

Ecotherapy in the *Tibb Nabawi* Perspective: An Initial Approach to Holistic Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Ecotherapy is increasingly accepted in modern medicine, emphasizing the therapeutic role of nature in supporting mental well-being. While ecotherapy is widely acknowledged in contemporary health practices, no comprehensive studies have explored this concept within the framework of Prophetic Medicine (*Tibb Nabawi*). *Tibb Nabawi* incorporates natural elements, such as water, herbs, and open spaces, commonly used for physical healing. However, the potential psychological and spiritual benefits of these elements, especially in enhancing mental well-being, have not been thoroughly examined. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the foundational principles of *Tibb Nabawi* that align with ecotherapy and exploring how these elements can contribute to a holistic mental health approach. A qualitative methodology was employed, using textual analysis of relevant hadiths and classical Islamic texts to identify natural elements within *Tibb Nabawi* that support mental well-being. Content analysis was then applied to assess how these natural components can provide benefits that promote mental balance and spiritual wellness. The study finds that principles in *Tibb Nabawi*, such as contemplation (*tadabbur*) and reflection (*tafakkur*) on nature, are consistent with modern ecotherapy practices. This is evidenced by the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) practices of secluding in the Cave of Hira and gazing at the night sky. These findings highlight the holistic nature of Prophetic teachings, which advocate a balanced lifestyle in harmony with the natural environment. The implications of this study suggest that Nabawi ecotherapy could offer a nature-based and faith-aligned alternative for supporting mental health, particularly among Muslim communities seeking culturally relevant care models. Further research could explore specific elements of nature therapy, such as water therapy (through ablution or viewing rivers) and green therapy (appreciating the beauty of forests and gardens), to enrich the concept of Nabawi Ecotherapy in the context of Islamic-based mental health.

Keywords: ecotherapy; *Tibb Nabawi*; mental health; Cave of Hira; hadith.

INTRODUCTION

Ecotherapy is an emerging form of treatment increasingly recognized in modern health practices. This approach utilizes interactions with nature, such as forest therapy, water therapy, and garden therapy, to support individuals' mental well-being (Doherty, 2016). Based on the theory that the environment has a significant therapeutic effect on humans, ecotherapy has proven effective in reducing stress, alleviating anxiety, and enhancing emotional balance. By integrating natural elements with holistic well-being, ecotherapy offers a profound and natural alternative for mental health treatment (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzī, 2004).

In Islam, various practices involving nature are emphasized, including the use of herbs, water, and meditation in tranquil settings. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) practiced these as part of comprehensive self-care (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzī, 2004). *Tibb Nabawi*, or Prophetic Medicine, extends beyond physical treatments to include

elements of life balance that align with nature (Ahmad Akram Mahmud and Afandi Awang, 2018). While traditional studies on *Tibb Nabawi* have focused on physical aspects, such as herbal remedies and dietary practices, recent research has begun exploring its relevance to mental health and psychosocial well-being through natural approaches embedded in Prophetic practices (Hatta Shaharom, 2008).

Problem Statement

Despite the growing body of research on ecotherapy in modern mental health medicine, there is a notable absence of studies linking it to the principles of *Tibb Nabawi*. A recent study by Akhbaryah Izzulhaq Muhammad (2023) successfully integrated ecotherapy with Islamic principles. However, its focus was limited to general Islamic values and did not address ecotherapy from the perspective of Prophetic Medicine. This is significant because Ibn Qayyim (2000) emphasized that effective soul therapy must be grounded in the guidance of the messengers, as there is no other path to true healing.

This gap highlights two critical challenges in understanding Nabawi Ecotherapy as part of *Tibb Nabawi*:

1. Lack of Specific References on Ecotherapy in *Tibb Nabawi*

No prior studies directly associate the concept of ecotherapy with *Tibb Nabawi*, leading to a limited understanding of how natural elements within this framework contribute to mental and spiritual well-being.

2. Unclear Principles and Elements of Nabawi Ecotherapy

While modern medicine has clearly categorized ecotherapy, *Tibb Nabawi* lacks an in-depth examination of elements such as herbs, water, and green spaces as forms of ecotherapy. Consequently, there is insufficient reference material to develop these Nabawi approaches into a comprehensive therapeutic concept.

