

# DHIKR and the Wisdom behind it\*

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## Abstract

The word *dhikr* is commonly translated as “remembrance” or “invocation”. In reality, it can take on a number of different meanings which the present work thoroughly explores. Amongst the many issues discussed, various categories of *dhikr* have been outlined, particularly as related to pure (or theoretical) vs. active (or willing) reason. Increasingly more elevated stages of being the rememberer of God have been described, and additionally discussed when one is remembered by God. It has also been explained how a thing or person may be the very embodiment of *dhikr* of God and also a reminder of God, while at the same time, it is celebrated and notable in itself and results in others to also become notable and esteemed. Particular emphasis has been made on the Divine Books and the Perfect Human.

**Keywords:** DHIKR, pure reason, active reason, Perfect Human, abundance of DHIKR, sincerity in DHIKR.

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*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Remembrance of God

Worship of God which is manifested in a variety of forms is also especially expressed in the form of *dhikr*, such that *dhikr* of God Almighty is one of the most evident forms of worshipping Him.

*Dhikr* of God, similar to other types of worship, can be divided into multiple categories, such as general *dhikr* and specific *dhikr*: general *dhikr* is that which does

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\* This article appears in chapter 10 of the book *Hikmat-e 'Ibādāt* by the respected author. As noted by the publishers, this chapter, unlike previous chapters in the book which are based on delivered lectures, “is one of the written works of Āyatullah Jawādī Āmulī – may God continue his presence amongst us – and has a distinctive flavor; the difficulty of the passages and their depth and richness relative to other chapters require particular attention on the part of the reader.”

We have translated the word *hikmat* used in the chapter title: “*Dhikr* and its *hikmat*”, which is also used in the book title: “The *hikmat* of acts of worship”, as *wisdom* (e.g. see verse 2:269 of the Holy Qur’ān), in contrast to the restricted word *philosophy* which is more related to a particular scholastic discourse. [Tr.]

not belong only to a specific being, and is instead found in all things; that is, all things spend their existence remembering God. By contrast, specific *dhikr* is that which belongs only to specific types of creation and is found in them, such as *dhikr* specific to an angel or specific to a human being.

Another form of distinction for *dhikr* is with regards to the inward and the outward, and this distinction is that which is sometimes referred to as *dhikr* of the heart vs. *dhikr* of the tongue, though such a distinction is not specific to the domain of human beings; this is because other conscious beings are sometimes contemplating God, which is *dhikr* of the heart, and sometimes remembering God in their own special language, which is *dhikr* of the tongue.

The expression *dhikr* is sometimes used as opposite to negligence, error, forgetfulness and such, and is therefore used in these cases to mean remembrance, recollection and such; and is sometimes used as opposite to decline and deterioration in which case it is used to mean the notable, esteemed, celebrated and such. *Dhikr* is sometimes used in the infinitive and descriptive sense, such as to remember God and to invoke the name of God, and sometimes is used to define a thing or person that is the embodiment and incarnation of the remembrance of God and is also a reminder of God, while that thing or person is notable in itself and also results in others to become noteworthy and esteemed. An example of this is the application of the title of *dhikr* to the holy Qur'ān or the person of the blessed Prophet – peace be upon him and his progeny – such that these luminous beings are not only embodiments and incarnations of *dhikr*, but also revive invocation of the name of God in others' tongues and His remembrance in their hearts, and also cause a society that remembers God to become esteemed and celebrated.

## 1.2 DHIKR of the tongue

While the *dhikr* of the tongue can be used in contrast with the *dhikr* of the heart, it can also be contrasted with the *dhikr* of actions and deeds; that is, sometimes an action too is referred to as *dhikr* from the perspective of it being a reminder of God, even if that act is performed with one's hand or feet or other organs. This is because *dhikr* as an invocation of God is not specific to the heart; rather, any deed that exhibits remembrance of God is a *dhikr* of Him. It can even happen that keeping silent becomes a *dhikr* of God, and by this we do not mean to say that “since silence is accompanied with reflection and contemplation, and these things result in remembrance of God, then the title of *dhikr* can be applied to keeping silent” (this is not the case because if this was true, application of *dhikr* to

being silent would be a description of an accompanying state [to being silent] and not a direct description); rather this is so because keeping silent is necessary or preferred in a situation; when speaking would bring about trouble and tribulation, or would result in strangers to hear what they are not suited to hear, keeping silent is in itself a *dhikr* of God. At the same time, if keeping silent results in a state of reflection, contemplation, observation and the like, from the perspective that it is a means to achieve perfection and is considered a pillar of transcendence, it will also be, as a preface not in itself, a true realization of *dhikr*.

### 1.3 Varieties of DHIKR

*Dhikr* takes on a variety of categories, based on an existential evaluation and ontological ranking: (i) sometimes it is evaluated based on the one that is remembered (*madhkūr*) in which case the most complete *dhikr* is the servant's remembrance of God and of His most magnificent Name (*ism-e a'zam*) because no *madhkūr* is more complete than God Almighty. (ii) Sometimes, the evaluation is based on the one that remembers (*dhāker*) in which case then the most complete *dhikr* is God's remembrance of the servant, since no *dhāker* is a match to God Almighty. Just as He is "the Best of the Remembered", He is also "the Best Rememberer" [see Sec. 7]. (iii) Sometimes this evaluation is performed on the basis of the quality of *dhikr* in terms of the degree of its sincerity (*ikhblās*), in which case again the most complete *dhikr* is remembrance of God with respect to a specific thing or a particular individual; this is because remembrance by God is beyond any contamination with falsehood, since anything that is manifested from the pure and unadulterated Truth is immune from being polluted with impurities and falsehood. (iv) And sometimes, the evaluation is based on the magnitude (quantity) of *dhikr* in which case again the best *dhikr* is the remembrance by God with respect to a specific thing or a particular individual.

God, who is pure and unadulterated witnessing (*shuhūd*), is immune from any error, negligence, forgetfulness and the like, and such shortcomings never find a path to His Majestic Sanctuary:

وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ نَسِيًّا

And your Lord never forgets (19:64).

وَمَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْ رَبِّكَ مِنْ مِثْقَالِ ذَرَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ

And not an atom's weight in the earth or in the sky may escape your Lord (10:61).

Since the aforementioned four-fold aspects by which *dhikr* is evaluated, namely (i) the remembered, (ii) the rememberer, (iii) the quality of *dhikr* and (iv) the magnitude of *dhikr*, are present and invoked in the manifestations of the names and attributes of God, it follows with regards to whichever of them [i.e. the manifestations] whose position of vicegerency of God is more complete and whose nearness to God Almighty is greater, that the most appropriate *dhikr* would be the inferior's *dhikr* towards it (according to the first perspective) and its *dhikr* towards the inferior (according to the other three perspectives).<sup>1</sup>

Even though each specific act of worship, such as prayer, fasting, charitable acts of *zakāt* and *khums*, pilgrimage, enjoining upon good, forbidding evil, supplication and the like are rightly considered as *dhikr*, and the broad meaning of *dhikr* and the general wisdom behind it does encompass all the aforementioned acts, yet *dhikr* in its own place is a special act of worship and produces its own specific effects [discussed in this work].

#### 1.4 Pivotal elements of DHIKR

The pivotal elements of *dhikr* are those which were briefly referred to, and they are ultimately related to the analysis of the essence of *dhikr* from the point of view of the efficient, final and material origins<sup>2</sup> [i.e. by whom, for whom and how *dhikr* is performed; or in other words the subject, object and quality/quantity of *dhikr*]. Other aspects such as the specific time at which *dhikr* is performed, the particular location, the manner of standing or sitting, being in a state of motion or rest, being alone or with a group, recitation in a high or low or minimal tone, language, specific number or types of recitations, the manner by which the Qur'ān is put in front or over the head, closed or open, *tawassul*<sup>3</sup> to a particular infallible or seeking intercession from a particular friend of God (*walī*), the cleanliness of the performer of *dhikr* and pureness of his inner consciousness and the like, are all related to satisfying the requirements of how to correctly perform the act of *dhikr*; all these

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<sup>1</sup> All things owe their existence utterly and thoroughly to God Almighty, and are manifestations of His names and attributes. It then follows that any attribution of greatness to God at the level of His names and attributes is also applicable to His creation, especially those in whom God reveals more of His names and attributes. It must however be kept in mind that the level of the Essence (*Dhāt*) of God is altogether a different realm, to which His creation have no access, and which can never be comprehended and is constantly glorified. [Tr.]

<sup>2</sup> Efficient (*fā'ili*) cause or origin is that by which a thing comes to be, final (*ghāi*) cause is the end purpose for which a thing comes to be, and material (*qābeli*) cause is that from which a thing comes to be. For instance, in the example of a house, the efficient cause is the carpenter, the final cause is to provide shelter and comfort, and the material cause is typically wood, nail, drywall, etc. [Tr.]

<sup>3</sup> *Tawassul* is a religious practice in which one seeks nearness to God Almighty, often via seeking nearness to a chosen servant of Him. [Tr.]

aspects have been especially visited and elaborated upon by the blessed household of the prophet – peace be upon them - as reported in collected works of hadith. While any act of *dhikr* will leave a particular footprint of worship (*athar-e 'ibādī*) [on its performer] and will bring about nearness of the rememberer to the Remembered God, yet in obligatory acts of worship (*farā'id*) or special recommended rituals (*nawāfil*) in which an exact and specified *dhikr* has been narrated, its replacement or modification is not permitted, meaning that one will not obtain the desired result from that obligatory or recommended act without the specified *dhikr* [see Sec. 10 for some examples of this].

The following two aspects must however be noted: that (i) sometimes, due to a multitude of the desired results, a small portion of the sublime aims of *dhikr* will still be obtained with replacement or modification of the specified *dhikr* even though remaining aspects of it are lost; and (ii) in other cases, due to the singularity of the desired result, one does not achieve any of the specific results for that particular act of worship that has been arranged using the specific *dhikr*.

The raised point (i) above (i.e. when multiple desired results exist) is however only valid for some recommended acts and not all; this is because some recommended traditions and acts of worship are not at all realized without performing specific *dhikr*, and therefore, no effect whatsoever will be produced [by changing the *dhikr* formula]. At the same time, the general effect of *dhikr* which is a general form of worship will still be obtained. For instance, if an individual's ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) is nullified due to intentional leaving out of a *dhikr*, even though the effect of performing the ritual prayer, which is to relieve from owing that act, has not been obtained yet that individual will still for instance partially obtain the reward of reciting the Qur'ān.

### 1.5 Substance of *DHIKR* and the essence of supplication and asking

As mentioned previously, the core substance of *dhikr* is different than the essence of supplication (calling upon) or asking (requesting); this is because mere paying of attention to God is *dhikr* of Him, even if not accompanied by addressing Him, demanding or requesting from Him. Therefore, even though [the act of] calling upon God or requesting something from Him is accompanied by His *dhikr*, or rather this very act of calling upon or asking Him is *dhikr* in itself, yet it is very possible for an act of *dhikr* to be realized while not accompanied by any act of calling upon or requesting, each of which is a specific instruction (*inshā'*). Thus in such a case, *dhikr* is rewarded in itself, and receiving a response or solution is not the matter at hand; this is because *dhikr* in the sense that it is *dhikr*, and is distinct

from a supplication or request, is in a different domain from that of calling upon or requesting, since at this realm there is no call or request in the first place for them to be answered. Even though it is possible upon performing a particular *dhikr*, for a specific need or difficulty to be resolved or a wrong to be forgiven or a blessing to be granted, yet none of these matters and similar ones have been implemented in the essence of *dhikr*. Since *dhikr* has a specific meaning compared to other acts of worship, whenever a seeker of the path (*sālik*) becomes acquainted and keenly associated with the specific meaning of an act of worship, and persists upon it and strongly abstains from diminishing and neglecting it, and implements it in his heart more strongly than other pillars of worship, he becomes the possessor of that stage (*maqām*), and as such, the status of the people of *dhikr* is distinct from that of other worshippers and they maintain their own invocations.

The meaning of an effective *dhikr* of the heart is that truth-affirming and belief-based *dhikr* that results in oblivion (*nisyān*) or [at least] a pretension of oblivion (*tanāsī*) with respect to falsehood, as similarly it would bring about negligence (*ghaflat*) or pretension of negligence (*taghāful*) with regards to any error; otherwise, a *dhikr* which simply occurs to the imagination can co-exist with preoccupation by falsehood and error, since no real aversive, protective and repelling effect can be expected from a purely imaginative source for *dhikr*.

Certainly, that which will have an effect is faithful affirmation, i.e. to believe the conclusion of a proposition and to have faith in the demonstrated essence of that statement; otherwise mere mental acceptance of the proven conclusion of a proposition, without that conclusion being truly interwoven with the heart of the knower in a way that it would result in an affirmation based on belief, is not going to have an effect on repelling error or preventing sins. This is because that which matters is belief not [mere mental] knowledge, and in other words, as long as knowledge based on pure (or theoretical) reason does not find a way to a belief based on active (or willing) reason<sup>4</sup>, it will not be productive.

Separation of knowledge from action is both possible and realized in practice; this is because separation of knowledge from faith and belief can be realized, as understood from the following verses:

وَجَاهِدُوا بِمَا وَاسْتَيْقِظْتُمْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ ظُلُمًا وَعُلُومًا

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<sup>4</sup> Reason (*‘aql*) is divided into two types: (i) pure reason (*‘aql-e nazari*) also known as theoretical or speculative reason, which is involved with gaining knowledge, and (ii) active reason (*‘aql-e ‘amali*), also known as willing or practical reason, which is involved with believing in and inclining towards one’s pure knowledge (i.e. is the action of the heart) and leads to the action of the other faculties. This distinction is further explained in Sec. 2. [Tr.]

And they rejected those signs in iniquity and arrogance, though their souls were convinced of them (27:14).

قَالَ لَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ هَؤُلَاءِ إِلَّا رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ بِصَآئِرٍ

Moses said (to Pharaoh), "You know well that these things have been sent down by none but the Lord of the heavens and the earth, as eye-opening evidence ..." (17:102).

In other words, pure reason has no obstacle in understanding and seeing the truth of something, however it is the active reason being consumed with lust and anger that has difficulty in believing in and having faith in that thing.

Now that some of the underlying fundamentals of the discussion have been outlined, we seek the attention of the rememberers of God and the people of *dhikr* to a number of points in the course of the following [ten] sections.

## 2. *DHIKR*, and Pure vs. Active Reason

*Dhikr* of God and remembrance of His most beautiful names and His manifestations is expressed in pure reason as divine thought, and additionally revealed in active reason as religious inclination. This is because as having knowledge of God is His *dhikr*, so is loving Him, and as divine knowledge is His remembrance, so is obtaining His morals and following His orders and avoiding his prohibitions. Put another way, this is because anything that brings about presence of God and His names and attributes [in the mind or heart of the rememberer] is *dhikr* of God, and in this direction, both pure and active branches have significant contributions.

According to what we said, the heading of *dhikr* is the common factor between both pure and active wings of flying in the path towards God and perfection, and subsequently, with regards to the commandment to perform abundant *dhikr* in the verse:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا

O you who believe! Remember God, remembering frequently (33:41),

it is possible to obey this command by continued involvement with divine knowledge, as it is also possible to do so with persistent involvement with religious rituals and morals, and it is also possible to do so with distribution of one's time by devoting a part to gain religious knowledge and devoting another part to acquire moral and active virtues. In this spirit, it is possible to consider these verses of the Qur'ān, which name or praise those that perform frequent *dhikr* of God, to

encompass the aforementioned three groups, i.e. the group that spends a considerable component of its time with sincerity to learn the religious sciences, and the group that utilizes a significant portion of its opportunities to attain moral characters, and the group that distributes its time, devoting a part to religious knowledge and the other to achieve morals and acts of worship.

Put another way, one may expand [the applicability of *dhikr*] to both domains of moral instruction (the normative; *insbāʾ*) and of knowledge (the descriptive; *ikhbār*), and to label all above groups as those that adhere to the command to perform frequent *dhikr* (i.e. in one domain, proper description and knowledge is the focus, and in the other, the norms, decrees and instructions). This is why with regards to the following hadith by the blessed prophet – peace be upon him and his progeny (ﷺ) – as narrated in the narrative collection “*Man-Lā-Yahḍarah al-Faqīh*”<sup>5</sup>:

"ارتعوا في رياض الجنة" فقيل له (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) و ما رياض الجنة فقال (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم): "حُلُقُ الذِّكْرِ"

“Travel and eat in the gardens of Heaven.” They asked him what the gardens of Heave are. He said: “circles of *dhikr*”!

Mullā Muḥammad Taqī Majlisī (‘first Majlisī’), upon his commentary of this hadith, has said: “what is known as circles of *dhikr* are circles of teaching knowledge, and it has been said that what is meant may be circles of sermon and preaching since they are intended to bring about reminder; yet, the more general and inclusive meaning that includes both aspects is more appropriate, with the condition that pursuing knowledge should be with the intention of performing *dhikr* of God and gaining His pleasure.”<sup>6</sup> Then he goes on to mention the importance of consciously and aptly listening to and being present in circles of scholarship, and recites the poem:

<sup>5</sup> This book is one of the four hadith collections known as “the Four Books” (*kutub-e arbaʿah*), which were compiled by three important scholars (referred to as ‘Muḥammad sons of three’ since all three were named Muḥammad and had the title of Abū-Jaʿfar). These books are:

1) *Al-Kāfi* by Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb Shaykh Kulaynī (16199 hadiths).

2) *Man-Lā-Yahḍarah al-Faqīh* by Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī ibn Bābwayh, known as Shaykh Ṣadūq (5963 hadiths).

3) *Tabḍih al-Aḥkām* by Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan known as Shaykh Ṭūsī (13590 hadiths)

4) *Al-Istibṣār* also by Shaykh Ṭūsī (5511 hadiths).

The aforementioned scholars attempted to include in these collections only those hadiths which were reliable (*ṣaḥīḥ*) according to their criteria. [Tr.]

<sup>6</sup> *Rawḍah al-Muttaqīn*, vol. 5, p. 512.



این سخن شیر است در پستان جان بی کشنده شیر کی آید برون<sup>7</sup>

This speech is [like] milk from the bosom of the soul  
Without pulling milk when will it ever come out?

That is, the preparedness of the seeker of knowledge, as well as the active presence of his illuminating talent and thirst for knowledge, act like that of pulling and absorbing the milk of knowledge flowing from the life and soul of the instructor and master. To achieve such commendable abundance, there is no solution except for the seeker involved with *dhikr* to place (i) all his perceptive faculties such as sense and imagination under the guidance of pure reason, and (ii) all his stimulated faculties such as attraction and repulsion, lust and anger, devotion and aversion, love and enmity, and eventually *tawallā* and *tabarrā*<sup>8</sup> under special supervision of active reason, so that all his testimonies of knowledge and inclinations of action are obtained with the name and remembrance of God. Such a seeker is a constant performer of *dhikr*; and one should note that (i) he who is a constant performer of *dhikr* is a constant performer of prayer (*ṣalāt*), and (ii) he who is a constant performer of *ṣalāt* is protected and saved from the harm of being impatient (*halū*) and the damage of being fretful (*jazū*) and miserly (*manū*).<sup>9</sup> The evidences for these two statements will be later provided [see Sec. 8.5] with necessary explanations.

In summary, all faculties of knowledge and action of the remembering seeker need to organize their thoughts and efforts under the leadership of reason. In such a case, the leadership of the rememberer's reason and intellect, which is, while remembering God Almighty, aptly involved with tasks of acceptance and rejection or *tawallā* and *tabarrā*, results in the flowing of the soul of *dhikr* across the bodies of the lower powers. Therefore, all faculties of knowledge and action of the remembering seeker are like a unified community under the leadership of a remembering, distinguished leader (*imām*). As such, their unified foundation will be immune from breaches of evils of ignorance pertaining to knowledge and action. Surely, the high status of the remembering seeker, who has collected in

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<sup>7</sup> This poem by Rūmī has also been recited as:

این سخن شیر است در پستان جان بی مکده خوش نمی گردد روا ن

with a very similar meaning. [Tr.]

<sup>8</sup> *Tawallā* and *tabarrā* are the most sublime forms of attachment to and love of all that is good, and detachment from and enmity with all that is bad. They are sometimes classified as two of the ten required branches in observing faith (other eight being: prayer, charity (both *zakāt* and *khums*), fasting, pilgrimage, enjoining upon good, forbidding evil, and fighting (*jihād*) in the way of God). [Tr.]

<sup>9</sup> Qur'ān 70:19-23.

himself both correct knowledge and good deeds, will be the manifesting source of both pure and active reason, and in this highest stage (i) co-presence of both these reasons is warranted, and (ii) each of the mentioned faculties of reason take the responsibility of guiding those they are in charge of.

In other words, the peak of the [existential] pyramid of such remembering seeker is comprised of a status of collective comprehensiveness (*jam' al-jam'*) which is the underlying state of his divine life: it is this comprehensiveness which is the leader of all leaders, and which is followed by all the significant faculties of man; and in turn, the lower powers, with the leadership of the other significant faculties and via their intercession, are connected to that transcendent state of human life. At the same time, such a seeker is the manifestation of God Who while being elevated and having eminence, is also humble and close and [with the] low, and Who while being near, is entirely exalted and lofty and distant:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ... الَّذِي بَعْدَ فَلَا يُرَى، وَقَرِيبَ فَشَهِدَ النَّجْوَى

All praise belongs to God ... Who is so far away that He is not seen, and is so near that He is fully aware of the whispered secret.<sup>10</sup>

الداي في علوه والعالى في دونه

The Close in His highness and the High in His closeness.<sup>11</sup>

Since the seeking human being who is a performed of *dhikr* is the vicegerent of God, and the vicegerent is the manifestation and sign of the One he represents, and the One who is being represented possesses the status of collective comprehensiveness and the underlying ranks, His vicegerent will also be necessarily like that.

### 3. The Revitalizing Nature of DHIKR

*Dhikr* of God and remembrance of His most beautiful names and most exalted attributes is like the flowing of the revitalizing spirit, a prominent example of which was the breath of Prophet Jesus which rendered alive any bird and the dead when he – peace be upon him – did so with the permission of God. If a thing, whether related to knowledge or action, is alive then it produces a [positive] impact, and if dead, not only does it not do so, but it will also leave a horrible

<sup>10</sup> Supplication of *Ifitāḥ*; this beautiful supplication, filled with remembrance of God and the blessed prophet and his household, and with particular remembrance of the Mahdī – peace be upon him – is recommended to be read in the nights of the month of Ramadan. [Tr.]

<sup>11</sup> *Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, supplication 47.

odor! And as such, a thought that is dead, or an action that is so, will leave no trace but damage, and it is because of this that we read in some religious statements that if something is begun without the name of God, it will be futile and fruitless.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, with regards to the sacrifice or hunting of animals (on earth or in air) in which case upon performing the act of sacrifice or throwing arrows or sending hunting dogs, one has to mention the name of God so that the sacrificed or hunted animal does not become an [unlawful] corpse and may be instead benefitted from: even though from the jurisprudential perspective this is a specific act of obedience [to be performed even if the wisdom behind it is not understood], yet from the deeper perspective, the wisdom behind it is valid in all the facets of human knowledge and action. In other words, any act that is not with the name and remembrance of God, is a foul-smelling corpse and the adverse effect of it is such that it will reveal itself at some point in time.

More elaborately, upon considering the secrets of such verses from the Qur'an as:

وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا مِمَّا لَمْ يُذَكَّرْ اسْمُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ وَإِنَّهُ لَفِسْقٌ

Eat not of that on which God's name has not been pronounced, and verily that is impiety (6:121),

فَاذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهَا صَوَافَّ

Then pronounce the name of God over them as they line up [for sacrifice] (22:36),

فَكُلُوا مِمَّا أَمْسَكْنَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَاذْكُرُوا اسْمَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ

Then eat what they [hunting animals] catch for you, and pronounce the name of God over it (5:4),

one will see the consistent message being that if the one who sacrifices is not a monotheist or intentionally does not mention the name of God [in the act of sacrifice], it will be equivalent to a corpse, and eating from it will not be legitimate (even if the animal is of the rare and precious variety!). Thus it becomes clear that the remembrance of God is like the breath of Christ that gives life, and that this

<sup>12</sup> "كل امر ذى بال لا يذكر بسم الله فيه فهو ابتر"

Any matter of significance not initiated with "in the name of God" will be fruitless (*Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 7, p. 170, Hadith 4) [narrated from the holy prophet].

revitalizing breath is the vicegerent of the Divine Breath which assures the creation of life upon the appearance of:

وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي

When I breathed into him of My spirit (15:29).

By contrast, anything in which the name of God and His remembrance is not displayed, even if appearing as a beautiful gazelle in the dessert of imagination, will be nothing but a corpse in the realm of truth and conscious reason.

The person of knowledge that does not act upon his knowledge and is an irresponsible and non-accountable thinker, is also a moving corpse similar to the one who sets aside the duty to enjoin upon good and forbid evil (not doing so with his hand or tongue or heart): both appear alive outwardly but are inwardly dead. It is narrated that Imām ‘Alī – peace be upon him – referred to both of these types of people as:

و ذلك ميتٌ الأحياء

And these are the dead [amongst] the alive.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.1 Note: Halting upon the narrated DHIKR

The meaning of *dhikr* of God is not the mere clause “in the name of God”; rather, mentioning any name amongst the most beautiful names of God, whether in the form of “in the name of God”, or in the form of *tahlīl* (“there is no god but God”), *takbīr* (“God is the greatest”), *tasbīḥ* (“glory be to God”), *taḥmīd* (“praise belongs to God”), and the like, is sufficient for the legitimacy of the sacrificed or hunted animal, just as it is beneficial for the protection of knowledge or action from becoming corpse-like. Yet, if a specific prescription regarding a particular *dhikr* has been narrated, such as that of the ritual daily prayer, it is necessary for that exact form of *dhikr* to be followed. Later in this writing, we shall discuss this issue, namely the necessity of halting upon the narrated *dhikr* [not altering, replacing or going beyond its form; see Sec. 10].

## 4. Degrees of DHIKR and Ranks of Its Performers

As mentioned in the opening parts, there exist a number of degrees for *dhikr* and ranks for its performers; and though each of these is appropriate on its own, it

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<sup>13</sup> *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Ḥikmah 374.

is still the highest stage that is the most sublime aim of the remembering seeker, so as to acquire it by passing through the lower stages. *Dhikr* is sometimes [performed] with respect to God's bounties, sometimes in regards to His name and also in some cases with regards to God Himself. Consider:

فَاذْكُرُوا آلَاءَ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

Therefore perform *dhikr* of the bounties [you have received] from God: that so you may prosper (7:69).

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ

O you who believe! Remember the bounty of God [bestowed] on you (33:9).

In these cases, remembrance of God's bounties including material and spiritual has been mentioned. Now, consider the following verses:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى \* وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى

Verily he prospered who purified himself, and remembered the name of his Lord, so prayed (87:14-15).

وَادْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا

And keep in remembrance the name of your Lord and devote yourself to Him whole-heartedly (73:8).

وَادْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا

And celebrate the name of your Lord morning and evening (76:25).

