

Perspectives on Meditation as an Islamic Practice: Interview with Shaykh Dr. Hasan Awan, MD

How can we better understand the relationship between meditation and Islamic practice?

Meditation in the general sense, as in mindfulness or contemplative silence as used in various traditional spiritual practices, has Islamic roots—specifically roots in the Qur’ān and the *Sunnah*. The ritual practices we perform as Muslims deepen our sense of being more aware of our life as a blessing and opportunity to contemplatively live a sense of connectedness to God’s presence. In other words, meditation in this sense, is usually not an isolated or separate practice in Islam that has been added from the outside to Islamic practice. Contemplative meditation has been a part of the Islamic Tradition since the foundation of Islam. However, Islamic contemplative practices may benefit from certain meditation techniques borrowed from various cultures or civilizations. These extrinsic techniques benefit Islamic meditation practice *as* Islamic practice and not as a non-Islamic practice. In this sense of meditation being part and parcel of Islamic practice, meditation is a kind of inward orientation and spiritual goal of those practices: to be in a meditative state of heart-presence with your ritual worship. This state of presence with God is what the well-known Ḥadīth of Jibrīl refers to as *iḥsān*: “to worship God as if you see Him” (Bukhari Vol. 1, Book 2, Hadith 47). According to the Prophetic definition of “beautiful spirituality,” *iḥsan* means to worship, serve, or adore God as fully present to us. This first and foremost implies that we are more consciously present for ourselves due to being aware of God’s unseen yet all-seeing Presence, as the second part of the Prophetic definition implies: “and if you do not see Him, verily He sees you.”

To be more fully present on every level of our being, outward and inward—for our ritual prayer or for our recitation of the Qur’ān, for example, or simply in greeting another believer with prayers of peace—is to seek Allah’s acceptance of and contentment with our worship. Simply listening with presence to the Qur’ān and listening in conscious silence to the *adhān* is actually a divine command (Qur’ān: 50:37 and 7:204), a *sunnah* of the Prophet (s), a practice of the pious predecessors, and simply proper religious etiquette (*adab*). All of this is to practice our religion from our presence of heart with God, and all are examples of forms of meditation. That is to say, all of the above is to practice our religion sincerely and as meditation. Therefore, meditation can be appreciated as distinct religious practices as well as an inner orientation to religious practice.

There is also the specific practice of simply being contemplatively silent—what is called *ṣamt* in Arabic, which has always been practiced from the beginning of the *sunnah* of the Prophet (s) by the *Rasūl* (s), and by the predecessors, as found in the most early Islamic spiritual texts, from Abū Ṭālib al Makkī (ra) to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (qs). Anas ibn Malik reported the *Rasūl* (s) said, “You must have good character and observe long periods of silence. By the One in whose hand is my soul, no behaviors are as beautifying as these two” (Musnad al-Bazzar,

7001). This is a well-known practice that has been carried out wherever one was: in the *masājid*, at home, and even out in nature. There are verses of the Qur’ān that speak of the ‘*ibād Ar-Raḥmān*, the servants of God who, in a particular verse (Qur’ān: 25:63) walk upon the earth humbly. If you reflect carefully on such verses, you discover that this description is also a divine prescription from God for how to walk with care and grace upon the earth, how to gently and reverently touch the earth, and how to be a servant of God who communicates peace to even the ignorant. A servant of the All-Merciful, Who created all that He did out of mercy and as mercy. Such a description is a divinely prescribed meditation practice. To walk upon God’s earth with gentle care and a meditative presence of heart, is the very description of the inner and outer nature of the servants who embody the divine attribute of the All-Merciful.

There are many ways to practice meditation in a manner that is already an Islamic practice or at least compatible with Islamic practice. Once you’ve cultivated the skills of meditative presence, you can apply them in many different ways, and not just limit your practice to the ritual activities of the religion. You can enter a meditative state through just listening with presence to your loved ones—actually being present for them, your children, your spouse, your mother, your father, your friends, your neighbors, those you work with or serve in the community, and your patients. In your relationship with others, meditative presence can be a means of actualizing a contemplative religious or spiritual life of service.

Can you give specific examples of how you teach meditation practice or recommend practicing it in an Islamic context?

