In the Qur’an it is stated categorically that it is God who created the human being and more specifically, his soul (nafs), as the following verse bears witness: O Mankind, fear your Lord who created you from a single nafs ... (Q. 4:1). In addition, it is interesting to note, it states that this very same human soul may be subject to both purification (tazkiya) or defilement (tadsiya) as Q. 91:7-10 explain: And [by] the soul and the One who proportioned it (wa-nafsin wa-mā sawwāhā); then He inspired it [to discern between] its iniquity and its righteousness (fa-alhamahā fujūrahā wa-taqwāhā); indeed, he who purifies it has succeeded (qad aﬄaha man zakkāhā); and indeed, he who defiles it has failed (wa-qad khāba man dassāhā). Although the compound phrase tazkiyat al-nafs does not appear in the Qur’an, Muslim scholars have borrowed this term from this particular occurrence of the verb zakka (tazkiya being the verbal noun (masdar) of the form II verb zakkā) along with al-nafs in Q. 91:9–10, deducing it from the aforementioned verses and developing it to denote a form of spiritual development and purification which they would claim has its basis in Islam’s primary, revelatory text.

Despite this, however, and even though the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs is seemingly part of the Qur’anic paradigm, there are virtually no works in the classical literature that deal with this topic specifically. This is most probably due to the fact that since this subject is perceived to be a ‘spiritual’ or even ‘mystical’ field of study, it was normally dealt with within the sphere of Şüfism. Yet, a trend has recently arisen amongst some contemporary writers which aims at re-examining this term and reclaiming it, in an attempt to provide a more ‘orthodox’ alternative in discussing the spiritual element of Islam to the expositions of this topic in Şüfism’s vast literature that are considered innovative in the pejorative sense (bid’ā). With the rise of reformist movements in the twentieth century, the attempt to reclaim tazkiyat al-nafs, as both concept and term, and to project it as being an ‘orthodox’ version of spirituality in Islam vis-à-vis the ‘innovative’ version propagated by Şüfism has been particularly true of the Salafi trend and we can regard the vast majority of material produced in this field within this limited perspective. It can also be observed that such works are mainly concerned with what will be termed in this article as a ‘practical’ approach to tazkiyat al-nafs, meaning that the implementation of the process of purification means essentially the application of the commands, prohibitions and etiquettes of Islam as a whole. Thus, the vast majority of these works are not essentially academic appraisals but, rather, exhortative treatises (kutub
da’wiyah/waziyah) written to encourage the reader to expend effort in becoming a better Muslim, hence the need for an academic appraisal of this subject.

Therefore, as the title suggests, this article aims to explore the concept of tazkiyat al-nafs in the Qur’an and, rather than present a specific theological position, as other works have done, reconstruct this concept as it manifests itself within both the Qur’anic text itself and a variety of classical Muslim source texts. This will be achieved by undertaking an in-depth study of the two terms tazkiya and nafs as found in the Qur’an by locating them within their various Qur’anic contexts, and examining them in the light of the exegetical literature (tafsir) as well as the works that deal directly with this subject area, so as to produce a working understanding of this concept from what is, quintessentially, a Qur’anic perspective.

The Singular Qur’anic Verse Mentioning Both the Terms tazkiya and al-nafs

Before moving on to discuss the finer implications of tazkiya and al-nafs, we must first turn our attention to the single most important sequence of Qur’anic verses relating to our area of enquiry, Q. 91:7–10, And [by] the soul (nafs) and the One Who proportioned it; then He inspired it [to discern between] its iniquity and its righteousness; indeed, he who purifies it has succeeded; and indeed, he who defiles it has failed. The significance of these verses cannot be over emphasised as they mention not only the nature of the soul and the potentiality and duality created in it, but also the possibility of its purification or defilement. As such, this is the only series of Qur’anic verses that makes mention of both the nafs and its tazkiya in one place, a fact which makes them deserving of further attention.

These particular verses have a number of interesting characteristics. The first of these being that the series of verses begins with the swearing of an oath using wāw al-qasm which, according to Islamic exegetical tradition, implies emphasis intended to draw the attention of the reader/listener to the importance of the discourse being presented. Not only this, but this particular verse comes after six previous verses also beginning with oaths, the objects of these oaths being the sun, the moon, the day, the night, the heavens, the earth and finally, this seventh oath concerning the soul. Commentators allude to the fact that this style in the Qur’an is utilised to draw attention to the greatness and perfection of such creations, these ultimately being indications of the Creator Himself. Perhaps more subtly, however, it can be further noticed that the first six items are manifest, i.e, ‘seen’ in the simplest sense, whereas the final object of the oath is ‘unseen’, causing some exegetes to conclude that this is in fact the greatest of the ‘unseen’ creations.

Similarly, these verses contain direct reference to the creator of this soul; the word used in the verse is mā, in this instance mā al-mawsūla (the relative pronoun), carrying the meaning of alladhī and in this specific example meaning man (the one
Thus, the verse speaks not only of the soul itself but also of the One who sawwāhā, carrying the meaning of ‘proportioned, made equal, made even and balanced’, suggesting not only that the soul was created in the body in a state of equilibrium but that this state of balance also exists at a moral level, since the soul has been given free will to choose between good and evil, a concept to which the following verse adds further credence.\(^7\)

This following verse (Q, 91:8) begins by making an important statement, i.e. that the soul is capable of receiving inspiration and insight, indicated by the use of the verb alhamahā, stating clearly that God, once again the active participle, is the source of inspiration. The subject of the inspiration is equally significant, however, as it is stated as being the soul’s iniquity (fujūr) and its righteousness (taqwā); thus the soul has been inspired and given insight to be able discern between and choosing either right action or sin. In this regard, Ibn āds (d. 67–8/686–8) said that the verse means ‘clarified for it [the soul] good and evil’ – an opinion that was also held by Qatāda (d. 117/735), Dahhāk (d. 102/721) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 162/778).\(^8\) This verse is therefore another indication of the soul’s free will and some commentators consider it to be an indication of the human being’s rational faculty or intellect (‘aql), this being the highest form of human ability. However, it should be noted that the subject of this inspiration is to choose between iniquity and righteousness, which is essentially a moral dilemma, in which there can be no doubt that the intellect plays a role, but the influence here of the heart (qalb) and/or of the conscience (damīr) cannot be underestimated. As such, this verse is also an indication of dual potentiality within the soul, and alludes to its responsibility and accountability, in both this life and the next, as it has been endowed with the capacity to discern and the ability to choose the right course of action or, alternatively, the opposite.\(^9\)

The results and consequences of such ‘informed’ choices are the subject of the next two verses (Q. 91:9–10), which is also the only time in the Qur’an where the word nafs is used in conjunction with a derivative of the term tazkiya. In the very next verse we are informed that true success, prosperity and salvation (falāh), meaning the acquisition of God’s good grace and entry into His Paradise, will be attained by ‘he who purifies it (zakkāh)’. This is the usual form II usage of the verb and therefore gives the meanings of ‘bringing about or causing growth, augmentation, reform and development’ or ‘purification’ in the broad sense. However, it is the subject of ‘it’ which concerns us here, as the attached pronoun being used is feminine, i.e. hā and as such refers directly to the term nafs mentioned previously. Thus, the verse in its broadest sense would mean, ‘he who has caused his soul to grow, be augmented, be reformed, developed and purified has indeed attained true success, prosperity and salvation’. In this sense Qatāda said that the meaning of the verse is, ‘he who has purified his soul through obedience to God and cleaned it from base characteristics and vices has indeed attained true success’.\(^10\)
It is also worth mentioning that the subject of the verb zakkā is not apparently obvious and thus Muslim exegetes have differed regarding exactly ‘who’ it is that is doing the purifying; the first of these views suggests that it is God that is the subject, in which case the verse would mean, ‘he whom God has caused his soul to grow, be augmented, reformed, developed and purified has indeed attained true success, prosperity and salvation’. In this regard it is related that it was the opinion of both Farrā’ (d. 207/822) and Zajjāj (d. 311/923) that the meaning of the verse is: ‘Indeed, a soul which God has purified is successful and indeed, a soul which God has caused to be defiled has failed.’

