

Psychospiritual Dynamics of Repentance in Islamic Psychology: A Narrative Review and Conceptual Model

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ABSTRACT

Repentance is an endeavor to return to one's primordial nature (*fiṭrah*) as a servant of Allah through seeking divine forgiveness and repairing one's relationship with others. Despite extensive discussions on forgiveness and moral repair, prior literature lacks an integrative model of repentance grounded simultaneously in Islamic theology and contemporary psychological theory. This study examines *tawbah* from the perspective of Islamic psychology by integrating theological concepts with contemporary psychological research. Using a narrative review and Conceptual Narrative Analysis, this study synthesized recent scholarly sources published between 2016 and 2025 to capture contemporary developments while maintaining doctrinal grounding alongside selected classical Islamic texts. The analysis was conducted through thematic synthesis and conceptual integration across intrapersonal, transpersonal, and interpersonal domains. The findings indicate that repentance involves moral emotions such as guilt, remorse, self-forgiveness, commitment, and spiritual fear; spiritual realignment through God-consciousness, ritual worship, and transformative engagement; and relational repair through apology, reconciliation, and restitution. These dimensions form an integrative model showing that repentance is not a singular act but a sustained psychospiritual process. This study offers a novel culturally grounded framework that may inform Islamic psychotherapy, religious counseling, and moral rehabilitation.

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INTRODUCTION

Repentance in Global Religion

According to Husain (1969), no individual—regardless of their position within the social or spiritual order—is exempt from moral vulnerability. Human beings, though endowed with moral and religious instruction, remain susceptible to ethical lapses that deviate from divine and societal expectations. Religiously inclined individuals often associate morality with the assurance of post-mortem salvation (Jones & Flaxman, 2023). However, moral fallibility may result in transgressions, which, from a theological standpoint, are classified as sins (Shabana, 2024). Within a religious framework, sin is typically defined as a violation of divine injunctions (Chowdhury, 2021). Despite divine disapproval of sin, the notion of God in many faith traditions remains fundamentally compassionate; sinners are not immediately condemned, but are instead granted the existential opportunity for repentance and moral recovery (S. R. Khan, 2024).

Heim (2022) argue that confession, repentance, and the pursuit of divine forgiveness are universally embedded across monotheistic traditions. Khan (2024) further underscore that religious systems promote forgiveness by institutionalizing it as a moral virtue, cultivating emotions such as empathy and compassion, and encouraging acts of reconciliation through sacred texts and ritual practice. Rushdy (2018) note that the historical concern with the interrelationship among repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation is a prominent feature across global religious traditions. Indeed, Islam (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020), Judaism (Ben Yair et al., 2025), and Christianity (Horowski, 2024) all place significant emphasis on forgiveness as a cornerstone of moral and spiritual well-being. Even that religious forgiveness extends into belief systems informed by reincarnation, such as Buddhism and Hinduism (Choe et al., 2019). However, in the present study, forgiveness is discussed only insofar as it relates to repentance, while *tawbah* remains the primary analytic focus.

More recently, Exline et al. (2017) have identified the influence of theological forgiveness on empirical research in psychology, particularly in areas concerning self-forgiveness and repentance. Although forgiveness has long been examined as a spiritual and interpersonal construct, its scientific exploration has historically remained peripheral within mainstream psychological discourse (Fincham, 2022). Nevertheless, forgiveness continues to garner attention in both popular and clinical contexts. As Brush *et al.* (2001) highlight, the concept of divine forgiveness has historically functioned as a psychological and physiological mechanism of healing (Mullen et al., 2023). Previous studies have reported a positive correlation between repentance and mental health outcomes (Nazar & Sabitha, 2017; Uyun et al., 2019). Yet repentance itself remains less systematically conceptualized and is often treated only as a step toward forgiveness rather than as a distinct moral-psychological process.

Repentance in Islamic Psychology

Repentance has frequently been associated with the concept of forgiveness, as it represents a foundational step in both receiving and extending forgiveness, whether toward God or fellow human beings (Khoury, 2022; Russell, 2020). However, reducing repentance to forgiveness risks obscuring its distinct structure in Islamic thought. In Islamic theology, *tawbah* constitutes not merely a theological imperative but an existential and psychological process interwoven with self-accountability, divine compassion, and moral reconstitution. Etymologically derived from the Arabic root *ta-ba*, *tawbah* connotes “to return,” not merely to ritual obedience but to a state of spiritual alignment with divine will (Abu-Nimer & Nasser, 2013; Rassool, 2021). Within this frame, *tawbah* is not simply a reactive emotion after wrongdoing, but an active process of transformation involving awareness of sin, remorse, cessation of wrongdoing, and commitment to change (Taimiyah, 2017).

The conceptualization of *tawbah* also resists reduction into a singular paradigm. Classical and contemporary Islamic scholarship distinguishes different forms of repentance according to the nature and intensity of transgression, including existential repentance, major repentance, and minor or habitual repentance (Al-Qardhawi, 2018; An-Nawawi, 2014). This study is primarily concerned with major repentance that carries moral, relational, and socio-legal implications, where *tawbah* must involve not only spiritual realignment but also relational restitution and identity reconstruction. Unlike approaches that emphasize institutional mediation, Islamic repentance is characterized by direct relationality with God, personal agency, and inner resolve. Qur’anic depictions of divine mercy, such as

Surah Az-Zumar (39:53) and Surah Al-Furqan (25:70), portray repentance as a process of moral hope and reconstitution, in which wrongdoing can be transformed into renewed ethical direction.

