathan et al., 2025).

Overall, the integration of Sufi spirituality and emotional balance creates a foundation for the emergence of a moderate religious attitude—one that is non-extreme, open-minded, and contextually responsive to the challenges of modernity. With a purified heart and balanced soul, individuals are able to embody a form of religiosity that is just, tolerant, and constructive. Therefore, *tasawwuf* can be understood as a spiritual bridge that connects individual inner transformation with the strengthening of social harmony in a pluralistic society.

## 2. The Social Dimension of Tasawwuf and Its Relevance to Religious Moderation

*Tasawwuf* functions not only as a spiritual path toward closeness to God but also carries a strong social dimension. Values such as *mahabbah* (love and compassion), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *adl* (justice) form the ethical foundation that guides humans to live harmoniously amidst diversity. In the socio-religious context, Sufi teachings emphasize that closeness to God must be reflected in compassionate and empathetic relationships with others. (Islamy, 2023) asserts that *tasawwuf* plays a significant role in internalizing the values of religious moderation through the strengthening of spiritual awareness and social morality.

In practice, within Indonesia's pluralistic society, the awareness that religiosity must embrace diversity serves as a crucial foundation for creating harmonious social life. Through the internalization of Sufi values, individuals can develop inclusive and empathetic attitudes that transcend formal religious boundaries. Research by Aden et al., (2023) highlights the important role of *tasawwuf* in shaping moderate and tolerant religious attitudes, emphasizing a balance between inner and social dimensions. Similar findings from the Muhammad, (2022) indicate that social Sufi teachings can strengthen religious moderation by fostering spiritual cultivation that nurtures self-awareness, openness, and respect for plurality. Thus, *tasawwuf* is not only relevant to individual spiritual development but, through its social dimension, also contributes to the reinforcement of social harmony in pluralistic societies, particularly in Indonesia.

The social contribution of *tasawwuf* to religious moderation is also evident in the practice of soul purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), which emphasizes a balance between emotional self-regulation and empathy toward others. This process teaches individuals to overcome egoism and intolerance by fostering moral consciousness and inner peace. When one regularly practices *muhasabah* (self-reflection) and *muraqabah* (self-monitoring in the presence of God), their behavior tends to be more patient, humble, and open to differences. This demonstrates how *tasawwuf* cultivates a moderate character in social life.

Furthermore, Sufi values act as a bridge between individual spirituality and communal life. (Fokky & Wasitaatmadja, 2017) shows that *tasawwuf* is adaptive to local cultures and plays a crucial role in fostering tolerant interfaith attitudes. In this

context, Sufi practices such as *dhikrullah* and *mahabbah* function not only as acts of worship but also as social instruments that strengthen human relations and social solidarity. These teachings emphasize that love for God must manifest as love for fellow human beings, regardless of religious or ethnic background.

Moreover, in the era of digital disruption and social polarization, Sufi values offer a reflective, calming, and empathy-building approach to religiosity. Mukhlisin, (2023) argues that religious moderation cannot be upheld solely through formal regulation but requires a solid spiritual foundation. Sufi spirituality fosters the awareness that healthy religiosity must be rooted in compassion and inner balance, rather than unilateral claims of truth. Therefore, the values of *tasawwuf* need to be actualized in the public sphere to cultivate a culture of peace and tolerance in pluralistic societies.

In conclusion, the strengthening of religious moderation can be achieved through the sustainable utilization of the social dimension of *tasawwuf*, whether in education, community development, or religious activities. When personal spirituality is connected to social ethics, religiosity ceases to be exclusive and becomes a space for universal brotherhood. Ultimately, *tasawwuf* serves as a spiritual path that not only brings individuals closer to God but also brings peace to the surrounding society.

### 3. Sufi Spirituality as a Bridge between Emotions and Religious Moderation

The integration of Sufi spirituality plays a significant role in connecting emotional balance with moderate religiosity. From a psychological perspective, a person's inner equilibrium greatly influences how they understand, interpret, and express religious teachings. When the heart is purified and stable, tendencies toward extremism or intolerance diminish, giving way to empathy and wisdom. This indicates that spiritual experiences in *tasawwuf* function as an emotional self-regulation mechanism that guides individuals toward peaceful and proportionate religiosity (Afiani & Haririe, 2024).

In the teachings of classical Sufi scholars such as al-Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi, spiritual balance is not merely the result of outward worship but also the fruit of continuous inner awareness cultivated through *dhikrullah* (remembrance of God) and *tafakkur* (contemplation). These practices foster calmness of heart and clarity of thought, enabling individuals to assess differences wisely without being clouded by negative emotions. In this context, Sufi spirituality positions humans as beings striving to achieve harmony between emotional intelligence and spiritual piety—a balance that lies at the heart of religious moderation.