The second view posits that it is the human being who brings about this process at a personal level, in which case Q. 91:9 would mean, ‘he who has caused his soul to be purified has indeed attained true success’. In this sense, Sufyān ibn ‘Uyayna (d. 198/813), Qatāda and others said of this verse that the meaning is ‘indeed, he who has purified his soul with God’s obedience and righteous actions has succeeded’, and similarly, Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201), commented that the meaning of zakkāhā is ‘purified it from sin and reformed it with righteous deeds’. It is not wholly implausible however that the process is indeed a combination of the two in harmony with one another.

The alternative consequence of these ‘informed’ choices is clarified in the very next verses, which allude to the idea that whoever selects a path of iniquity will indeed have failed (khāba). The verse used in diametric opposition with zakkāhā in Q. 91:10 is equally worthy of mention here; the conjugation used is dassāhā from dassasa, the final radical of this verb being substituted by an alif to ease and facilitate pronunciation. The meaning of this verb is ‘to hide or conceal’, which at first glance may seem obscure but the implication is that the person in question would commit sins, disbelieve and be disobedient, so much so that his soul would be ‘submerged’ in such reprehensible acts to the extent that his soul would be ‘buried’ in them. In this sense Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) said the meaning of dassāhā is ‘concealed it with iniquity and disobedience, as the reprobate hides his soul (dassa nafsahu), i.e. suppresses it through his committing of obscenities’. Similarly, Zajjāj commented by saying that such a person makes his soul lowly, despicable, vile and wretched. This emotive metaphor thus elucidates the state of the human soul and clarifies exactly how its ‘failure’ is constituted.

The concept of tazkiyat al-nafs as set forth in Q. 91:7–10 and interpreted by classical scholars can thus be seen to convey an image of the soul as open to both human and divine influence. As will become apparent in the following discussion, in which the Qur’anic depiction of the separate concepts of tazkiya and the nafs is explored, this is an image that resonates with their overall portrayal throughout the Qur’an.
The Concept of the Term tazkiya within the Qur’an

On examining the Qur’an for the term tazkiya we find that it does not occur in its specific verbal noun (masdar) form. Nevertheless, when exploring the text for derivatives of the root z–k–y and its various verb forms, we find numerous usages and derivatives. However, since the term tazkiya is a masdar of the form II verb the emphasis in this section will focus on this usage. In addition to the incidence of this form II verb zakā in Q. 91:9 cited above (which, it should also be noted, is the final occasion on which a form II verbal form derived from z–k–y occurs in the Qur’an), perusal of the Qur’anic text results in a further eleven instances of this form II verb, in both its past and present tenses. A connation of self-praise, when the verb is used in conjunction with the term nafs or its plurals (nufūs, anfūs) can be located in two of these verses, namely Q. 4:49 and Q. 53:32, both being used in the present tense and indicating a blameworthy quality of the human being.

In addition, four verses containing the verb can be seen in which God is the subject of the verb; in other words it is God who directly takes on the role of tazkiya of the human being. Two of these verses, Q. 4:49 and Q. 24:21, indicate that it is God who decides who is worthy of tazkiya as in both verses the phrase God purifies (yuzakkl) whomever He wills is found. This is extremely significant as it indicates that not only is it God who decides who will be purified but it is He who is the source of the tazkiya. In addition, this process of tazkiya is not arbitrarily decided but is due to the need that the divine attribute of justice (al-‘adl) be fulfilled as the verses end, ... and God is not unjust in the slightest (Q. 4:49), and, ... and God is the All Hearing, the All Knowing (Q. 24:21). The second set of verses, Q. 2:174 and Q. 3:77, in which God is the subject, describe the state of the disbelievers on the Day of Judgement. These verses indicate that God will neither address them (yukallimuhum) nor ‘purify’ them (yuzakkihim) by forgiving them their transgressions, thereby entering them into Paradise. Once again the emphasis here is on the fact that in any eventuality it is God alone who is the source of tazkiya.

Another four verses can be observed in which the subject of the verb is a divinely chosen emissary (rasūl); Q. 2:129, Q. 2:151, Q. 3:164 and Q. 62:2. This sequence of verses begins with the supplication of Abraham in Surat al-Baqara, when he says, O my Lord send them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your signs (āyātika), who will teach them the book (al-kitāb) and wisdom (ḥikma) and who will purify them (wa-yuzakkihim) (Q. 2:129). In the Qur’anic context this supplication was fulfilled with the sanctioning of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad, as in the very same sura we read, Similarly, We sent amongst you a messenger from yourselves, who recites to you Our signs, purifies you (yuzakkikum), teaches you the Book and wisdom and teaches you what you did not know (Q. 2:151). In latter parts of the Qur’anic text, in Q. 3:164 and Q. 62:2, we see that this concept is further reinforced as almost identical verses are found.
In addition, there is also an indication as to how exactly the Prophet should ‘purify’ those around him in Q. 9:103, in which we find God addressing the Prophet saying, *Take a charity from their wealth to cleanse them (tutahhiruhum) and purify them (tuzakklhim)* ... Thus, in this series of verses containing the verb *yuzakkî* we see that although the source of *tazkiya* is God, He facilitates the process of *tazkiya* by the sending of prophets, whose role is to instruct humanity as to how to perform the task of *tazkiya* by various means, one of which is the obligation to give of one’s wealth for God’s sake.23

**The Concept of the Term nafs within the Qur’an**

The term *nafs* and its derivatives occur in the Qur’an 398 times,24 which provides the researcher with a vast wealth of material, but it is also worth mentioning that most of these occurrences are usage of the reflexive pronoun. Despite this, there are numerous verses that are of significance when discussing the *nafs* from the Qur’anic perspective and the following usages may be observed:

1. **Nafs Signifying the Soul**

This is evidenced via the Qur’anic description of the soul (*ruh*) being extracted from the body at death by the angels, who rip the souls of disbelievers from their bodies, ultimately causing their demise. The verse in question is Q. 6:93, in which the angels are said to stretch forth their hands to grip the souls and drag them outwards, the souls themselves being termed *anfusakum.*25

2. **Nafs Signifying the Human Being**

Once again, the Qur’an makes reference to the *nafs* with the meaning of the human being (*insân*) as a whole, including both the body and the soul. One of the verses which identifies this usage is Q. 31:28, in which the creation and resurrection of human beings is discussed and is described as being easy for God, as if it were only the creation/resurrection of a single person (*nafsin wāhidatin*).26

3. **Nafs Signifying the Human Being’s Power of Understanding**

In this context, the word *nafs* signifies that the human being has the ability to comprehend and reason using his intellect to arrive at and perceive certain ideas and concepts. Not only this, but the Qur’an has also clarified that the human being may comprehend an idea until it becomes fixed in his mind to the extent that he reaches a level of certainty regarding the reality of this concept and it appears as fact, as far as he is concerned. The verse in question is Q. 27:14, in which this level of certainty is described as having been reached and in addition, is attributed to the *nafs* (*wa’stayqanathd anfusuhum*).27
4. *Nafs* Signifying the Heart

In addition to the intellectual implication of the term *nafs* in the Qur’an, there is also an implication that an emotional aspect also exists. Verses that imply such a meaning include Q. 7:205 and Q. 12:77, where both the attributes of remembrance (*dhikr*) and concealing a secret (*sirr*) are described as being actions of the *nafs*. It is also worth noting that both these qualities are considered actions of the heart, and therefore such verses indicate an intrinsic and fundamental link between the heart and the *nafs*.

