



## NAQSHBANDI SPIRITUALITY AND THE DIGITAL AGE: A CONCEPTUAL RESPONSE TO SOCIAL MEDIA-RELATED MORAL CHALLENGES

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**Abstract:** *This article examines how Naqshbandi Sufi principles can serve as a spiritual framework for addressing the ethical and psychological harms associated with contemporary social media culture. The study employs a conceptual and hermeneutic textual analysis, using classical Naqshbandi treatises and Qur'anic-Prophetic teachings as primary sources. These texts were thematically analyzed to extract the Eleven Naqshbandi Principles and map them to major digital harms documented in media psychology literature, such as addiction, distraction, narcissistic self-presentation, cyberbullying, and exposure to harmful content. The article proposes a theoretical model the Naqshbandi Digital Ethics Framework which integrates attention discipline, intention purification, and moral self-regulation as spiritual countermeasures to these harms. The findings contribute to Islamic communication ethics and offer practical implications for da'wah, education, and digital literacy initiatives. The article further outlines directions for future empirical validation through educational and counseling interventions.*

**Keywords:** *Naqshbandi; Sufism; Islamic Communication Ethics; Spiritual Psychology; Dhikr*

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana prinsip-prinsip Tasawuf Naqsyabandiyah dapat berfungsi sebagai kerangka spiritual dalam menghadapi dampak etis dan psikologis yang muncul akibat budaya media sosial kontemporer. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan analisis konseptual dan hermeneutik terhadap teks, dengan mengacu pada karya-karya klasik Naqsyabandiyah serta ajaran Qur'ani dan Nabawi sebagai sumber utama. Teks-teks tersebut dianalisis secara tematik untuk mengekstraksi Sebelas Prinsip Naqsyabandiyah dan memetakannya dengan berbagai dampak negatif digital yang telah didokumentasikan dalam literatur psikologi media, seperti kecanduan, distraksi, narsisme dalam presentasi diri, perundungan siber, serta paparan konten berbahaya. Artikel ini mengusulkan sebuah model teoretis yaitu Kerangka Etika Digital Naqsyabandiyah yang mengintegrasikan disiplin perhatian, pemurnian niat, dan pengendalian diri moral sebagai langkah spiritual untuk menangkal dampak tersebut. Temuan penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian etika komunikasi Islam serta menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi aktivitas dakwah, pendidikan, dan inisiatif literasi digital. Artikel ini juga menguraikan arah penelitian lanjut untuk validasi empiris melalui intervensi pendidikan dan konseling.

**Kata kunci:** *Naqsyabandiyah; Tasawuf; Etika Komunikasi Islam; Psikologi Spiritual; Dziki*



## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, social norms have been redefined by the technological revolution. Due to the high intensity of technology, society has become involved in social that act as formidable barriers to human development from ethical and moral lines<sup>1</sup>. The major revolution was the introduction of social media and YouTube sites, which left no stone unturned in diverting individuals into harmful behaviours and psychological upheavals.<sup>2</sup> At present, people have to incline towards more spiritual reforms to achieve real success in life. True personal and societal growth cannot be achieved without active engagement in all spheres of life, guided by a spirit of welfare and collective responsibility. In this context, it becomes imperative, especially for the elders and youth leaders, to guide the young generation towards foundational moral values. Principles such as truthfulness, honour, the pursuit of both spiritual and scientific knowledge, learning, nobility, humility, moral strength, material stability and ethical courage serve as essential pillars for holistic success and personal evolution. These virtues not only anchor ethical behaviour but also cultivate a resilient and virtuous internal character. The early Sufis, many of whom emerged from the spiritual heart of Islam, the pulpit of Masjid Nabawi, sought to transcend the allure of material indulgence, dedicating themselves to inner purification and spiritual growth<sup>3</sup>. Historians trace the roots of these mystics to the early 9th century CE, identifying them by their ascetic practices, such as wearing coarse woollen garments as a symbol of detachment from worldly comfort and as a training of the soul toward divine alignment. This learned community consciously renounced worldly temptations in pursuit of higher knowledge and spiritual awakening<sup>4</sup>. Humanity has, across epochs, sought to understand the self, the universe, and its divine purpose.

Sufism, in particular emphasizes inner transformation, mystical devotion, and the experiential remembrance of God (*dhikr*), all while consciously rejecting material distractions that create distance from the Divine<sup>5</sup>. In today's world, where existential challenges permeate every facet of life, those endowed with spiritual clarity and moral fortitude are better equipped to navigate the

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Fitzpatrick, *Applied Ethics And Social Problems: Moral questions of birth, society and death*, The Policy Press, 2008,10

<sup>2</sup> D.P, A., & C.O, P., *Role of social media on development*. Merit Research Journal, 2014, 2(2), 15–18.

<sup>3</sup> Hossein. Nasr, *Sayyid (2008). The garden of truth : the vision and promise of Sufism, Islam's mystical tradition*, 170

<sup>4</sup> Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Preachers And Sufi Singers in the Contemporary Muslim World*, *Islamic Studies*, 28/3 (Autumn 1989), 249-259

<sup>5</sup> Hassan Abu Hanieh, *Sufism and Sufi Orders: God's Spiritual Paths Adaptation and Renewal in the Context of Modernization*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Amman, 2011, 59



moral crises of the modern age. The rampant openness of immorality both online and offline demands cautious self-awareness. Social media, in particular, poses significant psychological and ethical risks, especially to students and young minds<sup>6</sup>. It is, therefore, essential for parents to remain informed and proactive in shielding their children from the potential harms of digital overexposure.

Cyberbullying has emerged as a pressing global issue, profoundly affecting the lives of students and society at large<sup>7</sup>. This malicious practice entails the deliberate manipulation, humiliation, and psychological harm of individuals through digital platforms, often leading to mental instability and emotional disturbances. Many students suffer in silence, burdened by emotional anguish that diverts their focus from academic pursuits and disrupts their overall well-being<sup>8</sup>.

Parents must be attentive towards their kids; they shouldn't let their children become habituated. As students increasingly access inappropriate or harmful online content, they not only squander valuable time but also experience mounting mental fatigue and frustration,<sup>9</sup> and emotional well-being.<sup>10</sup> Prolonged exposure to and interaction with social media platforms frequently fosters addictive behaviour, posing serious risks to the emotional and cognitive development of young individuals. In light of these dangers, parents must remain vigilant, ensuring that their children do not develop unhealthy dependencies on digital media. Active parental guidance and timely intervention are essential in safeguarding the mental health and moral compass of the younger generation.

To safeguard the younger generation from the pervasive and often corrosive influence of social media, it is imperative to instill in them a deep appreciation for the sanctity of life and the foundational importance of moral integrity<sup>11</sup>. In contemporary society, where digital platforms exert a powerful and often unchecked influence, there is an urgent need for collective awareness and the establishment of ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks to protect youth from the

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<sup>6</sup> Hutchinson W. Evidence of Race Degeneration. *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science*. 1909, 43.