I recommend developing the skill and art of *murāqabah*. One does not need a private, initiatic affiliation or a *ṭarīqah* for this kind of meditation, although such a spiritual connection (*talqīn*) may certainly be helpful and usually deepens the effect of such practices. *Murāqabah* in the most general Islamic sense is simply making the intention to be present for God, and discovering in that process that God is actually already and always present for you: that’s Islamic meditation in one line. But there’s an art to this presence, and in fact a whole way of Prophetic living. It is to live religion and life in general with *iḥsān*—with a beautiful mastery of our presence with God. This involves practice, practice, practice, which engenders profound self-knowledge through humility and gratitude.

Just to make a simple, yet fully conscious, intention (*niyyah*) of being present for yourself and for God, and to pay attention to your intention, is Islamic meditation (*murāqabah*). If you find it easier to do that right before you pray ritual prayers, so as to be more present and sincere for the worship of Allah (*swt*), that’s a beautiful practice. You sit, remaining consciously present, as is the *sunnah* of the Prophetic household (*ahl al-bayt*) and the righteous predecessors (*ṣalāf al-ṣāliḥ*), as well as of the righteous of today, who come early to the *masājid* and sit in the front row. They sit and worship Allah (*swt*), contemplating the signs of God in their life in some way. They recite the Qur’ān, maybe make *ṣalawāt* on the Prophet (s), or just simply be silent, centered, and present for God and ready for the prayer and to stand for the prayer at the *iqāmah*. This allows them to be in a much more profound state of gathered presence than someone who runs in just in time to catch the first *raka‘ah* (cycle of ritual prayer). This is sincerity of religion manifested as meditative presence.

This meditative presence before prayer is an example of a *sunnah* of the righteous, and it was a sign of the *ṣābiqūn*, or *muqarrabūn*—the *awwalīn*, those who were first, outwardly in attendance for prayer, and first inwardly in their spiritual rank or standing (*maqām*) with God. They were first in their preparation, inwardly and outwardly, to meet their Lord in the revealed ritual prayer. That's an example of how meditation can be practiced. An example of how students can practice meditation today is when you come home, sit, relax, unwind, and empty yourself, mind, and heart, of the effects of your external experiences of your day. Relax and release. Let it all go before Allah (*swt*) and make the intentional orientation of being simply and purely present for God alone: “And when you have finished your worldly duties, turn to Him in devotion”, as the Qur’ān commands the Prophet (s) and his spiritual followers (Qur’an: 94:7-8). This turning to God is both outward and inward.

There are many outward *sunnah* and *nawāfil* practices of devotion one can do to fulfill this Qur’ānic injunction. Yet, the process of inward turning to devotion is none other than meditation. This inward turning can be harnessed to enhance your outward devotions. You sit and simply return in your heart unto Allah’s presence—or rather, you return unto your own awareness of God’s ever-present Nearness to you. This is making your religion sincerely and purely for God (*mukhlisina-llahu d-dīn*), and it is none other than meditation, or having *murāqabah* (meditative vigilance) with God’s Presence. This is a practice that can be done for even five minutes at a time, although you will usually want to go longer as you deepen into feeling your intimacy with God.

Such meditative vigilance can be harnessed as a skill that can be practiced in many ways as part of Islamic practice. After ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) is a beautiful moment to practice *murāqabah* as a contemplative orientation to our religion with God, because after the blessed experience of a ritual prayer, as you are still seated in the tranquility of sending prayers, you are much more gathered as you’re giving *salāms* to the horizontal dimensions of your experience, which, beyond the two angels on your shoulders, is your directedness toward your neighbors in prayer and the world around you—to the right and to the left of you. For now you are in a state of peace. You radiate the energetic blessings of *salāms* because you’re in a state of peaceful presence, because you’ve just finished the revealed rite of prayer and you’ve returned to the world after your spiritual ascent, as “the ritual prayer is the spiritual ascent of the believer,” according to a famous saying, sometimes attributed to the Prophet (s). You give *salām* and you exit the formal ritual *ṣalāt*, but you’re still in a state of grace. You can sit there and simply bask in that sense of graceful presence. It is actually a *sunnah* to sit in the presence of the *barakah* that you’ve just experienced. The ritual prayer is already meditation, and the *julūs* position is a great posture for cultivating a meditative state of body, mind, and heart: the hips are relaxed, the spine is already positioned a little forward and straight, with the dorsal aspect of your feet extending at the bottom on the ground supporting your buttocks, and your abdomen and chest are mounted on your hips. You can consciously extend and expand this kind of meditation into a post-prayer routine practice, even if you have to change your posture to a cross-legged sitting position. All of this is a *sunnah*.

