

THE *IHSAN* HADITH AS THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION OF *MURAQABAH*: A COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH CONTEMPORARY MINDFULNESS

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Abstract

This study investigates *muraqabah* as an Islamic form of mindfulness by analyzing the Hadith of *Ihsan* (Hadith of Jibril) as recorded in Sahih Muslim. Employing a qualitative methodology grounded in a subjective hermeneutic approach, the study interprets *ihsan* as a theocentric mode of consciousness defined by continuous awareness of divine presence and oversight, articulated in the prophetic statement: "To worship Allah as though you see Him; and if you do not see Him, then know that He sees you." The findings demonstrate that while *muraqabah* shares functional similarities with contemporary mindfulness, such as enhancing inner tranquillity, emotional regulation, and attentiveness, it is fundamentally distinct in its transcendental orientation toward Allah. Rather than self-referential awareness, Islamic mindfulness is rooted in divine awareness (*muraqabah*), sincerity (*ikhlas*), and spiritual intensity, positioning consciousness within a relational and ethical framework. Core religious practices, including prayer (*salah*), Qur'anic recitation, remembrance (*dhikr*), and self-accountability (*muhasabah*), function as practical mechanisms for cultivating mindfulness within the paradigm of *ihsan*, deepening devotion and moral sensitivity. Unlike

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secular mindfulness approaches, which primarily prioritise psychological well-being and stress reduction, *muraqabah* integrates spiritual, ethical, and psychological dimensions within a holistic Islamic worldview. The study further highlights the relevance of *Ihsan*-based mindfulness for contemporary Islamic psychospiritual and therapeutic contexts, particularly in addressing anxiety and fostering emotional balance. Ultimately, this research affirms that the Hadith of *Ihsan* constitutes the foundational framework for *muraqabah*, offering comprehensive guidance for both the spiritual cultivation and social conduct of Muslims in modern life.

Keywords: *Muraqabah*; Hadith of *Ihsan*; *Ihsan*; Mindfulness.

Khulasah

Kajian ini meneliti konsep *muraqabah* sebagai bentuk *mindfulness* dalam Islam melalui analisis Hadis *Ihsan* (Hadis Jibril) sebagaimana direkodkan dalam *Sahih Muslim*. Dengan menggunakan metodologi kualitatif berasaskan pendekatan hermeneutik subjektif, kajian ini mentafsirkan *Ihsan* sebagai suatu bentuk kesedaran ketuhanan yang berterusan terhadap kehadiran dan pengawasan Allah, sebagaimana dinyatakan dalam sabda Nabi SAW: "Hendaklah engkau menyembah Allah seolah-olah engkau melihat-Nya; dan jika engkau tidak melihat-Nya, maka sesungguhnya Dia melihatmu." Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa walaupun *muraqabah* mempunyai persamaan fungsi dengan *mindfulness* kontemporari, seperti meningkatkan ketenangan dalaman, pengawalan emosi, dan tahap kepekaan, ia secara asasnya berbeza dari segi orientasi transendennya yang berpusatkan hubungan dengan Allah. Tidak seperti kesedaran sendiri yang bersifat sekular, *mindfulness* dalam Islam berakar pada kesedaran terhadap Allah (*muraqabah*), keikhlasan, dan keamatan spiritual, sekali gus meletakkan kesedaran dalam kerangka hubungan ketuhanan dan etika. Amalan agama teras seperti solat,

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bacaan al-Quran, zikir, dan muhasabah berfungsi sebagai mekanisme praktikal untuk memupuk *mindfulness* dalam kerangka Ihsan, sekali gus memperdalam penghayatan ibadah dan sensitiviti moral. Berbeza dengan pendekatan *mindfulness* sekular yang menekankan kesejahteraan psikologi dan pengurangan tekanan semata-mata, *muraqabah* mengintegrasikan dimensi spiritual, etika, dan psikologi dalam suatu pandangan hidup Islam yang holistik. Kajian ini turut menonjolkan kerelevanan *mindfulness* berasaskan Ihsan dalam konteks psikospiritual dan terapeutik Islam kontemporari, khususnya dalam menangani keresahan dan membentuk keseimbangan emosi. Kesimpulannya, kajian ini menegaskan bahawa Hadis Ihsan merupakan asas konseptual bagi *muraqabah*, serta menyediakan panduan menyeluruh untuk pembinaan kerohanian dan pembentukan akhlak sosial umat Islam dalam kehidupan moden.

Kata kunci: *Muraqabah*; Hadis *Ihsan*; Ihsan; *Mindfulness*.

Introduction

In recent decades, mindfulness has gained significant attention in psychological and therapeutic discourse as an effective approach to enhancing mental well-being. Originally popularised within clinical and secular contexts, mindfulness has increasingly been adapted across diverse cultural and religious settings. Among Muslim scholars and practitioners, this development has prompted efforts to reinterpret mindfulness within an Islamic epistemological and spiritual framework, giving rise to what is commonly referred to as Islamic Mindfulness. This adaptation raises important conceptual and theological questions, particularly regarding its foundations in Islamic sources and its relationship to established Islamic spiritual practices such as *muraqabah*.

A critical issue in this discourse concerns the extent to which mindfulness can be legitimately aligned with Islamic concepts without undermining Islam's distinct theological and epistemological principles. While some scholars argue for a close affinity between mindfulness and *muraqabah*, others caution against uncritical equivalence, emphasising the need for a rigorous textual and conceptual analysis grounded in authoritative Islamic sources, especially the Hadith literature.

Previous Studies

Previous studies have identified mindfulness as an effective technique for reducing stress and work-related fatigue. Tarissa, for example, reports that mindfulness practices can alleviate stress and uncontrolled fatigue caused by excessive workloads.¹ Similarly, research by Mardiah et al. demonstrates that mindfulness contributes to increased breast milk production and reduces anxiety among the elderly.² The accumulation of empirical evidence supporting mindfulness has encouraged its broader development and contextual adaptation by practitioners. In Indonesia, this process has led Muslim practitioners to formulate what is described as Islamic Mindfulness.

Several scholars, including Nazila Isgandarova, Justin Parrott, and Meidiana Dwiyaniti, suggest that mindfulness shares conceptual similarities with *muraqabah* in Islam, thereby providing a potential entry point for the

¹ Tarissa J. Hidajat et al., "Mindfulness-Based Interventions for Stress and Burnout in Teachers: A Systematic Review," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 134 (2023), 1-19, doi:10.1016/j.tate.2023.104303.

² Mardiah, Sri Sumarni, and Muflihah Isnawati, *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Tingkatkan Produksi ASI Ibu Menyusui* (Bangka Tengah: The Journal Publishing, 2023); Ni Komang et al., "Optimalisasi Kemandirian Lansia Dengan Penyakit Kronis Dalam Penurunan Tingkat Kecemasan Melalui Terapi Mindfulness," *Communaire: Journal of Community Service* 2(1) (2023), 1-80.

development of Islamic Mindfulness.³ However, this position is not universally accepted. Victor challenges the notion of a comprehensive equivalence, arguing that mindfulness is not a novel construct but a long-standing element within the spiritual traditions of major world religions. His argument aligns with the historical observation that religious communities have consistently practised forms of spiritual attentiveness and self-awareness grounded in their sacred texts, regardless of the extent of explicit textual elaboration.⁴

Despite these discussions, the concept of Islamic Mindfulness, particularly when anchored in *muraqabah* has yet to be sufficiently examined through its primary Islamic foundations. Notably, the discipline of Hadith does not contain works that explicitly employ *muraqabah* as a chapter title. Nevertheless, the concept appears in *Riyadh al-Salihin* by al-Nawawi, a text with a strong Sufi orientation, where one of the central foundations of *muraqabah* is the Hadith of *Ihsan*, also known as the Hadith of Gabriel.⁵

Existing research on Islamic Mindfulness has not adequately engaged with Islamic textual sources, particularly the Hadith of *Ihsan*, which constitutes the principal basis of *muraqabah* as a form of spiritual awareness in Islam. The absence of an in-depth analysis of

³ Nazila Isgandarova, "Muraqaba as a Mindfulness-Based Therapy in Islamic Psychotherapy," *Journal of Religion and Health* 58(4) (2019), 1146-1160; Justin Parrott, *How to Be a Mindful Muslim: An Exercise in Islamic Meditation* (United State: Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, 2017).

⁴ Victor Imaduddin Ahmad and Ahmad Suyuthi, "Salat Sebagai Sarana Pelatihan Mindfulness: Jawaban Untuk Tantangan Pendidikan Islam Menghadapi the Age of Complexity," *Akademika* 13(1) (2019), 105-121; William Michael Treanor, "Taking Text Too Seriously: Modern Textualism, Original Meaning, and the Case of Amar's Bill of Rights," *Michigan Law Review* 106(3) (2007), 487-543.

⁵ Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Riyadh al-Salihin*, ed. Mahir Yasin Al-Fahl (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir, 2007), 68-73.

this Hadith constrains the formulation of an authentic Islamic Mindfulness framework, as a nuanced understanding of *muraqabah* is inseparable from its textual foundations. Furthermore, ambiguity remains regarding the similarities and differences between *muraqabah* and mindfulness. While some scholars assert their equivalence, Victor questions the validity of this claim, and no study to date has systematically examined these concepts from both conceptual and theological perspectives.

These gaps underscore the necessity for research that not only clarifies points of convergence and divergence between mindfulness and *muraqabah*, but also firmly articulates the foundational basis of Islamic Mindfulness through the Hadith of *Ihsan*. Accordingly, this study aims to examine in depth how the meaning of *muraqabah*, as derived from the Hadith of *Ihsan*, may be understood in relation to the concept of mindfulness. By focusing on this Hadith as the epistemic foundation of *muraqabah*, the study seeks to elucidate its conceptual relationship. Practically, the findings are expected to contribute to the development of therapeutic interventions for stress and anxiety within Muslim psychotherapy contexts.

Research Methode

This qualitative study adopts a descriptive–analytical design, consistent with textual and interpretive research, and is structured around an inductive analytical pattern.⁶ The primary analytical framework employed is subjective hermeneutics, which is utilised as a methodological tool for interpreting the text of the Hadith of *Ihsan*.

In addition, the study incorporates a concise process of *takhrij al-hadith* based on the methodology formulated by Zayn al-Din al-‘Iraqi, as outlined in his work *al-*

⁶ Samsu, "Metode Penelitian: Teori Dan Aplikasi," in *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, ed. Rusmini (Jambi: Pusaka Jambi, 2017), 13.

Mughni.⁷ Accordingly, the research approach integrates subjective hermeneutics for textual interpretation with al-'Iraqi's *takhrij* method as a systematic tool for identifying and verifying Hadiths.

This study adopts a philosophical–interpretive approach grounded in subjective hermeneutics, focusing on the dynamic interaction between text and reader. Subjective hermeneutics, as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), emphasises that textual meaning is not fixed or exclusively determined by authorial intent, but emerges through the process of interpretation by the reader. Within this hermeneutical framework, the interpretation of a text is not strictly regulated once it has entered the public domain; instead, every reader possesses the legitimate capacity to interpret it. Accordingly, a text need not be confined to the original ideas or intentions of its author. Gadamer asserts that readers inevitably bring their own historical consciousness, traditions, and identities into the interpretive process, thereby enabling them to engage with and enter the author's conceptual world.

In this context, interpretation is shaped by the reader's pre-understanding and horizon of meaning. Gadamer highlights three key elements that influence this process: what the reader already possesses (*Vorhabe*), what the reader initially perceives or anticipates (*Vorsicht*), and what the reader projects or expects to attain through interpretation (*Vorgriff*). These elements underscore the fluid and evolving nature of understanding, which is central to the subjective hermeneutical approach employed in this study.⁸

⁷ Zayn al-Din 'Abd al-Rahim ibn al-Husayn al-'Iraqi, *Al-Mughni 'an Haml al-Asfar fi Takhrij al-Ihya' min al-Akhbar* (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2005).

⁸ Achmad Khudori Soleh, "Membandingkan Hermeneutika Dengan Ilmu Tafsir," *Tsaqafah* 7(1) (2011), 31.

Hans-Georg Gadamer developed what is commonly known as the theory of historically effected consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) as a framework for understanding texts. From Gadamer's perspective, understanding is never a neutral or purely objective act; rather, it is always shaped by history and human situatedness. To comprehend a text meaningfully, four interrelated stages must be acknowledged.

First, historical consciousness refers to the reader's awareness that their understanding is inevitably influenced by historical, cultural, and social factors. Gadamer emphasizes that a reader cannot fully detach from the traditions, life experiences, and socio-cultural contexts that have shaped their worldview. These external influences continuously affect how meaning is perceived and constructed.

Second, pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*) denotes the initial assumptions, expectations, and prior knowledge that a reader brings before engaging with a text. This pre-understanding is not an obstacle to interpretation but rather a necessary condition that enables understanding in the first place.

Third, fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) describes the dialogical process in which the reader's horizon, formed by their historical and experiential background, interacts with the horizon of the text, which represents the historical context and worldview from which the text emerged. Understanding arises when these two horizons are brought into a productive dialogue, allowing new meaning to emerge beyond both the text and the reader's initial standpoint.

Finally, the application involves discerning the text's meaningful sense by relating its insights to the reader's present situation. For Gadamer, understanding is incomplete without application, as meaning is fully realized

only when it speaks to contemporary concerns and lived realities.

In this way, Gadamer's hermeneutical theory underscores that interpretation is an ongoing, dynamic process shaped by history, dialogue, and contextual engagement rather than a fixed recovery of authorial intent alone.⁹

When approaching Hadith texts from Gadamer's hermeneutical perspective, interpretation must be responsive to the needs and context of the present. In the field of Qur'anic exegesis, this approach has been exemplified by scholars such as Ibn 'Arabi, who employed it in interpreting Sufi-oriented Qur'anic verses, and Hassan Hanafi, whose works demonstrate a nuanced renewal grounded in religious texts.¹⁰ These examples illustrate how subjective hermeneutics enables readers to engage dynamically with the text while considering contemporary concerns.

In this study, a straightforward *takhrij* (source verification) method is employed to examine the Hadith. This method was developed by al-'Iraqi (d. 806 AH), who applied it in the *takhrij* of Hadiths cited in al-Ghazali's *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* (d. 505 AH). The procedure of al-'Iraqi's method is as follows:

1. If a Hadith appears in either or both of the two authentic collections (*Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*), it is sufficient to attribute the Hadith to that source.

⁹ Nur Huda, Nur Hamid, and Muhammad Khoirul Misbah, "Konsep Wasathiyah M. Quraish Shihab dalam Tafsir Al-Misbah (Analisis Hermeneutika Hans-Georg Gadamer)," *International Journal Ihya' Ulum Al-Din* 2 (2020), 198-231.

¹⁰ Muh. Hanif, "Hermeneutika Hans-Georg Gadamer dan Signifikansinya Terhadap Penafsiran Al-Quran," *MAGHZA: Jurnal Ilmu al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 2(1) (2017), 93-108.

2. If the Hadith is not found in these two collections, the narrators are identified from the remaining six canonical books (beyond the *Sahihayn*).
3. When the Hadith exists in one of these six books, further tracing to other sources is conducted only if it serves a beneficial purpose, for example, if the narrator is widely regarded as reliable or if the wording of the Hadith corresponds more closely with the version cited in *Ihya'*.
4. If the Hadith is absent from all six canonical books, its sources are then sought in other well-known Hadith collections.

By combining Gadamerian hermeneutics with al-'Iraqi's systematic *takhrij* method, this study ensures that the interpretation of the Hadith of *Ihsan* is both contextually relevant and firmly grounded in classical Hadith scholarship.¹¹

In the study of the Hadith of *Ihsan*, the *takhrij* method is essential for tracing the Hadith to its original sources. However, for the purposes of this study, the investigation is limited to confirming its presence in *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*. Further extensive tracing is deemed unnecessary, as the Hadith is already documented in these collections, which Hadith scholars universally recognize as authentic.

Results and Discussions

1. Mindfulness

Recent years have witnessed a surge of interest in mindfulness, attracting attention from both scholars and organizational practitioners. According to Mariana and Leyland, mindfulness can be generally described as the practice of being aware of and attending to present-moment experiences without immediately evaluating or interpreting

¹¹ Mahmud al-Tahhan, *Usul al-Takhrij wa Dirasat al-Asanid* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'arif, 1996), 31-32.

them.¹² In this sense, mindfulness enables individuals to observe their internal and external experiences objectively, without attaching judgments or interpretations to the objects of attention. Consequently, mindfulness enhances one's capacity for non-reactive awareness and self-regulation.