In these places, it is the remembrance of the name (not bounty) of God that has been conveyed, whether His Greatest Name (*ism-e a'zam*) or others, and its selection is the task of the remembering seeker, similar to how the choice of the bounty to remember depends on the rank of the performer of *dhikr*. At the same time, to consider *both* material and spiritual bounties and blessings is the most desired and appropriate approach, just as choosing the Greatest Name, which contains [all other] great names, is the most elevated aim.

And then there are verses such as:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا لَقِيتُمْ فِئَةً فَاثْبُتُوا وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

O you who believe! When you meet a force, be firm and remember Allah much (and often); that you may prosper (8:45).

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ

Those who remember Allah, standing, sitting, and [lying down] on their sides  
(3:191).

فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمُ الصَّلَاةَ فَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِكُمْ فَإِذَا اطْمَأْنَنْتُمْ فَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ  
الصَّلَاةَ كَانَتْ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ كِتَابًا مَوْقُوتًا

After performing the ritual prayer, remember Allah, standing, sitting down,  
and [lying down] on your sides (4:103).

In these verses, and similar ones, it is the remembrance of the heading of “Allah” that is related, and not the remembrance of His bounty or His name. Nevertheless, the heading of “Allah” itself is one of the most beautiful names of God, and since from the divine and spiritual perspective, the status of the Absolute Being<sup>14</sup>, which should not even be phrased as a status or stage or the like, is more elevated than the heading of “Allah”, therefore verses which portray the *dhikr* of that Being are the most sublime, such as the verse:

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ

Therefore remember Me, I will remember you (2:152).

Such an expression is very rarely provided in the Qur’ān, and is of a similar status to the last verse of the blessed chapter *al-Fajr* in the Qur’ān in which the possessor of the satisfied soul, after obtaining (i) the status of contentment with regards to all stages of divine decree (*qaḍā*) and divine measure (*qadar*), as well as (ii) the status of God’s contentment with Him, is addressed with such a tone such that with the blessing of the Absolute Being, he returns onto Him and becomes included in the circle of servants in that transcendental stage (noting that use of the term ‘stage’ is only a figure of speech), and enters His particular heaven which is more elevated and eminent than any imaginable heaven:

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ \* ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً \* فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي \* وَادْخُلِي  
حَنَنِي

<sup>14</sup> Translated from the term *Huwiyyat-e Muṭlaq*, this term refers to the realm of the Essence (*Dhāt*), prior to its manifestation into the divine names and attributes: the one who performs *dhikr* of the Absolute Being has moved beyond recognition of God merely through His individual names and attributes. [Tr.]

"O (you) soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back you to your Lord,- well pleased (yourself), and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter you, then, among My servants! And enter you My Heaven!" (89:27-30)

Surely, verses in the Qur'an which mention the Absolute Being are extremely rare.

In short, while the aforementioned four stages of *dhikr* with regards to the ranks of the remembered [i.e. *dhikr* (i) of bounties of Allah, (ii) of the name of Allah, (iii) of Allah, and (iv) of the Absolute Being] are all praiseworthy, yet each lower degree will be a ladder toward the higher stage, and the ultimate aim of the various phases of *dhikr* is indeed to remember the Absolute Being.

#### 4.1 Note: Differences in the address due to differences in the addressees

Following the above discussion of the stages of *dhikr* of God, we add that the invitations extended by the Blessed Qur'an to the various audience for performing *dhikr* may have varied due to this variety of ranks in the addressees. To elaborate: all things and persons in the contingent world have emanated from God, yet they are not all the 'first emanation' (*ṣādir-e awal*), and similarly, while they are all returning to God, yet they are not all the 'ultimate returner' (*ṣāir-e nahāī*), who has reached the status of:

دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى \* فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ

He [the prophet] approached and came closer, and was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer (53:8-9),

and the stage of:

وَأَنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الْمُنتَهَىٰ

And that to your Lord is the final Goal (53:42).

Additionally, while all are commanded to remember God and perform His *dhikr*, not all are addressed to remember the Absolute Being so as to remember Him without the veils of identity (*ta'ayyun*). It is possible to infer signs of differences in address from different addressee titles: some have been addressed as "O mankind!"<sup>15</sup>, some others as "O people of the Book"<sup>16</sup>, some as "O you who believe"<sup>17</sup>, some as "O those who have eyes"<sup>18</sup> and "O those with understanding"<sup>19</sup>,

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<sup>15</sup> يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ

<sup>16</sup> يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ

<sup>17</sup> يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

and some as “O apostles”<sup>20</sup>, and finally the unique address and the distinctive attention of the One (*Aḥad*) God becomes directed towards the prophets and apostles of steadfastness (*ulul-‘azm*), and ultimately pointing to the ‘sole address of the contingent universe’<sup>21</sup> which is attention to the status of the Seal of the Prophets, who is not only more excellent in position than all prophets and apostles, but even with regards to the prophets of steadfastness is also more eminent (*a’lā*), more noble (*anbal*), more beautiful (*ajmal*) and more glorious (*ajall*). We make a final note that what we mean by limitation of address and restriction of attention is that the addressee himself has been veiled [and has not removed those veils]; otherwise, the Addresser does not have any veils to any being.

#### 4.2 Remark: the four ranks of the remembered for the rememberer

Similar to how sometimes it is the special mercy of God that is what is remembered (*madhkūr*), and the remembering (*dhāker*) seeker becomes attentive to that particular mercy of God, sometimes the extraordinary mercy of God becomes the *dhāker* and in turn makes the particular servant the *madhkūr*. What we mean to say is that the previously mentioned four stages which were outlined with regards to the *madhkūr* are also applicable from the perspective of the *dhāker* [i.e. a servant may be remembered by the (i) bounty of God, (ii) name of God, (iii) God, and (iv) the Absolute Being]. As an example, one may mention the second verse of the chapter *al-Maryam* in the Blessed Qur’ān in which we read:

ذِكْرُ رَحْمَتِ رَبِّكَ عَبْدَهُ زَكَرِيَّا

A remembrance of the mercy of your Lord (with respect) to His servant  
Zakariyyā (19:2).

In this verse, the remarkable mercy of God was assigned to Prophet Zakarīyyā – peace be upon him, and the person of Zakarīyyā – peace be upon him – became the object of *dhikr*, attention and compassion of that specific mercy.

Along the same line, with regards to the verse:

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<sup>18</sup> اولى الابصار

<sup>19</sup> اولى الالباب

<sup>20</sup> يا ايها الرسل

<sup>21</sup> The status of Prophet Muḥammad – peace be upon him and his progeny - is that of the medium of grace. His glorious position is such that he receives all grace directly from the Absolute Being and channels that to all of creation. Thus, he is ‘the mercy onto the worlds’ as asserted by the Qur’ān. In this sense, he is the ‘sole address of the contingent world’ as the sole venue through which God, at the level of the Essence, addresses and blesses the contingent world. [Tr.]



إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ

Verily Prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds; and remembrance of God without doubt is greater (29:45),

in which the remembrance and *dhikr* of God is mentioned to be greater [than anything], two points may be extracted: God being greater (i) from the aspect that He is the *Madhkūr* [remembering God is greater than remembering anything else], and (ii) from the perspective of being the *Dhākir*; i.e. when God remembers one of His servants such a remembrance is greater than the servant's remembrance of God as the One Remembered. It must however be noted that the accurate meaning of this is that the remembrance by God is so magnificent that it can not be put in words, not that the remembrance of the servant with respect to God is great and His remembrance of the servant is [merely] greater [see Sec. 4.3 next for elaboration]. This is because under the statement that "the Uncompounded Truth is all things,"<sup>22</sup> the remembering seeker is not even a dim shade (*ḥay'*) [in itself independent from God], let alone a shadow (*ẓill*) or a thing (*shay'*). In any case, there is no problem with the blessed verse implying all the above meanings since the use of a phrase to imply more than one meaning is an entirely solved problem, and for the people of wisdom, an objection to this issue [requiring God's word to only imply a single meaning] is not raised.

#### 4.3 Note: Narrations on the TAKBĪR

Since the knowledge of monotheists with respect to God Almighty is not alike, narrated statements about *takbīr* [witnessing that "God is Greater"] are also different. In some we read that "God is greater than to be described,"<sup>23</sup> in some it has been narrated that "God is greater than His creation,"<sup>24</sup> and in numerous hadiths it has been narrated that "God is greater than anything."<sup>25</sup> Those hadiths which have been narrated in the first category are most deep and compelling, and

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<sup>22</sup> "بسيط الحقيقة كل الأشياء"

This significant statement appears within the transcendental philosophy of *Mullā Ṣadrā*. It has been demonstrated that God's attribute of being uncompounded will only be valid and consistent if all things come from Him, are not independent entities and are therefore His manifestations. Thus, all things in the heavens and the earth *belong* to God, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, in the deepest meaning of the word! At the same time, God Almighty is not incarnated in any thing, and rather it is His names and attributes that are manifested in them, and therefore "He is none of those things" as mentioned following the above statement: ("... و ليس بشيء منها"). [Tr.]

<sup>23</sup> "الله اكبر من ان يوصف"; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 81, p. 254.

<sup>24</sup> "الله اكبر من خلقه"

<sup>25</sup> "الله اكبر من كل شيء"; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 90, p. 218.

even within themselves, they are not of the same status [and some are of most sublime nature]; for instance, in a hadith it has been narrated that at the presence of Imām Ja’far Sādiq – peace be upon him – a man once said: “God is greater”. The Imām – peace be upon him – asked the man: “What thing is God greater than?” to which the man replied: “All things”. The Imām – peace be upon him – said: “You constrained Him”. The man said: “Then what do I say?” The Imām replied: “God is greater than to be described”, and in a different narration, the Imām – peace be upon him – said: “Is there anything<sup>26</sup> so that God is greater than him?”

## 5. Degrees of Remembrance of God

One of the topics put forth in the beginning of this discussion was that there exist a number of degrees for the remembrance of God, depending on the intentions of the performer of *dhikr* and his inner aims. This is because, similar to other acts of worship, *dhikr* of God is sometimes performed for fear of hellfire, sometimes for hope of paradise, and sometimes to express gratitude for bounties and for the love of the One who is Remembered, which is aside from any types of fear or greed.

At the same time, as long as the core of sincerity and heading of servanthood of the *dhāker* and masterhood of the *Madhkūr* is intact, the act of worship is valid and its desired effect will be in place. Yet, it must be kept in mind that any lower stage is a ladder of progress for the remembering seeker so that he may transcend and rise above the level of fearful and desirous *dhikr* to a loving and grateful remembrance which in reality is an emancipated *dhikr* specifically for the Liberated<sup>27</sup>. Those acts of *dhikr* which are helpful and effective in freeing one from [worldly] difficulties and animosities, or to arrive at comfort and companionship, do not transcend the realm of fear and hope; instead, it is a *dhikr* performed to witness the pure Beauty and Glory of God and for His pure Splendor and Light that is able to surpass the realm of fear and greed, and will be the groundwork for reaching a status in which neither the *dhāker* nor the *dhikr* itself are observed, and instead it is only the *Madhkūr* that is taken into account, such that the seeker is cleared from the impurity of trinity (the rememberer, the remembrance and the

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<sup>26</sup> Thus, it is not correct to consider other things to be ‘things in themselves’ nor to compare God Almighty with them; rather they are mere manifestations of God Almighty, and do not even exist aside from consideration of the existence of God Almighty. [Tr.]

<sup>27</sup> The original term is *Aḥrār* and is quite distinct from the expression ‘Liberated’ in the modern, political sense of the word. It has a very deep application in the Islamic literature, and refers to those that have elevated themselves from the fears and hopes of this world and the next, and who bow their heads to none but God Almighty Himself. [Tr.]

remembered) and relieved from the contamination of duality (the rememberer and the remembered, or the remembrance and the remembered). As such, this eminent status is only accomplished with the pure [consideration of the] One Remembered, and this is pure monotheism.

### 5.1 Note: Enfolding of *DHIKR* of the servant with two *DHIKRS* of God

The *dhikr* of the remembering seeker with respect to the bounty of God brings about *dhikr* of the bounty of God with respect to him, just as *dhikr* of the servant with respect to God Himself results in *dhikr* of God with respect to the servant:

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ

Therefore remember Me, I will remember you (2:152).

Yet, any *dhikr* that emanates from the servant is actually enfolded [before and after] with two *dhikrs* by God, similar to the enfolding of the return/repentance (*tawbah*) of the servant with two returns by the Master. This is as follows: initially God sanctions His servant with the success to perform *dhikr* of Him, this blessing being *dhikr* of God with respect to the servant. Then, the servant succeeds to remember God, and yet again, upon accepting the *dhikr* by the servant, God will remember him and will pay him the necessary favor.

Up to this point, we referred to the subject-matter repeatedly expressed in speeches and writings of scholars of observation and understanding, such as Allāmah Tabātabāi – May God have mercy on him – with regards to the enfolding of the *tawbah* of the servant with two *tawbahs* by the Master, as arrived at by the verses of the Qur’ān.<sup>28</sup>

What this writing wishes to put forth is that the remembering seeker, whether in a state of [performing] *dhikr* or being the object of *dhikr* of God, is in a state of *dhikr*. This is because receiving the blessing of the remembrance of God by the servant, and being taught and conveyed the *dhikr* of God, is accompanied in its own right by the divine presence and expression, and this very presence of God is *dhikr* even if not appearing on the outside to be so. The evidence for this is that the duty of the seeker when hearing the recital of the Honorable Qur’ān is to become silent:

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

<sup>28</sup> *Tafsīr al-Mizān* (see commentary for verses 2:37 and 9:118. [Tr.]).