5. *Nafs* Signifying an Inclination to Good and Evil

The duality of the *nafs* to incline towards good and evil as described in the Qur’an and its tendency to change between the two, is one of its outstanding characteristics. Various verses indicate this, including Q. 50:16, Q. 75:2 and Q. 79:37. Due to the importance of these qualities they will be examined in detail in the subsequent discussion, in which two other facets of the *nafs* will become clear: first, the qualities that the *nafs* itself manifests to which various verses allude, and secondly, the various states that the *nafs* experiences as described in a number of verses.

**Qualities of the *nafs* in the Qur’an**

The basis for this discussion lies in the information alluded to in Q. 91:7–8, And [by] the soul (*nafs*) and the One who proportioned it; then He inspired it [to discern between] its iniquity and its righteousness. From these verses several issues become clear; first, that once again we find an inclination to the fact that it is God who not only created the soul but also fashioned it as He willed. Secondly, part of this fashioning was His inspiration of the soul to know, put very simply, that which is ‘right’ and that which is ‘wrong’. As such, this ability to comprehend the difference between virtue and sin also implies the faculty of free will to choose between the two, and consequently makes the *nafs* accountable for its actions in both this life and the next. In addition, this may also indicate that the *nafs* inclines to certain characteristic behaviours, which are not only an indication of the soul’s inner state but a manifestation of an individual’s humanity as a whole. As a result the following qualities of the *nafs* can be identified and observed in the Qur’an:

1. **It is the *nafs* that Experiences Death.**

As previously stated, it is God who created the human soul or *nafs* and, as such, it is Him who gives life to it also. Life is first given to the soul when it comes into existence in this life, in which it undergoes a phase of trial to test which of the souls is best in action. Following this, death will be brought to the human being and the soul enters another sphere of existence (*barzakh*) where it remains for a considerable period until it is resurrected and where it will return to its Lord, to be recompensed
for its actions. Thus, every soul will experience death, a fact to which a number of Qur’anic verses make reference, namely Q. 3:185, Q. 21:35 and Q. 29:57 in which the phrase *every soul will taste* [lit.] death (*kullu nafsin dhā’īqatu’l-mawti*) is reiterated.31 Also, in the same way that bringing life to the *nafs* is as a result of divine will then similarly, the causing of death is also by divine will (Q. 3:145). In addition, the lifespan (*ajal*) of the *nafs* is also predetermined by God, who will neither delay its term nor bring it forward (Q. 63:11).

2. The *nafs* has Perceptive Faculties

In addition, the Qur’an also alludes to a number of sensations, feelings and emotions, which the *nafs* consciously perceives, and which can be discerned. A survey of these is given below:

2.1 Desires, Appetites and Needs

The Qur’an confirms for us that the *nafs* can be described as having desires (*hawa*), as denoted in the following verses, _As for the one who feared the position of his Lord and forbade his soul its desires, then indeed, his abode is Paradise_ (wa-amma man khāfa maqāma rabbihī wa-nahā’l-nafsa ‘āni’l-hawa fa-innā’l-jannata hiya’l-ma’wā) (Q. 79:40–1). The *hawa* in turn act as emotions that drive the soul to fulfil its needs (*hajat/ma’talib*), as indicated in Q. 12:68, _And [therein] they will eternally enjoy everything that their souls desire_ (wa-hum fī mā’ṣhtahat anfusuhum khalidūna).32

2.2 Difficulty and Hardship

The *nafs* is also given to preferring ease over hardship (*mashaqqa*), and as such it dislikes to be burdened with what it considers difficult tasks. Indeed, the soul can be burdened with hardship, which it finds difficult and which requires a great deal of effort from it, as is inferred in Q. 16:7, _And they carry your loads to lands that you yourselves could not reach without incurring great hardship upon yourselves …_ (wa-tahmilu athqā lakum ilā baladīn lam takūnū bālighīthi illā bi-shiqqi’l-anfusi).

2.3 Endurance and Impatience33

The *nafs* has the ability of endurance (*ṣabr*), which enables it to withstand hardship and be patient, persevering in adversity, but its more common reaction is to be impatient with the events that befall it. The Prophet, despite his elevated status, is
also encouraged to be patient as the following address to him in Q. 18:28 suggests:

*And cause your soul to be patient with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and in the evening, seeking His pleasure* (wa’sbir nafsaka ma’a’lladhîna yad’ûna rabbahum bi’l-ghadâti wa’l-‘ashiyyi yurîdûna wajhahu).

### 2.4 Generosity and Miserliness

The Qur’anic text indicates the presence of the quality of miserliness (*shuhh*) within the human *nafs*, implying that this is one of its overwhelming qualities as it is commonly found in many souls: *Human souls are prone to miserliness* (*wa-uḥḍirat ’l-anfus ’l-shuhha*) (Q. 4:128). However, the Qur’an not only criticises this unenviable characteristic but also encourages its eradication and in fact extols the virtue of generosity (*jûd*), which is its direct opposite, suggesting that one replace the other entirely.  

### 2.5 Envy and Jealousy

Another of the most blameworthy characteristics in the Qur’an is that of *hasad* (envy and jealousy), hence it is not surprising that the Qur’an would be critical of this trait as is clarified in Q. 2:109, *Many of the People of the Book wish that they could return you back to disbelief after you have believed, out of envy in their souls, even after the truth has become clear to them* (*wadda kathîra min ahli’l-kitabî law yaruddûnakum min ba’di īmânikum kuffârân hasadan min ’indi anfusihim min ba’di mā tabayyana lahum al-haqqu*). However, *hasad* is not only regarded as being reprehensible but is also described as emanating from the *nafs* and, as such, it has the potentiality of not being characterised by this negative description but by positive counter-qualities.

### 2.6 Fear

Likewise, the Qur’an makes mention of *khawf* as a common psychological state induced by a variety of stimuli and attributes this quality of fear or apprehension with being a potential characteristic of the *nafs*, as verses Q. 20:67–8 suggest: *Moses was inwardly alarmed* [lit. in his soul] *but We said, ‘Do not be afraid, indeed, it is you who have the upper hand’* (*fa-awjasa fi nafsihi khîfatan Mûsâ qulnâ là takhaf innaka anta’l-a’lâ*). As with other negative faculties of the soul cited previously, the *nafs* has an equal potential to display directly opposing qualities such as bravery and self-confidence.

### 2.7 Conceit

Pride, arrogance and conceit, denoted by the Arabic term *kibr*, are qualities that the Qur’an states are present in the *nafs*, as is shown in Q. 25:21, which describes those
who deny the resurrection, saying: ... Indeed, they were arrogant in their own souls and were audaciously insolent (laqadi'stakbarū fi anfusihim wa-'ataw 'utuwwan kabiran). Conversely, the potential to attain modesty and humility is also possible, if these negative characteristics are eradicated. However, as with many qualities of the nafs, arrogance and conceit are commonly manifested in the majority of souls.

2.8 Anxiety and Distress

In addition to fear, the Qur'an also describes other psychological states, which result from personal discomfort, such as anxiety (dīq) and distress (haraj). Once again the Qur'an counts these as being qualities with which the nafs is characterised as verses Q. 4:65, ... then that they find no discomfort in their souls regarding what you have decided (thumma lā yajidū fi anfusihim qadarat mimmā qadayta), and Q. 9:118 ... and their very souls became anguished [lit. constricted them] (wa-dāqat 'alayhim anfusuhum) testify. Equally, the soul can also be nurtured to adopt the contrary and positive qualities of relaxation (ittisā') and tranquility (inshirāḥ).

2.9 The Ability to be Affected by Eloquent Speech

The Qur'an also confirms that the nafs may be affected by eloquent speech to the extent that the behaviour of a human being may be reformed due to it. As such, through being addressed with an eloquent oratory or written style, the nafs may receive admonition and thus return to the path of truth, as Q. 4:63 clarifies: ... and address them with a discourse that penetrates their souls (wa-qul lahum fi anfusihim qawlan balīghan).

