

## Importance and Effects of Remembrance (dhikr) in Socio-Psychological Terms

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### özet

**Sosyo - Psikolojik Açıdan Zikrin Önemi ve Etkileri.** Bu makalede zikrin insan psikolojisi üzerindeki etkileri ele alınmıştır. Konuya girilmeden önce zikrin etimolojik anlamı ve tasavvuf terminolojisindeki yerine değinilmiştir. Pratik yönü de olan bir bilim dalı olan tasavvufun en önemli metotlarında biri olan zikrin İslam kültürü içindeki kullanımı ve tasavvufta bu kelimenin kullanım alanları hakkında bilgiler de verilmiştir. İnsanın iç yapılanmasını temel hedeflerinden biri olarak kabul eden tasavvuf disiplininin herkesin uygulayabileceği bu metodun başta insan ve insanın oluşturduğu toplum üzerinde ne tür tesirler oluşturabileceği konularına değinilmiştir.

### anahtar kelimeler

Zikir, İnsan, Sosyo-psikoloji, tasavvuf.

### Introduction

While dhikr means keeping in one's memory, remembering, recalling, or learning by heart any given piece of information, it also holds such metaphorical meanings as reputation, honor and glory, salaah, prayer and the heavenly texts<sup>1</sup>.

In Sufi terminology, dhikr is construed as "remembering, keeping in mind, and not forgetting Allah." Dhikr is an ascetic practice whereby Sufis and members of mystic orders, be it an individual or a group, recite certain words and phrases in given quantities at various places and according to a predefined set of rules and manners. In tasawwuf, dhikr in the true sense happens when the dhakir goes ecstatic, remembering only Allah, and forgetting every-

1 Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, ns. Yousef Khayyat- Nadim Mar'asli, Dar al-Lisan al-Arab, Beirut, ts. v. IV, p. 308; Firuzabadi, Mohammed Ibn Yaqub, *al-Kamus al-Muhid*, Egypt, 1952.v. II, p. 34; Asim Efendi, *Kamus Tercumesi, Matca-i Osmaniye*, Istanbul, 1304-1305, v. II, p. 346.

thing else.<sup>2</sup> In dhikr, the intended target is to exert an effort for remembering what was long forgotten, and for keeping it in mind and heart for good. The outcome is a maturing of the divine connection and experience experienced internally by the individual. If one is enriched internally through dhikr, he will remember the creator of the universe with everything in it.

Although the term means ‘remembering, reciting’ in the Qur’an al-Karim, it is also employed in ways to mean salaah<sup>3</sup>, Qur’an<sup>4</sup>, men of wisdom,<sup>5</sup> advice,<sup>6</sup> and *tafaqqur* (reflection)<sup>7</sup> sometimes. In the Qur’an al-Karim, the word dhikr is mentioned in two hundred and ninety-one places together with its derivatives.<sup>8</sup> Emphasized by the Qur’an al-Karim as well, dhikr is one of the crucial functions of the heart. Because it is dhikr that brings about the peacefulness of the heart (Fath, 4). Dhikr is used within the Qur’an al-Karim in the following meanings: Qur’an (Hijr, 9), salaah (Juma, 9; Ankabut, 45), people of the book (Anbiyya, 7), and remembering Allah. (Baqara, 152; Anbiyya, 20, Ahzab, 35, 41, 42). In addition, while dhikr bears such meanings as abstaining from evil, being just, not falling for the world, and always remembering Allah’s orders (A’raf, 205; Kahf, 24; Munafiqun, 9; Nur, 37; Rad, 28; Ta Ha, 24), it is also used for religious practices like *hajj* (pilgrimage) and other similar practices (Baqara, 198-203).

The Qur’an says: “*They remember Allah standing up, sitting down and lying on their side.*”<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, one understands that dhikr is not restricted in terms of time and state. Another verse says: “*Remember Me, so that I remember you,*”<sup>10</sup> which points at the honor and pride that dhikr would bring.