Correspondingly, recent studies affirm that self-awareness-based spiritual practices such as *dhikr* and *tafakkur* can enhance empathy and strengthen social connectedness (Astuti et al., 2023). In Indonesia's pluralistic society, this Sufi approach can serve as a paradigm for a more balanced religiosity, prioritizing love, self-regulation, and spiritual wisdom as the foundation for engaging with differences.

The close relationship between emotional balance and religious moderation is evident in how *tasawwuf* guides individuals to recognize their personal limits. This integration emerges through practices of heightened awareness of being watched by God (*muraqabah*) and self-reflection (*muhasabah*). Individuals who regularly engage in *muhasabah* and *muraqabah* are more capable of restraining judgmental attitudes, managing anger, and opening space for dialogue with diverse perspectives. When these abilities are internalized, a harmonious form of religiosity emerges—free from egocentrism and fanaticism, yet rooted in compassion and spiritual awareness. Thus, inner balance serves as a psychological foundation for the growth of moderate religious behavior. This aligns with Hidayat, (2022), who emphasizes that social *tasawwuf* teachings highlight the need for harmony between one's relationship with God (*habl min Allâh*) and with fellow human beings (*habl min al-nâs*) as pillars of religious moderation. When individuals successfully regulate their emotional waves through stable spiritual practices, they gain a stronger foundation for appreciating differences and avoiding extreme behavior.

Moreover, Sufi values such as *mahabbah* (compassion), *tawazun* (balance), *futuwwah* (chivalry), and *itsar* (prioritizing others) have emerged as important dimensions in fostering religious moderation in Indonesian society. As elaborated in Athoillah Islamy's study *Nalar Sufisme dalam Pengarustamaan Moderasi Beragama*, (2023), these Sufi values align closely with indicators of religious moderation, including tolerance, anti-radicalism, national commitment, and cultural accommodation. For instance, the value of *mahabbah* serves as a key factor in cultivating tolerant and empathetic attitudes in interfaith relations.

Additionally, Sufi spirituality underscores the importance of awareness of the "Divine presence" in every social interaction. This perspective teaches that respecting differences is part of devotion to God, as all creatures are manifestations of His love. In social practice, this view fosters empathy and humanitarian solidarity across religious boundaries. Astuti et al., (2023) highlight that the internalization of *tasawwuf* values in Islamic education can strengthen interfaith tolerance and promote peaceful social behavior.

When inner balance through Sufi spirituality is established, religious moderation can be observed not merely as a political or normative compromise but as an authentic expression of mature spiritual experience. Individuals who have sincerely undergone soul purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and emotional self-regulation respond less rigidly or fanatically to differences. Conversely, they are more capable of showing appreciation for religious, cultural, and ideological plurality as a manifestation of Divine will, which creates diversity. The Neo-Sufism concept further reinforces the link between individual spiritual experience and social responsibility within the context of modern pluralism (F. Mubarok, 2022).

Therefore, *tasawwuf* spirituality can be understood as a bridge uniting the psychological and divine dimensions within humans. Its teachings emphasize that emotional stability and spiritual awareness are mutually reinforcing aspects that shape a holistic religious experience. When a person succeeds in cultivating a calm,

sincere, and God-conscious heart, moderate religiosity naturally emerges as a reflection of spiritual maturity. Within this framework, *tasawwuf* is not merely a means of drawing closer to God but also a vehicle for fostering harmonious, respectful, and balanced humanity.

## Conclusion

Sufi spirituality offers a significant contribution to building a balance between the inner and social dimensions of human life. In the context of modern life, which is rife with pressure and polarization, Sufi teachings such as *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), *mahabbah* (divine love), *sabr* (patience), and *tasamuh* (tolerance) have proven relevant for restoring emotional calm and strengthening humanistic values. Through spiritual practices such as *dhikrullah* (remembrance of God), *muhasabah* (self-reflection), and *muraqabah* (spiritual mindfulness), *tasawwuf* assists individuals in managing emotions, cultivating empathy, and avoiding extreme or exclusive religious behavior.

Socially, Sufi values serve as an ethical foundation that fosters moderate, just, and open attitudes toward differences. When spirituality is internalized within both individual and collective life, it gives rise to a form of religiosity that is soothing and contextually attuned to the multicultural realities of Indonesian society. Religious moderation from the Sufi perspective is not merely understood as a balance between two ideological extremes but as an expression of spiritual maturity rooted in compassion and inner equilibrium. Thus, Sufi spirituality can be viewed as a bridge between emotional maturity and religious maturity. *Tasawwuf* not only directs humans toward closeness to God but also teaches how spiritual awareness can be translated into peaceful, inclusive, and just social action. This relevance indicates that, amidst contemporary spiritual crises and social tensions, the values of *tasawwuf* deserve to be adopted as a paradigm of religiosity that unites inner depth with human responsibility.

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