

# Sufi Meditation

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**A traditional Sufi meditation practice for experiencing our connection with God (Allah), taught by Jewish Sufi teacher Murshid Netanel Miles-Yepz.**

**As with many spiritual traditions, Sufi meditation actually covers a spectrum of practices, which, like the concept of meditation itself, are often difficult to distinguish. These practices include: *dhikr*, the mantric recitation of divine names; *fikr*, linking these names with breathwork; *murraqaba*, the meditative technique of stilling the mind; *muhasaba*, contemplation or discursive meditation; and *wird*, Sufi prayers. Of course, the most characteristic meditative practice of Sufism is *dhikr*, or “remembrance.” This is a practice of repeating one of the *wazaif*, sacred phrases or divine names, to create a kind of “fly-wheel” in consciousness, so that one is in continuous remembrance of God—Allah. On another level, this practice may also lead to a melting away of all discursive functioning, leaving only interior silence and the presence of God. *Dhikr* can be performed in a variety of ways, vocally (*dhikr jahri*) or in silence (*dhikr khafi*). Often different Sufi orders are even distinguished by the style of their *dhikr*; for instance, Qadiri Sufis are known for their passionate vocal *dhikr*. Moreover, most Sufi orders have a distinctive mode of vocalizing the phrase, “no god,” but God—*la illaha illa-lah*, sometimes with accompanying movements. This is done both as a group**

and a solitary practice, and usually with the aid of a *tasbeih*, a string of ninety-nine beads carried by most Sufi initiates.

Though *fikr* is sometimes used as a general term for contemplation, its more particular usage has to do with linking the remembrance of the sacred phrase, or *wazifa* (singular form of *wazaif*), with the rhythm of the breath, so that “not a single breath passes without the remembrance of God.” Because the *wazifa* is remembered silently in *fikr*, it is also known as *dhikr al-qalbi*, the “remembrance of the heart.” In some orders where *dhikr al-qalbi* is the dominant mode of practice, it is sometimes said that remembrance is a spiritual wine, and that doing it aloud is like spilling the wine down your shirt, while silent recitation allows it to flow directly into the heart, creating holy intoxication. One simple, effective practice used among Universalist Sufis, is to put the English phrase “Toward the One on the breath:”

Without changing your breathing pattern, begin to think “Toward the One” with each inhalation and exhalation; as you breathe in and out, identify with the breath going in and out of your body; now, make the length of your inhalation and exhalation even, breathing in a calm and refined manner; continue in this manner for at least ten minutes.

The practice of meditation as it is popularly understood, that is to say, as a breathing or concentration practice leading to the stilling of the mind, is known as *murraqaba* in Sufism. In some ways, this is a false distinction, as *dhikr*, *fikr*, *muhasaba*, and even *wird* may also lead to the stilling of the mind and the opening to the Divine. Nevertheless, in terms of technique, *murraqaba* has most in common with the more

**familiar yogic concentration and breathing practices found in Hinduism and Buddhism. Murraqaba ranges from specific concentration techniques focusing on objects and images, to techniques focusing on the breath, especially in different lengths of inhalation, exhalation, and retention. Both murraqaba and fikr are also done as walking meditation practices.**

**Muhasaba is a word that has to do with “balancing accounts” and “precise calculation” and is used in two senses: self-examination, or taking account of one’s own personal thoughts and actions; and, a thorough examination of spiritual ideas and ideals, contemplating them in a discursive meditation. As mentioned before, fikr, meaning reflection, is in some ways a better word for the latter type of contemplation. Nevertheless, the accounting quality of muhasaba tells us something important about the nature of discursive meditation, i.e., that it must be more than simple reflection, a deeply penetrating, thorough examination of a concept in all its details, including all of its associated thoughts and feelings.**

**The final meditative practice of Sufism is wurd, the prayer of the Sufis. This is prayer apart from *salat*, the normative prayer practice of Islam, or from any other tradition. Extra or supererogatory prayers such as these are usually called *nawafil*, but wurd has a more specific usage in Sufism, being the prescribed prayers of particular Sufi order, the daily work of its adherents. While prayer is not generally associated with meditation, in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, at least, it has never really been separate from**

**meditation. For it has long been acknowledged in these traditions that there are deeper levels of prayer that lead to ecstasy, to profound contemplation, and even to interior silence.**

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**Notes on Sufi Article 1. The classic description of dhikr is found in Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali's *Deliverance for Ignorance*, nicely translated in Massud Farzan's *The Tale of the Reed Pipe: Teachings of the Sufis*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1974: 51-52. 2. See the interesting discussion of vocal and silent dhikr in relation to the successors of Muhammad in Gregory Blann's *The Garden of Mystic Love: Sufism and the Turkish Tradition*. Nashville, TN: Sundog Press, 2005: 14-15. 3. Javad Nurbakhsh. *In the Paradise of the Sufis*. New York: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1979: 34. 4. Paraphrased from Javad Nurbakhsh's *In the Paradise of the Sufis*. New York: Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, 1979: 34-35. 5. Universalist Sufism is a perennial Sufism associated with the first Sufi to come into the West, Hazrat Inayat Khan (d.1927). "Toward the One is the first line of his famous prayer of the same name composed in English. 6. Perhaps the most accessible presentation of a Sufi murraqa practice is found in Puran Bair's *Living from the Heart: Heart Rhythm Meditation*. New**

**York: Three Rivers Press, 1998. Another excellent traditional presentation is found in Nurjan Mirahmadi's *The Healing Power of Sufi Meditation*. Detroit, MI: Islamic Supreme Council of America, 2005.**