<sup>7</sup> Hinduja, S., Cyberbullying Research Summary 2; Hinduja, S., Patchin, J.W., n. d. Identification, Prevention, and Response 9

<sup>8</sup>Tarafdar, Monideepa, et al. "Explaining the Link between Technostress and Technology Addiction for Social Networking Sites: A Study of 'Distraction as a Coping Behavior.'" *Information Systems Journal* (2019)

<sup>9</sup>Dr. Papadopoulos Linda, "How does social media affect the mental health of young people?" April 12th, 2017

<sup>10</sup> Forssell, R., Exploring cyberbullying and face-to-face bullying in working life – Prevalence, targets and expressions. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2016 58, 454–460.

<sup>11</sup>Malaysian Institute of Integrity and National Integrity Plan.(2016).<http://pmr.penerangan.gov.my/index.php/budaya/6633-budaya-etika-dan-integriti-membentuk-budaya-kerja-cemerlang.html>. [Retrieved June 27 2024]; Khalidah, K. A., Rohani, S., & Mashitah, S. (2014). Ethical values and commitment towards achieving excellence: A study on public boarding school students in Malaysia. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 22, 33-50.



psychological and moral harm perpetuated by these technologies. Such harms, ranging from diminished cognitive focus and anxiety to social withdrawal and emotional trauma, pose serious threats to personal development and societal well-being. Left unaddressed, they can aggravate mental health conditions and, in extreme cases, contribute to self-destructive behaviors, including suicide<sup>12</sup>. To confront and transcend these challenges, Sufi saints placed profound emphasis on rigorous personal training aimed at cultivating spiritual fortitude, ethical consistency, and inner stability. They developed structured methodologies for nurturing the human soul, rooted in compassion, discipline, and divine remembrance. Central to this approach was the insistence on adhering to a moral framework grounded in the Islamic tradition. Among the most systematic and spiritually insightful of these contributions are the eleven principles advanced by the Naqshbandi Sufi order. These principles not only function as a spiritual code of conduct but also as practical tools to counteract the psychological and ethical distortions introduced by modern digital culture, including social media.

The rise of social media platforms has rapidly transformed communication patterns and identity formation among youth in Muslim societies. Research in media and communication studies indicates that digital environments can foster psychological risks such as addiction, cyberbullying, anxiety, and pornography exposure, particularly among adolescents who are cognitively and emotionally vulnerable to persuasive media design.<sup>13</sup> Despite these well-documented harms, the moral and spiritual dimensions of digital behavior remain less examined within Islamic scholarship.

Existing approaches to Islamic media ethics tend to focus primarily on normative guidance, such as halal-haram boundaries in digital content and behavior. While important, such frameworks often do not address deeper internal capacities self-control, intention purification, and vigilance of the heart that are essential for resisting algorithmically engineered temptations online. This conceptual gap calls for insights grounded in Islamic spiritual psychology that can nurture inner moral resilience, not only regulate external behavior.

Sufism has long served as a tradition of ethical and spiritual refinement, directing believers toward remembrance of God (dhikr), humility, and disciplined conduct.<sup>14</sup> Within this spiritual heritage, the Naqshbandi order is recognized for its structured principles that emphasize silent

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<sup>12</sup>China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC). The 24th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China [EB/OL]. <http://www.cnnic.cn/uploadfiles/doc/2009-07-16>.

<sup>13</sup> Melanie Schmitt, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy-and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood: And What That Means for the Rest of Us: A Book Review*, 10 (February 2024): 41-54.

<sup>14</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Shambhala Publications, 2017).



remembrance, mindful awareness of the heart, and discipline over the gaze and thoughts.<sup>15</sup> These teachings historically enabled Muslims to withstand societal distractions and moral pressures that threatened spiritual integrity.

However, the potential contribution of Naqshbandi praxis to digital ethics remains under-explored in existing literature. Scholars rarely consider how classical Sufi frameworks could be systematically applied to help individuals navigate contemporary digital environments shaped by personalization algorithms, attention extraction business models, and performative online culture.<sup>16</sup> As a result, Muslim youth often encounter digital moral threats without adequate spiritual tools for self-regulation.

This article addresses that gap by engaging in conceptual and hermeneutic analysis of the Eleven Naqshbandi Principles and situating them within current debates on digital well-being and online moral challenges. These principles offer countermeasures to pervasive harms such as mindless scrolling, social comparison, identity fragmentation, and impulsive digital interactions.<sup>17</sup> Instead of merely restricting harmful behaviors, the framework strengthens internal dispositions that guide ethical engagement online.

The approach proposed in this article contributes to Islamic communication ethics by bridging Sufi spirituality with modern media studies. It articulates a model that can empower da'wah practitioners, educators, counselors, and parents to cultivate media resilience in young audiences through dhikr-centered awareness, intentional media use, and purification of digital intentions.<sup>18</sup> These insights are especially relevant as Muslim communities seek holistic strategies to navigate digital modernity.

By positioning Naqshbandi spirituality as a formative ethical resource, this article lays the foundation for future empirical testing such as interventions in Islamic schools, spiritual counseling approaches for digital detox, and qualitative assessments of youth applying these principles in everyday media use. The integration of classical inner discipline with contemporary media literacy has the potential to enrich ethical discourse and foster spiritually grounded digital citizenship.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition* (Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future* (Profile Books, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (Penguin, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Heidi A. Campbell and Ruth Tsuria, eds., *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429295683>.

<sup>19</sup> Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, *The Journey of the Self: A Sufi Guide to Personality* (HarperCollins, 1991).



## METHOD

This study adopts a conceptual and hermeneutic qualitative method to interpret classical Naqshbandi spiritual teachings and reposition them as an ethical framework for contemporary digital behavior. The approach emphasizes textual interpretation and thematic synthesis rather than empirical measurement.<sup>20</sup>

Primary data derive from authoritative Naqshbandi textual sources, including the collected teachings of Khwaja Baha'uddin Naqshband and *Maktubat* by Imam Rabbani Ahmad Sirhindi. Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions related to remembrance (dhikr), guarding the gaze, and disciplining the self serve as theological foundations. These were supported by secondary literature in Islamic spiritual psychology, and contemporary media scholarship addressing social media addiction, identity fragmentation, and algorithmic persuasion.<sup>21</sup> Through this multi-source approach, the study maintains fidelity to Naqshbandi doctrine while situating its analysis within modern media ethics discourse.

Analytical procedures followed systematic thematic coding, identifying the Eleven Naqshbandi Principles as conceptual units emphasizing vigilance of breath, heart, gaze, and intention.<sup>22</sup> Each principle was interpreted through its functional mechanism within Sufi discipline such as attention control, moral restraint, and cultivation of divine consciousness. These themes were then mapped to dominant digital harms documented in communication studies, including compulsive scrolling, social comparison, impulsive engagement, and exposure to morally harmful content.<sup>23</sup> This mapping generated a relational matrix that links Naqshbandi spiritual capacities with psychological vulnerabilities exploited by persuasive platform designs.