On the importance of dhikr, the Prophet (pbuh) says: “*The relation between the one who remembers Allah and the one who does not is like that between an alive person and a dead person.*”<sup>11</sup> Another account is as follows: “*How would you like if I told you that the most beneficial deed of all is to remember Allah.*”<sup>12</sup>

2 Abd al-Karim Qushayri, *Al-Risalah*, Egypt 1940, pp. 221-226; Abu Hamid Ibn Mohammed Ghazali, *Ihya Uloom al-Din*, Beirut 1982, v. I, pp. 390-402; Suleyman Uludag, “Zikir” (Dhikr), IA, MEB, Istanbul, 1993, XIII, p. 561-563.

3 Ankabut, 45/9.

4 Hijr, 15/9.

5 Nahl, 16/43; Anbiyya, 21/7.

6 A’raf, 7/3; Isra, 17/41; Nahl, 16/43-44.

7 Baqara, 2/269; Ra’d, 13/19.

8 Abd al-Baki, Mohammed Fuad, *al-Mu’jam al-Mufahras li Elfaz al-Qur’an al-Karim*, Istanbul 1990, pp. 271-275.

9 Ali Imran, 3/191.

10 Baqara, 2/152.

11 Bukhari, Daawat, 66.

12 Tirmizi, Daawat, 6.

Bearing a broader meaning across the Qur'an, this word is attributed a different and outward meaning by the commentators than that attributed by mystics. Commentators usually construe relevant verses in a way to mean "remembering Allah, observing His orders in one's acts," and they do not perceive it as a recital of certain predefined words and phrases, either individually or in groups, in accordance with some normative rules. They hold dhikr equivalent to remembering Allah and all other religious deeds like praying, fasting and helping the poor.<sup>13</sup> On top of that, it is also recognized as dhikr when one waives an opportunity to commit wrong deeds. According to commentators, happiness occurs when salaah is fulfilled in a genuine manner. When salaah is performed in a genuine way, one will be safe from all vice.<sup>14</sup> If one thinks that he is in the presence of Allah during salaah, he will realize his inner connection with salaah. Otherwise, salaah is isolated from his soul, which is forgetfulness. Being the opposite of forgetfulness, if dhikr is incapable of eliminating forgetfulness, one has to assume that dhikr is not taking place properly. Denouncing those that perform the salaah in forgetfulness (Ma'un, 4-5), Allah praises those who do it in deep reverence (Mu'minun, 1-2). Having Allah in mind during salaah will affect the soul, bringing the performer of the salaah closer to good deeds, driving him away from evil.<sup>15</sup>

According to commentary writers, another important point meant by dhikr is the Qur'an al-Karim itself. Hearts will find peace only in reciting and performing duties defined by the Qur'an al-Karim. Man can achieve psychological and physical happiness only by surrendering to the Qur'an al-Karim, which is the greatest remembrance of Allah. Remembering Allah means reciting His name in every moment, and surrendering to Him with the full understanding that one is under His control.<sup>16</sup>

Dhikr is one of the most fundamental requirements in tasawwuf, and a strongest principle on the path to Greatest Truth.<sup>17</sup> According to Sufis, the essence of dhikr, which is the opposite of forgetfulness, is to keep Mawla present in the heart at all times, and to avoid anything that may cause one to forget about Him. Sufis take the performing of *farz* (obligatory), *wajib* (essential) and *sunnah* (act of the Prophet) deeds as the greatest forms of re-

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13 Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi, *Tafhim al-Qur'an*, Istanbul, 1988, v. IV, p. 229.

14 Elmalili Hamdi Yazir, *Hak Din-i Kur'an Dili* (True Religion: The Koranic Language), Istanbul, 1997, v. VIII, p. 230.

15 Suleyman Ates, *Kur'an-i Kerim Tefsiri* (Koran Commentary), Istanbul, 1995, IV, p. 1975.

16 Mawdudi, *age.*, v. V, p. 236; .

17 Qushayri, *Al-Risalah*, p. 110.

membering Allah, in which way they universalize the domain of dhikr by making it the common denominator of all religious deeds. Qushayri says the following about this: “One of the important characteristics of dhikr is that it is not restricted to a certain time. The subject is obliged to remember at all times. There is no time when dhikr is not performed as a farz or *nafl* (voluntary). While salaah is the most honorable of all deeds, it is not allowed at certain times. Yet, dhikr done in the heart can continue regardless of time or place.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, dhikr is a broad concept which, according to one's intention, can transform any physical or non-physical act into a religious deed.