This distinction reveals an important limitation in mainstream psychological approaches. Existing frameworks often interpret repentance through secular categories such as guilt, forgiveness, moral repair, or religious conversion. While these perspectives are useful for understanding emotional regulation, cognitive reframing, and interpersonal reconciliation, they tend to remain anthropocentric and do not fully account for the theocentric character of *tawbah* (Hall & Fincham, 2005; Paloutzian, 2005). In Islamic contexts, repentance is not limited to intrapsychic adjustment or social restoration, but also entails accountability before God, intentional reorientation toward the Divine, and reintegration into the moral community. For this reason, existing psychological models are not sufficient to fully explain *tawbah* in Islamic moral life, particularly when repentance functions as an intra-faith transformation that restores the self, the divine relationship, and the socio-ethical order (James, 2003; Vasegh, 2011).

The Conceptual Gap

Despite the growing body of interdisciplinary literature on forgiveness and religious behavior, there remains a notable absence of a systematized conceptual model of repentance grounded simultaneously in Islamic theology and contemporary psychological theory. In many Muslim-majority contexts, repentance serves as a central mechanism for moral-spiritual rehabilitation and behavioral correction (Rassool, 2021; Uthman, 2023). Existing frameworks remain conceptually partial, Kirkup's (1993) Judeo-Christian model identifies Admission, Restitution, and Discipline as key stages of repentance, while Rassool (2021) conceptualizes *tawbah* primarily as an intrapersonal process of spiritual renewal within therapeutic contexts.

Although these perspectives contribute to understanding moral transformation, they tend to frame repentance as an individual and relatively linear corrective process. Kirkup's model offers a clear moral sequence but does not fully integrate the transpersonal orientation toward the Divine, while Rassool provides an explicitly Islamic account but remains largely focused on individual spiritual recovery. Thus, prior models offer limited integration of intrapersonal transformation, divine reorientation, and interpersonal or communal restoration as interwoven dimensions of *tawbah* (Kirkup, 1993; Rassool, 2021).

The present study addresses this gap by proposing a tripartite conceptual model of *tawbah* comprising intrapersonal awareness and remorse, transpersonal relationship with the Divine, and interpersonal reparation. This formulation advances repentance theory by treating *tawbah* as a systemic and relational process rather than merely an individual moral act. Beyond theoretical clarification, the model may inform psychospiritual interventions such as Islamic-based psychotherapy, repentance-oriented counseling, and moral education, particularly in contexts where repentance is often practiced intuitively and informally (Uyun & Kurniawan, 2018).

METHOD

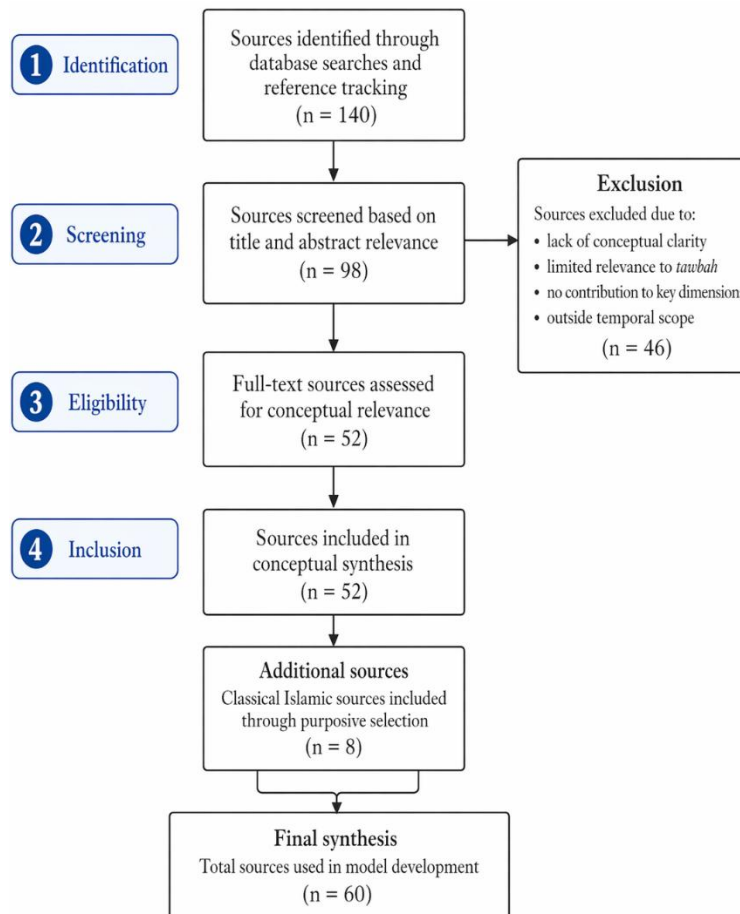
Research Design

This study employed a conceptual theory-development design using a narrative review to construct a conceptual understanding of tawbah as a form of repentance within Islamic psychology. Rather than functioning as a general library research exercise, the study was designed as a theory-building inquiry that synthesizes theological and psychological literature to develop an integrative conceptual model. Narrative review was selected because it accommodates diverse theoretical, theological, and empirical sources without limiting the synthesis to a single methodological orientation, making it suitable for interdisciplinary theory development (Siddaway et al., 2019). This study does not follow a strict systematic review protocol, as its primary aim is conceptual theory development rather than exhaustive evidence synthesis. Instead, it adopts a transparent narrative review approach that balances interpretive flexibility with methodological clarity.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted through Google Scholar and Scopus-indexed journals, prioritizing publications from 2016 to 2025 to ensure contemporary relevance. The search process was guided by thematic and conceptual relevance rather than a fixed keyword protocol. Initial searches employed broad terms such as “repentance,” “tawbah,” and “Islamic psychology,” which were iteratively refined as key concepts and themes emerged during the review process. Classical Islamic sources were selectively incorporated to maintain doctrinal accuracy, while modern psychological and spiritual literature provided empirical and theoretical grounding (Snyder, 2019).

Approximately 140 sources were initially identified through database searches and reference tracking. Following preliminary screening based on title and abstract relevance, 98 sources were retained for closer examination. Of these, 52 full-text sources were assessed as conceptually eligible and included in the core synthesis. In addition, 8 classical Islamic sources were incorporated through purposive selection to ensure doctrinal accuracy and theological depth. In total, 60 key works were ultimately synthesized in the development of the conceptual model. To enhance transparency, the literature selection process is summarized in Figure 1 as a conceptual literature selection process rather than a formal PRISMA protocol.

Figure 1. *Conceptual Literature Selection Process*

Inclusion Criteria and Literature Selection

The inclusion criteria emphasized conceptual relevance rather than methodological design. Sources were included when they contributed theoretical insight to the intrapersonal, transpersonal, or interpersonal dimensions of tawbah. In addition, priority was given to peer-reviewed publications, conceptually focused works, and sources that directly addressed repentance, tawbah, moral transformation, or related psychological and spiritual processes (Siddaway et al., 2019).

Works outside the thematic scope, those not directly relevant to the development of the proposed tripartite model, or predating the timeframe without theological justification were excluded. “Lack of conceptual clarity” referred to sources that did not define repentance or tawbah explicitly, addressed the concept only superficially, or failed to contribute meaningfully to one or more of the three analytical dimensions. To minimize selection bias, the review applied iterative comparison across sources, prioritization of conceptually central works, and cross-referencing between theological and psychological literature during the synthesis process (Jaakkola, 2020). Table 1 summarizes the categories of literature included in the review and their respective contributions to the development of the proposed model.

Table 1. *Summary of Literature Categories Included in the Review*

No.	Literature Category	Main Focus	Contribution to the Model
1	Classical Islamic sources	Doctrinal foundations of tawbah	Grounded the transpersonal dimension and ensured theological validity
2	Islamic psychology literature	Tawbah in Islamic psychological context	Framed repentance within Islamic psychological discourse
3	Moral psychology literature	Moral emotions and self-regulation	Supported the intrapersonal dimension
4	Forgiveness and moral repair literature	Interpersonal reconciliation	Clarified the relationship and distinction between tawbah and forgiveness
5	Spiritual transformation literature	Inner change and spiritual coping	Linked psychological transformation with divine orientation
6	Conceptual methodology literature	Theory-building and synthesis	Guided the development of the integrative model

Analytic Strategy

Data were examined using Conceptual Narrative Analysis, involving iterative reading, abstraction, and thematic integration across Islamic theological constructs and contemporary psychological theories. The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, key theological and psychological concepts related to repentance were identified from the selected literature. Second, these concepts were thematically organized into intrapersonal, transpersonal, and interpersonal domains. Third, the resulting themes were conceptually integrated into the proposed tripartite model of tawbah.

Key Islamic concepts such as *nadam* (remorse), *muhasabah* (self-reflection), and *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification) were analyzed in relation to psychological constructs including moral emotions, self-regulation, and spiritual coping (Keskin, 2025; Syafii & Azhari, 2025). Through this structured synthesis, the study formulated the proposed tripartite conceptual model of *tawbah*, integrating intrapersonal, transpersonal, and interpersonal dimensions within an Islamic psychological framework.

Methodological Rationale

This methodological approach was chosen because conceptual theory-building requires interpretive depth rather than empirical generalization. Narrative review combined with conceptual analysis provides the flexibility necessary to integrate theological principles with psychological frameworks and aligns with contemporary standards for rigorous conceptual inquiry in interdisciplinary psychology (Harris et al., 2018). In this study, the method was used not to aggregate findings statistically, but to clarify constructs, compare interpretive traditions, and construct a coherent theoretical model of tawbah within Islamic psychology.

CONCEPTUAL FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL INTEGRATION

The Dynamics of Repentance

The proposed three-domain model of tawbah, comprising intrapersonal, interpersonal, and transpersonal dynamics, is conceptualized as an integrative and recursive process rather than a strictly linear trajectory. Individuals may exhibit heightened ritual observance even before experiencing deep

spiritual transformation or moral realignment, particularly in contexts where social expectation or emotional guilt temporarily drive religious behavior. However, such increases in ritual practice without accompanying inner transformation are typically unstable and may not reflect enduring repentance unless followed by intrapersonal shifts such as remorse, self-forgiveness, and renewed commitment. This suggests that *tawbah* operates through interacting domains whose sequence may vary according to psychological readiness, divine awareness, and relational circumstances. This underscores the multidimensional nature of *tawbah* in Islamic psychology, where each dynamic can precede, follow, or intensify the others depending on the individual's psychological readiness, divine awareness, and relational circumstances.

Intrapersonal Dynamics

The intrapersonal domain of *tawbah* refers to the internal psychological processes that prepare the individual for spiritual reconciliation with God. This domain encompasses a range of affective and cognitive phenomena, including guilt, remorse, self-forgiveness, commitment, and spiritual fear. These experiences reflect not only the moral awareness of wrongdoing but also serve as psychological catalysts that initiate the transition from ethical disruption to spiritual restoration. Conceptually, this domain forms the foundational layer of repentance because it shapes the individual's motivation and capacity for authentic moral change.

Guilt

Guilt functions as an initial moral signal that reorients the individual toward accountability and repentance. Religious guilt reflects not just the violation of moral codes but the disruption of one's connection with the Divine (Park et al., 2025). Unlike generalized guilt that may lead to self-condemnation, religious guilt activates the moral conscience and motivates repair and reconciliation (Ding et al., 2016; Tunç & Candemir, 2023). This guilt can inspire positive change, reinforcing spiritual resilience and psychological healing (Jerome et al., 2023; Worthington Jr et al., 2016). Constructively processed guilt maintains attachment to God and drives repentance as a path to restoration (Ameer et al., 2025).

However, a critical distinction must be made between redemptive guilt and harmful self-blame. While the former fuels transformation, the latter may lead to paralysis, shame, or rumination (S. R. Khan, 2024; Khosravi, 2018). In Islamic psychology, guilt holds spiritual value only when it leads to *tawbat nasuha*—genuine repentance marked by regret, cessation, and divine reliance (Khalil, 2018; W. A. Khan & Sheharyar, 2025). Religious teachings, when internalized, help reframe guilt as a constructive force that guides the individual toward reform rather than despair (Khosravi, 2018; Rassool, 2021). Thus, guilt is treated here not simply as emotional distress, but as a morally productive state when it is directed toward reform and restoration.

Remorse

Remorse constitutes a core emotional mechanism in the intrapersonal dynamics of *tawbah* because it transforms moral awareness into a desire for change. As Khalil (2018) suggests, repentance is fundamentally rooted in the capacity for deep regret over actions that violate sacred moral obligations. In Islamic psychological tradition, remorse (*nadam*) is considered the core emotional antecedent to sincere repentance (Rassool, 2021). Far from being paralyzing, this remorse is affectively charged and

spiritually purposeful—it initiates vigilant self-awareness (*muraqabah*) and ethical introspection (*muhasabah*), which Bakri et al. (2025) describes as essential mechanisms of sustained behavioral transformation. In this sense, remorse is not merely an emotional reaction to guilt, but a spiritually oriented affective state that aligns the self with divine accountability and moral repair.

Crucially, remorse in the context of Islamic repentance functions as a motivational scaffold for self-control, transforming emotional distress into a mechanism for behavioral restraint and future-oriented ethical decision-making. When remorse is framed within a theologically coherent narrative, it facilitates the emergence of self-reproaching soul (*nafs al-lawwamah*), which reinforces internal checks against impulsive or pleasure-seeking behavior that contradicts divine injunctions (Al-Owidha, 2024; Khalil, 2018). This affective-cognitive transformation empowers the individual with an intrinsic reward system, where the discomfort of regret motivates adherence to spiritual discipline. Conceptually, remorse therefore links inner distress with disciplined moral action, making repentance not only sincere at the emotional level but sustainable at the behavioral level (Saleem & Sitwat, 2025; Yulianti, 2017).

Self-Forgiveness

Self-forgiveness constitutes an important intrapersonal dimension of tawbah because it restores moral agency without negating responsibility. Unlike self-excusing or moral disengagement, genuine self-forgiveness entails a conscious recognition of one's transgression, affective remorse, a firm intention to change, and a reparative orientation toward divine and interpersonal responsibilities (S. R. Khan, 2024; McKemy, 2023). In the Islamic tradition, this process aligns with the broader path of purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) and nearness to God (*qurb ilallah*), where self-forgiveness becomes a spiritual discipline rather than a mere psychological relief (Ghorbani et al., 2017; Uyun et al., 2019). As outlined by Khalil (2023) and Saleem and Sitwat (2025), repentance requires three core conditions—awareness of sin, sincere regret, and firm resolve not to return to the sin—implying that forgiveness of the self is embedded within the divine-human covenant.

From a psychospiritual perspective, self-forgiveness functions as a healing mechanism that mitigates pathological guilt and internalized shame, especially when such emotions threaten spiritual despair or alienation. When theological assurance is internalized, individuals are more likely to extend compassion (*rahmah*) to themselves, thereby cultivating emotional resilience, spiritual motivation, and moral resolve (Krause, 2017; Rassool, 2024b). In Islamic clinical settings, structured forgiveness interventions informed by religious counseling have proven effective in promoting psychological well-being and restoring the *fitrah*—the innate disposition oriented toward righteousness and divine alignment (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020; Uyun et al., 2019). Thus, self-forgiveness is understood here not as permissiveness, but as a reparative process that reconnects the self to both divine mercy and moral responsibility.

Commitment

Commitment represents the volitional dimension of tawbah through which repentance becomes behaviorally sustained rather than emotionally temporary. Rooted in remorse and reinforced through self-regulation, commitment enables individuals to resist pleasure-oriented impulses that often underlie sinful behavior (Koole et al., 2017). It can be understood as the individual's determination to strive, sacrifice, and remain accountable in pursuit of spiritual ideals (Abdullah, 2022; S. R. Khan, 2024). Khosla et al. (2020) observes that post-remorse commitment manifests through heightened devotion and

consistency in religious practice. Psychologically, this process functions as an internal reinforcement system that substitutes short-term gratification with long-term spiritual rewards such as divine pleasure (*riḍa Allah*), inner peace, and the hope of Paradise. Islamic theology fortifies this structure through concepts like divine self-monitoring and the triadic integration of Islam (practice), Iman (faith), and Ihsan (spiritual excellence), aligning both intention and behavior with divine expectations (Rassool, 2024a).

However, for individuals in the early phases of religiosity—such as new converts or those experiencing spiritual reawakening (*hijrah*)—commitment may be fragile, shaped by emotional vulnerability and limited theological literacy. Rahmawati and Desiningrum (2020) report that such individuals often build commitment through religious mentorship and structured learning. Nevertheless, this initial sincerity should not be misused as a rationale for repeated moral failure; otherwise, it risks devolving into spiritual rationalization. Without continued epistemic development (*ṭalab al-‘ilm*), ethical self-monitoring (*muḥasabah*), and behavioral recalibration, commitment remains declarative rather than transformative. In such cases, guilt loses its motivational function and may regress into complacency or self-deception (Andrabi, 2025; Huda & Salem, 2022). Commitment, therefore, is treated in this model as a dynamic discipline that stabilizes repentance by linking affective sincerity, cognitive clarity, and sustained moral effort.

Spiritual Fear

Spiritual fear (*khauf*) represents the existential dimension of intrapersonal *tawbah*, grounding repentance in awareness of divine judgment and moral consequence. In Islamic spiritual psychology, spiritual fear (*khauf*) denotes a deeply existential awareness of one’s moral inadequacy before the Divine, distinct from general fear or even God-consciousness (*taqwa*) (Bahmani et al., 2018). Rather than stemming from immediate external threats, *khauf* arises from the heart’s internal recognition of sin’s implications in the hereafter and the possibility of divine displeasure. This spiritually infused emotion mobilizes the individual toward ethical vigilance, heightened self-monitoring, and sincere repentance. *Khauf* is considered a foundational station (*maqam*) in the soul’s journey toward God (*suluk ila Allah*) and plays a vital role in initiating behavioral reform and spiritual realignment (Wachid, 2021). Notably, in early stages of religious reawakening, *khauf* becomes a critical anchor, especially when theological literacy is still in development. A prominent form of *khauf* in this phase is the fear of death in a state of unresolved sin, which triggers eschatological urgency and motivates immediate moral correction (Moezz et al., 2022).

Importantly, *khauf* must be held in dynamic balance with hope (*raja’*) to avoid tipping into despair (*ya’s*), which is theologically discouraged (Bahmani et al., 2018). In Islamic psychological ethics, *khauf* is not a terminal emotion but a transitional mechanism—redirecting guilt and regret into actionable commitment. Properly integrated, it supports ongoing moral restraint, nurtures *taqwa*, and enhances the repentant’s spiritual maturity. Far from being pathological, spiritual fear is conceptualized here as a constructive force that connects the emotional shock of sinfulness with sustained commitment to transformation.

Transpersonal Dynamics

Transpersonal dynamics represent the vertical dimension of tawbah through which the individual reorients the self toward the Divine. In the context of repentance, this dynamic entails a spiritual realignment that is initiated by the awareness of moral failure and sustained by acts of ritual, prayer, and inner reflection. It includes three core components: spiritual transformation, repentance rituals, and worship rituals. Together, these elements mark the shift from internal cognitive and emotional remorse to a restructured relationship with God, thereby positioning repentance as a sacred process of psychological and theological reconciliation.

Spiritual Transformation

Spiritual transformation constitutes the inner transpersonal shift through which tawbah becomes a sustained return to God rather than a temporary emotional response. In Islamic spiritual psychology, spiritual transformation (*al-taḥawwul al-rūḥānī*) refers to the inner metamorphosis of the soul (*nafs*) from a state of moral heedlessness (*ghaflah*) toward God-consciousness (*taqwa*) and divine closeness (*qurb ilallah*) (Syafii & Azhari, 2025; Trimulyaningsih et al., 2024). It is not merely a cognitive or emotional shift, but a theological and existential reorientation initiated by the realization of sin and divine accountability. The Qur'an highlights this awakening in Surah Al-Ḥadid (57:16), "Has the time not come for those who have believed that their hearts should become humbly submissive at the remembrance of Allah?" The process unfolds through stages: awareness of sin (*al-iḥsas bi al-dhanb*), remorse (*al-nadam*), and firm resolve to change (*al-'azm*) (Rassool, 2021; Saleem & Sitwat, 2025). This journey reinterprets adversity as divine pedagogy (*tarbiyah rabbaniyyah*) and obedience as a path to inner peace (*sakinah*), establishing repentance as both a moral and spiritual act (Trimulyaningsih et al., 2024).