The study employs an Islamic hermeneutic interpretive lens, treating Naqshbandi practices as living ethical technologies that shape moral agency across contexts.<sup>24</sup> Interpretation was guided by Sufi psychology, which understands human experience as a dynamic interplay between *qalb* (heart), *'aql* (intellect), and *nafs* (ego) influenced by both spiritual and digital stimuli.<sup>25</sup> Digital harms are thus read as disruptions of inner balance caused by attention extraction systems engineered for

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<sup>20</sup> John Cresswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches.*, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Anthony Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur'an, Miraj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (Paulist Press, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Kabbani, *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition.*

<sup>23</sup> Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation.*

<sup>24</sup> Paul Ricoeur and Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (TCU Press, 1976).

<sup>25</sup> Haeri, *The Journey of the Self.*



behavioral manipulation.<sup>26</sup> The interpretive synthesis yields the Naqshbandi Digital Ethics Framework, demonstrating how classical disciplines such as Hosh Dar Dam or Nazar Bar Qadam—operate as structured counterforces to algorithmically driven distraction and moral deterioration online. Through this methodology, the research proposes a conceptually grounded contribution to Islamic communication ethics while laying the groundwork for future empirical applications in da'wah, education, youth digital literacy, and spiritual counseling.<sup>27</sup>

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Mapping Naqshbandi Principles to Digital Harms

The systematic mapping conducted in this study demonstrates that the Eleven Naqshbandi Principles operate as a structured ethical apparatus designed to cultivate inward self-regulation against digital persuasion strategies. In the architecture of social media platforms optimized for instant gratification, emotional arousal, and prolonged engagement users often lose the ability to monitor their own mental and spiritual states.<sup>1</sup> Naqshbandi disciplines restore awareness of intention, attention, and desire, allowing the Muslim user to reassert moral agency even in highly immersive technological environments.

Derived from the core sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunnah and refined through the contemplative insights and terminological precision of Naqshbandi scholars, these principles offer a path toward inner purification and resilience in an increasingly chaotic world. The first of these foundational principles is:

#### ***Hosh Dar Dam***

*"Hosh Dar Dam"*<sup>28</sup> is known as awareness of breath, embodies the spiritual practice of maintaining continuous consciousness of one's breathing, serving as a safeguard against heedlessness and negative impulses. It encourages a deliberate, reflective approach to life, fostering mental clarity, emotional balance, and moral attentiveness. Through this disciplined awareness anchored in the rhythm of inhalation and exhalation, practitioners are called to rise above worldly temptations and nurture inner sanctity, humility, and devotion. The human being, composed of both soul and body, exists at the intersection of the divine and the material. This duality presents a spiritual trial, testing one's faith and fidelity to higher principles. In this sacred

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<sup>26</sup> Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*.

<sup>27</sup> Campbell and Tsuria, *Digital Religion*.

<sup>28</sup> Farida Khanam; *Sufism: An introduction*, Godward Books Publications, New Delhi, p.154



context, each breath becomes a moment of reckoning, an opportunity to evaluate intentions and align consciousness with the Divine. Redirecting one's awareness toward God through every breath not only enhances mindfulness but also ensures a deeper connection with both the temporal and eternal dimensions of existence<sup>29</sup>. This spiritual discipline is intrinsically linked to one's cognitive processes and intellectual faculties. Breathing that is devoid of divine remembrance becomes an unconscious act, leading to spiritual negligence, a hardened heart, and moral blindness. In an age overwhelmed by digital distractions and the moral distortions propagated through social media, especially among the youth, the adoption of such conscious practices becomes ever more vital. Cultivating this inner awareness is essential for preserving one's moral compass and achieving meaningful success in both this world and the hereafter.

### ***Nazar bar Qadam***

Another profound principle that offers a path to countering the pervasive influence of social media and cultivating a peaceful, purpose-driven life is "*Nazar bar Qadam*," literally translated as "watching one's steps"<sup>30</sup>. This concept calls for intentional awareness of one's thoughts, actions, and direction in life, encouraging a focus that is internally rooted and undisturbed by external distractions. At its core, it inspires individuals to live as conscious beings, fully aware of their divine origin and sacred purpose<sup>31</sup>.

In the realm of *Alam-i Malakut*, the celestial dimension, all souls once affirmed their recognition of God as their Creator. *Nazar bar Qadam* urges believers to carry this covenant into their earthly existence by remaining centred on their spiritual objectives and life goals.<sup>32</sup> People who spend excessive time on social media often experience mental fatigue, stress, and distraction from their life goals due to the constant exposure to distracting and harmful content. Unnecessary watching of unnecessary pictures and videos from social media creates veils in the

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<sup>29</sup> Fethullah Gulen, *Reflections on the Qur'an*, New Jersey: Tughra Books, 2012, p. 16; David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London: Penguin Books, 1984, pp. 310-311; Jamilah Khatoon, "Iqbal's Perfect Man", *Studies in Iqbal's Thought and Art*, (ed. Saeed Sheikh), Lahore 1972, p. 125; Muhammad Iqbal, *The Development of Metaphysics in Persia*, London, 1908, pp. 172-174.

<sup>30</sup> Amal M A Ibrahim, *The Principles of Naqshbandi Sufi Order*, *Journal of Science and Technology*, 2013, 14/2, p. 4

<sup>31</sup> "O prophet, remind mankind about the incident when your Rabb brought into existence the offspring's from the lions of Adam and his descendants (virtually every single individual of mankind) and made them testify about themselves. Allah asked them "Am I not your Rabb?" They all replied: "Yes! We bear witness that you are." This We did, lest you mankind should say on the Day of Resurrection: "We were not aware of this fact that you are our Rabb and that there will be a Day of Judgment. Or lest you should say: "our forefathers started the practice of shirk and we just followed, being their descendents. (Al-Quran: 7/172 -173)

<sup>32</sup> Ahmad Farooqi, *Maktubat* letter no 295



heart, transmitted from the eyes to the heart and mind. It is a call to stay grounded in purpose, aligned with divine law, and undistracted by the chaos of the material world. Practically, this principle is symbolized by the advice to keep one's gaze fixed on the feet while walking, an evocative metaphor that reminds seekers to avoid aimless wandering, whether physical or mental, and to pursue a life of direction and intention. It discourages frivolous pursuits and warns against the distractions that can obscure the heart and cloud spiritual insight. In the present age marked by the relentless distractions and ethical erosion propagated through social media, this principle becomes especially relevant. It calls for the construction of a value-based psychological framework, grounded in moral clarity and spiritual consciousness. By doing so, individuals can rise above the noise of the digital world, reclaim inner balance, and walk steadily toward a life of meaning, virtue, and fulfilment.

According to the Quran, "Abstain from sin, be it either open or secret. Indeed those who commit sins shall surely be requited for all they have done".<sup>33</sup> All sins cast images with dark veils over the heart, distorting and weakening positive thoughts.<sup>34</sup>

In such states of spiritual vulnerability, individuals must actively engage in discerning between truth and falsehood, lawful and unlawful, and constructive versus destructive influences. Without this conscious effort, negative thoughts can cloud the heart, obstructing the reception of divine illumination and leaving the mind susceptible to the manipulative influences of satanic forces. To combat such inner turmoil, Sufi masters advise a schedule of spiritual vigilance rooted in the continuous remembrance of God (*Dhikr*), fostering a heart that is guarded, grounded, and purified.

*"But those whose faces will be (lit with) white, - they will be in (the light of) Allah's mercy: therein to dwell (forever)."*<sup>35</sup>

Hence, spiritual aspirants are instructed to lower their gaze not as a mere outward gesture, but as a protective shield against the seductive allure of worldly distractions and immoral influences. This act is not only a defence mechanism but also an emulation of the noble example of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, who, in his walks and movements, would refrain from looking to the sides. He remained focused, dignified, and unwavering in his direction both physically and

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<sup>33</sup> Surah Al-An'am:120

<sup>34</sup> Surah Anam 6:122.

<sup>35</sup> Al Qur'an 24:30 Maulana Maidudi in his Taheem-ul Quran, in volume 3 has provided detailed information about it



spiritually, moving with purpose and resolve toward his divine mission<sup>36</sup>. Following in his footsteps, seekers are urged to adopt the same discipline, walking mindfully through life with eyes fixed not on the transient attractions around them, but on the ultimate goal of nearness to God.

### ***Safar dar Watan***

"*Safar dar Watan*,"<sup>37</sup> literally, "the journey within the homeland," is a profound Sufi concept that encapsulates the inner voyage toward one's true self and the realization of authentic existence. This spiritual philosophy encourages the seeker to transcend superficial identities and embark on a transformative path toward inner truth, aiming to fulfill the highest potential of the human soul. It is a metaphysical migration from the world of appearances to the essence of being, guiding the aspirant steadily back to the Divine source.

This inward journey mirrors the soul's ascent from the realm of physical creation (*'alam al-khalq*) to the luminous domain of the Divine (*'alam al-amr*), a progression that culminates in reunion with the Creator. In this sacred context, *Safar dar Watan* is not a physical displacement but an existential unfolding—an elevation from lower states of consciousness to refined spiritual stations. It resonates with the words of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ: "*I am journeying toward my Lord, from one state to a better state, and from one spiritual station to a higher station.*"<sup>38</sup>

This spiritual journey represents a profound shift from craving what is forbidden to yearning for the Divine Presence, from dwelling in the illusions of the temporal world to awakening to the reality of eternal truths. In contemporary life, social media has become a dominant force that embodies illusion, often leading individuals into states of psychological unrest, anxiety, and disconnection from authentic selfhood<sup>39</sup>. Despite the pursuit of perfection projected through curated online personas, many users unknowingly stray further from the core values of life, succumbing instead to unethical behaviours and hollow aspirations.

To transcend this distorted lifestyle, it becomes imperative to seek the guidance of a realized spiritual master, one who has been endowed with divine insight and ethical refinement

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<sup>36</sup> Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS)

<sup>37</sup> Shamsul Hasan, *Impact of the Naqshbandi Silsilah on Indian Muslims*, PhD Thesis, (Unpublished) Aligarh Muslim University 2010, p.101; R. K. Gupta, *The Science and Philosophy of Spirituality*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2005, 96

<sup>38</sup> Qur'an, XXXIII: 13; Qur'an, XVII: 78. These verses are related by Ibn Arabi with XVII: 78-79, which is about the station of praise (maqām al-mahmūd) dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS). More for stations detailed information is available in Full text of "Golden Chain of Naqshbandi Order" (archive.org)

<sup>39</sup> A. Helwa, *Secrets of Divine Love*, Naulit Publishing House, US, 2020, 58



through God's grace. Such a guide serves as a mirror to the seeker, illuminating the path of inner purification. With sincere mentorship, the aspirant is called to initiate an internal migration: abandoning base desires and cultivating higher moral virtues. This process involves purging the heart of worldly attachments and egoistic inclinations in favour of a deeper alignment with truth, humility, and spiritual awareness<sup>40</sup>. Only through such an inner metamorphosis can one withstand the seductive pull of social media and other distractions that cloud the intellect, distort perception, and obstruct the path to spiritual maturity. The path of *Safar dar Watan* thus becomes a transformative quest away from illusion, toward illumination; away from self-deception, toward divine realization.

### ***Khalwat dar Anjuman***

"*Khalwat dar Anjuman*" literally, "seclusion amid society",<sup>41</sup> advocates for an individual to cultivate spiritual solitude and introspection, even while being engaged in the fast-paced, interconnected world of modern society. It encourages individuals to prioritize meaningful interactions that contribute to the collective welfare of humanity, rather than becoming ensnared in the shallow distractions that dominate much of modern life, including the pervasive influence of social media. Such distractions can corrupt the mind, induce psychological distress, and ultimately lead individuals away from their true spiritual path<sup>42</sup>. The essence of *Khalwat dar Anjuman* lies in maintaining outward companionship with others while inwardly adhering to divine principles and spiritual teachings. It is a delicate equilibrium, an outward engagement with the world, tempered by an inward retreat into the heart's contemplation of God.

Etymologically, this concept encourages individuals to remain connected with the world while simultaneously detaching from its distractions through conscious spiritual practice. As stated in Sufi teachings, "The seeker engages in silent *dhikr* (remembrance) so deeply within his heart that even amidst a bustling crowd, he remains untouched by the noise around him." This profound state of spiritual recollection transcends external disturbances, drawing the individual ever closer to the Divine, rendering them unaffected by the trivialities of the external world as they remain resolutely anchored in the remembrance of God<sup>43</sup>. This philosophy is reflected in

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<sup>40</sup> <http://nurmuhammadia.com/11> Principles of the Naqshbandiyatul Aliya Sufi Order Nur Muhammad Realities Biography Islam Allah Haqiqat al Muhammadiyah.

<sup>41</sup> Shah Sahab Makhdoomi, Kitab *Khalwat Der Anjuman*. Dar Matbah, (n.d.) 5-35

<sup>42</sup> Yusuf, S. Maryam. 2020. "Inter-Subjectivity of *Khalwat* (Suluk) Members in the Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah Ponorogo." Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies 10(1): 103–26.

<sup>43</sup> Abdullah, Fuady. 2018. "Spiritualitas Sosial Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah: Kajian Terhadap Prinsip *Khalwat Dar Anjuman*." Jurnal Tsaqafah 14(2): 223–40



the Qur'anic verse: "Men whom neither trade nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allah, nor from establishing prayer and giving zakah. They fear a Day in which hearts and eyes will turn about." (Quran 24:37). Furthermore, the Qur'an advises<sup>44</sup>.

"O Prophet, instruct the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts; this is more conducive to purity for them. Indeed, Allah is well-acquainted with all that they do."<sup>45</sup>

### **Yad Kard**

"Yad kard"<sup>46</sup> expresses the spiritual and philosophical essence of Dhikr. In today's life, where traditional religious foundations are challenged by notions of free thought and expression, people are engaged in dialogues and debates to evaluate the applicability and compatibility of traditional philosophies in achieving personal objectives. In such circumstances, people need to adhere to dhikr to save themselves from the native impact of the postmodern lifestyle. According to Khwaja Ubaidullah Ahrar, "The true essence of dhikr is inward awareness of God, aimed at attaining this consciousness."<sup>47</sup> The purpose of Dhikr is to maintain unwavering focus and devotion towards the Beloved, fostering both oral recitation and mental concentration, requiring stability for effective practice. This stability is cultivated through consistent Dhikr, leading to a state of ecstatic mindfulness.

Khawaja Bahauddin Naqshband emphasized that the goal of Dhikr<sup>48</sup> is to continually remind the heart of al-Haq (The Truth), guarding against negligence. *[They are] those whose effort is lost in worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work.*<sup>49</sup> However, many young people today lack an understanding of the sublime vision and the path to fulfilling their purpose in life. The Prophet (pbuh) said: "Your Lord is delighted (in the way that suits Him) about a young person who does not have lustful desire."<sup>50</sup> It is crucial to dispel hazardous notions and thoughts that hinder intellectual growth and prevent individuals from attaining life's true objectives. The pervasive influence of social media, which captivates and distracts with constant

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<sup>44</sup>Abdullah Yusuf Ali, The Noble Quran, Surah Nur; 24:37

<sup>45</sup> Surah Nur; 24:30

<sup>46</sup>Ozkan Gozel, In a Foucaultian Perspective Sufism As An Art of Existence, Kayqi, 2012, p. 161, Available on <http://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file276721>

<sup>47</sup>Khwaja Ubaydullah Ahrar, Malfuzat Khaja Bahauddin Naqshband, Trans. Hafeez Anwar, Published by Hafiz Anwar, 2018, 20

<sup>48</sup>Hafiz Syed Shah, Naqshbandi Teachings–Lataif & Muraqabat, Abul Fida Islamic Research Centre,, 2018, pp. 30-32; Papas, A. (2014). Creating a Sufi soundscape: Recitation (dhikr) and audition (samā') according to Ahmad Kāsānī Dahbīdī (d. 1542). *Performing Islam*, 3(1-2), 25-43.

<sup>49</sup> Qur'an 18: 104

<sup>50</sup>Imam Ahmad, at-Tabarani, Abu Ya'la, and Ibn Abi Asim



use, impedes the development of spiritual, creative, and philosophical insights necessary for human progress. It undermines critical thinking abilities, leading to deviations and detractions from the path of spiritual and intellectual fulfilment.

The importance of dhikr is profoundly highlighted in the Quran, with numerous verses discussing its significance and effects on the human psyche. Surahs such as 57:26, Kahf: 28, Muzamil: 8, Ahzab: 35, 41; Araf: 205; Az-Zumur: 22-23; Aali- Imran:191; Nissa:103; Taubah:18; Araf:205; 13:27-28; 24: 37-37; 29:45; 33:41-42, 56; 63:9; 73:8; 87:14-15; 62:10; 4:103; 8:45; 28:8; 5:74; and 6:54, all emphasize the importance of dhikr. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi, in his work "Islahi Nisab," also quotes numerous ahadith to underscore the necessity of incorporating dhikr into daily life. Transitioning from the distractions of social media to the spiritual practice of constant remembrance (Yad Kard) (constant remembrance of God) can combat various modern evils, such as intoxication, pornography and spending too much time watching web pages on Facebook and other social media networks. Islam, as a religion rooted in nature, rejects a stagnant and psychologically debilitating way of life.<sup>51</sup> Instead, it promotes dynamism, as the eternal spiritual foundation of Islam encourages transformative change in all aspects of life. A society embracing such dynamism must integrate the concept of change into its way of living. People have strayed from contemplating God, the Creator, to whom we must all return. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent—supremely powerful and compassionate, guiding those who seek His path for true happiness and success. Hadrath Umar <sup>(RA)</sup> narrated that Prophet Muhammad <sup>(SAAS)</sup> said, "For everything, there is a polish, and the polish for the hearts is the Zikr (remembrance) of Allah. There is nothing more effective in saving a person from Allah's punishment than the Zikr of Allah." When asked, "Not even Jihad in the path of Allah?" he replied, "Not even if you were to continue striking with your sword until it breaks."<sup>52</sup>

Numerous ahadith from the Prophet Muhammad <sup>(SAAS)</sup> eloquently emphasize the importance of dhikr. Abu Darda<sup>(RA)</sup> narrated that Prophet Muhammad <sup>(SAAS)</sup> said, "Shall I not tell you of the best of your deeds, the most pleasing to your Sovereign, those that raise you most in status, and that are better than giving gold and silver, or meeting your enemy in battle and

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<sup>51</sup>Ashraf Ali Thanvi, *Islahi Nisab*, Idara Taleef Asrafiya, 1405 Hijra, 415-450

<sup>52</sup> Imam Abi Bakr Ahmad bin Hussain al-Baihaqi, *Sunan Al Kubra Baihaqi*, Bab al-Zikr, (urdu Trans.: Hafiz Sonallah), Maktaba rahimia, Lahore,



striking their necks while they strike yours?" The companions asked, "What is that, O Messenger of Allah?" He replied, "Remembering Allah (Dhikr)."<sup>53</sup>

In another hadith narrated by Abu Huraira <sup>(RA)</sup> and Abu Darda <sup>(RA)</sup>, Prophet Muhammad <sup>(SAAS)</sup> said, "No people sit in a gathering remembering Allah, but the angels surround them, mercy covers them, tranquillity descends upon them, and Allah remembers them before those who are with Him." Additionally, Prophet Muhammad <sup>(SAAS)</sup> conveyed Allah's words: "I am with My Slave when he remembers Me, and his lips move saying My Name."<sup>54</sup>

The Quran eloquently states that the remembrance of God brings solace to the heart and peace of mind. This principle serves as a powerful remedy against the negative effects of social media. As stated in Al-Quran 13:28, "Only in the remembrance of Allah <sup>(swt)</sup> will your heart find peace."<sup>55</sup>

Those who are excessively consumed by social media and spend their time in frivolous activities risk a bleak future. They will not be rewarded for their negativity; instead, they will face severe consequences. Al-Quran 20:124 warns, "Whosoever turns away from My remembrance, his life will be made tight and narrow, and on the Day of Resurrection, We shall raise him blind."

### ***Yad dasht***

*Yad dasht* refers to accomplished remembrance.<sup>56</sup> The practice where the reciter of Dhikr safeguards their heart through constant negation of evil and affirmation of positivity with every breath, remaining continuously in the presence of Allah Almighty and Exalted. It means the individuals focus their connection with the Creator through both external and internal actions. Their heart must remain centred in the presence of God. The ultimate achievement of 'yad Kard' is 'yad dasht', representing the highest state attainable through this method. This state signifies the continuous awareness of the absoluteness of God. It can be described in several ways: as the perfection of contemplation, as presence without absence, or as the witnessing of Truth. This profound realization is believed to be instilled in the initiate's heart through the love that the Essence has for its devotee. The philosophy of Yad Dasht is to work out as a conscious being and

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<sup>53</sup> Imam Muhammad Bin Yazeed Ibn Majah Al-Qazwinf , Sunan Ibn Majah, (Eng. Trans. Nasiruddin al-Khattab), Maktaba Dar-usSalam, 2007

<sup>54</sup> Sahih Bukhari , Hadith Number 3791

<sup>55</sup> Sahih Bukhari, Hadith Number 3792

<sup>56</sup> Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi, Mabd o Maad, (Urdu Tans. By Iqbal Ahmad Faroque) Maktaba Nabaviyah, Lahore, 1996, p.30 Thomas Dahnhardt, Change and Continuity in Indian Sufism, D.K. Print World (P) Ltd. New Delhi, 2002, pp.161, 162, 164, 405



to fulfil the purpose of life. In this regard, the seeker must keep their heart continuously in Allah's divine presence. Such a practice enables the seeker to realize and manifest the Light of God's Unique Essence. To build one's character, we need to remain away from or discard three of the four types of thoughts: Egoistic thoughts, Evil thoughts, Angelic thoughts.

People are meant to achieve perfection. Such thoughts govern the human mind on a positive basis. Such may be regarded as "Embracing Haqqani Thoughts": Only the fourth type of thought, Haqqani or truthful thoughts, will help to overcome devilish character, so the need is to adopt, affirm and withhold such a thought. The Salik achieves perfection by discarding all imaginings and embracing the reality of Allah's Oneness; the seeker attains the highest state of perfection.

### ***Baz Gasht***

*Baz Gasht*<sup>57</sup> means post-remembrance<sup>58</sup>. It is a philosophy of reform that holds significant value, especially in the context of social media. Many people feel trapped by the adverse effects and addiction to social media, believing they cannot find peace and serenity without it. For these individuals, Baz Gasht offers a philosophy that fosters a true understanding of life. This quality was developed and ingrained in the souls of earlier companions.

Baz Gasht is a state where the seeker, through dhikr by negating illogical activities and affirming life's reality, comes to understand the Holy Prophet's saying: "My God, You are my aim, and your good pleasure/satisfaction is what I seek."<sup>59</sup> While engaged in dhikr silently (as Naqshbandis uphold the Thought) within the heart, the constant remembrance of Allah helps prevent one's thoughts from wandering. This practice allows individuals to master their thoughts and cultivate a vision of love and divine perfection, steering them away from negativity. To achieve a higher level of perfection, Naqshbandi followers immerse themselves in constant dhikr.<sup>60</sup> This practice helps them extract from their hearts the secret of oneness and open themselves to the reality of distinctive heavenly manifestation.<sup>61</sup>

The prevention of damage is always beneficial, as human nature inherently encourages a return to virtuous conduct. Deviating from a righteous path results in continuous deterioration and downfall, rather than leading to growth and elevation. Such a person moves towards harm instead of well-being, wasting their life moment by moment. If someone finds themselves

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<sup>57</sup> K. Sunarman, *The Meaning of Four Books*, No Publisher, place of publication and date mentioned, 258

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Dahnhardt, *OP. Cit*, 2002, 161

<sup>59</sup> *Majmua alRasail al-Naqshbandiya al Khalidiya*, Available on <https://pdfcoffee.com/qdownload/--18439-pdf-free.html>, Retrieved on 18/5/2024

<sup>60</sup> Okzan Gozel, 161

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Dahnhardt, *OP. Cit*, 2002, 388



entangled in the quagmire of social media, feeling trapped in a cage, they should return to the illuminating path of divine nature. This return allows them to atone for their past misdeeds and restore their sense of purpose and direction.<sup>62</sup>

### ***Nigah Dasht***

*Nigah Dasht*<sup>63</sup> means be attentive. Zafrullah Khan emphasizes the importance of vigilance in both thought and action: "Struggle against all alien and weak thoughts and actions. Always be mindful of what you are thinking and doing so that you may overcome your immortality on every passing moment of your daily life. Be watchful and aware of what captures your attention. Learn to withdraw your focus from undesirable objects. This is also expressed as being vigilant in thought and remembering yourself."<sup>64</sup> Allama Iqbal conveys a similar message with unique eloquence:

"صورت شمشیر ہے دست قضا میں وہ قوم  
کرتی ہے جو ہر زمان اپنے عمل کا حساب"<sup>65</sup>

("The people who evaluate their actions at all times are like swords in the hands of Destiny.")

A sound logic for life involves focusing on positive and reliable things to protect oneself from distraction. One's sight must guard the heart by preventing negative thoughts from entering. Unscrupulous inclinations hinder the heart's union with the Divine<sup>66</sup>. Among the Naqshbandi Sufis, it is considered a great achievement for a seeker to protect their heart from bad inclinations for even fifteen minutes. Immoral advertising and unethical sites disturb the human psyche and create social imbalance.

Islam provides the means to safeguard the heart from negative thoughts and low inclinations, but it requires a conviction to transform one's life towards happiness and peace. Those who achieve this will know their heart, and knowing one's heart leads to knowing the Lord. As the Messenger of Allah (pbuh) said, "Who knows himself, knows his Lord."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Jawad Muhdasi, *Fitrat ki Taraf Bazgasht*, (Urdu Trans.) Margoob Aalam Askari, Mutharia Fikri wa Saqafati Markaz, Srinagar, 2014, 31

<sup>63</sup> M. Fethullah Gulen defined it as self-supervision, *Sufism Emerald Hills of the Heart*, Eng. Trans.by Ali Ünal, Tughra Books, New Jersey, 2009, vol.3, 14

<sup>64</sup> Zafarullah Khan, *Islam in the Contemporary World: A New Narrative*, National Book Foundation Islamabad, 2016, 18

<sup>65</sup> Allama Iqbal. *Kulliyat Iqbal* (Urdu), Masjid Qurtabi, Bali-Jibril, 393/136

<sup>66</sup> Casey, Donald, "Rumi: Faith, Knowledge, and Reason." *The Fountain Journal*, March/April 2002, 23-31

<sup>67</sup> *al-Tawdīh li-Sharḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* 2/512, al-Bukhari, an-Nasa'i and Ibn Majah, *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn* 3:2-3 , *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn* 3/358, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'* 10/208



Life is a divine gift that must be safeguarded from the myriad evil practices that pervade contemporary society. While social media offers some benefits, its drawbacks far outweigh them, leading to widespread depression and family conflicts. Numerous researchers have highlighted that social media's impact often results in these negative outcomes. Despite similar usage rates across genders, studies indicate that girls tend to spend more time on social media than boys.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, females experience higher rates of depression compared to their male counterparts, especially during adolescence a trend that can extend into emerging adulthood.<sup>69</sup>

The influence of social media is more pronounced among women, who are more susceptible to its lure of luxury and superficial attractions. This susceptibility contributes to greater mental health issues, with women being more inclined to internalize problems exacerbated by social media exposure. Gender differences in depression, which emerge in adolescence, reflect this pattern, underscoring the significant impact of social media on women's mental well-being and their predisposition to its adverse effects.<sup>70</sup>

According to Branje et al. (2010), "the quality of a mother-child relationship is linked to depressive issues in both males and females, while the quality of a father-child relationship is linked to depressive problems in males."<sup>71</sup> Gender differences in social media use during emerging adulthood are notable, with Simoncic et al. (2014) finding that more women use social media compared to men.<sup>72</sup>

Awareness, like *Wuquf Zamani*, *Wuquf 'Adadi*, and *Wuquf Qalbi* defined as the state or quality of being conscious of something, involves having knowledge or perception of time, situation, fact, or environment. Such awareness involves the heart through its desires and sentiments. This fundamental aspect of cognition enables individuals to process information, make informed decisions, and respond appropriately to their surroundings, thereby safeguarding against wrongdoings.<sup>73</sup> In both psychological and Sufi philosophy, awareness

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<sup>68</sup> Duggan, et.al, Social media update 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.pewinternet.org/05/20/2014>

<sup>69</sup> Meadows et.al, Depressive symptoms, stress, and support: Gendered trajectories from adolescence to young adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 2006, 35(1), 93-103

<sup>70</sup> Galambos, et.al. Gender development in adolescence. In R.M. Lerner & L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent psychology: Vol. 1: Individual bases of adolescent development*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. 2009, 305-357

<sup>71</sup> Branje, et.al (2010). Longitudinal associations between perceived parent-child relationship quality and depressive symptoms in adolescence. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 38(6), 751-763.

<sup>72</sup> Simoncic, et.al (2014). Facebook use and depressive symptomatology: Investigating the role of neuroticism and extraversion in youth. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 40,1-5.

<sup>73</sup> Fowler, et.al. (1981). Lexical access with and without awareness. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 110,341-362



provides insight or understanding of the prevailing situation or thought. Being aware of thoughts that create dissent or accord between humans and divinity is essential, often referred to as consciousness.<sup>74</sup>

Sufi scholars, particularly the Naqshbandi Khawajgan, developed three concepts of awareness: *Wuquf Zamani*, *Wuquf Adadi*, and *Wuquf Qalbi*.<sup>75</sup> These terms emphasize the importance of being mindful of time, numbers, and the heart. These concepts promote action based on realism, ensuring that individuals remain conscious of the events and circumstances around them. By practicing these forms of awareness, individuals can maintain a continuous connection with their spiritual and temporal realities, fostering a balanced and vigilant approach to life.

***Wuquf Zamani (Awareness of Time):***

*Wuquf Zamani* emphasises the importance of being aware of time in human life. Timely recovery from a negative lifestyle is crucial for safeguarding against anxiety. Social media often leads people to waste precious time, disrupting their spiritual journey. To counter this, individuals must remain vigilant, exercise caution and self-control, and act wisely in every aspect of their lives. This stage is a significant spiritual milestone on the path to enlightenment. Avoiding social media addiction promptly aids in achieving positive life goals. If not addressed, it can become a persistent habit, making it challenging to overcome anxiety, stress, and negativity. People who waste their time need to recover and count their spiritual instincts daily to mitigate their losses.

***Wuquf Adadi (Awareness of Number)<sup>76</sup>:***

Sufi scholars use the term *Wuquf Adadi* to describe the careful mention of certain words or phrases in the exact number prescribed by their guide. The fundamental purpose is to recite dhikr through counting to cultivate a positive heart and mind. Counting is not for the sake of numbers but to focus purposefully, securing the heart from negative thoughts and enhancing concentration to achieve spiritual goals. The number theory is not random but relies on the guide, varying from one dhikr to another.<sup>77</sup> According to Shah Naqshband, "Observance of the numbers in dhikr is the first step in the state of acquiring Heavenly Knowledge (ilm ul-

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<sup>74</sup> Hussain, Amir; et.al (2009). *Brain Inspired Cognitive Systems*, Springer Science Business Media, New York, 2008, 298

<sup>75</sup> Fethullah Gülen, 15

<sup>76</sup> Fethullah Gülen, 15

<sup>77</sup> <http://naqshbandi.org/teachings/topics/the-principles-of-the-naqshbandi-way/awareness-of-numbers-wuquf-adadi/> retrieved on 20th May 2024



ladunni).<sup>78</sup> Overcoming negativity requires training the heart to develop traits necessary for human development.

**Wuquf-i Qalbi (Awareness of the Heart):**

Wuquf-i Qalbi signifies that initiates who have reached the pinnacle of their spiritual journey should turn to God with all their faculties and concentrate on Him. This state is for those who have achieved the highest level of spiritual awareness. Recovery from false and negative notions of life is vital for healing the heart.<sup>79</sup> Life is precious, and its intentions are processed by the heart. When your eyes catch sight of an object, it sends a message to the heart for reaction. If a person is aware of negative thoughts, the heart quickly reacts to protect against distraction. Ignoring these signals leads to a negative impact on the heart and mind, resulting in the deterioration of human character.

Naqshbandi Principle	Digital Harm Targeted	Mechanism of Ethical Intervention	Applied Practice Example
Hosh Dar Dam (Mindfulness of breath)	Impulsive scrolling, emotional overreaction	Cognitive slowing and emotional regulation	Pause for one conscious breath before clicking, reacting, or sharing <sup>2</sup>
Nazar Bar Qadam (Gaze discipline)	Pornography, envy, doomscrolling	Visual filtering and moral attention	Scroll past harmful visuals immediately; curated feed selections <sup>3</sup>
Safar Dar Watan (Inner journey)	Identity fragmentation; performative self	Self-reflection and purpose realignment	Ask: "Is this post aligned with who I am becoming?" <sup>4</sup>
Khalwat Dar Anjuman (Solitude in society)	Overconnectivity; FOMO; loneliness paradox	Detachment despite engagement	Silent dhikr during online interaction; designated reflection periods <sup>5</sup>
Yad Kard / Yad Dasht (Remembrance of God)	Nihilism; loss of purpose	Divine-centered mindfulness	Dhikr prompts before unlocking a device <sup>6</sup>
Baz Gasht (Returning to God)	Relapse into digital addiction	Repentance and intentional reset	Digital fasting—weekly platform breaks <sup>7</sup>
Nigah Dasht (Monitoring thoughts)	Algorithmic persuasion; cognitive hijacking	Intention checking and thought self-regulation	Ask: "Why am I still here?" every 10 minutes online <sup>8</sup>

<sup>78</sup> <https://nurmuhammad.com/11-principles-of-the-naqshbandiyatul-aliya-sufi-order/> retrieved on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024

<sup>79</sup> Shivan Mahendrarajah M. *The Sufi Saint of Jam History, Religion, and Politics of a Sunni Shrine in Shi'i Iran* in *Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization*, Cambridge University Press, 2021, 205



<b>Naqshbandi Principle</b>	<b>Digital Harm Targeted</b>	<b>Mechanism of Ethical Intervention</b>	<b>Applied Practice Example</b>
Wuquf Zamani (Awareness of time)	Time-wasting; binge-usage	Accountability and temporal ethics	Review screen time daily; set worship-linked limits <sup>9</sup>
Wuquf 'Adadi (Awareness of number)	Compulsive binge content	Structured consumption boundaries	Limit video watch counts: e.g., three beneficial videos per day <sup>10</sup>
Wuquf Qalbi (Awareness of heart)	Desensitization to immorality and hate	Affective vigilance and moral sensitivity	Log off when the heart experiences discomfort <sup>11</sup>

The Naqshbandi Digital Ethics Framework therefore demonstrates how classical inner disciplines can effectively mitigate digital harms by strengthening the ethical agency of the user rather than merely restricting exposure.