To address these challenges, this study seeks to introduce Nabawi Ecotherapy as a foundational concept, elucidating how the natural elements in *Tibb Nabawi* can be effectively utilized to promote mental and spiritual well-being. This research aims to provide a conceptual framework, fill critical knowledge gaps, and contribute to a growing body of literature on nature-based therapies grounded in Islamic values.

This research aims to introduce Nabawi Ecotherapy as an initial concept that elucidates how natural elements in *Tibb Nabawi* can be utilized for mental and spiritual well-being. The objectives of this study are:

1. To Provide a Conceptual Foundation for Nabawi Ecotherapy: Present an understanding of how natural elements in *Tibb Nabawi* support mental well-being.
2. To Address Knowledge Gaps in the Use of Nature for Mental Well-Being: By analyzing the principles in *Tibb Nabawi* related to nature, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of nature-based Islamic therapy.
3. To Offer an Initial Contribution to Research on Nature-Based Therapy Grounded in Islamic Values: Provide early insights rooted in Islamic values to support mental well-being in a natural and culturally aligned manner for Muslim societies.

Overall, this study aims to pioneer a new field in Islamic medicine, namely *Nabawi Ecotherapy*, which combines the strengths of nature with self-care practices to achieve balanced mental well-being. The study also seeks to enrich the literature on Islamic medicine, paving the way for more in-depth research on the application of *Nabawi Ecotherapy* in modern healthcare systems.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach as it is well-suited for an in-depth understanding of the concept of *Nabawi Ecotherapy*, particularly in exploring the natural elements in *Tibb Nabawi* that support holistic mental health (Awang Idris, 2018). The qualitative approach provides flexibility to analyze the elements of Prophetic Medicine that contribute to physical and mental well-being and to examine the relationship between these elements and the concept of ecotherapy in modern medicine.

The documentation method is employed for data collection, focusing on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include authentic hadiths that discuss the use of natural elements in Prophetic Medicine. Additionally, this study refers to classical Islamic medical texts, such as *Tibb Nabawi* by Ibn Qayyim, which contain crucial information on natural elements used by Prophet Muhammad (SAW). Secondary sources consulted include journal articles, academic books, theses, and dissertations that investigate natural elements in Islamic medicine and ecotherapy in the modern context. These materials are sourced from libraries, digital journals, and personal collections to ensure comprehensive and complete references.

For data analysis, the content analysis method is employed to identify the principles of *Tibb Nabawi* that align with the concept of ecotherapy. This analysis examines primary texts to identify natural elements, such as water, green spaces, and herbs, that play a role in supporting physical and mental balance. It also includes a comparison between natural elements in *Tibb Nabawi* and those commonly utilized in modern ecotherapy to assess their compatibility within the context of holistic well-being.

Through this method, the study aims to understand how Nabawi Ecotherapy can benefit mental and physical health, ultimately contributing to the development of an ecotherapy model grounded in the principles of Islamic medicine.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Mental Health Issues in Malaysia

A harmonious and peaceful life is the aspiration of every individual across all age groups (Noraznida Husin et al., 2022). Essentially, harmony and well-being are states free from physical and mental stress or disturbances. According to a study by Arnida Anuar et al. (2021), well-being is a measure of quality of life assessed psychologically or internally, encompassing several dimensions such as joy, self-confidence, health, family life, work, education, finances, and others. Specifically regarding health, an individual's well-being is closely linked to physical, mental, and social health. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that these three aspects must be fulfilled for an individual to achieve optimal health.

From an Islamic perspective, however, this division is considered incomplete. According to Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (2019), Islam emphasizes the interconnection between physical and mental health with spiritual well-being. This view is widely agreed upon by Islamic philosophers. Al-Balkhī himself criticized medical practitioners who prioritized physical health over mental and psychological health (Musfichin, 2019). This issue was eventually addressed seriously by the WHO, leading to continuous research and, in 1984, the inclusion of spirituality as a component in defining human health. Consequently, the concept of health now encompasses four dimensions: physical, mental, social, and spiritual (biopsychosociospiritual) (Rifqi Rosyad, 2016).