According to Sufis, kalimat al-tawhid is the most virtuous of all dhikrs as it holds in itself the very essence of religion. There is no other means or way that is this effective for cleansing and taming the carnal self. This dhikr helps one strengthen his faith, enlighten his heart, and grow more mature; it helps achieve the attraction of Qayyumiyyah al-Zatiyyah, and spiritual awareness and caution. Tawhid is a dhikr that renews the faith of believers. It is a ritual that eliminates all doubts and conflicts from the heart of the Sufi. Any person who performs the dhikr of tawhid in a sincere manner will achieve union with the Beloved without the need for an intercessor or a mediator. Any person that joins the circle of tawhid has made friends with Haqq. The dhikr of tawhid is the most effective among the self-control disciplines that the Sufi chooses in order to unite with the One.

The greatest of all names and recitals is the name Allah. All names and attributes are brought together in this name. Performing dhikr with this name helps one achieve the virtue of reciting Allah with His unlimited number of names and attributes. Those who recite the name Allah frequently will experience a state of extreme spiritual enthusiasm. Such state is balanced by a teacher who has perfected himself. In this sense, Ibrahim Hakki of Erzurum explains that, during dhikr, the dhakir dives deep into an ocean of ecstasy, where he sometimes cannot stand the full splendor of the *dhikrullah*, going into a state of lunacy.<sup>19</sup> Just like it is impossible to make good again a rotten egg, reversing such disturbance is impossible even for ordained saints. As one can understand, each dhikr affects the spiritual structure of an individual in a different way depending on its inherent quality. Out of these, the *kalimat al-tawhid* has no adverse effects on the spiritual structure of man. Getting deeper in this dhikr, the structure of consciousness gets more peaceful, and one's soul journeys toward perfection. But if those dha-

18 Same work, p. 368.

19 Erzurumlu Ibrahim Hakki, *Marifetname* (The Book of Gnosis), Istanbul 1984, v. 2, p. 691.

kirs who recite the name Allah, which is like a summary of all names, recite this name too much without being aware of his own spiritual capacity, he may experience some spiritual instability. This dictates that dhikr be within the limits of one's individual capacity. Because any overload that is beyond one's limits will, just like circuit breakers in a power circuit, trip the switches in one's spiritual world, seriously disrupting the spiritual balance. At this very point, the perfected murshid (teacher) plays a crucial role in tasawwuf as he defines which disciple should engage in which dhikr and in what quantities according to the capacity and character of each. Keeping the disciple under check, he helps him maintain his inner balance with dhikr. In this context, Ali Ramitani draws an analogy between the murshid and a bird-keeper who knows how much seed each bird is to eat every day and feeds all birds accordingly. In the same way, the murshid must take into consideration the capacity of each disciple when he is training them.<sup>20</sup> Another principle the Naqshbandi order uses for achieving a lasting state of remembrance is *wuquf al-adadi* which is one of the main principles collectively called the *usul al-ashara*. It means observing the number.<sup>21</sup> At this point, Baha al-Din Naqshband points out the importance of observing numbers in dhikr by saying, "*Observing the number in dhikr is for bringing unity to a fragmented inner world,*" and "*wuquf al-adadi is the first station of secret wisdom.*"<sup>22</sup>