Daphne M. Davis and Jeffrey A. Hayes define mindfulness as a form of psychological awareness, citing Germer's interpretation that mindfulness involves living moment to moment with attentive awareness of the mind.¹³ Similarly, they refer to Martin's description, which frames mindfulness as a calm, nonattached psychological state in which attention is sustained without bias or fixation. These conceptualizations share commonalities with Russell's definition, which emphasizes maintaining focus on the present moment. While subtle differences exist among these definitions, they converge on the central idea of sustained, non-judgmental attention to the present.¹⁴

¹² Mariana Toniolo-Barrios and Leyland Pitt, "Mindfulness and The Challenges of Working from Home in Times of Crisis," *Business Horizons* 64(2) (2021), 2.

¹³ Daphne M. Davis and Jeffrey A. Hayes, "What are the Benefits of Mindfulness? A Practice Review of Psychotherapy-Related Research," *Psychotherapy* 48(2) (2011), 198-208.

¹⁴ Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D., is an internationally renowned scientist, author, and meditation teacher who played a pivotal role in introducing mindfulness into mainstream medicine and society. He is the founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Clinic (1979) and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society (1995) at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, where he served as Professor of Medicine until his retirement in 2000. His bestselling books, such as *Full Catastrophe Living and Wherever You Go, There You Are*, have been translated into numerous languages and have made mindfulness meditation widely accessible. Kabat-Zinn's work has significantly influenced the integration of mindfulness across various sectors, including healthcare, education, corporate environments, law, and sports. (Source: <https://www.mindfulnesscds.com>, cited 13 November 2022, 09:14 WIB).

Jon Kabat-Zinn, a leading figure in mindfulness research, offers a widely cited definition: "*The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment to moment.*" This definition underscores the intentional effort required to cultivate mindfulness while fully inhabiting each moment, resisting distractions or intrusive memories that may cloud present-moment awareness. Shauna Shapiro, a clinical psychologist and expert in mindfulness and self-compassion, identifies three core components in Kabat-Zinn's definition: (a) attention, (b) attitude, and (c) intention.¹⁵

Kabat-Zinn further notes that mindfulness is inherently variable across individuals and moments: awareness may be complete at certain times but interrupted at others due to internal or external distractions. As he states, "*We are all mindful to one degree or another, moment by moment,*" highlighting the dynamic and fluctuating nature of mindfulness practice.¹⁶

2. *Muraqabah* as an Islamic Mindfulness Concept

Etymologically, *muraqabah* derives from the Arabic root meaning "to guard," "to watch," or "to pay attention."¹⁷ Conceptually, *muraqabah* refers to the continual awareness of and attentiveness to Allah's presence. Ibrahim al-Khawwas defines *muraqabah* as the sincerity of the heart for the sake of Allah, whether one is alone or in a crowd. This definition highlights *muraqabah* as an attitude of self-regulation, wherein a person remains conscious of Allah in solitude, ensuring that their actions are unseen by others,

¹⁵ Noah G. Bruce et al., "Psychotherapist Mindfulness and The Psychotherapy Process," *Psychotherapy* 47(1) (2010), 83=97.

¹⁶ J. David Creswell, "Mindfulness Interventions," *Annual Review of Psychology* 68 (2017), 494.

¹⁷ Ibrahim Mustafa et al., *al-Mu'jam al-Wasit*, ed. Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah (Cairo: Dar al-Da'wah, n.d.), 363.

yet continues to remember Allah even in social or crowded situations.¹⁸

Ibn Qayyim similarly describes *muraqabah* as a servant's constant knowledge and belief in Allah's supervision over them, both physically and mentally.¹⁹ Al-Ghazali frames it as awareness of the All-Watching One coupled with setting one's intentions toward Allah, while al-Qushayri emphasizes a continuous consciousness of Allah's supervision.²⁰ Collectively, these definitions converge on the notion that *muraqabah* represents an ongoing state of spiritual vigilance, linking awareness of divine oversight to ethical and devotional conduct.

Al-Muhasibi further elaborates that *muraqabah* constitutes the highest level of *haya'* (shyness before Allah) and categorizes it into three dimensions: first, *muraqabah* in obedience, achieved through performing righteous actions; second, *muraqabah* in disobedience, manifested by refraining from sinful acts; and third, *muraqabah* of the heart, wherein one guards the inner self from impure thoughts.²¹ As exemplified by the prophetic instruction, "*Worship as if you see Allah; if you cannot, then surely Allah sees you,*" al-Muhasibi asserts that this third dimension is the most challenging and laborious, surpassing outward physical acts such as fasting or

¹⁸ Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Ahmad ibn Isma'il al-Khawwas, a prominent Sufi teacher, authored several essays on Sufism. He passed away in 290 AH. (Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Rahman al-Maghrawi, *Mawsu'ah Mawaqif al-Salaffi al-'Aqidah wa al-Manhaj wa al-Tarbiyyah* (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Islamiyyah, n.d.), 451.

¹⁹ Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Madarij al-Salikin bayn Manazil Iyyak Na'bud wa Iyyak Nasta'in* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1973), 2: 66.

²⁰ Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 4: 398; 'Abd al-Karim ibn Hawazin al-Qushayri, *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, n.d.), 1: 329.