Mental health problems are no longer unfamiliar in Malaysia (Nurul Atikah Abbas & Kamarul Azmi Jasmi, 2022). Continuous surveys and research have shown a rising number of individuals experiencing mental health issues (Rajab & Saa'ri, 2017). According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS, 2020), three out of ten adults in Malaysia aged 16 years and above are at risk of experiencing mental health problems. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, works productively and effectively, and is able to contribute to their community" (Lackey, 2018).

Mental health encompasses three primary components: stress, anxiety, and depression (NHMS, 2020). Stress refers to an emotional reaction involving feelings of sadness and exhaustion caused by life events such as disappointment (Syed Lamsah et al., 2018). Depression, or Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), is a common and serious illness that typically affects a person's mood and behavior, including sleeping, eating, or working habits. Although it is a serious condition, it is treatable (Your Health in Mind, 2018). Meanwhile, anxiety refers to feelings of worry, unease, fear, and apprehension. Anxiety disorders are characterized by excessive worry, often accompanied by physical symptoms such as elevated blood pressure and nausea. It occurs when an individual's reactions are disproportionate to normal responses in a given situation (American Psychological Association Therapy, 2018).

Various approaches have been adopted to address mental health issues in Malaysia. One proven complementary treatment is ecotherapy, which has the potential to significantly improve individuals' mental health (Maria Rueff & Gerhard Reese, 2023).

Concept of Ecotherapy

Ecotherapy is a new branch of ecopsychology that utilizes the environment as a treatment method for addressing mental health issues, based on the premise that a healthy ecosystem contributes to good health (David Orr, 2009). Linguistically, the term "ecotherapy" combines two words: "eco," derived from the Greek word oikos, meaning "home," and "therapy," which refers to the treatment or healing of the soul (Fisher, 2013).

From a terminological perspective, according to Geoff Berry (2023), ecotherapy is an umbrella term referring to a new form of psychotherapy that considers the role of the environment and recognizes the human-environment relationship (Linda Buzzell & Craig Chalquist, 2009). Ecotherapy can also be defined as a type of mental health and well-being treatment involving interaction with the natural environment to alleviate stress and depression and enhance well-being (Marissa Bryers, 2022).

Thomas J. Doherty (2015), in his research, further broadens the scope of ecotherapy by defining it as psychotherapeutic activities such as counseling, psychotherapy, social work, self-help, prevention, and public health initiatives conducted with ecological awareness or intent. It often employs natural environments and incorporates nature-based activities or processes as an integral part of the therapeutic process. This approach focuses on the ecological aspects of self, identity, and human behavior, with its implementation ranging across various scales, from personal to planetary levels (Thomas J. Doherty, 2015).

In conclusion, ecotherapy is a therapeutic process encompassing psychotherapeutic activities that use the environment as its fundamental medium. Ecotherapy is also referred to by other terms, such as green therapy, earth-centered therapy, and nature-based therapy (Linda Buzzell & Craig Chalquist, 2009).

Andy McGeeney (2016) outlined several specific characteristics of ecotherapy practices as follows:

Table 1: Characteristics of Ecotherapy

Nu	Characteristics of Ecotherapy	Explanation
1	Conducted Outdoors	Ecotherapy activities are conducted outdoors, not limited to buildings or specific facilities.
2	Inclusive for Everyone	Ecotherapy is open to all groups, including those who feel marginalized.
3	Participant Involvement	The relationship between therapist and client is crucial in planning and decision-making for healing.
4	Collaboration with Partners	It is recommended to have partnerships with other institutions to enhance funding opportunities and treatment quality.
5	Cooperation with Authorities	Collaboration with local authorities is established to promote community health and well-being.
6	Boosts Self-Confidence	Ecotherapy helps restore and improve clients' self-confidence.
7	Monitoring and Evaluation	All processes are continuously monitored and evaluated, with results shared with others.
8	Sustainable and Long-Term	Ecotherapy is designed to provide lasting change and focus on the future.
9	Holistic Perspective	Uses a holistic approach that involves more than just medical intervention.
10	Sharing Outcomes with Others	The outcomes of treatment are shared with others to provide broader benefits.