The Prophet (s) incorporated in the post-prayer routine the *tasbīḥ*: *Subhāna Llāh*, *Al-ḥamduli Llāh*, *Allāhu akbar* (Muslim, 939). This *tasbīḥ* after the ritual prayer in the sitting position (*julūs*) is a recommended *sunnah*. It is a profound meditation practice that takes full advantage of the state of cultivated presence mentioned above, if we are attentive to the presence of our Lord (swt). I recommend being fully present for this *sunnah* practice and contemplatively reciting the *tasbīḥ*—not in haste—all as a form of meditation. This *sunnah* act promotes simply sitting for God, rather than allowing the *nafs* to run back into the world and forgetting to imprint these blessings received from the ritual prayer on our hearts. It is an outer and inner invitation to appreciate the gathered state of presence, the stillness of mind, the peace of heart that you’ve just experienced or been given in the prayer, so that you can take it home with you and live such a beautiful prophetic presence in your life. When you give the *salāms* and exit the prayer, have you actually left God’s presence? Whatever your answer is, know that God has not left your presence. This is true meditation: to be able to integrate that consciously into your awareness as you go about the rest of the day until the next prayer. This becomes a kind of meditative practice extending the blessings of what you have received from Allah (swt) during your ritual prayer into your life. This is living religion as meditation.

There is also sometimes a fear in the believer that practicing meditation is a kind of bid‘ah or innovation in religion. Can you speak to this concern a little more?

There is often ignorance or neglect on our part of what the *Sunnah* offers, outwardly and inwardly. This leads to concerns of innovation regarding various spiritual practices that actually have a sound Islamic basis. Meditation is a good example of this. Practicing meditation for five to ten minutes in the morning, then upon your return home, then in the night, and finally extending the duration of the practices as you get more comfortable, should not be confused with *bid‘ah*, or religious innovation. Just as using a prayer rug facilitates the implementation of praying upon a ritually pure place by sacred law, harnessing the skill sets of meditation is one way to facilitate the implementation of praying with a pure and sincere presence of heart in our spirituality or religion with God. Meditation is not an innovation in your religion; it is the very intention to deepen your religion. Such an intention or action can never be an innovation. It is sincerity in practice, and it is in the *Sunnah* and the Qur’ān. In an authentic hadith found in Abu Dawud, “Jabir ibn Samurah reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, would pray the dawn prayer and sit crossed legged in his place until the sun had risen brightly” (Abu Dawud, 4850). When seen appropriately, meditation is as natural as sleeping, and it is implicit as well as explicit in Islamic teachings. *Ḥudūr al-qalb*, or meditative presence of heart, is the essence of religion as *iḥsān*. It’s the meaning of what the Prophet (s) said regarding beautiful worship: “to worship God as if you see Him, and if you do not see Him, verily He sees you”: *In ta‘budu Llāha ka‘annaka tarāhu, fa in lam takūn tarāhu, fa innahu yarāka*. To be able to worship God as if you spiritually see God and to know that He Sees you is to have heart-presence with God. It is to feel deeply and know convincingly that God is Present and Near.

This kind of beautiful and contemplative worship is the domain of practicing Islam through our heart-presence. *Iḥsān* is to spiritually witness God in your heart “as if you see Him,” and if you cannot do so—because in reality, we cannot make God into an object of our limited perception,

especially in Islamic teachings—then we arrive at an intimate understanding or direct knowing (*ma'rifah*) of the reality that God in His Oneness (*Tawhīd*) already sees you and encompasses your “seeing” of Him. This is one great meaning of the Qur’ānic verse: “No vision reaches Him, yet He encompasses all vision” (Qur’ān: 6:103). As another *ḥadīth* teaches us that Allah gazes upon you in your heart (Muslim, 2564). In connecting the implications of these two *ḥadīths* and the verse cited: your heart-presence as the locus of your witnessing God and God witnessing you is the very foundation of *ihsān*. It is also the very definition of meditative presence. In other words, *ihsān* and *murāqabah* are one and the same reality. For *murāqabah* simply means intimate vigilance with our awareness of God—being aware of God’s awareness of us. This is meditation in the Islamic sense.

So meditation, understood as *ihsān*, is the orientation to our religion through our heart-presence. It is the third dimension of our religion as outlined explicitly in the well-known *Ḥadīth of Jibrīl*. Therefore, to strive to cultivate or enhance the practice of our religion (*al-Dīn*) through our heart-presence in a manner that aligns with the Qur’ān and the *sunnah* can never be an innovation in religion. It’s the very purpose of the religion of God. Finally, *murāqabah* or silent meditation is exactly and explicitly what the Prophet (s) practiced after *fajr* prayer, while sitting silently for God and awaiting the post sunrise prayer-*ṣalāt al-ishrāq* (Muslim, 670). If sitting still and silently for a period of time as the Prophet (s) did daily is not meditation, I am not sure what is. And this was the Beloved’s (s) daily practice after *fajr*. Therefore, there is no innovation here.