²¹ Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Zahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, ed. al-Arnaut (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, n.d.), 107.

charitable giving, because it requires continual vigilance over the heart.²²

Al-Ghazali similarly regards *muraqabah* as a state of the heart cultivated through knowledge that shapes both internal and external conduct. This knowledge entails awareness that Allah observes the innermost thoughts, knows all secrets, supervises human deeds, and governs all efforts. Importantly, in this understanding, the secrets of the heart are no less known to Allah than visible actions are to others, underscoring the inseparability of inner consciousness and divine oversight in the practice of *muraqabah*.²³

3. Correlation of the Muraqabah Concept with Mindfulness

Muraqabah, a spiritual practice in Islam emphasizing awareness of divine oversight, exhibits notable parallels with the modern concept of mindfulness, which focuses on full attentiveness to the present moment. In *muraqabah*, individuals cultivate constant remembrance of Allah through practices such as *dhikr* (invocation), *tafakkur* (contemplation), and *tadabbur* (reflection on divine signs), fostering heightened sensitivity to the divine presence. This process resonates with mindfulness, which encourages individuals to remain fully present in their current experience, free from distraction and evaluative judgment. Both approaches aim to cultivate mental and emotional equilibrium; however, while mindfulness is typically secular and oriented toward psychological well-being, *muraqabah* is deeply rooted in a spiritual relationship with God.

The correlation between *muraqabah* and mindfulness is further reflected in their therapeutic applications. In the

²² Harith ibn Asad al-Muhasibi, *Risalah al-Mustarshidin*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghuddah (Syria: Maktab al-Matbu'ah al-Islamiyyah, 1971), 79.

²³ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, 4: 398.

context of Islamic psychotherapy, *muraqabah* functions as an awareness-based practice analogous to techniques such as Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (MBCT). Through recitation of *dhikr* and reflection on Qur'anic verses, practitioners experience inner peace and stress alleviation, producing effects comparable to mindfulness exercises focused on breathing or bodily sensations. Both methodologies involve guided meditative practices that calm the mind; however, *muraqabah* incorporates a spiritual dimension by situating divine oversight as the ultimate source of serenity.²⁴

Moreover, the Islamic ritual of *salat* (prayer), closely associated with *muraqabah*, demonstrates similarities with mindfulness through its structured attentiveness, devotional focus (*khushu'*), and Qur'anic recitation. Practicing *salat* requires full engagement with the present activity, mirroring mindfulness exercises emphasizing sustained attention. The deliberate, rhythmic movements performed with *tuma'ninah* (calmness) induce physical relaxation, while *khushu'* nurtures inner tranquility, analogous to mindfulness fostering emotional balance through centered awareness. Consequently, both *muraqabah* and mindfulness aim to enhance self-awareness and holistic well-being, albeit via frameworks shaped by differing spiritual and philosophical orientations.²⁵

The observed correlation underscores the potential for Islamic spiritual practices to complement contemporary psychological approaches while preserving their divine focus. This connection provides a foundation for further theological exploration, particularly through the Hadith of Gabriel, which articulates the concept of *ihsan*, elevating

²⁴ Esma Sayin, "Psychological and Therapeutic Effects of *Muraqaba*," *Turk-Islam Medeniyeti: Academic Arastirmalar Dergisi* 10(19) (2015), 125-134.

²⁵ Isgandarova, "Muraqaba as a Mindfulness-Based Therapy", 1146.

mindfulness to a state of spiritual excellence within the Islamic tradition.

4. The Hadith of Gabriel and the Concept of Ihsan

The Hadith of Gabriel serves as a foundational text for *muraqabah* and provides the theological basis for legitimizing the concept of mindfulness within an Islamic framework. This Hadith, a longer narration addressing key dimensions of *Islam*, *Iman* (faith), and *Ihsan* (excellence in worship), contains a specific segment that explicitly elaborates on *ihsan*:

قَالَ: فَأَخْبِرْنِي عَنِ الْإِحْسَانِ. قَالَ: أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ،
فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ (رَوَاهُ مُسْلِمٌ)

Translation: "(Muhammad to Gabriel) Inform me about *Ihsan*." He (Gabriel) answered, "It is that you should serve Allah as though you could see Him, for though you cannot see Him yet (know that) He sees you." (Narrated by Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj)²⁶

5. Takhrij of the Hadith of Gabriel on Ihsan and Its Classification by Muhaddithin

The Hadith of Gabriel is extensively recorded across major Hadith collections, reflecting its theological and spiritual significance. In Musnad Ahmad, it is narrated by both 'Umar ibn al-Khattab and 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar from his father.²⁷ Al-Bukhari records the Hadith in *Sahih* under the heading *Su' al Jibril* in *Kitab al-Iman*, linking it to the five pillars of Islam and the six pillars of faith.²⁸ Al-Bukhari also records a variant in *Kitab al-'Ilm*, under the chapter *Qawluh 'inna Allaha 'indah 'ilm al-sa'ah*, from Abu Hurayrah. This

²⁶ Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj Al-Naysaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, ed. Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Baqi (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi, n.d.), 1: 28.

²⁷ Ahmad ibn Hanbal al-Shaybani, *Musnad Ahmad*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arnaut (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 1999), 1: 435.

²⁸ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 6: 115.

version concludes with a reference to Surah Luqman 31:34, highlighting Allah's comprehensive knowledge and reinforcing the theological and spiritual dimensions of *ihsan* and *muraqabah*.