(Reference: Andy McGeeney, 2016)

The ecotherapy approach is based on the theory that connecting with nature can have positive effects on individuals experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress. Examples of ecotherapy include Horticultural Therapy, Green Exercise (activities in natural environments) (Russel, 2001), Animal-Assisted Therapy (interaction between humans and animals) (Berget et al., 2011), Wilderness Therapy (group activities/sports), Natural Lifestyle Therapy, Eco-Dream Work, and Community Ecotherapy (Jordan & Hinds, 2016).

Ecotherapy is grounded in several theories that highlight the positive effects of the environment on human mental health, including the Attention-Restoration Theory (ART) and the Stress-Reduction Theory (SRT). ART demonstrates that natural environments are often associated with feelings of awe, which can induce calmness and help individuals detach from their anxieties (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989). Meanwhile, SRT suggests that exposure to nature can reduce stress and improve physical and mental health by activating the parasympathetic nervous system, responsible for relaxation and rest (Ulrich, 1981).

Islamic law (Shariah) itself emphasizes spiritual values that can help address an individual's psychological issues (D.R. Sanjaya, 2020). Elements of aqidah (creed), shariah (Islamic law), and akhlaq (morality) provide a systematic methodology for helping individuals overcome mental health challenges (Seprianto et al., 2022). The Islamic approach to mental health care is rooted in spirituality and is carried out as a preventive, curative, constructive, and rehabilitative method (Khairunnas Rajab, 2006).

This demonstrates that Islamic treatment concepts are highly effective in helping patients understand themselves (Seprianto et al., 2022), as evidenced by empirical studies. According to Akbarsyah Izzulhaq Muhammad (2023), the connection between ecotherapy and Islam is evident, with Islam providing a spiritual foundation for ecotherapy practices. This integration enriches ecotherapy as a discipline and a healing method for clients. Furthermore, it underscores that Islam, as a monotheistic religion, is not destructive but constructive in its approach to mental health care.

The Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) has been regarded as the best reference for human development, both psychologically and spiritually. Sa'īd Hawwā' (1999) viewed the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW) as a comprehensive system capable of addressing any human problem in contemporary times. Ibn Qayyim (1993) similarly emphasized that soul therapy must be rooted in the guidance of the messengers, as there is no other way to achieve true healing except through their teachings. He (2000) further elaborated that Prophetic therapy could cure various ailments by focusing on aspects such as heartfelt connection, reliance (tawakkul) upon Allah (SWT), obedience, submission, supplication, repentance, and seeking forgiveness from Him.

Zainal Abidin (2016) highlighted that while Prophetic psychology closely resembles the Islamic psychology model grounded in turath (heritage) elements, a significant distinction lies in its emphasis on the Prophet's profile. Prophetic psychology showcases the Prophet (SAW) as an exemplary figure who successfully optimized the soul's potential in every aspect of life.

Therefore, this study advances the concept of ecotherapy by establishing *Tibb Nabawi* as a foundational bridge connecting the two fields.

The Concept of Ecotherapy Based on *Tibb Nabawi*

The foundational practice of ecotherapy can be traced to the actions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). This is evident in a hadith from *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*:

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ أُمِّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَنَّهَا قَالَتْ: أَوَّلُ مَا بُدِيَ بِهِ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مِنَ الْوَحْيِ الرُّؤْيَا الصَّالِحَةُ فِي النَّوْمِ، فَكَانَ لَا يَرَى رُؤْيَا إِلَّا جَاءَتْ مِثْلَ فَلَقِ الصُّبْحِ، ثُمَّ حَبَبَ إِلَيْهِ الْخَلَاءُ، وَكَانَ يَخْلُو بِغَارِ جِرَاءٍ، فَيَتَحَنَّنُ فِيهِ وَهُوَ التَّعَبُّدُ اللَّيَالِي دَوَاتِ الْعَدَدِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَنْزِعَ إِلَى أَهْلِهِ.

Translations: Narrated by Aisha, the Mother of the Believers, she said: "The first form of revelation given to the Messenger of Allah (SAW) was through good dreams during his sleep. Whatever he saw in a dream would

come true as clearly as the break of dawn. Then, solitude became beloved to him. He would seclude himself in the Cave of Hira, where he engaged in worship for several nights before returning to his family."