Do you have any more specific instructions or recommendations for anyone interested in going deeper into meditation through Islamic practice?

I recommend practicing some kind of meditation in the morning, perhaps after your prayers when you wake up. The morning is a nice time of stillness for the mind and body before the day starts. It’s also a good time to sit and be more consciously present for Allah (swt) after obligatory worship. You will then reap the benefits as the day unfolds, because you’ve experienced a kind of deepening of the *barakah* (spiritual blessing) received from ritual prayer and extended it through remembering God in stillness in your heart-presence. The effects of this experience can be taken with you and returned to throughout your day. You may notice a qualitative shift in how you relate to your daily experience—to your inner emotions and to your coworkers. Additionally, when you come home from professional work or school and you experience a transition point between work and home, this is a good moment to simply sit and center yourself again and allow the experiences of your day to settle and be released, with the permission of Divine mercy. In fact, our ritual prayers (*salah*) offer this opportunity of contemplative transition from the world to a direct relationship with God, and back to the world after praying, five times a day. Simply be present for God’s already present Presence, and see the wonders that occur.

Finally, at the end of the day, before you sleep, you can again sit for God and be present. Scan the unfolding of your day by witnessing it again inwardly, and release that which is other than God in your experiences as you prepare to return to God in sleep. This can take the form of a contemplative supplication, a meditative conversation and listening to God, giving thanks, and asking for forgiveness, and an inner listening to what you need to hear from His Nearness to you. Our tradition calls this practice, *munajat*, or intimate discourse with God. Such a practice goes

beyond our personal ‘asking’ as *du’a* (supplication). It is one of the greatest practices of presence in Islamic spirituality.

The following advice may help deepen your meditative presence with God. Imagine making supplication in a more gathered state of mind with the help of a little meditation practice rather than being all over the place in your scattered mind and then asking Allah for various things. Imagine that you’re more in your heart, and from this inner contemplative space, you begin making a personal heartfelt prayer, a supplication or *du‘ā*. Because you feel existentially more centered and in your heart, you’re more present in your asking of God. Now imagine extending that conversation into a contemplative silence in which you intimately connect with God’s Listening and Loving Silence. Imagine emphasizing this kind of contemplative inwardness in your experience of the supplicatory prayer in the form of Allah’s Silent and Loving Presence. Imagine simply listening to His Presence, to His communication to you, before, within, and beyond your speaking with Him (*swt*). Finally, imagine not saying *amīn* to close your prayer as you normally would, but instead, simply staying in that supplicatory openness of heart as your day unfolds. That’s a beautiful meditation! This is *murāqabah*.

This is also what the Christian mystic Brother Lawrence calls “the practice of the presence of God.” As suggested, it is already found in our Tradition. It’s a beautiful informal practice of meditative, centering, and contemplative personal prayer. In supplicatory prayer, we speak beautifully to God, and God beautifully listens. In meditation, we listen beautifully for God in contemplative silence, and God speaks beautifully through that same silence of the heart. The practice of the presence of God combines both personal prayer and meditation and facilitates, by an amazing grace (*tawfīq*), a profound sense of spiritual and contemplative inwardness amidst any outward situation. It’s what the *awliyā’* of our Islamic tradition referred to when they spoke of *munajāt* with God, which in Arabic translates to the intimate spiritual discourses with one’s Lord. Such *munajāt* go beyond the outer kind of supplication of the tongue and mind and move your attention inwards, as you stay present for God in your heart, where you discover that the purest discourse is pure listening on the side of man and God (*swt*). While such discourse is usually appreciated as a divine grace and lofty station, it is perfectly all right to actively give due courtesy (*adab*) to God and listen deeply to His discourse with you, which is always present, but from which we are usually absent. This intentional practice will lead you to that ever-present grace of practicing presence with God.

Such “practice of the presence of God” can be a continuous, moment-to-moment meditation-prayer. It can unfold as your whole day and night. But it takes faith, practice, and the courage of consistency, regardless of our life circumstances. One of the best sacred times to cultivate this practice is during *tahajjud*, the night vigil prayer. In fact, when this is done at this beautiful and graceful moment of the still heart of the night, your heart will be open to a continued inner dialogue with God throughout the day and night. That’s why I like this term, “the practice of the presence of God.” For Brother Lawrence, practicing presence with God meant being in intimate dialogue with God for the whole day, in all circumstances. It is a spiritual union in communion. It is true friendship with God. Your assimilation of all your experiences actually becomes an intimate conversation with God and a meditative listening to God’s intimations

(*wāridāt*) through those signs that unfold outwardly and inwardly as your day and night unfold. Notice that God gave you life, and He reminds you of this every morning as you awaken. You are returning that God-given life by simply having that intimate, subtle conversation of gratitude and presence with Him inwardly. This is a meditative state of presence, and it is perfectly Islamic. In fact, it is the very heart of Islam, in which nothing veils the servant from his Loving Lord (*swt*) except his own *nafs* (ego-self).

You mention the term “presence” or the “practice of the presence of God” in the Christian mystical context and mention its Islamic parallels. Can you elaborate more on how this relates to meditation and to Islam?

Presence is a universal concept with specific applications in various spiritual traditions. When you have a presence or audience with anything, you are consciously present for it. When you have presence with another, yourself, or God, you make yourself more available and present for them. You present yourself to them. We experience this kind of conscious presentation when we are getting ready to be present for a special event, such as a wedding. Such present-ation as it concerns spiritual practice means being entirely present as yourself and as you truly are, and not as a self-projected image of yourself or what you wish to be. In Islamic teachings, when presence concerns God, God is already and always present because He is *Presence* as such. Without God's *Presence*, all would be absent, as in nonexistent. So our specific or particular presence, our entire existence and the possibility of being more present, is predicated upon the necessity of God's universal Existence, His Being. This is why God is termed Necessary Being (*Wujūd Al-Muṭlaq*) in Islamic theology/philosophy. The term Divine Presence (*Ḥaḍrah Ilāhiyyah*) in Islamic spirituality is functionally analogous to the term “Necessary Being” in Islamic metaphysics.

Now, we make ourselves more present for someone or something by being more consciously available and open to them. Part of that process of making ourselves present or open is to be aware that we have been absent or closed to ourselves and the other in some way, either in an unconscious or conscious manner. We may find that we are either lost in our thoughts or in our daydreaming, overwhelmed by emotions, worries, or suffering, affected by our actions, or obstructed in some other way from being more fully present to our direct experience of the now of our existence. This whole process of being present or consciously making ourselves more present for anything, especially for God's eternal and all-embracing Presence, is the practice of presence. It is the practice of *the presence of God*, or the practice of *having presence with God*. The former (practice of the presence *of* God) is more aligned with the first part of the prophetic definition of *ihsān* (beautiful spirituality) as it emphasizes directly witnessing or spiritually connecting with God's objective presence : “to worship God *as if* you see Him.” The emphasis in this mode of *ihsān* is on being present to our direct experience of God's actual and beautiful presence. The latter (the practice of having presence *with* God) is more aligned to the second part of the same definition as it emphasizes a subjective faith in and mental awareness of God's Presence despite our absence of direct spiritual witnessing: “and if you do not see Him, [know that] verily He sees you.” This emphasizes a mode of *ihsān* through which we make ourselves more beautifully present by being mentally aware of God. To make ourselves more available and present through conscious intention and vigilant attention to our intention and action of being

present, and to be sensitive to how we become absent or are no longer present, is nothing other than the skill and art of meditation. In this regard, meditation as such, as well as *ihsān*, is the very practice of presence as it concerns Islamic spirituality. This phrase, “the practice of presence,” is profoundly Islamic as it deals with the third dimension or pillar of our religion as transmitted through the well known *Ḥadīth of Jibrīl*. (Nawawi’s 40 Hadith, no. 2)

If somebody wanted to start a meditation program of practice for themselves, for their own spiritual or personal development, how would they go about doing that? Should it be something like a regimented practice, in a more structured way, or should it be a bit spontaneous and not forced? I appreciate that meditation is more about one’s sense of being as opposed to doing something. But how can we strike that balance between a regimented doing and our sense of contemplative being through the practice of meditation?

Your remark regarding how meditation is more about a sense of being over doing is quite insightful. The whole point of meditation is to return your attention back to your aware being, which is ultimately borrowed from God’s attributes of pure Life/Being and pure Awareness (*Al-Ḥayy/Wujūd* and *Al-‘Alīm/Al-Khabīr*). We’re consciously returning our attention to awareness and rediscovering existentially, in our immediate experience, that our awareness is already God’s Awareness. This process of turning and re-turning our attention and rediscovering a sense of contemplative being is, in its own way, a kind of *tawbah*, which in Arabic, connotes a sense of turning towards. It is a re-turning to God by connecting with your sense of pure being as your heart. In your re-turning of your attention to your sense of aware being, you realize that Allah is *At-Tawwāb* (the One who continually Turns towards you). In this way, even your turning back to God by turning your attention from the objects of the world and your own mind—such as your thoughts and feelings—more inward to the ground of your being is already God’s Turning toward you, as *At-Tawwāb*. He is actually turning unto you in order for you to turn to Him. In other words, God is constantly meditating upon you! He is *Ar-Raqīb*, the Ever-and-Lovingly-Watchful. This is where the term *murāqabah* comes from.

This will become clearer and transformative as you practice meditation more and more. When you commit to meditation, to being present for God, you will become more sensitive in your direct experience to how you get caught up in your life experiences by turning toward the objects of your daily experience and making them your reality. When you consciously return towards yourself in meditation, you will recognize that you are actually returning to God’s already-present presence, discovered as your spiritual heart. That is Islamic meditation. It’s a matter of paying attention. The way to pay more attention is by developing the skill and art by repetitive practice, because you may recognize it for one moment, but then it’s lost to you because of circumstances such as prior psychological conditioning and the effects of your thoughts, feelings, and actions upon your reality and sense of self. You might be stressed out, or you might have had a bad day—religiously, spiritually, or psychologically—the day before. All of that plays into your present-moment experience of your soul and life. Or you might be processing or repressing a heated argument you had, which creates emotional or energetic blockages and takes you out of your heart presence, fixates you on a struggle with yourself that pushes you out of your spiritual center or presence with God, and exteriorizes your

consciousness into attachment to worldly things. These worldly things may not be bad in themselves; it is our forgetfulness of God in the process that adversely affects us as we become attached to that which is other than God.

Therefore, by practicing the skill of meditation on a regular or regimented basis, we facilitate a sensitivity to being more aware of our sense of centeredness or sense of self. When we move away from our center, we learn how to bring ourselves back to our discovered heart-center. This is really the art of spirituality, the art of meditation, or the art of presence. It is the art of getting to know yourself. "He who knows themselves knows their Lord," according to a classic Arabic proverb (Hilyat al-Awliya', 10/208). To be able to recognize we have been distracted and drifted away from our task of being present for ourselves and God, and to be able to gently return our attention to God's Presence as our very heart and being, is the very skill and art that meditation teaches us as self-knowledge.

There is a concern for some that practicing meditation can lead to psychological imbalances. Is this an accurate statement?

Meditation generally involves intentionally focusing the mind through our attention on a given object of concentration for a sustained period of time. When we do this, the mind begins to wander and wants to be distracted until we become more focused or one-pointed in our attentiveness through practice. Eventually, with practice and Divine grace, the mind is gathered and still enough to relax and sink into our heart-center. It is during this process of stilling, that certain subconscious tendencies or suppressed feelings, emotions or thoughts may arise. There is difficulty for some with this. But this usually subsides with practice and with the help of a skillful teacher who can help walk you through this and help you rest and abide in your innate stillness. In fact, it is only during the process of stilling, that subconscious tendencies arise as forms or modes of egoic-resistance. When we discover our innate stillness, we learn to rest or abide 'there', in our center. We are con-center-ated. Here, in the center as our stillness, there is no arising of resistance in the same way that there is during the stilling process. When engaged in stilling, we are in a state of internal struggle, or *mujahada*. When in stillness, we are in a state of presence, or *muraqaba* as genuine meditation.

If one already has psychological imbalances or some element of severe trauma in their life and if they are interested in meditation, then it's important for them to practice meditation in a more controlled or clinical setting, with a therapist or clinician. At least they should have the permission of their therapist to practice meditation with a teacher, given the possible difficulties with the stilling process. Other than this, in my view, the benefit of acquiring the skill sets of meditation, the art of working with our attention, especially in our mind-scattered, attention deficit digital age, outweighs any harm. As long as meditation practice is done under some form of guidance, and is not prolonged for over 30 minutes without the spiritual support of our religious practices, there is no harm in my view. Current mindfulness studies have suggested great physiological and psychological benefits from guided meditation. Connecting meditation to our religious practice or discovering it in such practices as already present adds a spiritual benefit.

