

## **Title: "Soulful Serenity: A Journey of Healing and Empathy in times of atrocity"**

*Dr Wim Sulayman Van Ael*

*Director and practitioner Muslim Mental Health UK*

In a world inundated with distressing images of innocent suffering, it is only natural for the heart to feel heavy, and anxiety and stress to take root within us. In these trying times, we must find solace, not only for our minds but also for our souls. This spiritual practice, which I have lovingly named "Soulful Serenity," draws inspiration from the Holy Quran and blends it with the principles of diaphragmatic breathing and cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT).

The technique I will describe here combines the recitation of Quranic verses with diaphragmatic breathing and mindfulness. It can help individuals shift from a passive state of emotional distress to an active state of awareness and control. Here's how it can be effective and why it's important:

**1. Grounding in the Present Moment:** This technique encourages individuals to focus on their breath, the verses, and their surroundings, effectively anchoring them in the present moment. When faced with distressing images or overwhelming emotions, it's common for the mind to wander into negative thought patterns or become trapped in the past or future. Being present is a crucial first step in regaining emotional control.

**2. Emotion Regulation:** By reciting Quranic verses, engaging in diaphragmatic breathing, and visualizing positive outcomes, individuals can regulate their emotional responses. This process helps in calming the nervous system and reducing the intensity of negative emotions, such as anxiety, fear, or sorrow.

**3. Reinterpretation and Positive Focus:** The verses and the practice of "Soulful Serenity" allow for a reinterpretation of the distressing images or emotions. Individuals are encouraged to focus on the potential rewards, the Divine's mercy, and the concept of returning to loved ones. This reframing of the situation helps individuals find meaning and hope even in the face of tragedy.

**4. Empowerment and Active Coping:** By engaging in this technique, individuals take an active role in managing their emotional state. Instead of being passive recipients of distressing information, they become empowered to cope with these emotions and channel them in a constructive manner. This shift from passivity to activity is crucial for emotional well-being.

**5. Mind-Body Connection:** Diaphragmatic breathing and mindfulness practices promote a strong mind-body connection. The deep breaths calm the body's stress response, leading to lower cortisol levels and reduced physical tension. This, in turn, aids in mental clarity and emotional control.

**6. Expanding Emotional Resilience:** This technique encourages individuals to engage with nature and appreciate the beauty and blessings around them. This expands their emotional resilience, making them more adaptable to life's challenges and less likely to remain imprisoned by negative emotions.

**7. Foster Empathy:** The practice of compassion and empathy is embedded in this technique, as it encourages individuals to connect with the suffering of others and to envision a better world. By promoting empathy, individuals not only heal themselves but also contribute to making the world a more compassionate place.

In summary, the technique I will be sharing with you is essential because it helps individuals regain control over their emotions, allows them to find meaning in distressing situations, and empowers

them to take an active role in their emotional well-being. It fosters empathy and emotional resilience, helping individuals navigate the challenges of life with a stronger and more positive mindset.

### Practicing the: Soulful Serenity Technique

**Recite Verses (end of) 4, 5 6 and 7 of Sura Mohammed:** Take a moment to reflect upon the verses, reciting them with mindful focus, as you begin your journey of healing:

وَالَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ (Wa-alladhīna quṭilū fī sabīli l-Lāh)

فَلَنْ يُضِلَّ أَعْمَالَهُمْ (falan yuḍillā a'mālahum)

سَيَهْدِيهِمْ وَيُصْلِحُ بَالَهُمْ (sayahdīhim wa-yuṣliḥu bālahum)

وَيُدْخِلُهُمُ الْجَنَّةَ عَرَّفَهَا لَهُمْ (wa-yudkhilluhumu l-jannata 'arrafahā lahum)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَنصُرُوا اللَّهَ (yā ayyuhā alladhīna āmanū in tansurū l-Lāh)

يَنصُرْكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتْ أَقْدَامَكُمْ (yansurkum wa-yuṭabbit aqdamakum)

- “And those who are killed in the cause of Allah - never will He waste their deeds.
- He will guide them and amend their (mental/emotional) condition.
- And admit them to Paradise, which He has perfumed for them.”

Now, as you recite these verses, let us practice the "Soulful Serenity" technique, an approach rooted in both science and spirituality. Begin with diaphragmatic breathing, which involves deep inhalations and exhalations.

**Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Inhale deeply for a count of four, allowing your abdomen to rise, and exhale for a count of four, feeling your abdomen fall. This rhythmic breathing has profound effects on your body, reducing stress, fear, anxiety, and depression by activating the body's relaxation response.

The scientific perspective on the effects of deep breathing on the body, anxiety, and stress is well-documented and underlines how magnificently we were designed and created by an All-Willing Powerful Lord:

#### 1. Reduction in Stress and Anxiety:

- Deep breathing activates the body's relaxation response by stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system. This reduces the production of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, leading to a calmer state of mind.
- It can increase the production of endorphins, which are natural mood lifters, promoting a sense of well-being and reducing anxiety.

#### 2. Lowered Heart Rate and Blood Pressure:

- Deep breathing can slow the heart rate and reduce blood pressure, promoting cardiovascular health.

#### 3. Improved Oxygenation:

- Deep breathing ensures better oxygen exchange in the lungs, leading to improved oxygenation of the blood. This can boost energy levels and mental clarity.

#### 4. **Enhanced Relaxation:**

- Deep breathing helps relax muscle tension and reduces physical symptoms of stress, such as headaches, muscle aches, and digestive issues.

#### 5. **Mindfulness and Focus:**

- Deep breathing is often used as a component of mindfulness meditation. It can improve concentration and help individuals become more present in the moment, reducing ruminative and anxious thoughts.

#### 6. **Emotional Regulation:**

- Deep breathing can help regulate emotions and improve emotional intelligence, making it easier to manage stress and respond to challenging situations with composure.

**A Powerful Truth:** Remember, dear soul, that every negative emotion not channelled willingly will manifest itself unwillingly through anger, depression, aggression, procrastination, or even addiction. By taking control of your breath and focusing on these sacred verses, you reclaim your emotional well-being.

**Expand Your Horizons:** Continue to breathe in this manner while listening and reflecting on the beauty of these verses. Envision these suffering children being rewarded with the greatest recompense. As you do so, open the door to your imagination, known in CBT as "Spiritual Soul Journeying."

**Spiritual Soul Journeying:** Visualize their soul soaring towards the Divine, embraced by light and love. See them in a state of bliss and reward, knowing that they will one day reunite with their beloved ones. This vision will provide you with a deep sense of peace and connection.

**Embrace Nature's Blessings:** While practicing "Soulful Spiritual Serenity," take a leisurely walk through nature. Immerse yourself in the vibrant colours and enchanting scents of the world around you. In doing so, you not only alleviate your burden but also cultivate gratitude for the blessings that still grace your life.

#### **Finally:**

Let this practice be your spiritual sanctuary, your refuge in moments of despair. As you breathe, recite, and journey within, remember that you are not alone in your empathy and love. The Creator, the Most Compassionate, is with you every step of the way.

May "Soulful Serenity" be your source of healing, resilience, and renewed connection with the world around you. Through this practice, may you find the strength to endure and the courage to empathize with the suffering of others.

*Dr Wim Sulayman Van Ael*

*Director Muslim Mental Health UK*