The Prophet's act of secluding himself in the Cave of Hira was a form of isolation aimed at calming the heart, engaging in self-reflection, and contemplating the natural world. Sayyid Ramadhan al-Būtī (2019) elaborated on this practice, stating that a Muslim's faith cannot be considered complete, even if adorned with various acts of worship, obedience, and good deeds, until the individual takes time for solitude to introspect, feel Allah's watchfulness, reflect on the wonders of creation, and derive lessons from these signs about Allah's greatness.

Thus, the act of contemplating nature (*tadabbur alam*) is evidence of the perfection of one's faith. Simultaneously, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzī emphasized that one of the key criteria in Prophetic therapy to achieve complete individual health is strengthening faith (Retno Anggraini and Wahyudi Widada, 2020). This highlights that isolation and connecting with nature are integral methods in *Tibb Nabawi*, aiming to enhance faith and mental well-being.

Contemplating nature is not only an act of worship but also a means to calm the soul and alleviate stress. Modern studies have demonstrated the psychological benefits of interacting with nature, including stress reduction and the enhancement of positive emotions. This underscores the relevance of *tadabbur alam* as both a spiritual and therapeutic practice within the framework of *Tibb Nabawi*.

The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also emphasized that interacting with nature could foster positive emotions within an individual. This is evident in a hadith from *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*:

عَنِ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ: بَثُّ عِنْدَ خَالَتِي مَيْمُونَةَ، فَتَحَدَّثَتْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مَعَ أَهْلِهِ سَاعَةً ثُمَّ رَقَدَ، فَلَمَّا كَانَ ثُلُثَ اللَّيْلِ الْأَخْرَجُ قَعْدًا، فَتَنَظَّرَ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَقَالَ: {إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ}.

Translation: Narrated by Ibn Abbas (RA): "I stayed overnight at the house of my aunt, Maimunah. The Messenger of Allah (SAW) conversed with his family for a while and then went to sleep. When the last third of the night arrived, he woke up, looked at the sky, and recited: {Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding}."

Al-Sa'dī (2007), in his commentary, explained that in this verse, Allah encourages His servants to think, reflect on His signs, and observe His creations. Allah uses the term "signs" without specifying a singular purpose, indicating the vastness and multiplicity of these signs. This is because the signs within creation are truly extraordinary, capable of captivating the gaze, satisfying the reflective mind, touching the hearts of the sincere, and enlightening clear intellects about divine matters.

From this, it can be understood that reflecting on nature inspires positive emotions in individuals, evoking feelings of joy, awe, and tranquility. This practice was exemplified by the Prophet (SAW), who would look at the sky during the night and recite Quranic verses. This aligns with numerous past studies on Prophetic therapy rooted in Quranic verses (Al-Sayyid Abd Hakim, 1998). In the context of Nabawi ecotherapy, such practices align with modern ecotherapy principles, which encourage interaction with nature to achieve emotional balance and mental calmness.

In conclusion, the *tafakkur* (reflection) and *tadabbur* (contemplation) of nature practiced by the Prophet (SAW) not only strengthened faith but also enhanced mental well-being. These practices are further supported by contemporary scientific studies that demonstrate how interacting with natural environments can improve quality of life and reduce stress. Hence, ecotherapy based on *Tibb Nabawi* provides a holistic approach, rooted in divine revelation while aligning with current scientific findings on the benefits of nature for mental health.

Therefore, this research has successfully addressed its objective of introducing the concept of ecotherapy based on *Tibb Nabawi*, paving the way for it to become a catalyst in the field of Islamic medicine.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that ecotherapy based on *Tibb Nabawi* offers a holistic approach that prioritizes interaction with nature for mental and spiritual well-being. The practices of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW),

such as retreating for solitude (*khalwah*) and gazing at the night sky, outline principles of nature therapy that not only rejuvenate the soul but also strengthen faith. Nabawi ecotherapy emphasizes spiritual aspects, distinguishing it from Western ecotherapy, which predominantly focuses on psychology, making it a unique and comprehensive method.

For future research, it is recommended that specific elements of nature therapy, such as water therapy (through *wudu* or observing rivers) and green therapy (appreciating the beauty of forests and gardens), be examined in greater detail. This would further enrich the concept of Nabawi ecotherapy within the context of mental and spiritual well-being rooted in Islamic values.

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