Muslim narrates the Hadith in *Sahih, Bayan al-Iman wa al-Islam wa al-Ihsan (Kitab al-Iman)*, from both 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar and Abu Hurayrah.²⁹ Muslim's version emphasizes the foundational role of *ihsan* in Islamic belief and practice, particularly in relation to *muraqabah*.³⁰ Abu Dawud includes it in *Bab fi al-Qadar (Kitab al-Sunnah)*, narrated via 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar, focusing on predestination, while al-Nasa'i records it in *Bab Tawqir al-'Ulama' (Kitab Ahl al-'Ilm)*, adding a reference to *ghusl* in response to the question, "What is Islam?" The chapter title, *فَعَجِبْنَا لِتَوْقِيرِهِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ*, underscores the respect for knowledge demonstrated by Jibril.³¹

Ibn Majah includes the Hadith in *Kitab al-Iman*, with chains via both 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar and Abu Hurayrah. Modern scholars, including al-Albani and al-Arnaut, rate the *isnad* of these narrations as *Sahih*.³² Generally, these versions are cited in theological contexts rather than ethical or Sufi frameworks. In all cases, *ihsan* follows Islam and Iman, although the sequence of the latter two varies. Notably, only Muslim explicitly titles the chapter with *ihsan*, emphasizing its role in establishing the concept.

Among Sufi authorities, the Hadith of Gabriel is foundational in the teaching of *muraqabah*. Al-Qushayri

²⁹ Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, ed. Muhammad Zuhayr ibn Nashir al-Nashir (Beirut: Dar Thawq al-Najah, 1422), 1: 19.

³⁰ Al-Naysaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, 1: 29-30.

³¹ Sulaiman ibn al-Ash'ath Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abi Dawud* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, n.d.), 4: 359; Ahmad ibn Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i, *Sunan al-Nasa'i*, ed. Shu'ayb al-Arnaut (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 2001), 5: 381.

³² Muhammad ibn Yazid Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 1: 44.

cites it at the beginning of his chapter on *muraqabah*, linking it to Qur'an 33:52 and commenting:

هَذَا الَّذِي قَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُن تَرَاهُ
فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ إِشَارَةً إِلَى حَالِ الْمُرَاقَبَةِ

Translation: "This is what the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: 'If you do not see Him, He sees you,' indicating the state of *muraqabah*."³³

Similarly, al-Sarraj references the Hadith at the start of the *muraqabah* chapter in *al-Luma'*, and al-Muhasibi begins his discussion in *Risalah al-Mustarshidin* with the same narration. These applications within Sufi literature confirm its centrality in conceptualizing *muraqabah* and illustrate the Hadith's enduring role in linking spiritual awareness to divine supervision.

6. The Interpretation of *Ihsan* in the Hadith of Gabriel and Its Correlation with *Muraqabah*

The term *ihsan* in Gabriel's Hadith is a pivotal concept that underpins the Sufi understanding of *muraqabah*, as cited by scholars such as al-Qushayri, al-Ghazali, al-Muhasibi, and Ibn Qayyim in their respective works. Etymologically, *ihsan* derives from the Arabic root *يُحَسِّنُ* – *أَحْسَنُ*, meaning "to do perfectly or skillfully" and "to confer benefit." According to Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, in the context of this Hadith, *ihsan* refers primarily to achieving perfection and skill in worship, fulfilling conditions, pillars, sincerity, and solemnity.³⁴

Gabriel's Hadith explicates Islam, Iman (faith), and *Ihsan* in a question-and-answer format between the angel Gabriel and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

³³ Al-Qushayri, *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah*, 330.

³⁴ Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1397), 1: 120.

The Prophet's response, "*Ihsan* is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you cannot do so, then indeed He sees you," indicates two levels of spiritual awareness. The phrase "أَنْ تَرَاهُ" represents the highest level, wherein the servant internalizes the feeling of witnessing Allah's presence in their heart, as though perceiving Him directly. The phrase "فإنه يراك" signifies the level of acknowledging Allah's omnipresent observation, fostering vigilance and conscientiousness in all actions. Both levels derive from knowledge of Allah and reverential fear (*taqwa*).³⁵

Aligned with the concept of *ikhlas* (sincerity), al-Khatibi, as cited by al-Thibi, interprets *ihsan* as sincerity—the essential requirement for valid faith and worship. Actions lacking sincerity do not achieve the level of *ihsan*. Al-Tibi further emphasizes that "as if you see Him" serves as a safeguard against hidden shirk (polytheism), encouraging humility and devotion.³⁶ Ibn al-Mulaqqin underscores that *ihsan* entails awareness of divine supervision and perfecting solemnity in worship.³⁷ Similarly, al-Nawawi notes that attaining *ihsan* requires knowledge of Allah's observation, ethical conduct, and maintaining sincerity in worship.³⁸

Abu Isma'il al-Ansari categorizes *ihsan* into three dimensions: first, in intention, achieved through knowledge, purification of motives, and strengthened resolve; second, in appearance, through adherence to Shari'ah-mandated conduct; third, in behavior and attitude, manifesting awareness of Allah's constant observation.³⁹

³⁵ Al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, 1: 120.

³⁶ Al-Husayn ibn 'Abdillah al-Tibi, *Al-Kashif 'an Haqa'iq al-Sunan*, (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Mukarramah, 1997), 2: 429.

³⁷ Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Abd al-Rahim al-Mubarakfuri, *Tuhfat al-Ahwardhi bi Sharh Jami' al-Tirmidhi*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 7: 291.

³⁸ Al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, 1: 120.

³⁹ Al-Tibi, *al-Kashif 'an Haqa'iq al-Sunan*, 2: 430.

Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani cautions against the exaggerated Sufi interpretations (*ghuluw al-sufiyyah*), which misrepresent the term as signifying existential annihilation.⁴⁰ Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali considers *ihsan* as activating the “eyes of the heart” akin to physical sight, representing the pinnacle of faith.⁴¹

Al-Wallawi distinguishes between the highest level of *ihsan*, worshipping with the perception of seeing Allah and the subsequent level, *muraqabah*, where one worships with the awareness that Allah observes them, whether alone or in a crowd. In contrast, al-‘Uthaymin emphasizes the motivational quality of worship: performing acts out of love and devotion to Allah ensures perfection, whereas worship out of fear fulfills obligations, both reflecting significant spiritual levels. *Ihsan* can also extend to interpersonal conduct, including ethical behavior toward others.⁴²

The Hadith of Gabriel functions as the primary textual foundation for *muraqabah*. Indicators derived from the Hadith include consciousness of divine supervision, sincerity, and purity of heart, as noted by Ibn al-Mulaqqin.⁴³

Early Sufi scholars, including al-Muhasibi, utilized this Hadith to structure *muraqabah* into three dimensions: obedience through action, abstention from disobedience, and inner vigilance over the heart, as documented in *Risalah al-Mustarshidin*.⁴⁴ Likewise, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah incorporated the Hadith into his conceptualization of *muraqabah* in *Madarij al-Salikin*.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Al-‘Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, 1: 120.

⁴¹ Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Wallawi, *Zahirah al-‘Uqba fi Sharh al-Mujtaba* (Damascus: Dar al-Mi‘raj al-Dawliyah, 2003), 209.

⁴² Muhammad ibn Salih al-‘Uthaymin, *Sharh Riyad al-Salihin*, (Cairo: Dar al-Salam, n.d.), 1: 480.

⁴³ Muhammad ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sadiqi, *Dalil Falihin li Turuq Riyad al-Salihin* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma‘rifah, 2004), 56.

⁴⁴ Al-Muhasibi, *Risalah al-Mustarshidin*, 81.

⁴⁵ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Madarij al-Salikin*, 2: 65.

The correlation between *ihsan* in Gabriel's Hadith and the practice of *muraqabah* is profound. *Ihsan* encapsulates worship with acute awareness of Allah's observation, fostering spiritual vigilance and sincerity. The phrases "to worship Allah as if you see Him" and "indeed He sees you" directly underlie *muraqabah*, wherein the servant internalizes divine supervision, resulting in heightened consciousness, moral rectitude, and sincerity in both worship and daily conduct. Consequently, Gabriel's Hadith defines *ihsan* as the pinnacle of spiritual excellence and establishes *muraqabah* as its practical manifestation, guiding believers toward perpetual God-consciousness and ethical integrity.

7. Mindfulness in the Context of the Hadith of *Ihsan*

A subjective hermeneutic analysis of mindfulness within the framework of *ihsan*, as articulated in the Hadith of Gabriel, provides profound insights into its spiritual significance and contemporary relevance for Muslims. This approach enables an immersive engagement with the Hadith recorded in Sahih Muslim, wherein the Prophet Muhammad SAW defines *ihsan* as worshipping Allah "as though you see Him," and, if that is unattainable, maintaining awareness that Allah observes all actions.⁴⁶

This perspective emphasizes that mindfulness in the context of *ihsan* surpasses ordinary attentiveness; it embodies a heightened state of consciousness infused with a divine dimension. The practice involves continual awareness of Allah's oversight, fostering moral vigilance, sincerity, and ethical conduct in both worship and daily life.

Contemporary qualitative studies among Muslim communities in the United Kingdom indicate that many perceive a strong alignment between mindfulness and Islamic practices. Rituals such as *salat* (prayer) and Qur'anic recitation serve as practical applications of this

⁴⁶ Al-Naysaburi, *Sahih Muslim*, 1: 28.

mindfulness, enabling believers to focus on Allah and cultivate a deeper spiritual connection. These findings suggest that *ihsan*, as a form of mindfulness, retains its spiritual potency while demonstrating adaptability to modern cultural and social contexts.⁴⁷

Subjectively, *ihsan* encourages individuals to cultivate heightened spiritual awareness in both worship and daily life. For example, during *salat* (prayer), the concept of "as though you see Him" motivates Muslims to internalize Allah's presence, thereby enhancing devotion, focus, and concentration. When such direct visualization is challenging, the awareness that "He sees you" serves as a guiding reminder to maintain sincerity and mindfulness in every action and supplication. Classical scholars, including Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani and al-Nawawi, emphasize that *ihsan* represents the perfection of worship, rooted in devotion, sincerity, and the constant consciousness of Allah’s oversight. This experience is inherently personal, shaped by an individual’s spiritual imagination and level of faith, resulting in a diverse range of interpretations and experiences of *ihsan*.⁴⁸

Moreover, mindfulness in *ihsan* extends beyond theoretical understanding to practical implementation in daily life. Devotional prayer (*khushu’*) exemplifies this principle, as individuals endeavor to remain fully present before Allah. Similarly, acts of remembrance (*dhikr*), such as the conscious recitation of "Subhanallah" or "Astaghfirullah," foster a sustained inner connection with Allah even outside formal worship. Within Sufi traditions, the practice of *muraqabah* cultivates continuous awareness of Allah’s oversight, as highlighted by scholars such as al-Qushayri and al-Sarraj, who explicitly link this practice to

⁴⁷ Eman AlBedah, Vuokko Wallace, and Paul Chadwick, "Barriers and Facilitators of Mindfulness-Based Interventions for Muslims in the UK," *Mindfulness* 16 (2025), 1364-1375.

⁴⁸ Al-‘Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, 1: 120.

the Hadith of *Ihsan*. Additionally, self-reflection (*muhāsabah*) functions as a critical mechanism for evaluating one's actions and intentions, ensuring alignment with the consciousness of Allah's presence, as elucidated by Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali.⁴⁹

Even in social interactions, *ihsan* manifests through honesty, patience, and justice toward others, which, according to al-'Uthaymin, constitutes an essential aspect of *ihsan* toward fellow beings. Collectively, these practices demonstrate that mindfulness in *ihsan* reflects a holistic awareness that permeates all facets of life.