2.10 Regret and Grief

As well as psychological states the nafs also experiences emotions and the Qur'an implies this in a number of verses. Included in these are the feelings of regret (nadm) and grief (taḥassur) over matters which may appear to be lost. For example, in Q. 35:8 God informs His Prophet not to grieve over or feel regretful regarding the actions of his people in Mecca: So do not waste away your soul with regret for them. Indeed, God is well acquainted with what they do (fa-Id tadhhab nafsuka 'alayhim hasaratīn inna'llaḥa 'alimun bimā yaṣṣa'ūna). Similar feelings are also expressed in the following verse, in which the situation on the Day of Judgement is described, when it is said that the nafs will regret and grieve over its deficiencies regarding its duty to its Lord: Lest no soul should say 'Woe is to me for having neglected what is due to God, and having been of those who scoffed!' (an taqūla nafsun yā ḥasratā 'alā mā farraṭu fi janbi'llāhi wa-in kuntu la-mina'l-sākhirīna) (Q. 39:56).
2.11 The Ability to Comprehend

As mentioned above, in Q. 27:14 the Qur'an has clarified that the human being may comprehend an idea until it becomes fixed in his mind to the extent that he reaches a level of certainty regarding the reality of this concept. Similarly, the ability of the nafs to completely comprehend (idrāk) may be impaired due to its consideration of baseless conjecture (zann), causing doubts and worries to flourish, as is found in Q. 3:154. Given this, it could be argued that all other levels of understanding with regard to the nafs would fall between these two extremes. In addition, God, as the Creator of all mankind, has endowed every one of them with the ability to perceive and comprehend righteousness and immorality or, put very simply, the difference between good and evil. Thus, every nafs is aware of its actions and is conversant with the nature of such actions, as Q. 75:14–15, Q. 81:14, Q. 82:4–5 and Q. 91:7–10 indicate. In the same way that the nafs can come to 'know' certain information, it may also be heedless or ignorant of other matters. Indeed, from a Qur'anic perspective, the nafs is completely unaware of the unseen (al-ghayb), including the true nature of the hereafter, how it will act in the future and where its demise will be: And no soul knows what it will earn tomorrow and no soul knows in which place it will expire. Indeed, God is all knowing and well acquainted (wa-mā tadrī nafsun mādhā taksibu ghadān wa-mā tadrī nafsun bi-ayyi ardītū inna illāhā ‘allmūn khabiṇun) (Q. 31:34).35

2.12 The Ability to Conceal Feelings

As has been mentioned previously, the nafs manifests certain emotions, but at the same time it has the ability to conceal and hide its true feelings. Despite this, however, one of the major concepts progressed in the Qur'an is that God is fully acquainted with even these concealed thoughts, emotions, ideas and feelings, as Q. 2:284 confirms: Whether you make manifest what is [hidden] in your souls or you hide it, God will take you to account for it (wa-in tubdū mâ fī anfusikum aw tuḫfīhū yuḥāsibkum bihi’llāhu).36

2.13 Responsibility

Bearing in mind the various abilities described above that the nafs has been granted, including emotional, perceptive and intellectual faculties, as well as the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, the nafs is consequently responsible for its actions within the realms of its capabilities. In this regard, the Qur'an states in Q. 2:286 that, God does not burden a soul beyond its capacity (lā yuкалīfū’llūhū nafsan illā wus’ahā). In other words, every nafs has the ability to act and earn or acquire good deeds and bad deeds based on its intentions, personal effort, determination and free will. This responsibility is unique to each individual and, as such, human beings are personally responsible for their actions. Consequently, each
person will be recompensed accordingly on the Day of Judgement, their ultimate abode being determined by their actions in this life, as is affirmed in Q. 14:51, *So that God will recompense every soul with what it earned. Indeed, God is swift in taking account (li-yajziya’llahu kulla nafsin mā kasabat inna’Ilāha sari’u’l-ḥisābi).*

As a consequence of the wide range of the qualities of the *nafs* described above, the *nafs* experiences a number of states or categories that the Qur’an has also elucidated. The human being experiences these states as a result of his intentions, thoughts, motives, deeds and will, and therefore it is appropriate at this juncture to shed light on these states of the *nafs*.

**States of the *nafs* in the Qur’an**

On examining the Qur’anic text the reader finds three types of *nafs* described, the soul inclined to evil, the self-reproaching soul, and the tranquil soul.

1. **The Soul Inclined to Evil**

This state of the *nafs* occurs when the human being is overcome by his desires, to the extent that he pursues the appetites of his soul to the exclusion of everything else. In this state the limits set by God are made secondary in comparison to the fulfilment of corporeal needs and desires. Thus, the performance of forbidden acts is common and the ultimate result is sin and transgression. The essence of this notion is evidenced in the verse, *And I do not absolve my own self [of blame], as indeed, the [human] soul is prone to evil (inna’l-nafsa la-ammdratun bi'l-su’i), except when my Lord bestows mercy, as indeed my Lord is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful (Q. 12:53).*

Within the Qur’anic context, this verse alludes to the lowest level of the human soul, which not only encourages the performance of evil but also exerts effort to make such actions acceptable and appealing to the human being. Thus the *nafs* is described as enticing (*sawwallat*), subjecting (*tawwa’at*) and tempting (*tuwaswisu*) in Q. 20:96, Q. 12:18, Q. 5:30 and Q. 50:16. Given this, it is not surprising that the exaggerative form *ammdra*, which literally means ‘constantly urging, always demanding, inciting and instigating’ is used to describe the *nafs*, as this type of *nafs* is always commanding the evil and the base. Jurjani (d. 816/1413) defined *al-nafs al-ammdra bi’l-su’i* as follows:

*It is the one [*nafs*] that inclines to the bodily nature, ordering [the pursuit of] physical pleasures and appetites, attracting the heart to base levels; as such, it is the abode of every evil and the source of blameworthy characteristics.*

In addition, and as previously mentioned, this verse also implies that it is through God’s mercy alone that this state of the *nafs* does not exist permanently, as it is its
natural and regular state. It is only through God’s beneficence that the other states of the nafs, via repentance and turning away from the soul’s desires, become manifest in the human being.

Furthermore, on examining and contrasting these qualities of the nafs as described in the Qur’an, one finds a direct comparison between such attributes and those used to describe Satan. In fact, Iblis has been attributed with enticing (sawwala), misguiding (yudilla) and being tempting (al-waswas) in Q. 47:25, Q. 4:60 and Q. 114:3–4 respectively. Thus, it can be inferred that there is a degree of similarity in the way both the nafs and Satan influence the behaviour of the human being at a ‘psychological’ level. It would seem that Iblis entices and suggests actions and thoughts to the nafs, whereas the nafs itself, due to its self-serving outlook, pursues such deeds, satisfying the conscience by making them appear seeming and appealing. To this effect, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) comments:

As for the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-ammdra bi’l-su^), Satan is its associate and companion; he makes promises to it and awakens its desires, casting falsehood into it, commanding it to evil and making it appear appealing in a form that it will find acceptable and condone, with a variety of provisions and falsehood, false hopes and destructive appetites. He seeks aid against it with its desires and wishes and through him every evil enters it.

2. The Self-Reproaching Soul

Similarly, within the Qur’anic context this is the next level of the nafs, according to which it is elevated from the previous base state so that the veil of disobedience is lifted and the soul begins to blame itself for the transgressions it has committed, inclining towards repentance, regret, self-recrimination and reproach. These implications can be gleaned from the following Qur’anic verses: Do not swear [an oath] by the Day of Judgement nor by the self-reproaching soul (bi’l-nafsi’l-lawwâma). Q. 75:1–2. These verses are clear evidence of a second state of the soul, i.e. the soul being described as being self-reproaching or lawwâma. However, the use of this particular adjective describing the soul has been the focus of discussion for Muslim scholars, leading them to a variety of opinions.

The first of these views can be summarised as suggesting that the term al-lawwâma is derived from the Arabic verbal noun talawwum meaning ‘shifting repeatedly’ and being synonymous with taraddud. This state of the soul is characterised by its changeability, fickleness, capriciousness and inconsistency, never truly remaining steadfast upon one state of affairs. In this state, the soul is mindful then heedless, loves then hates, is happy then sad, is obedient then disobedient, righteous then
immoral, as well as many other qualities and a variety of levels of each characteristic in between, changing from one state to another, never truly settling on one quality.\(^\text{43}\)

The second view considers this to be derived from the term *lawm* meaning ‘blame’, the implication being that the soul blames itself or alternatively is blameworthy. Opinions regarding this derivation of this exaggerative form *lawwāma* also vary and can be summarised as follows: the first opinion holds that the aforementioned verse refers to the description of the soul of a believer. This view was common amongst the early Muslim scholars, and it is reported that al-Ḥasan al-บาشري (d. 110/728) said regarding this verse, ‘By God, we do not see the believer except that he blames himself [asking himself], “What did I intend by my speech? What did I intend by my eating? What did I intend by my thoughts?”’, whereas the shameless reprobate continues step by step, not sanctioning his soul.’ Similarly, when Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 104/722) was asked about the same verse he replied, ‘This is the soul that blames itself for what has passed and feels regret; it blames itself for the evil it has committed, as to why it did it, and with regard to doing good, as to why it did not do more.’\(^\text{44}\)

In a different view *al-nafs al-lawwāma* is regarded as referring to both the sinner and the righteous person in the sense that the righteous person blames his soul for the committing of a sin or the neglect of an act of obedience.\(^\text{45}\) Thus, Jurjānī defined *al-nafs al-lawwāma* as follows: ‘It is the one [al-nafs] that is illuminated with the light of the heart according to the amount that is has become awakened from habitual heedlessness; as soon as it commits a transgression due to its naturally oppressive disposition it takes to blaming itself.’\(^\text{46}\) In contrast, the degenerate person blames itself for losing out on some form of carnal satisfaction.

In a variation of this theme, this form of blaming is said to take place on the Day of Judgement, whereupon every soul will blame itself for its deeds in the worldly life. Thus, there will be the sinful who will blame themselves for the sins they have committed, while the righteous will blame themselves for their deficiencies with regard to God’s rights over them.\(^\text{47}\) In this regard, al-Ḥasan al-باشري is reported to have said, ‘there is no one who exists in the heavens or on the earth who will not blame himself on the Day of Judgement.’\(^\text{48}\)

Finally, in his comment on these various views Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya states:\(^\text{49}\)

All these statements are true and do not contradict one another, as the soul (*nafs*) may be described as such, in the sense that it has been termed ‘self-reproaching’ (*lawwāma*). However, self-reproach is of two types: self-reproach that is blameworthy (*malūma*), by which is meant the soul that is ignorant (*jāhila*) and tyrannical (*zālīma*) and which has been censured by God and His angels. [The second type is] self-reproach that is not blameworthy (*ghayr malūma*), which is the
soul that continues to reproach its owner regarding his deficiencies in obedience to God despite his best efforts; [in this sense] this is self-reproach that is not blameworthy (lawwāma ghayr malāma).

3. The Tranquil Soul

This is the highest state of the nafs, having gained tranquillity from establishing God’s obedience, accepting His threat of punishment and promise of reward in Paradise, being satisfied with His decree. Such a soul has put its trust in Him alone, tasted the sweetness of faith and felt the pleasure of communicating with its Lord, to the extent that it seeks no other substitute. As such it does not deviate from God’s devotion, nor is it affected by the changes in circumstances that normally cause a change in the psychological state of the human being, or attracted to the ornamentation of the worldly life. This state of the nafs and its serenity and stability is alluded to in Q. 89:27–30, [It will be said to the righteous] ‘O tranquil soul (al-nafsu’l-mutma’inatu), return to your Lord content [with Him] (radiyatan) and pleasing [to Him] (mardiyyatan), so enter into [the ranks of] My devotees and enter My Paradise’.

Commenting on this verse, early Muslim scholars provide a variety of views. For example, Mujahid said of al-nafs al-mutma’inna, ‘It is the soul that is satisfied with the decree of God; it knows that what does not befall it was not destined to do so and what does befall it was destined to do so’. Similarly, al-Hasan al-Basri clarifies, ‘If God, the Mighty and Exalted, wishes to seize it [the nafs], it is contented with God and God is satisfied with it. As such, He commands its soul (ruh) to be seized, enters it into Paradise and makes it of His righteous devotees.’ In addition, Qatada (d. 118/736) comments saying, ‘It is the believer whose soul became assured regarding what God has promised’. Moreover, Ibn Zayd states, ‘It [the nafs] was termed tranquil (mutma’inna) due to it being given glad tidings of Paradise upon death, at resurrection and on the Day of Judgement’. In a similar quote Ibn Kathîr (d. 774/1372) commented on the last part of Q. 89:30, enter My Paradise, that this will be said to the believer during the throes of death and on the Day of Resurrection.

Thus, from Q. 89:30 itself and the explanatory notes from Muslim commentators we can glean a reasonable amount of information; firstly, that this particular state of the nafs has been described as mutma’inna meaning ‘tranquil’ or ‘serene’ but one may well ask what is the source of this tranquillity and serenity? Similarly, the nafs in this state of serenity is commanded to return to its Lord being in a state of absolute contentment with Him. One may well query once again in what way is satisfaction (ridâ’) a quality of the serene soul and what is the relation between them? In these verses the nafs is also described as being pleasing to God and we must also enquire as to what has brought about God’s approval of such a soul?
As for the first and paramount quality, i.e. that of tranquillity and serenity, this is said to be brought about by this soul’s constant remembrance of God, relying on the following Qur’anic verse: *Those who have believed and whose hearts become tranquil through the remembrance of God; isn’t it through the remembrance of God that the hearts become tranquil?* (Q. 13:28). Thus, one of the methods through which this state of the *nafs* may be attained is through being engaged in the remembrance of God as much as possible.

This serenity of the soul is further augmented by the acquisition of the quality of riḍā', which can be understood in the very broad sense of satisfaction and acceptance of the religion of Islam, as is indicated by the following *hadith* transmitted on the authority of the Prophet’s uncle al-‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭallib (d. 33/654 or 34/655), according to which the Prophet is reported to have said, ‘The one who is contented with God as his Lord, Islam as his religion and Muḥammad as his Prophet has truly “tasted the flavour of faith”’. On a more specific note, however, this form of riḍā' is usually related to the devotee’s faith in the sixth pillar of Islamic belief, commonly referred to as faith in divine predestination (*al-qaddā' wa'l-qadar*), according to which the practitioner of Islam is required to believe in God’s preordainment of all matters. This final article of Islamic faith is arguably the most difficult to actualise since it requires firm conviction (yaqīn) in God’s overall wisdom and plan; this conviction is alluded to and hence nurtured in a number of Qur’anic verses including Q. 57:23 and Q. 64:11. This being the case, there is an indication then that the tranquil soul has not only reached this level but perfected it, in the sense that no matter what befalls it in terms of human or personal tragedy its faith in the Almighty remains firm, as it knows that this has been preordained before it even existed. Similarly, it is not overjoyed by the bounties it enjoys, but on the contrary recognises God’s favour upon it and fulfils the divine right of gratitude. It is thus this elevated level of perfection in faith that brings about God’s pleasure and satisfaction, as no matter what such a soul endures it remains content with its Lord and as a result its Lord is satisfied with it. In this regard Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya comments:

> If the *nafs* becomes at ease from doubt to certainty, from ignorance to knowledge, from heedlessness to remembrance, from deception to repentance, from ostentation to sincerity, from deceit to truthfulness, from being incapable to being competent, from the tyranny of conceit to the submissiveness of humility, from arrogance to modesty, from laxity to action, then the soul has achieved tranquillity.

