

ISLAMIC MINDFULNESS

ISLAMIC MEDITATION

ACCORDING TO
IMAM AL-GHAZALI



By Dr Sara Kadir

INTRODUCTION

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is the state of being completely focused on the present moment, not taking the past or the future into consideration.

Mindfulness can also be described as being in a state of consciousness, awareness or remembrance. This state of awareness has been scientifically proven to enhance psychological wellbeing and decrease levels of depression and anxiety.

What is Islamic Mindfulness?

Let us start by defining what 'Islamic Mindfulness' is, so we're on the same page. I define Islamic mindfulness as:

'Paying attention to the present moment, on purpose, with awareness of God's presence'

The outcome of the above should lead to good action and enhanced wellbeing. Where, purposeful present moment awareness is qualified only by the awareness of the One God (tawḥīd), as it is the concept of tawḥīd that lies at the centre of Islamic mindfulness, from which all associated concepts and practices gain significance.



Islamic Mindfulness

"Paying attention to the present moment, on purpose, with awareness of God's presence."

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Islamic Mindfulness can take two forms:

1. An activity that is carried out purely to bring attention to the moment. From an Islamic perspective it is purposefully bringing God into the present moment.



2. Daily activity-integrating mindfulness into daily 'mundane' tasks. In the Islamic perspective it is purposefully bringing God into mundane activities-turning them into acts that serve divine purpose and bring wellbeing.



This guide is concerned with the first type:

An activity that is carried out purely to bring attention to the present moment. From an Islamic perspective it is purposefully bringing God into the present moment.

This will be carried out through the practice of meditation, in line with Al-Ghazali's guidelines found in his book 'The Revival'.

Why can't i just practice meditation the secular/contemporary way?

You can. The techniques presented in the secular sphere are effective when your faith is getting a bit overwhelming (it happens!). However, as Muslims, our teachings stipulate that in order for peace to be realised one MUST connect with God. As any reality that does not include God is a false reality and therefore any feelings of peace without the inclusion of God is false peace.

Incorporating God into meditative practices reinforces your spirituality, which in turn enhances your wellbeing, both in this world and the next.

I have a podcast on this subject if you want to learn more on the significance of meditation, including Islamic meditation, in wellbeing. The podcast can be found on the INsane site.

Let's start....



Before you start:



1. Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.



2. Decide for how long you will meditate. If you are new at this start with 2 minutes and work your way up.



3. Close your eyes (if you like), so that you are not easily distracted.



4. Sit comfortably.



5. Take a couple of deep breaths. Inhale through the nose for 4 counts and exhale from the mouth 7 counts. Do this ten times and then breathe normally.

A Meditative Technique:

Al-Ghazali's meditation has 2 stages:

Stage 1:

Repeat the word 'Allah', (or any of God's other names) continuously. You should continue to do this until you find yourself repeating 'Allah' with no effort.

You should be patient in doing this until the word is in union with the heart, at this point you are in a state of remembrance.

Al Ghazali states:

He should persevere in this until the pronunciation, the words and the image of the word is erased from the heart and the only thing left of it is meaning. Here, the heart is fully present, as if it is obliged to be in this state, unable to separate from the meaning of the word.

Once the practitioner reaches this stage in the meditation, Al-Ghazali states, the practitioner may choose to stop or carry on into the second stage.



“When the word is in union with the heart, at this point you are in a state of remembrance.”

Imam Al-Ghazali



Stage 2:

In the second stage, Al-Ghazali states, one becomes prepared and susceptible to the revelation of the truth from the unseen world, which he describes as 'whiffs of God's mercy,' revealing themselves like a 'bolt of lightning' to the heart, varying in lengths and degrees of illumination. However, Al-Ghazali goes on to clarify, such revelations are dependent upon the practitioner's sincerity and presence of mind during the practice, as well as, their behaviour in general.

Tip:

you can change which word to repeat depending on what state it is you want to feel. For example:

When you feel anxious or scared, repeat 'Al-Qawi' (The powerful), until you feel nothing but power in your heart.

When you feel bitterness or anger or want to feel loved repeat 'Al Wadood' (The Lover), until you feel nothing but love in you heart.

When you feel overcome by enemies/life repeat 'Al-Aziz' (The Worthy), until you feel nothing but worth in your heart.

OBJ





"A person who is more mindful of God is less distracted by worldly life, and so, less susceptible to the doubt and confusion that manifest in the heart from satanic whispers."

Dr Sara Kadir



You can see how meditating using God's names can change you from a negative mood to a positive one and can take you from a state of hopelessness and weakness to hope and power.

Al-Ghazali states that during meditation: 'the practitioner should avoid worldly thoughts and 'return his soul to the phrase'.

What can i do if I can't concentrate?