A critical distinction between *muraqabah* in the context of *ihsan* and secular mindfulness warrants consideration. *Muraqabah* is inherently theocentric, with all awareness directed toward Allah, as articulated by al-Muhasibi, who describes it as vigilance in obedience and avoidance of sin for Allah's sake. In contrast, secular mindfulness is largely self-centered, focusing on thoughts, emotions, and environmental stimuli without a God-centric spiritual dimension. The objective of *muraqabah* is to attain closeness to Allah and spiritual excellence, as emphasized by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah in *Madarij al-Salikin*, whereas secular mindfulness primarily aims to enhance psychological well-being, such as reducing stress or improving attentional control. Practically, *muraqabah* involves acts of worship, including prayer and *dhikr*, whereas secular mindfulness employs meditation techniques. Their contextual foundations also differ: *muraqabah* is rooted in Islamic teachings, grounded in the Qur'an and Hadith, while secular mindfulness often draws from Buddhist traditions adapted to contemporary scientific frameworks. For Muslims, *muraqabah* engenders tranquility infused with awe and love for Allah, whereas

⁴⁹ 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Ahmad Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, *Jami' al-'Ulum wa al-Hikam*, ed. Muhammad al-Ahmedi (Syria: Dar al-Salam, 2004), 1: 35.

secular mindfulness offers calm without transcendent meaning.

The practical implications of mindfulness within *ihsan* are evident in both worship and mental health. Cultivating full awareness during prayer enables individuals to concentrate more intently on recitations and ritual movements, rendering worship more meaningful and spiritually vibrant. Similarly, *dhikr* and *muraqabah* provide emotional solace amid life's pressures, while *muhasabah* encourages continuous self-reflection and personal growth. From a mental health perspective, devoted prayer and *muraqabah* have been shown to reduce anxiety, as supported by contemporary studies cited by Shahid Ijaz, while simultaneously fostering a sense of security through the awareness of Allah's constant supervision. Imam al-Ghazali, in *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, emphasizes that *dhikr* and *muraqabah* purify the heart from restlessness, a perspective that resonates with the psychological benefits attributed to secular meditation practices.⁵⁰

In conclusion, through the lens of subjective hermeneutics, mindfulness as articulated in the Hadith of *Ihsan* emerges as a God-centered spiritual awareness that permeates both worship and daily life, transforming routine actions into profoundly meaningful experiences. Its holistic practices, from devoted prayer and *dhikr* to ethical conduct toward others, position *ihsan* as a comprehensive framework for living. Unlike secular mindfulness, which is primarily self-focused, *ihsan* directs awareness toward a deeper, relational consciousness of Allah, fostering both spiritual elevation and psychological well-being.

Conclusion

⁵⁰ Shahid Ijaz, Muhammad Tahir Khalily, and Irshad Ahmad, "Mindfulness in Salah Prayer and Its Association with Mental Health," *Journal of Religion and Health* 56(6) (2017), 2297-2307.

The concept of mindfulness within the framework of *ihsan*, as articulated in the Hadith of Jibril (recorded in *Sahih Muslim*), represents an integrative spiritual paradigm that synthesises divine awareness (*muraqabah*), sincerity, and spiritual intensity in religious practice. According to the Hadith, *ihsan* is defined as worshipping Allah as though one sees Him, and if that is not possible, with the awareness that Allah is ever-watchful. This formulation highlights the transcendental dimension of mindfulness in Islam, which extends beyond the mere present-moment awareness commonly emphasised in secular mindfulness approaches.

In contrast to secular mindfulness, which originates from Buddhist traditions and primarily aims at stress reduction and mental well-being without a theological orientation, *muraqabah* is rooted in the theocentric tradition of Islam. It is understood as a continuous awareness of Allah's oversight, as explained by al-Muhasibi, with the goal of fostering obedience and deterring sinful behaviour. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, in *Madarij al-Salikin*, underscores that *muraqabah* constitutes a spiritual stage in the journey toward closeness with Allah.

Religious practices such as prayer, Qur'anic recitation, *dhikr*, and self-reflection (*muhasabah*) are key mechanisms for cultivating mindfulness within the framework of *ihsan*. The awareness of Allah's presence during worship enhances devotion and fosters a deeper spiritual connection. The phrase "as though you see Him" encourages internalisation of divine presence in prayer, while "He sees you" functions as a continual reminder of divine oversight, reinforcing sincerity and conscientiousness.

Moreover, the practical application of mindfulness within *ihsan* extends to social and ethical conduct. Internalised divine awareness through *muraqabah* shapes interpersonal behaviour, manifesting in honesty, patience, and justice, thus grounding both individual piety and social ethics in spiritual consciousness.

The implications of Islamic mindfulness encompass both spiritual and psychological dimensions. Contemporary studies indicate that devotionally performed prayer and the practice of *muraqabah* contribute to anxiety reduction and enhanced inner tranquility. These effects are comparable to those of secular mindfulness but are distinguished by a theological depth that links consciousness to a transcendent orientation.

In conclusion, mindfulness, from the perspective of *ihsan*, constitutes a theocentric form of awareness that transforms religious and social experiences into spiritually meaningful dimensions. The integration of divine awareness and sincerity in worship establishes a holistic framework that not only surpasses secular approaches but also provides a comprehensive model for navigating the complexities of modern life with spiritual robustness and emotional balance.

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