And when the Qur'an is recited, listen to it with attention, and become silent:  
that you may receive Mercy (7:204),

and since such silence and listening with attention is by the commandment of God Almighty, subsequently such silence will be *dhikr* and remembrance of God, even if not accompanied with a remembrance of the tongue. Therefore, recitation of divine verses is a *dhikr* of God, and so is receiving and absorbing them. In other words, to say and to listen are both acts of *dhikr*, and therefore if a person, as a result of remembrance of God, brings forth in himself the aptitude to become the object of *dhikr* by God and so that God remembers him, then it is surely the case that his state of listening and remaining quiet, and receiving and absorbing God's *dhikr* towards him, congregate and gather within the inner circle and depth of his heart. And this silent, attentive, receptive and awaiting state-of-being is *dhikr* of God, and according to the firm statement: "His overflowing charity does not increase in Him but [even more] generosity and kindness,"<sup>29</sup> this very received and absorbed *dhikr* will generate further and repeated *dhikr* by God, and such a complete, aware, remembering seeker will be a persistent performer of *dhikr* and prayer:

طُوبَى لَهُمْ وَحُسْنُ مَآبٍ

For them is (every) blessedness, and a beautiful place of (final) return (13:29).

## 5.2 Positive vs. negative silence

Given the previous explanation, the benefit of positive silence will reveal itself compared to negative silence. This is because attentive and active silence when reciting the 'book of compilation', so that the divine message is heard by the hearing of the head, is itself an act of *dhikr*. And similarly, an awaiting and searching silence, in which one situates himself as the addressee when reciting the 'book of creation'<sup>30</sup>, so that the sound of the glorification of the angels and other beings of the universe is heard with the hearing of the heart, such a silence is also *dhikr*, thought and expression of gratitude towards God. By contrast, a constant, dull and dead silence brings about nothing but error and oblivion.

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<sup>29</sup> "وَلَا تَزِدْهُ كَثْرَةَ الْعَطَاءِ إِلَّا جُوداً وَكَرَمًا"; Supplication of *Ifitāh*.

<sup>30</sup> In the Islamic literature, parallel references are sometimes made to two 'books': the book of compilation (*tadwīn*), which refers to the Qur'an, and the book of creation (*takwīn*), referring to the universe (and particularly to the Perfect Human which contains the elements of the universe within him; also see Sec. 8.2). One implication is that just as the Qur'an is a text that is recited, God's creation is also to be thought as a book to be read by individuals of insight and understanding in order to approach the Writer of the text of creation. [Tr.]

Note: From previous discussions, it becomes apparent that *dhikr* of God in its comprehensive meaning is what is thought, what is imagined (in concepts and in pictures), and what is sensed (both by what is seen and what is heard). Then with regards to such verses as the following:

الَّذِينَ كَانَتْ أَعْيُنُهُمْ فِي غِطَاءٍ عَنْ ذِكْرِي وَكَانُوا لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ سَمْعًا

[Unbelievers] whose eyes had been under a veil from remembrance of Me, and who had been unable even to hear (18:101),

وَمَنْ يَعْشُ عَنْ ذِكْرِ الرَّحْمَنِ نُفَيِّضْ لَهُ شَيْطَانًا فَهُوَ لَهُ قَرِينٌ

If anyone withdraws himself from remembrance of [God] Most Gracious, We appoint for him an evil one, to be an intimate companion to him (43:36),

such verses include both the outward and inward senses, and they can be accepted and thought about without a need to interpret them as mere figures of speech [e.g. *dhikr* of the eyes].

## 6. Benefits of DHIKR of God

*Dhikr* of God has numerous benefits, some of which we next refer to.

In the sense that the act of *dhikr* finds an ontological unity with the performer of *dhikr*, and also since *dhikr* of God is accompanied by His presence, it then follows that the performer of *dhikr* finds himself present in the presence of God, and therefore benefits enormously from perfection of this nearness and presence. As a result, being in a domain of constructive guard/humility (*haya*), he will avoid many disgraceful thoughts, blameworthy morals and reprehensible deeds:

أَلَمْ يَعْلَم بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَىٰ

Does he not know that God sees? (96:14)

And in his struggles with the inner and outer demons which call the servant towards desires and open up such avenues in front him, he achieves victory over them such that (i) to avert any danger of being polluted with sins, he remains justly and modestly protected, or (ii) to remove uninvited occurrences and sins that have already been committed, he strives in a very repenting and returning manner:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى \* وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّىٰ

Verily he prospered who purified himself, and remembered the name of his Lord, so prayed (87:14-15).

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَغْفِرِ اللَّهُ ذُنُوبَهُ  
إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَلَمْ يُصِرُّوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلُوا وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

And those who, having done something to be ashamed of, or wronged their own souls, earnestly bring God to mind, and ask for forgiveness for their sins,- and who can forgive sins except God?- and (they) are not persistent in (the wrong) they have done, while they know (3:135).

Here, the first verse may be stating the first mentioned issue of averting sins, while the second verse affirms the removal of committed sins by repenting and returning to the shadow of the remembrance of God.

Since Satan, who is the cause of oblivion and error and distraction from the Truth, is beaten up by the *dhikr* of God, then remembrance of God Almighty will result in one of two positive impacts: first is that it will prevent the occurrence of error and oblivion, and in other words, it will have an averting effect on danger; and the second is that it will transform the already-occurred oblivion into attention and awareness, and in other words, it will have a removal and cleansing effect on danger:

وَمَا أَتَسَانِيهِ إِلَّا الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أَذْكُرَهُ

None but Satan made me forget to remember (and mention) it (18:63).

وَإِنَّمَا يُنْسِيَنَّكَ الشَّيْطَانُ فَلَا تَقْعُدْ بَعْدَ الذِّكْرِ مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ

And if Satan ever makes you forget, then after remembering, do not sit in the company of those who do wrong (6:68).

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصُدَّكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلَاةِ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُنْتَهُونَ

Verily Satan's plan is (but) to excite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of God, and from prayer: will you not then abstain? (5:91).

اسْتَحْوَذَ عَلَيْهِمُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَأَنسَاهُمْ ذِكْرَ اللَّهِ

Satan has got the better of them: so he has made them forget the remembrance of God (58:19).

In these verses, the origin of the phenomenon of forgetfulness has been recognized as Satan, and in the verse:

وَاذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ

And remember your Lord when you forget (to do the right thing) (18:24),  
remembrance of God eliminates oblivion and removes the emerged danger.

Satan never neglects from afflicting the human being since it is the ‘evident enemy’, and nothing but persistent coercion and harassment can be expected from the evident enemy, and subsequently the source of protection against it or cleansing from it must also be continued, which is why we have been ordered to perform frequent and abundant *dhikr*, whether generally:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا

O you who believe! Remember God, remembering frequently (33:41),

or specifically:

وَاذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ كَثِيرًا

And remember your Lord frequently (3:41).

In the latter verse, Prophet Zakariyyā – peace be upon him – has been commanded to perform frequent *dhikr*. Now, with regards to any guidance which has been awarded to the prophets and God’s special people, others are also commanded to pursue and follow such guidance, except if a reason has been brought forth against such generalization. In the case of frequent *dhikr*, we do not have any such reason to limit [applicability to others], and in fact, evidence exists for such generalization.

## 6.1 Fruit of pure sincerity

Certainly, continuation of *dhikr* of God and persistence upon remembering Him is considerably productive; however, the effect of pure sincerity is more than that of frequent *dhikr*, and in fact, sincere *dhikr* is that very frequent *dhikr*. By contrast, insincere *dhikr*, even if quantitatively abundant, is small *dhikr*. As evidence for this, first consider the verse:

إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَهُوَ خَادِعُهُمْ وَإِذَا قَامُوا إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ قَامُوا كُسَالًا يُرَاءُونَ النَّاسَ  
وَلَا يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

The Hypocrites think they are over-reaching God, but He will over-reach them: When they stand up to prayer, they stand without earnestness, to be seen by people, but little do they hold God in remembrance (4:142)

In the context of this verse, a hadith has been narrated from Imām ‘Alī – peace be upon him – in which he said:

من ذكر الله عزّ وجلّ في السرّ فقد ذكر الله كثيرا ، إنّ المنافقين كانوا لا يذكر الله علانيةً  
و لا يذكرونه في السرّ

Whoever remembers God Almighty in secret has verily remembered Him abundantly; the hypocrites used to remember God in public and not remember Him in secret.<sup>31</sup>

The essence of this radiant hadith is that since this world is an insignificant commodity, and the people of hypocrisy perform *dhikr* for this world and not to be liberated from it, [love of this world] being the root of all transgressions, then their *dhikr*, though quantitatively plentiful, will in reality be little and insignificant.

Since any *dhikr* is like an arrow into the dark heart of the army of Satan, then upon (i) invasion of the enemy from the outside, and (ii) attacks of Satan and requests of the lower self (*ammārah*) and movements of the deceiving self (*musawwalah*) from the inside, it is necessary to seek help from frequent remembrance of God and to seek refuge through it, similar to what has been said about the smaller struggle<sup>32</sup>:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا لَقِيتُمْ فِئَةً فَاثْبُتُوا وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ  
O you who believe! When you meet a force, be firm and call God in remembrance much (and often), so that you may prosper (8:45).

Since performing frequent *dhikr* is the commandment of God and it is only obeying of this commandment that is beneficial, when describing those that have been saved and those insightful pious who have been freed from danger, God Almighty refers to abundance of remembrance by them and admires them for such abundant *dhikr*:

<sup>31</sup> *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 7, p. 164, hadith 3.

<sup>32</sup> The smaller struggle (*jihād-e-asghar*) refers to the battle with outside enemies, while the greater struggle (*jihād-e-akbar*) refers to the struggle with the lower self (as indicated by a famous prophetic hadith). In the aforementioned text, both struggles are mentioned. [Tr.]



إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

Except those who believe, work righteousness, and engage much in the remembrance of God (26:227).

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

You have indeed in the Messenger of God a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in God and the Final Day, and who engages much in the remembrance of God (33:21).

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ ... وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا

عَظِيمًا

For Muslim men and women ... and for men and women who engage much in remembrance of God,- for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward (33:35).

## 6.2 Note: Benefits of remembering manifestations and signs of God

In order to gain victory against the inner or outer enemy, remembrance of divine manifestations and *dhikr* of specific signs of God provide special contributions. This is why God commands the blessed prophet ﷺ to keep in his mind the leaders of the past, each of whom have been, within their boundaries, manifestations of a Name amongst the most beautiful divine Names, and to be reminded of their traditions and ways of life and inner aspects in order to succeed:

وَاذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ صِدِّيقًا نَبِيًّا

And mention in the Book [the case of] Abraham: He was a man of truth, a prophet (19:41).

وَاذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ مُوسَى إِنَّهُ كَانَ مُخْلَصًا وَكَانَ رَسُولًا نَبِيًّا

Also mention in the Book [the case of] Moses: for he was specially chosen, and he was an apostle, a prophet (19:51).

وَاذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ إِسْمَاعِيلَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ صَادِقَ الْوَعْدِ وَكَانَ رَسُولًا نَبِيًّا

Also mention in the Book [the case of] Ismā'il: He was (strictly) true to what he promised, and he was an apostle, a prophet (19:54).

وَاذْكُرْ فِي الْكِتَابِ إِدْرِيسَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ صِدِّيقًا نَبِيًّا

Also mention in the Book [the case of] Idrīs: He was a man of truth, a prophet (19:56).

In these verses, and numerous similar ones in the Qur'ān, God has reminded the revered prophet of Islam to remember the previous prophets and friends of God, and has indicated their remembrance as a source of strength for the blessed prophet in fulfilling the covenant of delivering the message, similar to the fact that remembering God, and sincerity and perseverance in this regard, is very effective in achieving victory over His enemies. This is why God Almighty said the following to Moses and Aaron – peace be upon them – when sending them to invite Pharaoh and his court:

اَذْهَبْ أَنْتَ وَأَخُوكَ بِآيَاتِي وَلَا تَنِيَا فِي دَعْوِي

Go, you [Moses] and your brother, with My Signs, and slacken not, either of you, in keeping Me in remembrance (20:42).

That is, you (Moses) and your brother (Aaron), while having miracles and signs bestowed upon you by Me, go forth to the Pharaoh, and in reviving My name and remembrance, do not allow any frailty, weakness and slackness to infiltrate you. Prophet Moses – peace be upon him – had considered performance of abundant *dhikr* as one important reason for him to request participation and vizierhood of his brother Aaron – peace be upon him:

وَأَشْرِكُهُ فِي أَمْرِي \* كَيْ نُسَبِّحَكَ كَثِيرًا \* وَنَذْكُرَكَ كَثِيرًا

And make him [Aaron] share my task; that we may glorify You much, and remember You much (20:32-34).

The effectiveness of the remembrance of God is such that God has commanded (i) in some cases (for his servants) to uphold and retain their power, strength and vigor; e.g.:

خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ

Hold firmly to what We have given you (2:63),

يَا يَحْيَىٰ خُذِ الْكِتَابَ بِقُوَّةٍ

O Yahyā! take hold of the Book with might (19:12),

وَأَعِدُّوا لَهُمْ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ

Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power (8:60).

And (ii) sometimes He has prohibited weakness and slackness such as in the verse:

وَلَا تَنِيَا فِي ذِكْرِي

And slacken not, either of you, in keeping Me in remembrance (20:42).

It was in order to seek help from such a hidden power, i.e. assistance from remembrance of God and attentiveness to manifestations of power and for the presence of the divine might, that Prophet Moses – peace be upon him – was commanded to acquaint and remind his community of the days of manifestation of God's might:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا مُوسَىٰ بِآيَاتِنَا أَنْ أَخْرِجْ قَوْمَكَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَذَكِّرْهُمْ بِأَيَّامِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ

And We sent Moses with Our signs [and the command]: "Bring out your people from the depths of darkness into light, and teach them to remember the Days of God." Verily in this there are Signs for those that are firmly patient and grateful (14:5).

Any stage in which an uncommon grace of God is manifested, and some of the hidden secrets of the universe are revealed, and a fraction of the concealed truths are brought to light, that stage in its capacity is a day amongst the special days of God. And if the above verse has been applied [by narrations] to the issue of the appearance of Imām Mahdī – peace be upon him – and the Return (*Raj'ah*) and the Resurrection (*Qiyamah*), this is done so in the sense of providing instances for the meaning of the verse, not to restrict the meaning of the verse to those instances only.

### 6.3 The hazard of becoming oblivious of God

From the previous discussion it becomes clear that the hazard of being forgetful of God and to err in His remembrance is to be defeated by the enticements of the outer and inner enemies:

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَىٰ

But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment (20:124).

فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْ مَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَلَمْ يُرِدْ إِلَّا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا

Therefore turn away from those who turn their back on Our Message and who desire nothing but the life of this world (53:29).

The rational analysis for the negative results of becoming oblivious of God and to forget His name and His remembrance is that: God Almighty is not only the Creator of the human being, but is also the Upholder of his contingent existence and identity. This is to the extent that knowing the human being is not possible without having knowledge of his Upholder. In other words, to comprehend a dependent and contingent meaning without having knowledge of the meaning by which it is maintained, which is God, will not be feasible. Then, upon forgetting the Upholder, the identity of the human being will also be forgotten, and upon forgetting one's identity, there will not exist a sensation against the continued presence of the invaders of identity, and by not sensing any such danger, no rebellion and action will take place against the invading enemy. As a result, all the perceptive and stimulated faculties of man [see Sec. 2] will be captured by Satan, and will, from then on, comprehend things and act with respect to them according to the desires originating from the bloodthirsty nature of that malicious and egocentric ruler, and any good becomes understood as bad by him, and any evil accounted as noble!

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

And be not like those who forgot God, then He made them forget their own souls! Such are the transgressors! (59:19)

Some have said that with regards to the famous narration: "Whoever came to know himself, then verily he came to know his Lord,"<sup>33</sup> its relation with the aforementioned verse is that of an inverse process of reasoning; that is, if having knowledge of God arises from knowledge of one's self, then it is the case that oblivion of God and lacking knowledge of Him is a result of forgetting one's self and lacking knowledge of it.

In any case, *dhikr* of God results in remembrance of one's identity and attaining its transcendence, and forgetting God will result in forgetfulness of one's identity and its abandonment in the company of any invading oppressor, in which case, no such thing as a human identity will remain, and instead, it will be replaced with something else, which will then impose upon him all its egoistic and satanic requests and desires with the outward appearance of civilization, happiness and perfection!

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<sup>33</sup> "من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربه"; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 2, p. 32.

## 7. The Best Rememberer and Remembered

From the perspective that the *dhikr* of God is an existential excellence, and any such existential excellence is most appropriately applicable to God Himself, He will then have the most perfect *dhikr*. As stated in the opening parts of this writing [Sec. 1.3] God Almighty, from the aspects of being both the Rememberer and the Remembered and from the perspectives of sincerity, continuity and other aspects relevant to perfection of *dhikr*, will encompass all [excellent] ranks. This is why, in prayers narrated from the blessed household of the prophet – peace be upon them – God has been acclaimed as the Best Rememberer and the Best Remembered; below we mention examples of this as they appear in the invocation of *Jushan-e Kabir* (and later we will mention those aspects requested from God relating to qualities and magnitudes of *dhikr*, as appearing in a number of invocations including those of *Sha'bāniyyah*, *Dhākerīn*, *Kumayl* and *Abu Ḥamzah Thumālī*).

In the prayer of *Jushan-e Kabir*<sup>34</sup>, which has been narrated by Imām ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (*al-Sajjād*) from his revered fathers from the blessed prophet – peace be upon him and his progeny – from the trustworthy Angel Jibrā’īl – peace be upon him, we read:

(١) يَا خَيْرَ الدَّاكِرِينَ (٢) يَا خَيْرَ الْمَذْكُورِينَ (٣) يَا مَنْ ذَكَرُهُ خُلُو (٤) يَا مَنْ لَهُ ذِكْرٌ لَا  
يُنْسَى (٥) يَا مَنْ ذَكَرُهُ شَرَفٌ لِلدَّاكِرِينَ (٦) يَا أَعَزَّ مَذْكُورٍ ذِكْر (٧) يَا خَيْرَ ذَاكِرٍ وَمَذْكُورٍ  
(1) O Best of those who remember; (2) O Best of those who are  
remembered; (3) O He Whose remembrance is sweet (4) O He Whose  
remembrance is not forgotten (5) O He Whose remembrance is an honor for  
those who remember Him (6) O Most exalted of all who are remembered (7)  
O Best Rememberer and Remembered.<sup>35</sup>

From these expressions, one can deduce that one of the most beautiful names of God Almighty is the Rememberer<sup>36</sup> and the other is the Remembered.

The conception of God being the Best of those who remember and of those who are remembered is not contrary to the unity of deeds and actions (*tawḥīd-e af‘ālī*) [God being the ultimate source of actions], just as it is not contrary to the

<sup>34</sup>The magnificent prayer of *Jushan-e Kabir* is a very powerful prayer consisting of 100 sections each with 10 names of God, and is narrated to have been taught to the blessed prophet in one of his battles, and to contain the greatest Name of God (*ism-e a‘zam*). It is especially recommended to read this prayer at the beginning of the blessed month of Ramadan, with the benefit that God will provide the servant with sustenance in the Night of *Qadr*. [Tr.]

<sup>35</sup>The following seven invocations occur in sections 3, 39, 48, 71, 75, 86 and 95 of the prayer of *Jushan-e Kabir*. [Tr.]

<sup>36</sup>In fact, in section 40 of the aforementioned prayer, God is explicitly invoked as “O Rememberer” (*Yā Dhāker*). [Tr.]

unity in attributes (*tawḥīd-e aṣṣāf*) nor to the unity in essence (*dhāt*) [all attributes and essence being mere manifestations of God]; this is because if one remembers something aside from God, if such remembrance is accompanied with negligence and oblivion of God, then it is not *dhikr*, and if it is with God's remembrance, then there exists no 'otherness' [than God] except in the sense of being signs, manifestations, reflections, and the like, and in this sense, remembrance of anything is *dhikr* of one of God's signs.<sup>37</sup>

The secret behind the sweetness of His remembrance and the praiseworthiness of His *dhikr* and its continuity was already mentioned in previous sections, and what we would like to add at this point is that if we consider the rememberer to be God then He will never forget:

وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ نَسِيًّا

And your Lord never forgets (19:64).

And if the rememberers are His created signs, then since the entire universe is in a state of constant remembrance of Him, and no being exists that is even momentarily oblivious of obedience, glorification, prostration and return to Him, then it is appropriate to say:

يَا مَنْ لَهُ دِكْرٌ لَا يُنْسَى

O He Whose remembrance is not forgotten.<sup>38</sup>

## 7.1 Continuity of *dhikr*

Now that it has been affirmed that *dhikr* of God is an existential excellence and perfection (because *dhikr* is other than supplication and asking) and that this applies to God Almighty in the best possible manner, then the worshipping seeker strives to attribute himself with the divine attributes and to be described with God's qualities and to be a rememberer of Him. This is why one of the most important things we ask of God in our supplications is that very thing which He has ordained for the believers: that is the all-important issue of *dhikr*, [and the

<sup>37</sup> If one considers God merely as one rememberer and one remembered amongst many other ones who remember and are remembered (even if the best of them), then this is *not* consistent with the unity of deeds, attributes and essence. By contrast, the correct view is that things other than God that remember or are remembered are merely His manifestations, and are not independent entities. Thus remembrances by and of God are the best acts of *dhikr* in comparison with remembrances by and of His manifestations, while still preserving conceptions of unity. And God knows best. [Tr.]

<sup>38</sup> *Jushan-e Kabīr*, sec. 71

blessing to perform it] in abundance, seeking nearness to God through it, to be fervently devoted to it and to be consistent in it even if there is a single *dhikr* (since continuity is different that multitude).

In the invocation of *Sha‘bāniyyah*<sup>39</sup> we read:

(١) إلهي و ألهمني و لهاً بذكرک الی ذکرک (٢) و أن تجعلني ممن يُلمّ ذکرک

(1) My Lord, inspire me with a fervent love of remembering You; (2) And make me one who perseveres upon remembering You.

And in the supplication of *Kumayl*<sup>40</sup> we read:

(١) أتقرب اليک بذكرک (٢) تُلهمني ذکرک (٣) لهج به لسانی من ذکرک (٤) أن

تجعل اوقاتي من الليل و النهار بذكرک معمورة (٥) و ذکره شفاء

(1) I seek nearness to You with remembrance of You; (2) Inspire me with remembrance of You; (3) My tongue has repeatedly remembered You; (4) Make my time, day and night, utilized in Your remembrance; (5) (O He) Whose remembrance is a sure cure.

And in the supplication of *Abu-Hamzah Thumālī*<sup>41</sup> one comes across:

(١) أَللّهُم اشغلنا بذكرک (٢) أَللّهُم خصّني منك بخاصّة ذکرک

(1) O God engage us in Your remembrance; (2) O God make me specially chosen with special remembrance of You.

i.e. that I may specially remember You, and You too remember me specially. In these instances, many requests have been made with regards to *dhikr* of God, and aside from perseverance in the act *dhikr*, fervent love (*tawallub*) and intense devotion and attachment and enthusiasm and impatience and eagerness in remembrance of God are of the most transcendent and complete stages of the *dhikr* of the servant with respect to God.

<sup>39</sup> This supplication is one of the most beautiful heritages left by the household of the prophet – peace be upon them. It is narrated that Imām ‘Alī and his holy descendants – peace be upon them – used to recite it in the month of Sha‘bān. In fact according to the Shi‘a scholar and mystic – Mirzā Jawād Malekī Tabrizī – in his book *al-Murāqibāt*: “those affiliated with this invocation become close with the month of Sha‘bān because of it, and it is because of this invocation that they eagerly await the arrival of this month”. [Tr.]

<sup>40</sup> This remarkable supplication was taught by Imām ‘Alī – peace be upon him - to his faithful companion Kumayl ibn Ziyād, and is commonly recited in the night preceding Friday. [Tr.]

<sup>41</sup> *Abu-Hamzah Thumālī* was a close companion of Imām ‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn (*al-Sajjād*) and has narrated a long supplication which the Imām used to recite, after having spent most of the night performing prayers. [Tr.]

## 7.2 Most comprehensive attributes of ḌHIKR

Such aforementioned *dhikr* will certainly lead to a constructive existence, a restored time of life and the production of a fruitful living; this is because a life spent in oblivion is a ruined one, and times spent in mere blunder are destroyed, and the most comprehensive attributes of *dhikr* are [mentioned in] ‘the whispered prayer of the rememberers’ (*Dhākerīn*), which is one of the fifteen invocations attributed to Imām ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn (*al-Sajjād*) – peace be upon him. In it one reads:

(1) Among Your greatest favors to us is the running of Your remembrance across our tongues; (2) Inspire us with Your remembrance alone and in assemblies, by night and day, publicly and secretly, in prosperity and adversity, and make us intimate with the silent *dhikr*; (3) My God! love-mad hearts are enraptured by You, and disparate intellects are brought together by knowing You, thus hearts find no serenity except in remembering You, and souls find no rest except in seeing You; (4) And I pray forgiveness from You for every pleasure other than remembering You; (5) My God! You have said - and Your word is true – “O you who have faith, remember God with much remembrance and glorify Him at dawn and in the evening”; and You have said - and Your word is true – “Remember Me, and I will remember you”; thus You have commanded us to remember You, and promised us that You will remember us thereby, in order to ennoble, respect, and honor us. And here we are, remembering You as You have commanded us. So recompense what You have promised us, O Rememberer of the rememberers!

## 7.3 Note: the manner to perform ḌHIKR

*Dhikr* of God is sometimes in the form of supplication (*du‘ā*) which belongs to the domain of instruction (i.e. the normative (*inshā’*)), and sometimes takes the form of attributing qualities to God, or [invoking] proofs of existence of God and the unification of all attributes of the Essence with each other and all with the Essence of God; and these belongs to the domain of the descriptive (*ikhbār*) and are not of the same type as the normative. In this sense, the more general nature of *dhikr* compared to the act of supplication [which is only in the domain of *inshā’*] becomes clear. Moreover, each of *dhikr* and supplication have their own specific characteristics which distinguishes them from one another, though sometimes it is possible for a descriptive sentence to be issued in an instructive sense and to take the form of supplication. Yet, performing supplication in the form of asking (*su‘āl*) maintains its nature which is calling upon God and not [simply] the act of requesting which is the [basic] meaning of asking.



#### 7.4 Remark: Eventual serenity of the remembering seeker

At the beginning when the remembering seeker brings to life the remembrance of God on his tongue, and then in his heart, since the One Remembered overpowers the performer of *dhikr*, His mighty presence overwhelms the rememberer, and this constructive unrest and fear is the context for an ultimate serenity. Here, the remembering seeker seeks help from that very One Remembered, and carries the heavy burden of His remembrance with His aid, since His bounties will not be carried except by His support.

The Blessed Qur'an too while providing admiration for remembering believers whose hearts beat with the remembrance of God, narrates their eventual outcome which is the stage of obtaining certainly and serenity:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَىٰ رَحْمَةٍ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

Verily believers are those who, when God is mentioned, feel a tremor in their hearts, and when they hear His signs rehearsed, find their faith strengthened, and put their trust in their Lord (8:2).

And in the sense that the Holy Qur'an is itself remembrance of God (as we will later explain), the following has been revealed with regards to this divine book:

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُّتَشَابِهًا مّتَابِرًا تَتَذَكَّرُ مِنْهُ جُلُودُ الَّذِينَ يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ ذَٰلِكَ هُدَىٰ اللَّهِ يَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُضْلِلِ اللَّهُ فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ هَادٍ

God has revealed the most beautiful Message in the form of a Book, consistent with itself (yet) repeating [its teaching in various aspects]: the skins of those who fear their Lord tremble thereat; then their skins and their hearts do soften to the *dhikr* of God. Such is the guidance of God: He guides therewith whom He pleases, but he whom God leaves to stray, can have none to guide (39:23).

From these and similar verses one can construe that the seeker, at the beginning of the journey, becomes fearful upon remembrance of God and a holy fear overtakes his heart; then gradually, upon becoming more acquainted and close with the One Remembered, and reading and hearing His word, his faith intensifies and this intensification of faith results in his entrance to the fort of safety, stronghold of providence and the guard of liberation from fear and the like. Then, his outward

and inward, his body and heart, both become serene and quiet upon remembrance of God. Therefore, if it has been said that:

أَلَا بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ تَطْمَئِنُّ الْقُلُوبُ

Without doubt it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find rest (and satisfaction) (13:28),

perhaps this refers to the journey at its eventual stage; otherwise, at the beginning of the journey it is possible for shiver and trembling to overtake the seeker, just as diving into the ocean is sometimes preceded with an initial fear; although it is possible for some ocean-hearted divers, even at the beginning stages of trial and practice, to become guests of the ocean with serene and restful hearts, yet such courage is only the share of a very rare group of ocean-divers. Additionally, for the stage of serenity to occur, there is much benefit to remember the traditions and ways of life of the fiends of God in the bitter occurrences in history, and their patience and endurance in the struggle against evil. Such remembrances all return to the remembrance of God, and the outcome of such patience, endurance and serenity is the result of the remembrance of God.

#### 7.5 Reminder: Initial fear of the hardhearted ignorant

The initial panic that overtakes the heart of the hardhearted ignorant is different from the fear that belongs to the remembering seeker at the beginning of the path, similar to how the calmness that is the share of the ignorant as a result of being oblivious of God is different that the certainly and serenity that becomes the share of the seeker at the end of the path. This is because one is genuine and the other is false, one is a reward and the other, a punishment.

The Blessed Qur'an has said the following with regards to the genuine and false senses of security, and the appropriate and inappropriate senses of serenity:

أَفَأَمِنُوا مَكْرَ اللَّهِ فَلَا يَأْمَنُ مَكْرَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

What! do they then feel secure from God's scheme? But none feels secure from God's scheme except the people who shall perish (7:99).

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوا إِيمَانَهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْأَمْنُونَ وَهُمْ مُّهْتَدُونَ

Those who believe and obscure not their belief by wrongdoing, theirs is security; and they are rightly guided (6:82).

According to this, security of the non-believer is a false sensation and a void comprehension, and the security of the believer is a genuine sensation and a valid comprehension.

#### 7.6 Note: Effect of remembrance of God on the heart

*Dhikr* of God does not produce genuine serenity until it becomes affixed to one's soul. This is because mentioning God's name on the tongue is like watering branches of a tree whose only effect is to clean the tree, while remembrance of God in the heart is equivalent to watering the root of the tree which will end up in growth and fruitfulness of the tree. This is why God Almighty has said:

وَاذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ فِي نَفْسِكَ تَضَرُّعًا وَخِيفَةً وَدُونَ الْجَهْرِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ وَلَا تَكُنْ مِنَ الْغَافِلِينَ

And remember your Lord in your (very) soul with humility and in reverence without loudness in words in the mornings and evenings, and be not of those who are unheedful (7:205).

Thus, what is important in the removal of ignorance and oblivion is the remembrance of God in the heart, while accompanied with inner crying and expressions of need.

Such a remembrance has as its benefits that (i) it forces the remembering seeker to be involved in active production, work and efforts to satisfy the requirements of the Islamic society, such that he is relieved from any laziness and idleness that are (sometimes falsely) supported by the excuse of a faulty type of piety (*zuhde madhmūm*), and (ii) no profitable work distracts him from the remembrance of God, nor forces him to quit pursuing a permissible (*halāl*) line of work or to initiate an impermissible (*harām*) type of activity or to become tainted with any other misdeed; this is as God has said:

رِحَالٌ لَا تُلْهِهِمْ تِجَارَةٌ وَلَا بَيْعٌ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ يَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا تَتَقَلَّبُ فِيهِ الْقُلُوبُ وَالْأَبْصَارُ

Men whom neither merchandise nor selling diverts from the remembrance of God and the keeping up of prayer and the regular charity; they fear a day in which the hearts and eyes shall turn about (24:37).

Such men of God, as a result of the penetration of the remembrance of God [into their hearts and souls], not only are they not negligent of their bodily acts of

worship such as the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*), but they are also mindful of monetary acts of worship and pay the regular charity (*zakāt*).

Consider this: the most noble mosque on the face of the earth after the Sacred Mosque in Mecca is the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina, and the master of all days and the day of Muslim celebration is the day of Friday; furthermore, the ritual prayer has been described as an act of *dhikr*, and particularly the Friday prayer has been mentioned in the Qur'ānic chapter of *al-Jumu'ah* as *dhikr* of God (as we will God-willing later discuss); some people who had no share of remembrance of God by heart, though they had it on their tongues, upon praying behind the Leader that has never had and will never have any similar, i.e. the Seal of the Prophets ﷺ, even with all these benefits and honorable aspects of the location and act of worship, hearing of the sermon of the Friday prayer and the sermon-giver himself, they abandoned all these, and upon hearing the sounds of the trumpets of trade, they escaped from the prayer in order to purchase a merchandise at a cheaper rate or to store more of that commodity!

وَإِذَا رَأَوْا تِجَارَةً أَوْ لَهْوًا انْفَضُّوا إِلَيْهَا وَتَرَكُوكَ قَائِمًا قُلْ مَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ مِنَ اللَّهِو وَمِنَ التِّجَارَةِ  
وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ

But when they saw some bargain or some amusement, they dispersed headlong to it, and left you standing [in the Friday prayer].  
Say: "What is with God is better than any amusement or bargain! and God is the Best of providers" (62:11).

## 7.7 Remembrance of contents of religious texts

In order for God's Name to be accompanied by remembrance of the knowledge, commandments and wisdoms taught by Him, He Almighty has issued the order to his servants to remember the contents of religious texts throughout history, past and present:

خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ وَادْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ  
Hold firmly to what We have given you and bring to remembrance what is therein: so that you may fear God (2:63).

وَادْكُرْنَ مَا يُتْلَىٰ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَالْحِكْمَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ لَطِيفًا خَبِيرًا

And remember what is recited to you in your homes, of the Signs of God and His Wisdom: for God understands the finest mysteries and is well-acquainted (with them) (33:34).

And to this end, opportune times have been selected for ensuring the remembrance of God:

فَإِذَا أَقْبَضْتُمْ مِنْ عَرَفَاتٍ فَادْكُرُوا اللَّهَ عِنْدَ الْمَشْعَرِ الْحَرَامِ وَاذْكُرُوا كَمَا هَذَاكُمْ وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمِنَ الضَّالِّينَ

Then when you pour down from (Mount) Arafat, remember God at the Sacred Monument, and Remember Him as He has guided you, even though before this, you were lost (2:198).

The secret behind gaining little or no benefit in some remembrances of God is that the weaker one's attentiveness to the *dhikr* of God becomes, that void is filled with negligence of God, and the effect of negligence of God is preference of this world to the next, leaving the blessed prophet standing and the like. This is because attributes of one's self and one's external deeds mutually influence one another; and similar to how a genuine prayer, which is the pure *dhikr* of God as He says "establish the prayer for My remembrance,"<sup>42</sup> prohibits one from indecency and bad deeds, committing indecency and evil deeds too prohibit one from prayer and *dhikr* of God.

## 7.8 Mutual influence of remembrance of truth and oblivion of falsehood

The essence of the result of being attentive to this world, and being deceived by it, on the decline and erosion of remembrance of God can be found in compilations of religious narrations, particularly that of *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Imām 'Alī – peace be upon him – has said:

And know that desires make reason falter and make remembrance oblivious. You should falsify desire because it is a deception, and he who has desires is in deceit.<sup>43</sup>

By God, surely the remembrance of death has kept me away from play and amusement, while obliviousness about the next world has prevented him [his enemy 'Amr ibn 'Aas] from speaking the truth.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> "وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي" (20:14).

<sup>43</sup> *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 86.

It must be noted that what is meant by remembrance of death is actually with regards to life after death and the reckoning and reward and punishment, which is the return towards God the Reckoner (*al-Ḥasīb*) [the One Who has account of all things, and judges very accurately], and we shall expand upon this later.

Another example of the mutual influence of (i) remembrance of truth and (ii) oblivion of falsehood (and similarly (i) remembrance of falsehood and (ii) oblivion of truth), can be understood from the famous saying of Imām ‘Alī – peace be upon him:

O people! What I fear most about you are two things - acting according to desires and extending of hopes. As regards acting according to desires, this prevents from the truth; and as regards extending of hopes, it makes one forget the next world.<sup>45</sup>

That is, similar to how remembrance of truth prevents obedience of the desires, obedience of the desires too prevents remembrance of and inclination towards the truth. It has been narrated from Imām Ja’far Sādiq – peace be upon him – that being in a state of desiring to multiply one’s belongings (*takāthur*) results in oblivion of one’s sins, and parting with the remembrance of God hardens the hearts.<sup>46</sup>

## 8. Instances of *DHĪKR*

### 8.1 The Perfect Human

*Dhikr* of the Truth, and being a remembrance and reminder of it, is one of the beautiful Names of God Almighty, as shown in the previous section.<sup>47</sup> What we wish to describe in more detail in this section is that whatever is a rememberer of God and a reminder of Him is a manifestation of the Divine Name of ‘the Rememberer’ (*Dhāker*). Amongst the manifestation of this Name, the Perfect Human - particularly the pure and infallible Household of the Prophet - and also the heavenly books - particularly the Blessed Qur’ān, are perfect mirrors and complete, all-encompassing signs of the *dhikr* of God. This is why God Almighty

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<sup>44</sup> *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 84.

<sup>45</sup> *Nahj al-Balāghah*, sermon 42.

<sup>46</sup> *Wasā’il al-Shi’a*, vol. 15, p. 280, hadith 1.

<sup>47</sup> In the previous section, the author has discussed that (i) God is the Best Rememberer, and that (ii) the worshipping seeker strives to enact this and other attributes of God in himself (Sec. 7.1). In the present section, the latter point is elaborated. [Tr.]

has identified some things or individuals as *dhikr*, and has esteemed them with this attribute. For instance:

فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَا أُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قَدْ أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكُمْ ذِكْرًا \* رَسُولًا يَتْلُوا عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ  
اللَّهِ مُبَيِّنَاتٍ لِيُخْرِجَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ

Then fear God, O you men of understanding - who have believed!- for God has indeed sent down to you a *dhikr* - an Apostle who recited upon you the signs of God containing clear explanations, that he may lead forth those who believe and do righteous deeds from the depths of Darkness into Light (65:10-11).

In this verse, it is possible that the title of *dhikr* has been applied to the person of the blessed Apostle of God – peace be upon him and his progeny, i.e. for the word ‘apostle’ (*rasūl*) in the verse to be an explanation of the heading of *dhikr* so that we can conclude that what is meant by *dhikr* here is the very prophet. And the reference to ‘sending down’ (*inzāl*) in the verse does not negate this; this is because just as the expression of ‘sending forth’ (*irsāl*) is applicable to the blessed prophet given his status of apostlehood, also given his status of ‘being with God’ (*‘ind*-God) [in the highest reachable world] the expression of ‘sending down’ is applicable to his manifestation in the lower world of nature.

In some other verses, the term ‘sending down’ (*inzāl*) has also been utilized with a similar meaning; e.g.:

فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِهِ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا النُّورَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ مَعَهُ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

So it is those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light which was sent down with him,- it is they who will prosper (7:157).

In this verse, one can deduce that the Qur’ān (the light) was sent down with the blessed apostle – peace be upon him and his progeny; i.e. both have been sent down by and from God Almighty. Therefore, both the Qur’ān and the Perfect Human have a status of ‘being with God’ and have been manifested from there. In short, the term ‘sending down’ does not contradict application of *dhikr* to the person of the blessed prophet.

Another evidence implying that the Perfect Human is a manifestation of the Divine Name of ‘the Rememberer’ is a narration in which Imām Ja’far Sādiq – peace be upon him – said that “no group ever gathered in a gathering in which they did not remember God Almighty and us [the Household of the Prophet] except that gathering will become a source of regret for them on the day of Judgment!” Then the Imām narrated from his blessed father, Imām Bāqir – peace be upon him

– that “indeed remembrance of us is from the remembrance of God, and remembrance of our enemy is from the remembrance of Satan.”<sup>48</sup>

The secret of this hadith providing an evidence for our statement is that if the Perfect Human, such as from the pure and infallible Household of the Prophet, is not a manifestation of the remembrance of God, his/her remembrance will never be a remembrance of God. This is since the only “Truth” is God, and only His remembrance is *dhikr* of “Truth”, and since the Perfect Human is a manifestation of the remembrance of Truth, remembering him is *dhikr* of God. Perhaps it is due to this fact of being a total manifestation (of God) and also the annihilation of the Perfect Human in the Divine Beauty and Glory that the hadith scholar Shaykh Ṣaḍūq has narrated (in the form of indirect but certain narration<sup>49</sup>) that an infallible has said:

Sending blessings upon Muḥammad and his progeny is equal at the sight of God Almighty to performing glorification (*tasbiḥ*), invocation of His unity (*tahlīl*) and declaration of His greatness (*takbīr*).<sup>50</sup>

Our proof for such analysis is that, according to some Islamic narrations, just as God has no equivalent, invocation of His unity also has no equal<sup>51</sup>; and if something such as sending of blessings upon the pure and infallible Household – peace be upon them – is equal to invocation of God’s unity, explanation of such equality is that the Perfect Human has nothing of himself, just as he sees nothing aside from God and His beautiful names and exalted attributes. Thus, he is nothing but remembrance of the Truth, and in this sense, sending of blessings upon them is equal to that which has no equal; that is, the Perfect Human is nothing foreign to the divine names. Pay attention.

## 8.2 The compiled *DHIKR* of God

So far we outlined application of *dhikr* to the Perfect Human which is the ‘book of creation’<sup>52</sup> of God the Rememberer, and with further search, more evidence can be found to this end.

<sup>48</sup> *Wasā’il al-Shi’a*, vol. 7, p. 153, hadith 3.

<sup>49</sup> The term used is *irsāle mosallam*: this is a kind of narration for which the complete chain of narrations leading to the infallible has not been recorded, but a level of certainty exists which substantiates attribution to the infallible. [Tr.]

<sup>50</sup> “الصلوة على محمد وآله تعدل عند الله عز وجل التسبيح والتكبير والتلهيل والتعظيم”; *Wasā’il al-Shi’a*, vol. 7, p. 194, hadith 8.

<sup>51</sup> *Wasā’il al-Shi’a*, vol. 7, p. 208, hadiths 1 and 5.

<sup>52</sup> See footnote 30. [Tr.]



A second instance of application of *dhikr* is to the ‘book of compilation’ of God, being the Qur’ān or others. The divine compilation, aside from its existential backbone which is God’s objective *dhikr*, is also from the perspective of its content and invitation and claim, the literary, written and mental *dhikr* of the Best of Rememberers. God’s expression with regards to the message and books given to previous apostles such as Noah and Hūd is worth pondering upon:

أَوَعَجِبْتُمْ أَنْ جَاءَكُمْ ذِكْرٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ عَلَى رَجُلٍ مِنْكُمْ لِيُنذِرَكُمْ وَلِتَتَّقُوا وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

“Do you wonder that there has come to you a *dhikr* from your Lord, upon a man of your own, to warn you,- so that you may fear God and receive His Mercy?” (7:63)<sup>53</sup>

With regards to the Qur’ān, God refers to it (i) sometimes as ‘the *dhikr*’ in an absolute sense, (ii) sometimes as ‘the wise *dhikr*’, (iii) in some case as ‘the *dhikr* for all creatures’, and (iv) in another instance as ‘full of *dhikr*’, etc.

(i) The first type of reference occurs in verses six<sup>54</sup> and nine of the chapter *al-Hijr*:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

We have, without doubt, sent down the *dhikr*; and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption] (15:9),

and also in the following verse:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

We have sent down unto you the *dhikr*; that you may explain clearly to the people what is sent down to them, and that they may give thought (16:44).

(ii) Use of the heading ‘the wise *dhikr*’ for the Qur’ān appears in verse 58 of the third chapter:

ذَلِكَ نَتْلُوهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنَ الْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ

This is what we recite unto you of the Signs and the wise *dhikr* (3:58).

<sup>53</sup> This is the saying of Prophet Noah; first part of the verse also appears in 7:69 which is the saying of Prophet Hūd. [Tr.]

<sup>54</sup> وَقَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِي نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الذِّكْرُ إِنَّكَ لَمَجْنُونٌ

They say: "O you to whom the *dhikr* is being revealed! truly you are mad (and possessed)! (15:6)

(iii) The Qur'ān as 'the *dhikr* for all creatures' has been mentioned in verse 104 of the Chapter Yūsuf (Joseph):

وَمَا تَسْأَلُهُمْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَجْرٍ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا دِكْرٌ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

And you do not ask them for a reward for this; it is nothing but a reminder for all creatures (12:104).

(iv) And the Qur'ān as 'full of *dhikr*' can be seen in such verses as the first verse of the chapter *Ṣād*:

ص وَالْقُرْآنِ ذِي الذِّكْرِ

*Ṣād* - By the Qur'an, full of *dhikr* (38:1)

And since the message of Qur'ān is in harmony with the inner, sublime nature (*fīrat*) of human beings as well as the objective universe, God has prepared this book for the remembrance of mankind with regards to what they find inside and outside themselves, and has repeatedly mentioned in the chapter *al-Qamar*:

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ

And We have indeed made the Qur'an easy for *dhikr*: then is there anyone that will mind? (54:17,22,32,40).

Note: Use of the term *dhikr* meaning noteworthy, notable, celebrated and the like, as applied to the Perfect Human (the Book of Creation) and to the Heavenly Book particularly the Qur'ān (the Book of Compilation), requires its own discussion which if needed will be outlined [see Sec. 9].

### 8.3 The ritual prayer (ṢALĀT)

A third clear instance of *dhikr* is the ritual prayer, particularly the Friday prayer. The significance of prayer, described as the pillar of religion, has made it take on a special position in all faiths and schools of the divinely inspired prophets.

God Almighty has instructed the follower of Prophet Moses – peace be upon him – to make the Torah and prayer the bases for deliverance and to cling onto them. And He had commanded the seekers in the way of Prophet Jesus – peace be upon him – to make the Bible and prayer foundations of salvation and to hold fast by them. And He ordered the journey-goers in the path of the Blessed Prophet Muḥammad – peace be upon him and his progeny – to recognize the Qur'ān and prayer as cornerstones of liberation from any harm and to firmly grasp onto them. From this generality, one can conclude that the universal message of

God to all nations is that the Heavenly Book and prayer are the foundations of salvation. Even though the divine books including the Torah, Bible and Qur'an also encompass the prayer, yet from the aspect of mentioning the more specific after the more general (or the part after the whole) [in order to further emphasize], the issue of prayer has been separately mentioned side-by-side along with the Heavenly Book:

وَالَّذِينَ يُسْكِنُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّا لَا نَضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُصْلِحِينَ

As to those who hold fast by the Book and establish regular prayer,- never shall We suffer the reward of the righteous to perish (7:170).

This verse embraces all nations in all times and places, meaning that with regards to those who hold fast by the Divine Book and establish the ritual prayer (i.e. are virtuous (*sāliḥ*) and encourage nobility (*muṣliḥ*)), God will indeed not allow their rewards to perish. Since the aforementioned verse appears in the midst of narrating the story of the children of Israel, and at the same time considers the Muslims as its audience, it embraces all divine compilations.

#### 8.4 Remark: the difference between IMSĀK and TAMŚĪK

The difference between *imsāk* and *tamsīk* (or *tamassuk*) is that with *imsāk*, the thing that is being grasped onto is protected from falling, whereas with *tamsīk* or *tamassuk*, the one that grasps is saved from it. God performs *imsāk* of the heavens so that they do not fall:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحْسِكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ أَنْ تَزُولَا

Surely God upholds the heavens and the earth [to exist and to function] (35:41).

The individual that is devoted and obedient to the Qur'an and the Household of the Prophet, both of which are divine *dhikr*, performs *tamassuk* so that he does not fall. Since God is the Absolute Truth, and remembrance of the Truth results in oblivion of falsehood, lies, oppression and any other corruption [Sec. 7.8], and the ritual prayer is an unbreakable connection between the servant and God, therefore the duty to perform prayer was decreed for this very purpose.

With regards to the following verse:

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي

"Verily, I am God: There is no god but I: So serve Me (only), and establish regular prayer for my *dhikr*" (20:14),

one can clearly conclude that the main purpose of upholding the regular prayer is to revive the remembrance of God as it drives any matter of falsehood into oblivion. And because the Friday Prayer has a characteristic which other prayers do not have, and it is recommended in the Friday prayer to recite the chapters of *Jumu'ah* and *Munāfiqūn* after the opening chapter in the first and second parts (*rak'a*), respectively, then upon paying attention to these chapters we come across some observations: in the chapter of *Jumu'ah*, the Friday prayer has been referred to as *dhikr* of God:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نُودِيَ لِلصَّلَاةِ مِنْ يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ فَاسْعَوْا إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَذَرُوا الْبَيْعَ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

O you who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday [the Day of Assembly], hasten earnestly to the *dhikr* of God, and leave off business (and traffic): That is best for you if you but knew! (62:9).

And also in the chapter of *Munāfiqūn*, it is very likely that the Friday Prayer has been mentioned as *dhikr* of God:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تُلْهِكُمْ أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

O you who believe! Let not your riches or your children divert you from the *dhikr* of God. And if anybody does that, then it is they that are the losers (63:9).

### 8.5 Note: Frequent performer of *DHIKR* is a frequent performer of prayer

What has passed so far in this section has been that (i) the ritual prayer, particularly the Friday Prayer, is the *dhikr* of God. From a logical perspective, by reversing statement (i), we can only say that *some* [and not necessarily all] acts of *dhikr* of God are the prayer, and that those individuals that are in a state of constant *dhikr* are not necessarily in a state of constant prayer. This is logically the case unless firm evidence is provided to allow complete inversion of statement (i) into saying that (ii) *any* act of *dhikr* is an act of prayer. In fact, independent evidence does exist to this end, and that is the hadith narrated by Imām Muḥammad Bāqir – peace be upon him – saying<sup>55</sup>:

<sup>55</sup> *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 7, p. 150, hadith 5.

لا يزال المؤمن في صلاة ما كان في ذكر الله عزوجل، قائماً كان أو جالساً أو مضطجعاً؛

إن الله عزوجل يقول: " الذين يذكرون الله قياماً و قعوداً و على جنوبهم "

A believer does not cease to be in a state of prayer as long as he is in *dhikr* of God Almighty, whether he is standing or sitting or lying down; God Almighty says: "Those that remember God standing and sitting and on their sides".

Therefore, the frequent performer of *dhikr* is a frequent performer of prayer, and the constant performer of *dhikr* is a constant performer of prayer, and whatever effect that is derived from continuity of prayer can also be derived from continuity of *dhikr*.

The most apparent benefit of continuity of prayer is that outlined in verses 19 to 23 of the chapter *al-Ma'ārij*:

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا \* إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا \* وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا \* إِلَّا الْمُصَلِّينَ \*  
الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ دَائِمُونَ

Truly man was created very impatient;- Fretful when evil touches him; And miserly when good reaches him;- Except for *Muṣallīn* (those that pray);- Those who remain constant in their prayer (70:19-23).

Since the word *Muṣallīn* has been explained as those that remain constant in their prayer, it can be seen that it is an attributed quality, not a subjective noun [i.e. not those that merely perform prayer, but those whose *quality* is to pray, to whose souls the act of praying has become affixed]. In any case, continuity of *dhikr* has the state of continuity in prayer, though with regards to cases in which such generalized declaration is valid; otherwise, with the mere act of *dhikr*, it is not permissible to abandon the act of ritual prayer, since the jurisprudential decree of the ritual prayer has its own place.

#### 8.6 Remark: the difficulty of performing frequent *DHIKR*

Frequent acts of *dhikr*, or continuous ones, require guarding [against oblivion and sin], being attentive and being in a state of nonstop reckoning, and such a state is difficult [to maintain]: Imām Sādiq – peace be upon him – has been reported to have said that people do not have the ability for three things: (i) pardoning (blunders, mistakes, bad deeds of) people, (ii) observing equality and parity in

wealth on the part of a brother with his [faith] brother, and (iii) frequent *dhikr* of God.<sup>56</sup>

What is meant by the difficulty of performing frequent *dhikr* is the very presence of the heart and the remembrance of God in the inner circle of the heart and in secret; otherwise, public acts of *dhikr* for the sake of gaining people's attention, even if frequent, are easy and little, and even if continuous, are episodic only; this is because this world is a small merchandise (*matā'e qalīl*) and what is for this world is petty and insignificant. This statement can be construed from the hadith by Imām 'Alī – peace be upon him – as previously narrated [Sec. 6.1]:

من ذكر الله عز وجل في السر فقد ذكر الله كثيرا ، إن المنافقين كانوا لا يذكرون الله علانية  
و لا يذكرونه في السر ، فقال الله عز وجل : " يراؤن الناس و لا يذكرون الله إلا قليلا "

Whoever remembers God Almighty in secret has verily remembered Him abundantly; the hypocrites used to remember God in public and not remember Him in secret, then God Almighty said: "They stand without earnestness, to be seen by people, but little do they hold God in remembrance."<sup>57</sup>

## 9. The Way to Becoming Notable

*Dhikr* meaning to be noteworthy, notable and celebrated is not possible without *dhikr* of the Truth; this is because that which is void of the Truth has no share of permanence and continuity:

مَا عِنْدَكُمْ يَنْفَدُ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ

What is with you vanishes and what is with God is enduring (16:96).

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ لَهُ الْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

Everything is perishing except His Face (28:88).

Those that have no association with the name and remembrance of God will ultimately join the ranks of those forgotten and will be mere tales in history; meaning, what will be said of them is as such: "in the past, he was a king, a chief, a leader, ..."; which means that presently no sign of them remains, except in the midst of history's memory and buried inside some pages. God Almighty describes this group as those that were tales in history:

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 157, hadith 12.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 164, hadith 3; the Qur'anic verse quoted appears in *An-Nisā* 4:142.

فَاتَّبَعْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ بَعْضًا وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ

So We made them follow each other [to disaster] and We made them as tales  
(that are told) (23:44).

فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ وَمَرَّقْنَاهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَرِّقٍ

So We made them as tales (that are told) and We scattered them, an utter  
scattering (34:19).

It should be clear that a thing when scattered, dissociated, fragmented, slashed and torn apart by God will never return to its original form; therefore, a thing or person will become noteworthy only if having established a profound attachment to the remembrance of the Truth and the name of God. This is the reason why, with regards to the status of the blessed prophet having been the Apostle of God (who not only had and continues to have an unbreakable bond with the remembrance of God, but also was and continues to be the manifestation of the name of the Truth and the most magnificent sign of the divine remembrance), it has been said:

وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ

And (did We not) exalt for you your *dhikr* (name)? (94:4)

God not only made the Holy Prophet ﷺ have a name, but He exalted and elevated his name; similarly, the rank of a believer is exalted, and the ranks of the knowledgeable believer, which is higher than the rank of the believer that is not so, will be exalted and elevated. And also, the notable name that belongs to truly human societies, similar to the Holy Prophet – peace be upon him and his progeny - has been elevated. The Blessed Qur'an, itself celebrated since it contains remembrance of God, will result in the celebration of its true followers, which is why God Almighty has said the following in this regard:

لَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ كِتَابًا فِيهِ ذِكْرُكُمْ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

We have revealed towards you [O people] a book in which is your *dhikr*: will  
you not then contemplate? (21:10)

This verse, while inviting mankind to the remembrance of Truth, also gives glad tidings of the grace and bounty of becoming notable and esteemed (and it is possible to construe this meaning from a number of other verses). This is because

proper fame and noteworthiness is a sign of linking with God and connecting with the Truth.

This is why, in the invocation of *Abu-Hamzah Thumālī*, as a legitimate request based on knowledge and wisdom, we read the following: “And exalt my *dhikr*”<sup>58</sup>; meaning, O Allah! exalt and elevate my name, as you did so for the Blessed Prophet – peace be upon him and his progeny. The origin of this request is that the community of the Blessed Prophet follows his pattern of conduct as an exemplar [including in asking God for their name to be exalted]:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُو اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

You have indeed in the Messenger of God an excellent (beautiful) exemplar for any one whose hope is in God and the Final Day, and who engages much in the *dhikr* of God (33:21).

Therefore, the community involves itself in religious blessings and divine grace [as the prophet did], though the distinction between the root and the branch, the leader and the follower, the infallible and the fallible, the perfect and the imperfect, is still valid in its own place.

## 10. God's *DHIKR* Being a Sure Cure

Similar to how it is true that the Name of God is medicine, his remembrance is a sure cure: “O He Whose Name is medicine and His *dhikr*, a cure.”<sup>59</sup> To remedy any pain, a specific medicine with a specified amount and instruction is required. Similarly, to cure from any disease there exist specific boundaries crossing which will be dangerous. This is why the remembering seeker, to cure his diseases, must halt upon and not cross a narrated *dhikr* and its particular quantity and quality; otherwise, there is no benefit in disorderly *dhikr*, except from the perspective of general *dhikr* and the hope of benefit which is a matter on its own and does not require a specific directive. In this context, i.e. the fact that specific *dhikr* is fixed-in-prescription (*tawqīfī*) and that it is necessary to abstain from adding or subtracting to and from it, a number of narrations exist in the literature, some of which we next mention.

### 10.1 Evidence for *DHIKR* being fixed in prescription

<sup>58</sup> "وَأَعْلَ ذِكْرِي"; The invocation of *Abu-Hamzah Thumālī* (see footnote 41).

<sup>59</sup> "يَا مَنْ اسْمُهُ دَوَاءٌ وَ ذِكْرُهُ شِفَاءٌ"; The supplication of *Kumayl* (see footnote 40).



1) Ismā'il ibn Fuḍayl inquired from Imām Ṣādiq – peace be upon him – about the meaning of the verse:

وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ غُرُوبِهَا

And glorify with praise of Your Lord before the rising of the sun and before its setting... (20:130).<sup>60</sup>

The Imām replied: it is required for any Muslim to say the following ten times before the rising of the sun and before its setting:

لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له، له الملك و له الحمد، يُحْيِي و يُمِيت و هو حي لا يموت،

بيده الخير و هو على كل شيء قدير

There is no deity but God; He is Alone and has no partner; His is the Kingdom [of all the worlds] and all praise is due to Him; He gives life and causes death; and He is ever-living and death will never come to Him; in His hand is all good and He has absolute power over everything.

The narrator reported that he then repeated all this except saying “He gives life and causes death, and causes death and gives life”. The Imām said: “O you! Verily there is no doubt that ‘He gives life and causes death, and causes death and gives life’, but say the way I say.”<sup>61</sup>

From this hadith, it becomes apparent that what belongs to God, and what He is named and attributed with, should not enter the domain of followed *dhikrs* except what has been mentioned in the Blessed Qur’ān - which is the word of the Best of Rememberers - or mentioned by manifestations of the beautiful names of God - meaning the Perfect Human Beings such as the Prophets and the Blessed Infallibles (peace be upon them) who have no word of their own, and whatever they present us with is from the hidden guidance of God Almighty. Therefore, in the aforementioned hadith it has been commanded that even though God gives life and causes death, and causes death and gives life, yet in this specific *dhikr* one has to only mention the first part, that God gives life and causes death.

2) ‘Alā ibn Kāmil said that he heard Imām Ṣādiq – peace be upon him – saying with regards to the verse:

وَاذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ فِي نَفْسِكَ تَضَرُّعًا وَخِيفَةً وَدُونَ الْجَهْرِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ

<sup>60</sup> A nearly similar verse appears in chapter *Qāf* 50:30. Also, for related verses in a similar context, see *Hūd* 11:113 and *al-Isrā* 17:78. [Tr.]

<sup>61</sup> *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 7, p. 227, hadith 4.

And bring your Lord to remembrance in your (very) soul, with humility and  
in reverence, without loudness in words (7:205),

in order to follow its order at night time, one is to say:

لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له، له الملك و له الحمد، يُحيى و يُميت و يُحيى، و

هو على كل شيء قدير

There is no deity but God; He is Alone and has no partner; His is the  
Kingdom (of all the worlds) and all praise is due to Him; He gives life and  
causes death, and causes death and gives life; and He has absolute power over  
everything.

The narrator then said that he said: “In His hand is all good”. The Imām –  
peace be upon him – replied: “indeed ‘in His hand is all good’, but say as I tell you  
ten times and [say]: ‘I seek refuge in God, the All-hearer, All-knower’<sup>62</sup> when the  
sun is rising and when it is setting, ten times.”<sup>63</sup>

This means that even though all good is in God’s hand, and it is from his  
power that anything reaches any other thing, yet to say this in this particular *dhikr*  
is not necessary or beneficial, and for the purpose of attaining the aim of this  
specific *dhikr*, one must avoid adding to it.

3) In the context of learning one’s responsibility in the era of the occultation of  
Imām Mahdī – peace be upon him, *Zurārah* has narrated the famous prayer: “O  
God let me know You ...” (which is actually a type of reasoning on why  
prophethood, existence of apostles of God as well as the Proof and Imām in each  
time is needed) from Imām Sādiq – peace be upon him – who also taught *Zurārah*  
to say the following:

يا الله، يا رحمن، يا رحيم، يا مقلب القلوب ثبت قلبي على دينك

O Allah! O Compassionate! O Merciful! O Turner of the hearts! Establish my  
heart firmly on your religion.<sup>64</sup>

The narrator instead said: “O Turner of the hearts and eyes”; the Imām said:  
“Though God is the Turner of the eyes, but in this supplication say what I taught  
you [not more and not less].”

Reminder: The present discussion is about *dhikr* and not supplication - though  
each supplication in its own context has the *dhikr* of God with it; yet what was

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<sup>62</sup> اعوذ بالله السميع العليم

<sup>63</sup> *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 7, p. 227, hadith 6.

<sup>64</sup> *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 52, p. 148, hadith 73.

mentioned in the third example above is related to the topic of supplication which is outside the present discussion that *dhikr* is fixed in prescription; reference to this last example [unlike the first two] is therefore only to indirectly support our claim.

## II. Generality of *DHIKR*

As mentioned in the introduction to the topic of *dhikr*, anything that revives the Name of God and His remembrance is His *dhikr*, be it in the common form of *dhikr* amongst those that perform *dhikr*, or in the form of thoughts amongst the scholars; in other words, the circle of education [in areas that revive the Name of God] is a circle of *dhikr*, and the teacher and learner are both preoccupied with the divine *dhikr*. This statement, arrived at by analysis of the meaning of *dhikr* and general conclusions, can be further established from some narrations in this area. Luqmān<sup>65</sup> told his son:

O my son! Prefer congregations over your (very) eye! Then, if you saw a group of people performing *dhikr* of God, sit with them, since if you are a learnt man, your knowledge will benefit you, and if you are ignorant, they will teach you, and it may be that God covers them with his shadow of mercy, so that you are covered with them; and if you see a group of people not performing *dhikr* of God, then do not sit with them, since if you are learnt, your knowledge will not benefit you and if you are ignorant, they will increase you in ignorance, and it may be that God covers them with the shadow of punishment and then you are covered with them.<sup>66</sup>

Apparently, performing *dhikr* of God here is that of *dhikr* of divine knowledge, because Luqmān stated that sitting with rememberers of God increases an ignorant person in knowledge, along with other evidence in this narration. This is why the compiler of the book of hadith *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*<sup>67</sup> has said that the great scholars of hadith in the School of the Household of the Prophet, such as *Kulayni* and others, have interpreted such narrations as above to refer to scholastic circles of *dhikr*, and as a result have narrated these in chapters dealing with the importance of scholastic

<sup>65</sup> Chapter 31 of the Blessed Qur'an is also named after *Luqmān*. [Tr.]

<sup>66</sup> *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 7, p. 231, hadith 2.

<sup>67</sup> This monumental work, by Shaykh Hurr 'Āmili, is a vast collection of important hadiths in the school of the Household of the Prophet, as compiled over an 18 year period. It has been organized under 50 headings, and at the end of the work, a thorough discussion has been provided by the compiler with regards to the chains of narration, and related topics in the science of hadith. This work contains 35,868 hadiths in various areas (particularly in jurisprudence), and its works of reference, aside from "the Four Books" (see footnote 5), consist of 170 other sources. [Tr.]

gatherings and discussions. The aforementioned compiler of *Wasā'il* then goes on to say that in many narrated instances, *dhikr* has the meaning of *knowledge*.<sup>68</sup>

## 11.1 Remark: The domain of *dhikr* of God

Since *dhikr* means remembrance and is not specific to a name, and since scholastic discussions in the area of divine knowledge and commandments are clear instances of remembrance of God, then the field of teaching and learning is the domain of *dhikr* of God. As a result, any benefit applicable to general acts of *dhikr* – though not the specific *dhikr* – is also equally valid for scholastic circles. For instance, what has been narrated about God being the companion of those that remember Him is also applicable to those in circles of teaching and learning.

*Abu-Hamzah Thumālī* has narrated from Imām Bāqir – peace be upon him – saying: in the original genuine and undeviated Torah, it has been inscribed that Prophet Moses – peace be upon him – asked God: “Are You near so that I may whisper to You, or are You far so that I call upon You?” God revealed onto him:

أنا جليسُ مَنْ ذَكَرَنِي

I am the companion<sup>69</sup> of one who remembers Me.<sup>70</sup>

The generality of the hadith encompasses any *dhikr* of God, be it in close invocation, loud calling, scholastic *dhikr*, discussion of thoughts and religious heritage.

## 11.2 Note: Harmony between remembrance of God and scholarly contemplation

Remembrance of God (*dhikr*) is in complete harmony with deep scholastic contemplation - which is also *dhikr* of God, and each of them supports and seeks aid from the other. In other words, remembrance of God strengthens the core of knowledge and promotes the intelligence to thrive, while scholastic activity makes the spirit reverberate with the remembrance of God; and whenever one becomes somber and subdued, the other one freshens and revives it and allows it to flourish.

<sup>68</sup> *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 7, p. 231, hadith 2.

<sup>69</sup> The Arabic word used is *jalis* which literally means one who sits with another person! Thus, this hadith emphasizes the extreme proximity and companionship of the Lord of the Universe with the one that rememberer Him. [Tr.]

<sup>70</sup> *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 7, p. 49, hadith 2.

Rūmī has referred to one side of this relationship where he has likened *dhikr* to the Sun which makes the sullen and somber thought vibrate with life:

این قدر گفتیم باقی فکر کن      فکر اگر جامد بود رو ذکر کن  
ذکر آرد فکر را در اهتزاز      ذکر را خورشید این افسرده ساز

We said this much so far, you go contemplate the rest  
If your thinking is at a standstill, go ahead and perform *dhikr*  
*Dhikr* makes thoughts pulsate with joy  
(Then) make *dhikr* the Sun of these dispirited thoughts.<sup>71</sup>

At the end, it is appropriate to say:

سُبْحَانَ مَنْ جَعَلَ الْإِعْتِرَافَ بِالْعِجْزِ عَنْ الذِّكْرِ ذِكْرًا  
Glory be unto Him Who has made one's confession of not being able to  
perform [true] *dhikr*, a *dhikr*!<sup>72</sup>

O Lord! Bestow the sweetness of Your remembrance upon Your eager devotees.

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<sup>71</sup> Rūmī's Mathnawī Collection, 6<sup>th</sup> book.

<sup>72</sup> Inspired from what has been said about [the inability to] give thanks to God (*Ṣaḥīfah al-Sajjādiyyah al-Jāmi'ah*, supplication 6).