Moreover, spiritual transformation bridges inner awakening and outer religious practice. Penitents may begin with emotional conviction yet lack theological literacy; transformation nurtures motivational readiness for worship, including *ṣalah*, *dhikr*, and Qur'anic recitation. As a transpersonal dynamic, it transcends ego-bound change and draws from the dialectic of spiritual fear (*khauf*) and hope (*raja'*), which collectively sustain moral vigilance and spiritual aspiration (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020). Contemporary research affirms that Islamic-based spiritual transformation leads to increased self-regulation, meaning-making, and resilience in both religious and clinical contexts (Aprilianti, 2024; Fajar & Saepulrohimi, 2025). Conceptually, spiritual transformation functions here as the bridge between moral awakening and enduring devotional reorientation, thereby stabilizing tawbah as a continuing rather than episodic process. In this sense, spiritual transformation is not only a sacred transition but a continuous psychological realignment, restoring the soul to its *fiṭrah* and embedding the individual in a lifelong process of divine return, remembrance, and renewal (Khofifah, 2025).

Repentance Rituals

Repentance rituals translate inner remorse into embodied acts of return, making tawbah observable in disciplined spiritual practice. In Islamic theological and psychological traditions, repentance rituals (*taqs al-tawbah*) are more than an outward expression of regret; they constitute an embodied spiritual system designed to restore the soul's moral alignment with divine will. Islamic scholars, Rassool (2021) and scholars of Islamic studies and theology (Reynolds & Moghadam, 2021) emphasize that accepted repentance involves sincere intention (*niyyah*), verbal supplication (*istighfar*), bodily purification (*wuḍu' or ghusl*), and the ritual performance of *ṣalāt al-tawbah*. These acts function as integrative mechanisms

that unite cognition, affect, and behavior within a sacred frame of servanthood (*ubudiyah*). Uyun et al. (2019) argues that repentance must engage the whole person—emotionally, intellectually, and physically—to be spiritually effective. Psychologically, these rituals provide emotional containment and somatic recalibration, allowing individuals to reclaim agency and initiate self-correction through tangible spiritual engagement.

Furthermore, the ritual of *tawbah* acts as a liminal threshold between inner remorse and external transformation, symbolizing the movement from sin to sanctity. Empirical findings by Uthman (2023) indicate that those who practice repentance rituals holistically—through action, reflection, and prayer—experience greater inner peace and moral clarity. In contexts such as addiction recovery or moral rehabilitation, these embodied rituals have been shown to foster identity repair, reduce relapse, and instill renewed religiosity (Nazar & Sabitha, 2017; Younas et al., 2025). Within Islamic psychology, *taqs al-tawbah* is a vital stage in soul purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*), transforming guilt into purpose and despair into divine connection. In this model, repentance rituals are therefore understood as transitional mechanisms that connect intrapersonal remorse with transpersonal reorientation. It not only marks the cessation of immoral behavior but also inaugurates a renewed ethical trajectory, reorienting the individual toward transcendental purpose (*ma'na al-wujud*) through disciplined, sacred action.

Worship Rituals

Worship rituals represent the stabilizing dimension of transpersonal *tawbah*, through which repentance is sustained in everyday religious practice. Worship rituals (*'ibadah*) in Islamic spiritual psychology are not merely a sequence of external acts, but a psycho-spiritual recalibration that restores the servant's (*'abd*) broken covenant with God after moral deviation. Following sincere repentance, formerly negligent individuals often undergo a motivational reorientation, which prompts renewed commitment to practices such as prayer (*salah*), fasting (*sawm*), remembrance (*dhikr*), and Qur'anic recitation. This shift is activated by core spiritual emotions—guilt, remorse, fear of divine consequence, and hope for divine mercy—which stimulate the soul's ethical faculties and initiate a process of soul purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) (Hendricks et al., 2023; Uyun et al., 2019). As Rassool (2024b) and Hanin Hamjah et al. (2017) highlight, *'ibadah* functions not only as a theological obligation but also as a stabilizing mechanism for emotional regulation and moral integrity, anchoring the penitent in divine mindfulness and spiritual coherence.

The path from ritual neglect to devotional consistency is rarely immediate; instead, it unfolds through guided transformation. Individuals who are new to religiosity—such as converts or those returning from prolonged spiritual estrangement—often possess limited theological knowledge and rely initially on emotional conviction. To support this fragile stage, Islamic pedagogy emphasizes gradual cultivation through instruction (*ta'lim*), development (*tarbiyah*), and community participation (Alkouatli, 2018). Participation in *majlis dhikr*, structured religious learning, and mentorship nurtures not only ritual competence but also epistemic readiness (Abdalla, 2025). This experiential religiosity transforms *'ibadah* into a sustained form of repentance—one that reinforces behavioral discipline and deepens divine connectedness (Alsuhaymi & Atallah, 2025; Hanin Hamjah et al., 2017). Thus, worship is positioned here not only as an outcome of repentance, but as an ongoing process through which *tawbah* becomes psycho-spiritually integrated and behaviorally enduring. Ultimately, worship becomes more

than an outcome of repentance; it operates as an active process of psycho-spiritual integration, aligning the individual's inner state with the transcendent reality of the meaning of existence (*ma'na al-wujud*).

Interpersonal Dynamics

Interpersonal dynamics constitute the relational dimension of *tawbah*, indicating that repentance is not fully realized without addressing harm done to others. Beyond intrapersonal remorse and divine accountability, true repentance necessitates acknowledging harm, seeking forgiveness (*i'tiraf*), engaging in reconciliation (*sulh*), and, where necessary, offering restitution (*ta'wid*). These actions are not merely social niceties but religious imperatives grounded in the Qur'anic ethos of justice and mercy. Unlike secular models, the Islamic tradition views interpersonal reparation as a spiritually charged endeavor that reflects one's sincerity before God and reaffirms the moral coherence of the *fitrah*. In this model, repentance is therefore understood not only as a matter of divine grace, but also as ethical accountability enacted within human relationships.

Apology

Apology functions as the initial interpersonal expression of repentance, translating moral recognition into relational accountability. Apology, as a pivotal act in the interpersonal dimension of repentance, transcends mere verbal acknowledgment; it signifies the moral assumption of responsibility and initiates the potential for relational repair (Bippus & Young, 2020; Cohen, 2020). Within the Islamic tradition, seeking forgiveness from those one has wronged is an ethical imperative that complements divine *tawbah*, as reflected in the Prophet Muhammad's directive: "*Whoever has wronged his brother in anything, let him seek his forgiveness today before no dinar or dirham will be accepted*" (Bukhari, 2449). Psychologically, the act of apology can mitigate relational rupture by activating empathy, signaling remorse, and restoring the offender's moral identity (Iwai et al., 2023; Witvliet et al., 2020).

However, apology does not guarantee reconciliation; when perceived as insincere or ill-timed, it may provoke retaliation (Grunenberg et al., 2026), and when outright rejected, it can evoke existential anxiety, shame, and repressed guilt (Dhami, 2016). This introduces an important limit within the interpersonal dynamics of *tawbah*: repentance may be sincere even when forgiveness is not granted. The refusal of forgiveness does not negate repentance, but it introduces a rupture that must be spiritually and psychologically addressed. Without closure, the penitent may struggle to process guilt constructively unless guided by theological and emotional integration (Rassool, 2021).

The denial of interpersonal forgiveness redirects repentance into a more solitary and theocentric path. Islamic moral psychology teaches that the ethical responsibility of the wrongdoer remains, regardless of the other's response (Saleem & Sitwat, 2025). In such cases, repentance may deepen through sustained remorse, humility, and ethical perseverance (*sabr*), transforming into a unilateral discipline of self-regulation (*mujahadah*) and spiritual vigilance (*muraqabah*) (Khalil, 2018; Saleem & Sitwat, 2025). Here, the individual no longer seeks moral closure through external validation but through divine acceptance and internal reform. Empirical studies show that religious coping and self-forgiveness act as buffers against despair in the face of relational impasses Triana (Fincham et al., 2020; Triana & Sudjatmiko, 2021). Thus, rejection of apology does not terminate the repentance process; rather, it reveals that interpersonal repair and divine acceptance may proceed along different trajectories. The penitent

redirects their path from horizontal reconciliation toward vertical communion, reaffirming that the ultimate aim of repentance is divine proximity, not merely social resolution.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation represents the fuller interpersonal consolidation of *tawbah*, in which repentance moves beyond apology toward renewed ethical coexistence. Reconciliation, in the context of repentance, represents more than the cessation of interpersonal conflict; it marks a deliberate moral convergence grounded in forgiveness, mutual recognition, and renewed ethical intention (McNeil, 2020; Strabbing, 2020). In Islamic ethical psychology, reconciliation (*sulh*) is framed as a divinely sanctioned virtue, as emphasized in the Qur'anic verse: “*Reconciliation is best*” (Qur'an, Al-Nisa', 4:128). This process involves not only repairing relational rupture but also restoring trust (*thiqah*) and fostering social solidarity (Dollahite et al., 2019; Worthington Jr & Robles, 2022). It presupposes the prior acts of apology and forgiveness, but transcends both by requiring a mutual emotional recalibration, often facilitated through dialogue, mediation, or moral mentoring (Hussain, 2020; Maoz & Frosh, 2020). Unlike mere cessation of harm, reconciliation necessitates a renewed moral contract, wherein both parties co-create conditions for sustained peace and ethical coexistence.

Psychologically, reconciliation acts as a mechanism for moral closure, transforming unresolved guilt and resentment into shared meaning and emotional resolution. Through structured processes—such as restorative justice frameworks or faith-based interventions—it integrates fragmented memory, mitigates emotional reactivity, and enhances moral growth (Fisher, 2018; Floro, 2025). For the penitent, successful reconciliation affirms the social validity of their repentance, reinforcing identity transformation through reintegration. For the victim, offering reconciliation post-forgiveness reaffirms moral agency and generosity. At the same time, reconciliation is not treated here as a universal or obligatory endpoint, since Islamic ethics allows relational distance when safety, continuing harm, or emotional vulnerability remain unresolved. However, reconciliation in Islamic ethics is contextual and non-obligatory; when safety, ongoing harm, or emotional vulnerability persists, relational distancing is permissible (Parrott, 2018; Rahim, 2025). In such cases, the model preserves a distinction between the interpersonal ideal of reconciliation and the continuing spiritual validity of repentance.

Restitution

Restitution constitutes the reparative completion of interpersonal *tawbah* by translating remorse and apology into concrete restoration. In Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), restitution (*'iwaḍ*, *diyyah*, or *kaffarah*) serves not only as a legal mandate but as an ethical pillar that completes the cycle of repentance. Classical Islamic law prescribes various forms such as *qisas*, *diyyah*, *hadd* (e.g., hand amputation for theft, *rajam* for adultery), and *ta'zir* as divinely sanctioned mechanisms for restoring justice (*'adl*) between wrongdoer and victim (Amin & Khan, 2024; Djalaluddin et al., 2023). However, the implementation of such restitutive practices remains context-dependent, especially in secular legal systems like Indonesia, where criminal offenses such as theft are punished with imprisonment under The Indonesian Penal Code (KUHP), not *hudud* penalties (Fawwas, 2025). This raises an important conceptual issue: restitution cannot be reduced to a fixed legal form, but must be understood in relation to the normative and institutional context in which repentance is enacted. Thus, a comparative analysis between Islamic law

and Indonesian penal law is essential to establish a principled middle ground that upholds both ethical seriousness and legal legitimacy.

For those who repent in non-Islamic jurisdictions, restitution becomes a hybrid process—accepting civil penalties (e.g., prison time) or offering voluntary reparations may symbolize sincere repentance in the absence of *shari'ah* enforcement. Moreover, restitution is not solely legal; it is also profoundly psychospiritual. The penitent may undergo internal conflict, moral tension, and cathartic guilt, which are transformed into healing when restitution is made—even if it requires personal loss, public humiliation, or enduring punishment (Cesur, 2025; Pannier, 2023). In cases where legal restitution is unattainable, due to the death or anonymity of the victim, Islam encourages symbolic alternatives like charity (*sadaqah*), increased worship, or continuous seeking of forgiveness (Absar, 2020; Muhammad, 2020). In this model, restitution therefore functions not only as compensation for harm, but as a mechanism for restoring moral equilibrium across legal, spiritual, and psychological domains. Thus, restitution is not only about tangible compensation, but also about the restoration of moral equilibrium, making it a deeply transformative act across spiritual, legal, and psychological domains.

An Integrative Model of Repentance in Islamic Psychology

Drawing together the preceding conceptual synthesis, this study proposes an integrative model that maps the psycho-spiritual trajectory of *tawbah*. As illustrated in Figure 2, the model delineates three interlocking dynamics, intrapersonal, transpersonal, and interpersonal, each of which contributes uniquely to the overall transformation. Rather than viewing these dimensions as sequential or siloed, the model emphasizes their recursive, overlapping, and mutually reinforcing character, forming a holistic arc of moral-spiritual renewal. In this sense, the model represents the main conceptual finding of the study by organizing previously dispersed theological and psychological elements into a unified framework of repentance. This integrative approach allows for a nuanced understanding of repentance as a dynamic system rather than a discrete event. Figure 2 should therefore be read as a conceptual representation derived from narrative synthesis rather than as an empirically validated pathway. Its purpose is to clarify the interdependence of key dimensions of *tawbah* and to provide a heuristic framework for future empirical and applied work in Islamic psychology.

matter—it is an ecosystem of spiritual reorientation, where remorse, ritual, and relational accountability coalesce to support enduring transformation and return (*rujūʿ*) to the divine moral order.

At the same time, the model remains conceptually bounded. It has not yet been tested empirically across different Muslim populations, nor has it been examined through psychometric, qualitative, or intervention-based designs. Accordingly, its present contribution is theoretical: to offer an integrative framework that can guide future validation, refinement, and contextual application in Islamic psychological research and practice.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that repentance, within the framework of Islamic psychology, is not merely a momentary behavioral shift but a multidimensional and dynamic psychospiritual process involving intrapersonal, transpersonal, and interpersonal domains. The findings highlight that foundational emotions, such as guilt, remorse, and fear of divine consequence, play a pivotal role in reconfiguring the human relationship with both God and others, while fostering moral self-reconstruction and spiritual renewal. The integration of spiritual transformation, ritual worship, and interpersonal restitution suggests that repentance serves not only as an individual's quest for divine forgiveness but also as a vehicle for ethical restoration and social reconciliation. The conceptual model proposed herein offers a culturally embedded and theologically grounded framework of repentance in Islamic psychology, with potential implications for clinical practice, faith-based counseling, and moral education in Muslim societies.

At the same time, this study has several limitations. As a conceptual and theory-building inquiry, the proposed model has not yet been empirically tested across different Muslim populations or applied settings. The synthesis also relies on selected theological and psychological sources, which means that alternative doctrinal interpretations, cultural variations, and contextual expressions of repentance may not yet be fully represented. Accordingly, the model should be understood as a theoretical framework that invites further validation, refinement, and contextual adaptation rather than as a definitive account of repentance in all Islamic contexts.

Recommendation

It is recommended that psychospiritual approaches to repentance be further integrated into the clinical and applied domains of Islamic psychology, especially in religiously oriented communities where conventional psychological models may fall short in addressing moral and spiritual crises. Such integration offers a culturally congruent modality for individuals seeking moral rehabilitation and existential realignment. Future research should empirically validate the proposed model through longitudinal studies, phenomenological investigations, or the development of assessment instruments tailored to the spiritual dimensions of repentance. Collaborative efforts between mental health practitioners, religious scholars, and policymakers may further support the translation of repentance from a primarily theological discourse into a more applicable psychological and ethical resource for character development and social healing.

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Authors contribution

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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