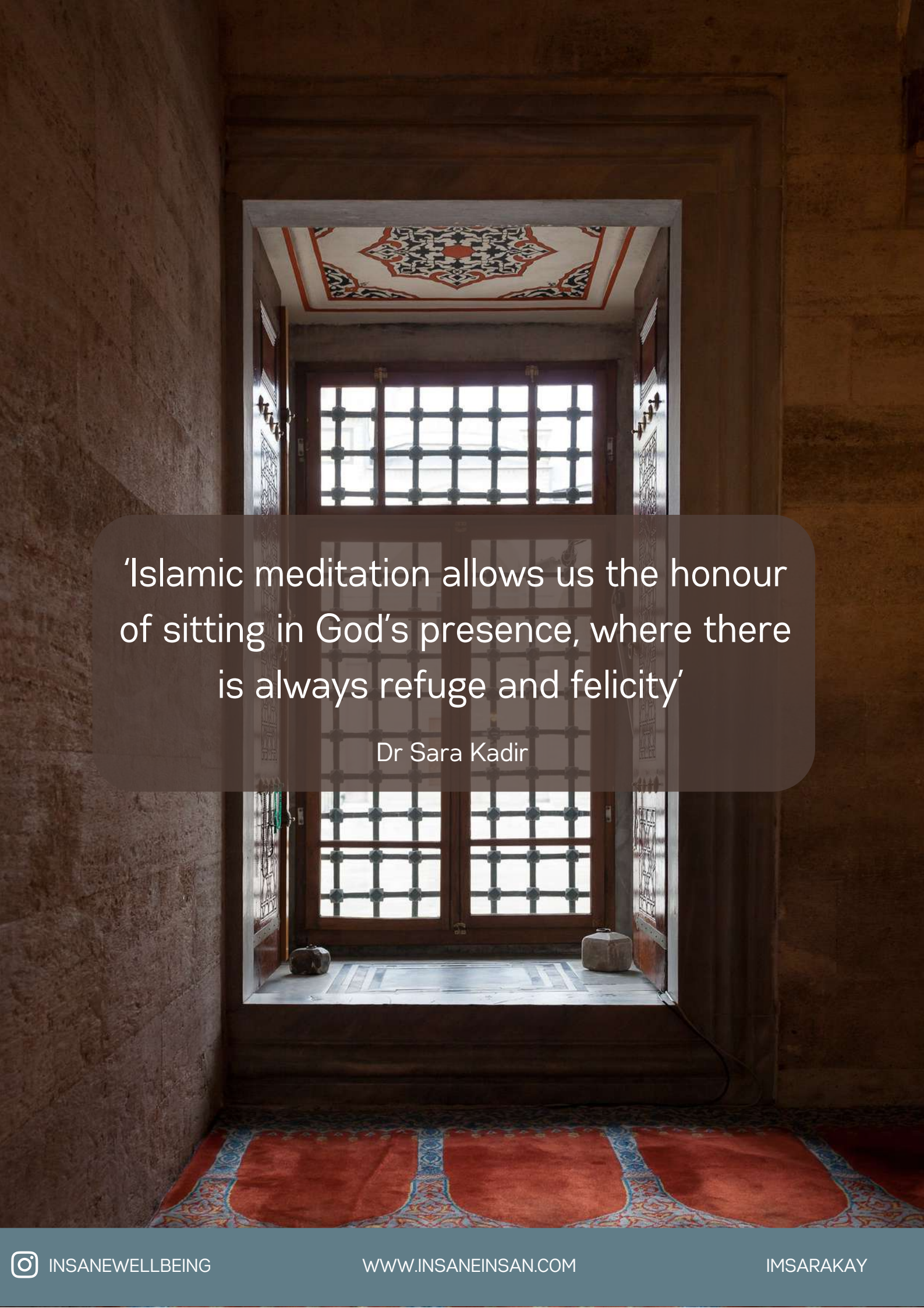
At first, your mind will wonder A LOT, Al-Ghazali warns:

'Whispers may emerge from the phrase itself: about its nature, about what we mean by the word 'Allah,' and for what reason He is God and is to be worshipped, so that notions come to him which open a gateway into thought.'

Al-Ghazali states 'one should pay no attention (to distracting thoughts) and return consciousness back to the remembrance of God'.

Concentrating on nothing but a word is going to be DIFFICULT at first. We are in the age of distraction and we are losing the ability to be mindful, including being mindful of God. This is why meditation is so important, it helps you get a hold of your thoughts and trains you it to be aware of God and be focused.





'Islamic meditation allows us the honour
of sitting in God's presence, where there
is always refuge and felicity'

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Furthermore, these distracting thoughts are seen as a normal part of meditative development. Al-Ghazali states:

‘A man who devotes himself to remembrance and to fending off distracting attachments from his heart, will necessarily be exposed to such thoughts as these.’

Meditation trains resilience as it is a form of training for your mind, teaching it to stay focused and to work for you and not against you. The ability to control your thoughts is essential to your wellbeing. Through practicing meditation you will be able to catch negative thoughts at any moment during your day and direct them towards positive narratives, narratives that empower you.

Furthermore Islamic meditation, acts a reminder that God is present and aware of all we do and all that is happening. It reminds us of our purpose in life, which is His worship, which should encourage us to practice patience when afflicted with tests and to remember that life is finite, whereas the next world is eternal.

Finally, Islamic meditation allows us the honour of sitting in God’s presence, where there is always refuge and felicity.



A photograph of an arched doorway in a stone building. Above the doorway is a semi-circular plaque with the Arabic word 'الله' (Allah) in white calligraphy on a gold background. The doorway is dark, and some light is visible through the opening. The surrounding stone is weathered and grey.

الله

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meditative practices reinforces
spirituality, which in turn
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world and the next.

Dr Sara Kadir

Salaam! I'm Sara and I have a PhD in "Mindfulness and psychological wellbeing from a Qur'anic perspective". Much of my research relied upon the works of Imam Al-Ghazali in his book "The Revival".

I launched 'INsane' after noticing people were genuinely interested in my research. The INsane logo has a double meaning, it can also be read as the Arabic word for human 'insan'. You can find more about the project and me on my pocast, the link for which is on the website.

I am passionate about informing Muslims on wellbeing from an Islamic perspective. I see this as a duty and a privilege.

This guide will be the first of many (insha'Allah). You can download it free from the INsane website.

I pray that the knowledge i share brings you clarity and courage. Because finding peace takes courage.



Feel free to contact me for collaborations, feedback or thoughts on: the insane website or on twitter @imsarakay

Sara K