### **Naqshbandi Ethical Praxis in the Age of Social Media-Related Moral Challenges.**

Modern digital well-being approaches generally emphasize human-centered solutions such as screen-time regulation, mindfulness exercises, and digital detox strategies.<sup>80</sup> These methodologies are grounded in secular psychology and aim primarily to restore balance between cognitive load and personal efficiency in the midst of persuasive digital environments engineered to capture attention. While beneficial, such frameworks anchor ethics to individual comfort and productivity, leaving deeper moral and spiritual vulnerabilities insufficiently addressed.

Naqshbandi spiritual ethics, by contrast, operates within a God-centered ontology that frames media use as part of one's moral accountability before Allah. Rooted in *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul), it understands distraction, comparison, and random consumption not merely as behavioral weaknesses but as spiritual lapses that distance the heart from remembrance (*dhikr*). Through this lens, the goal of ethical media engagement is not simply behavioral correction but strengthening spiritual consciousness in everyday digital interactions.<sup>81</sup>

One of the distinctive features of the Naqshbandi tradition is its ability to embed discipline directly into ordinary acts of attention. Practices like Hosh Dar Dam and Nazar Bar Qadam train users to regulate breath and gaze at the precise point where digital environments attempt to seize

<sup>80</sup> Shivam Gupta et al., "Operationalizing Digitainability: Encouraging Mindfulness to Harness the Power of Digitalization for Sustainable Development," *Sustainability* 15, no. 8 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15086844>.

<sup>81</sup> Haeri, *The Journey of the Self*.



control.<sup>82</sup> These embodied interventions transform habitual scrolling moments into opportunities for cultivating mindfulness of God. The believer is thus trained not only to avoid harmful content but to guard the entrance to the heart making media use a site of worship rather than passive consumption.

Furthermore, Naqshbandi principles such as Wuquf Zamani, Wuquf 'Adadi, and Wuquf Qalbi contribute a rigorous temporal and affective accountability often absent from secular models. They emphasize questions of intention *why* one is online rather than merely *how long*.<sup>91011</sup> Emotional responses, internal discomfort, and spiritual agitation become diagnostic indicators prompting ethical withdrawal or realignment. In this sense, Naqshbandi ethics introduces a relational accountability that binds digital behavior to the health of the heart and one's proximity to God.

Additionally, this framework recognizes the inner self as an arena of moral struggle (*mujahadah al-nafs*). It shifts the focus from external monitoring (filters, parental control apps) to volitional self-discipline formed through continuous dhikr and reflection.<sup>83</sup> Unlike purely cognitive approaches, Naqshbandi practices preserve moral imagination, humility, and intentionqualities crucial for resisting algorithmic manipulation that exploits vanity, desire, and tribal identity formation online. This positions Muslim users not only as consumers but as ethically responsible communicators in the digital public sphere.

Despite its transformative promise, the approach has limitations. Spiritual practices cannot fully counteract structural harms embedded within surveillance capitalism such as algorithmic amplification of hate, commodification of attention, and personalized nudging.<sup>84</sup> Its applicability also depends on spiritual readiness and access to qualified mentorship, which may vary significantly across youth demographics. Empirical validation remains necessary to measure behavioral change, emotional resilience, and ethical awareness produced by Naqshbandi-based interventions in real digital environments. Thus, the model is best understood as a complementary layer that must work alongside regulation, education, and technological reform.

Nevertheless, this study argues that Naqshbandi spirituality offers a unique ethical contribution: it reframes digital challenges as opportunities for spiritual growth. It equips Muslims with internal tools—vigilant intention, disciplined attention, and heart-centered accountability to

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<sup>82</sup> Kabbani, *Classical Islam and the Naqshbandi Sufi Tradition*.

<sup>83</sup> "Sufism in Western Contexts | Brill," accessed December 8, 2025, [https://brill.com/edcollbook/title/39558?srsltid=AfmBOopX2piurIEJjtJOTICXS0C5-CfjO7TUxGuAZKTRk\]FE5uDPjBxI](https://brill.com/edcollbook/title/39558?srsltid=AfmBOopX2piurIEJjtJOTICXS0C5-CfjO7TUxGuAZKTRk]FE5uDPjBxI).

<sup>84</sup> David Lyon, *The Culture of Surveillance: Watching as a Way of Life* (2018).



resist moral erosion and shape identity through divine remembrance. By integrating the spiritual and the technological, this framework enriches Islamic communication ethics and provides actionable pathways for da'wah programs, Islamic education, and youth counseling to cultivate digital citizenship grounded in virtue, resilience, and proximity to Allah.

## CONCLUSION

The pervasive influence of social media in contemporary Muslim societies poses profound ethical and psychological challenges, particularly for youth whose identities are actively shaped within digital spaces. Distraction, addictive usage, exposure to harmful content, and moral desensitization demonstrate that technological advancement has not been matched by equivalent spiritual safeguards. This study has argued that without strengthening inner moral resilience, external regulations alone remain insufficient to address the depth of social media-related harms.

By engaging in conceptual and hermeneutic analysis of the Eleven Naqshbandi Principles, this article demonstrates that classical Sufi discipline offers a systematic framework for counteracting digital-era vulnerabilities. Each principle *Hosh Dar Dam*, *Nazar Bar Qadam*, *Safar Dar Watan*, *Khalwat dar Anjuman*, *Yad Kard*, *Baz Gasht*, *Nigah Dasht*, and the three forms of *Wuquf* cultivates spiritual attention, intention purification, and heart-based vigilance that oppose addictive scrolling, algorithmic persuasion, identity distortion, and moral heedlessness. Rather than merely restricting behavior, these principles reorient digital media use toward divine remembrance and ethical self-regulation.

The Naqshbandi Digital Ethics Framework therefore expands the discourse in Islamic communication ethics. It bridges classical spiritual psychology with modern media studies, situating digital participation within a God-centered ontology of accountability. This model contributes to the field by offering actionable guidance for Muslim parents, educators, *da'wah* practitioners, and counselors seeking to nurture spiritually grounded digital literacy. It also encourages Islamic communication programs to incorporate Sufi inner ethics into curricula addressing technological morality.

Nonetheless, the framework is not without limitations. Spiritual practices alone cannot remedy structural harms embedded in surveillance capitalism, platform economics, and exploitative algorithmic architectures. Moreover, the level of spiritual commitment required for consistent application varies across individuals, particularly among youth. Thus, Naqshbandi spirituality should complement not replace policy reform, institutional guidelines, and digital well-being education.



Future research is needed to test the practical effectiveness of these principles through qualitative and behavioral studies.<sup>21</sup> Examples include digital-detox interventions grounded in *dhikr*, assessments of youth emotional resilience when applying Naqshbandi awareness practices, comparative studies with secular mindfulness programs, and instructional module design for Islamic schools and mosques.<sup>22</sup> Empirical validation will strengthen this framework's relevance and scalability for Muslim communities navigating rapid technological change.

Ultimately, this study concludes that Naqshbandi spirituality invites a paradigm shift: digital media is not merely a technological field but a spiritual arena. Through disciplined remembrance, guarded attention, and ethical intention, Muslims can transform their digital presence into a medium of purification and proximity to Allah. In an age where the screen increasingly shapes the self, returning to the heart remains the most powerful act of resistance and renewal.

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