#### *Importance and effects of dhikr in socio-psychological terms*

Being at the heart of Sufi practices, dhikr is an important means for spiritual training. More than remembering or reciting Allah's names and attributes in a certain harmonious way, dhikr is a verbal expression of a sort of devotion that has its roots in surrender of the heart. It is therefore that all Sufis have regarded dhikr as the keystone of applied religion.<sup>23</sup> Primary purpose of tasawwuf and all other mystical activities is ensuring victory over Satan of the soul that resides in human heart and represents Allah. That is to say, ensuring superiority of the soul over nafs (the carnal self), and achieving full control over the nafs which is identical to the worldly plane. This is because nafs is one of the principal themes in tasawwuf. The struggle of tasawwuf is a struggle for eliminating the nafs. Human nature is based on a constant battle between the "nafs" and the "soul." The target that dhikr aims at in this battle is to distinguish between the physical and spiritual

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20 Safi, Ali Ibn Hussein Waiz Kashifi, *Tarjama al-Rasakhat al-Ayn al-Khayat*, Istanbul 1292, p. 66.

21 Same work, p. 25.

22 Same work, pp. 30-31.

23 R. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, Arkana, 1989, p. 45.

being of man, enabling free movement of this spiritual being toward Allah. Dhikr is to concentrate thought on one place in order to release the spiritual powers that will assist one make progress on the path. Dhikr is generally regarded from this perspective in tasawwuf.

Playing a dominant role in tasawwuf, dhikr, as pointed out earlier, is found in many places in the Qur'an. Qur'an al-Karim talks about the beneficence of dhikr for humans directly in over sixty verses, and indirectly in two hundred and fifty-six verses.<sup>24</sup> Emphasized this much by Qur'an, dhikr is an inner activity of man. With the verse, "*And remember your Lord by your tongue (and within yourself), humbly and with fear without loudness in words in the mornings, and in the afternoons and be not of those who are neglectful.*" (A'raf, 205), Allah orders that dhikr is performed in a sincere and humble manner. Remembering Allah at all times is a quality of sincere Muslims. Taking one step further in showing their sincerity, Sufis claimed that the heaven or hell is not the true objective for them. They care about neither getting closer to heaven, nor away from hell. They are just people who are madly in love with the idea of becoming one with Allah.<sup>25</sup> And some Sufis desired heaven merely as a means for uniting with and seeing Allah.<sup>26</sup>

Inner performance of dhikr depends on the condition of the heart. What is important in dhikr is not the action of the tongue, but that the heart moves with Allah. By just reciting Allah's name, the tongue helps dhikr settle deep in the heart and the heart participates in the dhikr<sup>27</sup>. When dhikr takes the heart under its control, it enlightens all feelings of one with heavenly light, who becomes the addressee of Allah following appraisal: "...now We have removed from you your veil, so your sight today is sharp." (Qaf, 22). Any person who is the recipient of such appraisal sets an example of the "perfect man" which is desired by individuals and societies alike. Increase in the number of such people will create a livable society. Presence of people of such high character proves the significant impact dhikr has over human psychology. According to Sufis, failure to remember or fulfill dhikr will result in the death of the heart. Forgetting is one of the feeblenesses of limited man. This feebleness is manifested in remembering Allah, too. The Qur'an explains the situation of those who forget Allah with the verse, "...woe to those whose hearts are hard against the remembrance of Allah..." (Zumar, 22.).

24 Abd al-Baqi, *Mu'jam*, p. 273-274.

25 Yunus Emre, *Divan*, ed. Abdalbaki Golpinarli, Istanbul, 1964, p. 257.

26 A. Schimmel, "Mystic Prayer and Invocation in Islam," AUIFD, Ankara, 1953, issue ??-???, p. 211.

27 Maqqi, Abu Talib, *Qut al-Qulub*, Cairo 1982, p. 248.

When the heart is deprived from dhikr, the soul is devoid of love. A heart that is far from Allah's love will befriend the nafs.<sup>28</sup>

Such feebleness are seen at times among Sufi orders during practices of asceticism. Extremist behaviors of some disciples during dhikr sessions are not acceptable. Thus, remembering Allah has something to do with neither the way one dresses nor his posture. Remembering Him is about heart and intention. Holding certain postures above others, or cladding one's self in certain ways is against the spirit of the Qur'an al-Karim. Dhikr should tread an internal path of destitution and secrecy. