

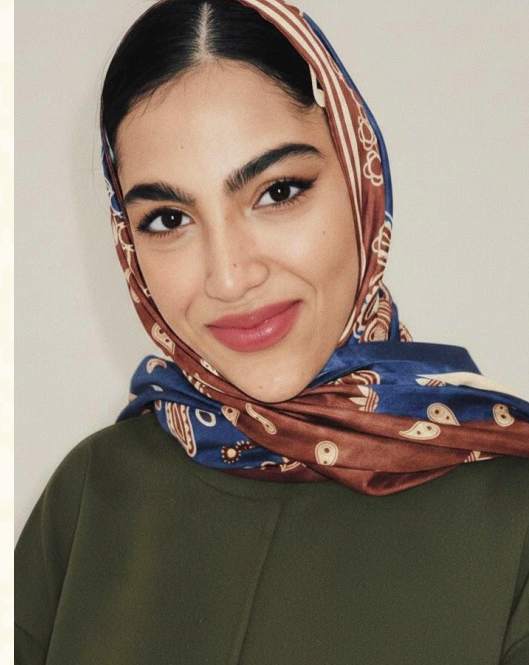
Mishaal Javed and Miguel Farias

From Remembrance to Insight: *Hudur al-Qalb* and *Basirah* in *Salat* and *Dhikr*

Sufi epistemology locates the *qalb* (spiritual heart) as a locus of perception through which *basirah* (heart-insight) and certainty (*yaqeen*) may arise. While classical literature offers rich accounts of such ways of knowing, contemporary psychological and contemplative science discussions often neglect the epistemic and therapeutic dimensions of Islamic devotional practices such as *salat* and *dhikr*. This paper addresses that gap through a qualitative investigation of *salat* and *dhikr* as heart-centred practices of discernment, examining how their reported therapeutic effects are bound up with epistemic, devotional, and ethical transformation as described through participants' accounts of well-being.

Drawing on open-ended qualitative responses from $n = 41$ practitioners of *salat/dhikr* and/or mindfulness, analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, the paper examines how practitioners themselves describe the conditions and outcomes of heart-centred worship. The analysis is situated in dialogue with classical formulations of *hudur al-qalb* articulated by scholars such as al-Ghazali, alongside contemporary psychological models of attention, presence and absorption. Two interrelated themes illuminate an epistemic pathway from attention to insight. First, participants consistently describe cognitive and affective clarity, characterised by mental settling and *hudur al-qalb* (a gathered presence of the heart in worship, often expressed as *khushu*), alongside a reorganisation of perspective that enables calmer and more deliberate judgement. Second, this clarity is frequently framed as relational and purposive: practitioners describe prayer and remembrance as a means of seeking guidance and being heard by Allah, resulting in a sense of moral direction, reassurance, and discernment.

While both Islamic-only and mindfulness-only participants described similar shifts in attention and perspective that yielded clarity and focus, Islamic-only accounts more frequently framed these shifts within a theocentric ontology, emphasising the temporariness of worldly concerns (*dunya*) and a loosening of attachment (*ta'alluq*) through reorientation towards God, often articulated through the language of *tawakkul*. This qualitative divergence is placed in dialogue with neuroimaging research comparing *dhikr* and mindfulness body-scan meditation, where *dhikr* shows overlapping activations associated with focused attention and positive affect, alongside increased default mode network activity, suggesting heightened self-referential processing during remembrance. I argue that, in these accounts, *hudur al-qalb* functions as an epistemic practice: a cultivated mode of *khushu*, mediated by *niyyah*, through which practitioners describe insight as becoming recognisable through its fruits. This maps onto Islamic models that locate *yaqeen* (*certitude*) and *basirah* (*insight*) as fruits of remembrance and worship. By foregrounding ordinary criteria of discernment drawn from lived practice, this study contributes to debates on the validation of experiential knowledge and the relevance of Sufi epistemology for modern psychological, therapeutic, and ethical inquiry.



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Mishaal Javed is a recent graduate of the MSc Psychology programme at the University of Greenwich. Her work focuses on Islamic contemplative practice, mental wellbeing, Islamic epistemology and the psychology of religion. Her dissertation, currently being developed for publication, compares *salat* and *dhikr* with mindfulness meditation using a mixed-methods design, with qualitative analysis foregrounding clarity, detachment, and guidance as lived outcomes of practice. She currently works as an Assistant Psychologist with Psicon, and as a part-time research assistant with Dr Miguel Farias (Coventry University) supporting research in the psychology of religion and contemplative science. Alongside her research, Mishaal is a musician and artist, and co-founder of Kairo Girls' School.



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