This is obviously an extremely elevated state of faith and practice, to which Ibn al-Qayyim refers further, saying:
As for perfection in serenity, it is contentment with His command, in terms of fulfilling it sincerely and perfectly so that no wish, desire or blind imitation is preferred to it. As such, neither uncertainty that contradicts His revelation nor any whim that opposes His command is entertained. Indeed, if it [i.e. uncertainty] occurs it is considered to be Satanic insinuation (wasāwis) ... this is what the Prophet termed 'pure faith' (ṣariḥ al-īmān).

In addition to the perfection of faith alluded to in the above discussion, the quality of permanency also graces this state, in the sense that this type of soul is so well accustomed to this form of faith and practice that it becomes a resident feature of its nature and character. In this regard Jurjānī has defined the tranquil soul as follows:

It is the one [al-nafs] whose illumination with the light of the heart has been completed to the extent that it has been divested of every blameworthy attribute and has been adorned with every praiseworthy characteristic.

Therefore, in summary, the human being experiences these various states as a result of his intentions, thoughts, motives, deeds and will, as well as his governance over the various qualities of the soul which play an intrinsic part in his status as the basest form of humanity, manifested as the soul inclined to evil (al-nafs al-amnāra bi'l-sū'), an intermediate phase – the self-reproaching soul (al-nafs al-lawwāma), or its most elevated state – the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-muṭma'inna).

Conclusion

This article has attempted to survey the mention, usage and concept of the terms tazkiya and nafs in the Qur‘an to shed light upon their understanding within the Qur‘anic paradigm. To this end, the discussion first addressed the only verses in the Qur‘an to make mention of both these terms in conjunction, from which it can be discerned that the nafs is primarily created by God in a form of equilibrium: He inspires it and gives it insight so that it is able to discern between either right action or sin. The result of this ability to choose leads ultimately to the nafs undergoing a process of purification (tazkiya) or, alternatively, a process of defilement (tadsiya), which has enormous consequences for it in the Hereafter. Commenting on this series of verses Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbālī (d. 795/1393) summarises, saying:

Their meaning is: successful indeed is the one who purified himself (zakkā nafsahu) with obedience to God and the one who has defiled himself with disobedience [to God] has failed. Thus, obedience purifies the soul and cleanses it (tuzakkā al-nafs wa-tutahhiruhu) and
so it is elevated, whereas disobedience defiles the soul and hinders it, so it is lowered and becomes like someone buried in the dust.

Following on from this basis, the discussion moved on to explore the wider connotations of *tazkiya* and the *nafs* in the Qur'an. Indeed, a great deal has been uncovered regarding the emphasis of *tazkiya* and also its facilitation and implementation. It has been found, for example, that from the Qur'anic perspective it is God who is the source of *tazkiya*, as many verses indicate, and the decision of who will be purified in this sense is ultimately a divine one. Similarly, the process and implementation of *tazkiya* has also been attributed to the prophets and messengers and to the Prophet Muḥammad in particular. Thus, Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbali states concerning the Prophetic role, ‘he purifies their hearts and cleanses them from the filth of polytheism, iniquity and misguidance; indeed, souls (*nufūs*) are purified if they are cleansed from all of this and whoever purified his soul has indeed attained success’.

There are various verses in the Qur'an that allude to this and in fact they state that it is one of the major roles of such divinely chosen and guided emissaries. Furthermore, depending on the interpretation of the verses in question, it has also been shown that the human being himself can take the impetus regarding the process of *tazkiya* via the decisions he makes, having been endowed with the faculty of discernment regarding the course of right action or a path of misguidance. As such, *tazkiya* can be understood to be a multi-level and multi-faceted process, indicating to a subtle, complex and yet complimentary process of human development.

On examining the term *nafs* it was also demonstrated that the following concepts regarding the *nafs* are presented in the Qur'anic discourse: the *nafs* signifying the soul, the human being, the human being’s power of understanding, the heart, and the human inclination to good and evil. This in itself is significant, since all these various facets of humanity – including both the physical and metaphysical – are inferred by the term *nafs* and therefore, are all the object of purification from the Qur'anic perspective. Furthermore, greater light has been shed on the very nature of the *nafs* through the elucidation of various qualities that the *nafs* possesses; it can be seen, for example, that the Qur’an alludes to the fact that the *nafs* experiences a variety of ‘psychological’ and almost ‘physical’ states which dictate its nature. In addition, there is almost a dual potentiality within the *nafs*, according to which its nature tends to negative potentialities, but with volition, will, training and experience, its positive potentialities can be nurtured.

It has also become clear that these very qualities of the soul, depending on how well governed they are, give rise to a number of states or types of the *nafs* which are alluded to in the Qur’an (the soul inclined to evil, the self-reproaching soul and the tranquil soul) and, indeed, a great deal of information can be gleaned regarding the nature of the soul from this discussion. The first state, that of the soul inclined to evil, is said to be the base form of the *nafs* in its natural state, being inclined to the
worldly life and being closest to an animal existence; it is controlled and motivated by the fulfilment of its desires and Satanic insinuation, being forever inclined to the base and the contemptible. The second, that of the self-reproaching soul, can be viewed as an intermediate state where the nafs is undergoing an internal moral and psychological battle between good and evil and as such is continuously shifting between the positive and negative potentialities inherent within it. The final form, the tranquil soul, is the ultimate state of the nafs, wherein the base instincts have been conquered, the internal moral and psychological battle has been won, the truths of faith have been realised and complete contentment with God has been attained. The very fact that the Qur’an refers to a variety of states that the soul may experience suggests that one may interchange between states due to one’s personal physical and emotional condition and, also, that there is a ultimate state of purification that may be attained – referred to here as the tranquil soul – which in turn would be the goal of tazkiya.

Thus, upon surveying the Qur’anic text with an increased understanding of the process and goal of tazkiyat al-nafs, we may conclude that the subtle interplay between the divine (God), the human elect (prophets/messengers) and the humble worshipper (the human being), all have their parts to play; from divine guidance and inspiration, to human moral and spiritual excellence and example, to firm will, certitude and extreme effort. Similarly, that very essence of humanity – the human soul – has been seen to be multi-faceted, multi-layered and highly complex. In fact, in addition to this, the Qur’an has alluded to the goal of the aforementioned process of tazkiya, i.e. the attainment of the state of the nafs known as the tranquil soul (al-nafs al-mutma’inna), which is its final and ultimate product.

We may therefore conclude that although the term tazkiya and, indeed, the compound phrase tazkiyat al-nafs do not occur in the Qur’an in these specific forms, we can affirm that the notion of tazkiyat al-nafs is intrinsic within the Qur’anic discourse. Moreover, rather than adopting a specific theological stance or ideological view to describe the process and concept of tazkiyat al-nafs, we may also conclude that the Qur’an itself alludes to and clarifies the nature and concept of how the soul may be purified. Thus, from this discussion it may be observed that our understanding of tazkiyat al-nafs from the Qur’an alone has been developed to mean: the growth, augmentation, reform, development and purification of the human soul, via divine guidance, prophetic example and individual effort, to attain its most elevated form, that of the tranquil soul, this in turn being the pinnacle of human perfection.

NOTES

1 The current article will concentrate on the term ‘al-nafs’ alone and not consider its synonymous counterpart ‘al-ruh’ so as to limit the scope of the research. For a more complete


4 Such works include: (i) al-Mustakhlaṣ fi taẓkiyat al-anfūs by Saʿīd Ḥawwā, 4th edn (Cairo: Dār al-Īslām, 1988). This is one of the most comprehensive works on the subject of taẓkiyat al-nafs and begins with the various ways through which the soul may be purified that can be placed under the umbrella term of 'Islamic beliefs and practices', since they not only include physical acts of worship such as prayer (ṣalāt) but also metaphysical aspects such as knowledge of the ailments of the heart and their cure. The discussion also encompasses the faults and ailments of the soul such as ostentation (riyd) and arrogance (kibr) and the importance of cleansing the soul of such qualities. The opposing scenario in terms of positive moral and ethical qualities that need to be nurtured, such as patience (ṣabr) and gratitude (shukr) is also examined, as well as the importance of emulating both the attributes of God and the characteristics of His Prophet. Finally, the fruits of taẓkiya are also expounded and can be summarised as being the eradication of every blameworthy quality of the human being. Thus, Ḥawwā’s work is extremely thorough and is extremely important within the context of taẓkiyat al-nafs. (ii) Minhaj al-Īslām fi taẓkiyat al-nafs by ʿUmar Sulaymān al-Asbqar
Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur’anic Paradigm

This very short treatise begins by stressing the importance of the subject matter in that it is only through a process of *tazkiya* that the human soul will remain ‘healthy’, which has an ultimate effect on its fate in the Hereafter. Ashqar subsequently defines *tazkiya* linguistically and terminologically and also discusses the importance of purification for the heart. In the second half of the treatise the author examines the ‘Islamic’ methodology regarding purification of the soul, stressing the importance of true faith in Islamic monotheism (*tawhid*), knowledge (*’ilm*), remembrance (*dhikr*), and repentance (*tawba*). This work is representative of a ‘practical’ approach to *tazkiya*, being well written and concise. (iii) *Tazkiyat al-nafs* by Sa’d ibn Mu’ammad al-Takhís (Riyadh: Dár al-SamT’T, 1992). This short work begins with an introduction to contextualise the subject matter and continues with an appraisal of the various Qur’anic verses dealing with *tazkiya* and the commentaries of Muslim exegetes concerning them. Subsequently, a discussion of the ailments and faults of the soul is provided along with an exposition of the three types of soul alluded to in the Qur’an. Takhís continues by examining various ways in which the soul may be purified, including perfecting acts of worship (*ihsán al-‘ibáda*), reciting the Qur’an (*talídwa*), the remembrance of God (*dhikr*) and reflecting upon the lives and statements of the pious predecessors (*al-salaf al-sálih*). The final section of the book is devoted to the method and means of introspective examination (*muhdsabat al-nafs*) and thus, this work also suggests a ‘practical’ approach to *tazkiya* within an ‘orthodox’ framework. (iv) *Ma’dlumfl’l-suluk wa-tazkiyat al-nufus* by ʿAbd al-ʿAzîz Al ʿAbd al-Latît (Riyadh: Dár al-Watan, 1993). This work, as the title would suggest, deals with a variety of moral and ethical issues from the Islamic perspective before examining the importance of *tazkiyat al-nafs* halfway through the book. Al ʿAbd al-Latît, in approaching this subject, relies on quoting from classical Islamic scholarship as represented by Qurṭûbî, Ibn Taymiyya and especially Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya to present an ‘orthodox’ representation of the subject matter. Although this work is limited in its dealing with *tazkiyat al-nafs*, it is well informed, concise and well written, the quotes in particular being useful. (v) *Tazkiyat al-nafs* by Ahmad ibn ʿAbd al-Halîm Ibn Taymiyya (Riyadh: Dár al-Muslim, 1994). This book in fact is not a new work and indeed is little more than a new edition of the section by shaykh al-Islâm Ahmad ibn ʿAbd al-Halîm Ibn Taymiyya discussing this topic extracted from his *Majmuʿat al-fatwa*, being edited by Muḥammad ibn Sa’d al-Zahtâni. Zahtâni for his part has provided an introduction regarding Ibn Taymiyya and also provides a brief section regarding *tazkiyat al-nafs* to contextualise the treatise of the aforementioned scholar, as well as producing the usual annotation typical of an edited text. As for Ibn Taymiyya himself, he begins by discussing the various verses mentioning the terms related to *tazkiya* and provides the views of the early Muslim exegetes regarding their meaning as well as supplying his own opinions. Regarding purification of the soul, he concentrates his discussion around the importance of pure faith in Islamic monotheism, as well as complying with every legally binding command and every injunction forbidding an act. It is this very pragmatic approach that seems to have influenced many of the contemporary scholars mentioned here to adopt a very ‘practical’ methodology to *tazkiya*.

(vi) *Manhaj al-hlamfl tazkiyat al-nafs* by Anas Karzûn (2 vols. Beirut: Dár Ibn Hazm, 1997). This work spanning two volumes is the published version of the author’s PhD thesis awarded by Umm al-Qura University in Mecca and is a thorough...
academic and extensive survey of tazkiyat al-nafs in the Islamic context. The study begins with definitions of both tazkiya and nafs and focuses on the nafs, its relationship with the intellect (‘aql) and the heart (qalb), the duality of its qualities and the three types of nafs alluded to in the Qur’an. The concept of the soul is further examined in the light of the views of the philosophers and modern psychology before being examined in the light of religions other than Islam, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity. Karzün then turns his attention back to the Islamic perspective by first examining the credal basis for the process of tazkiya in Islam before examining the ‘practical’ approach to this discipline, which includes the ‘physical’ acts of worship such as prayer, fasting but also more esoteric methods of training the soul such as introspective examination and striving against its desires (muṣāhahadat al-nafs). The next major section discusses the ailments of the soul such as arrogance and hindrances to the realisation of tazkiya such as the effect of Satan on the soul, as well as how to overcome these impediments. The final section of this work examines the fruits of implementing the Islamic concept of tazkiyat al-nafs, which may be summarised very simply as happiness in this life and in the Hereafter. The value of this work cannot be underestimated due to its comprehensive nature and academic style and it remains one of the most important works in this field of study. (viii) Tazkiyat al-nafs collected and arranged by Ahmad Farid (Alexandria: Dār al-‘Aqīdah li’l-Turath, 1998). This work contains many of the subjects discussed as stations (maqāmāt) that we would expect to find within the classical works of the tāsawwuf genre, including sincerity (ikhlās), intention (niyya), the heart (al-qalb), seeking forgiveness (istighfar), gratitude (shukr), contentment (riyāḍ), hope (rajāʿ), as well as many others. The content of the book however, has been extracted from the works of other eminent scholars such as Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya and Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali and seems to be an attempt to produce a book dealing with tāsawwuf issues but presenting them via the works of the scholars who followed the way of the salaf. Thus, this book attempts to present the subject of tazkiyat al-nafs in the light of the above-mentioned scholars and so we find many quotes from the Qur’an, hadith and the first three generations of Muslims, as well as those who followed their methodology. (ix) Tazkiyat al-nafs by Muhammad ‘Abd al-Qadir Abū Fāris, (Amman: Dār al-Furqān, 2000). This work is yet another of those that propose a practical approach and in fact the whole book is dedicated to this purpose. After a brief but useful introduction Abū Fāris begins his exposition by first providing an in depth discussion of the concept of sincerity before examining more familiar acts of worship in this genre such as reciting the Qur’an, remembrance and prayer, as well as also discussing the subjects more familiar to the apologetic Sufi literature such as abstinence (zuhd), humility (tawā’dū) and forbearance (ḥilm). Although Abū Fāris appears to have said nothing new, his work is filled with examples and he has provided a series of counsels and advice at the end of every section, which makes his work somewhat unique. (x) Self Purification and Development by Amin Ahsan Islahi (Delhi: Adam Publishers, 2000). This appears to have been one of Islahi’s works that have been translated from Urdu, the original being entitled Tazkiyah-i-nafs and being the product of his lectures on the subject in the early 1950s. This culminated in a two-volume work, part 1 of the book being published in 1957, while the second part was completed in 1989 and published in 1992. It is also worth noting that the original work was first translated into English with the title How to Attain True Piety and Righteousness in Islam; this clearly being a translation of the first part of Islahi’s work and which was subsequently re-published with the title quoted here. As such, this is one of the few works in English concerned with this subject area and although the author considers the main object of tazkiya to be the human soul, he devotes much of this work to other aspects of tazkiya also. These other aspects revolve around a ‘practical’ approach and thus, concentrate on the purification of knowledge and action, where the author focuses his attention on the practical duties of Islam embodied in the ‘five pillars’ namely: prayer, fasting, zakāt and pilgrimage (hajj). Although only the first two chapters specifically concern the study area of the current article, this work is nevertheless a useful addition to the literature concerning
Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm

Tazkiya, especially in terms of western languages, (xi) Purification of the Soul – Concept, Process and Means by Jamaal al-Din Zarabozo (Denver: Al-Basheer Publications, 2002). This work begins by examining the concept of nurturing the soul in religions other than Islam and includes discussion of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity, as well as modern psychology. The author then discusses the concept of tazkiya and nafs in Islam, summarising by providing a shari'a definition of the compound term tazkiyat al-nafs. Having provided the reader with a working definition, the importance and goal of the purification is then examined and is followed subsequently by a discussion of the process of purification, which posits a 'practical' approach denoted by a concentration on faith and action. The work is concluded by a comparison of the 'Sunnî' and 'Sûfi' methods of purification and the benefits of adopting the former approach. From the contents alone, this work bears a great resemblance to that of Karzin, is written in a semi-academic style and from a specific standpoint – that of strict, 'orthodox', Sunni Islam, indicative of the Salafi denomination.


11 This meaning of zakkî is alluded to in Tabari, Jamî' al-bayân, vol. 12, p. 603; Âlusî, Râh al-ma'ânî, vol. 15, pp. 361–2.


13 It should be noted that this latter rendering is the preference of Ibn Taymiyya who also suggests that the introduction of the word qad at the beginning of this verse and the one following it, changes the suggested meaning of the verse from simply informing (khabar) to being a command (amr) and thus, the implications alluded to in the verses are indeed incumbent duties upon the faithful. See Ibn Taymiyya, Tazkiyat al-nafs, pp. 37–42.


16 See Ibn Taymiyya, Tazkiyat al-nafs, p. 43.

17 Again, Ibn Taymiyya, Tazkiyat al-nafs, p. 43.

18 The forms quoted in the Qur'ân other than form II include the form I of the verb – meaning 'to purify' – in the past tense in Q. 23:21 where it is used to indicate that it is God who purifies the human being and that this is from His bounty upon them. The form V derivative also meaning 'to purify' is also used, in both the past tense (tazzakkî) and in the present tense
(yatazakkā) in Q. 20:76, Q. 35:18, Q. 79:18, Q. 87:14 and Q. 92:18 respectively, and alludes to the human being taking the initiative to purify himself from the ‘filth’ of disbelief (kufr), polytheism (shirk), ignorance (jahl) and sin (dhnh). It should also be noted that this derivative also exists in a condensed form (yazzakka) where the ‘/’ has been merged (idgham) in Q. 80:3 and 7, with a similar connotation and without changing the meaning. In addition to this, the superlative (azka) is found on four occasions, in Q. 2:232, Q. 18:19, Q. 24:28 and 30, with the implication of being ‘purer’ or more ‘pure’. The adjectival derivative is also used in both its masculine (zaki) and feminine (zakiyya) forms in Q. 19:19 and Q. 18:74 respectively, again with a similar connotation of ‘purity’ or ‘innocence’ and in fact the feminine form (i.e. Q. 18:74) is used in conjunction with the word nafs. Finally, the derived noun ‘zakdt’ used as Islam’s monetary duty can be found in 32 verses in various places. See Muhammad Fu‘ad ‘Abd al-BaqI, al-Mu’jam al-mufahras li’l-Qurān al-‘azim (Cairo: Dār al-Hadith, 1996), pp. 406–7; Nahhās, l’rāb al-Qurān, vol. 5, pp. 94–5; Hans Wehr, The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, edited by J. Milton Cowan, pocket book edition (New York: Spoken Languages Services, 1976), pp. 379–80; Hanna E. Kassis, A Concordance of the Qur’an (Berkley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 1325–7.


30 See Q. 67:2.

31 It should be also noted that in addition to the complete retaining of the *nafs* at death, the *nafs* is partially retained during sleep where it may be returned to the body in which life continues or retained completely, in which case the death of the body results. See Q. 39:42; cf. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisan al-‘Arab*, vol. 14, p. 234; Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-sihhah*, p. 672; Lane, *An Arabic–English Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 2827.

32 Also see the following verses: Q. 2:87, Q. 5:70, Q. 41:31, Q. 53:23.

33 This begins a series of qualities which display the duality of the *nafs* mentioned above and in verse Q. 91:7–8, where either quality – positive or negative – may be manifested by the *nafs*, or more commonly where one of the qualities mentioned is more apparent. In addition, it is worthy of note that many of the more ‘positive’ qualities alluded to in this section are not directly stated in the Qur‘ān but are inferred by the phrase *then He inspired it [to discern between] its iniquity (fujurahā) and its righteousness (taqwāhā)*. Since the Qur‘ān refers to many of the negative qualities of the soul directly, as is shown in this section, it is intrinsically understood from the above verse that the potential to more positive qualities is equally inherent within the *nafs* despite their apparent lack of explicit mention.


35 See also Q. 32:17.


It is also worth noting that some of these terms have also found their way into Sūfī theosophy being adopted with their own specific connotations. Once again, a discussion of such terms is beyond the scope of the current article and as such, will not be discussed here. However, the reader may consult the following works which deal with this topic: Najjār, *al-Taṣawwuf al-nafṣī* (n.p., 1984), pp. 246–7; Ābd al-Khāliq al-Shabrāwī, *The Degrees of the Soul*, translated into English by Muṣṭafā al-Badawi (Dorton: Quilliam Press, 1997), pp. 20–60; Robert Frager, *Transforming the Self*, http://www.katinkahesselink.net/sufi/sufi.htm; Kamuran Godelek, *The Neoplatonist Roots of Sufi Philosophy*, http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Comp/CompGode.htm; Tosun Bayrak al-Jerriah, *Seven Levels of Being*, http://www.crescentlife.com/spirituality/seven-levels.htm.


40 Jurjānī, al-Ta’rījīt, p. 239.


42 This fits neatly with the description of the *nafs*’s duality above in the section dealing with the qualities of the *nafs*, where the potentiality of the soul to adopt a positive quality, or its negative counterpart was explored, as discussed.


45 It is for this reason that some contemporary researchers have termed the self-reproaching soul the human conscience (al-damārī). See Muṣṭafā Fāhmī, *al-akhīlaq bayn al-falsafāt wa-l-Islām* (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa al-‘Arabīyya, 1987), pp. 139–140.


47 It is worthy of note that the verse itself is almost indicative of both circumstances in the worldly life and in the Hereafter, as the verse mentions the Day of Judgement (al-qiyāma) prior to mentioning the self-reproaching soul. As such, there is a subtle indication to self-recrimination in the worldly life that is private and self governed, whereas on the Day of Judgement, according to Muslim theology, the censuring will be imposed and extremely public.


57 This is said to be one of the main differences between the tranquil soul and the self-reproaching soul; whereas the former has gained mastery over its appetites and desires through extreme effort, strong conviction and imposing punitive measures, the latter remains somewhat inclined to the soul inclined to evil, despite its best efforts to overcome it. See Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, \textit{al-Rūh}, pp. 265–6.

58 Jurjānī, \textit{al-Ta'rīfāt}, p. 239.

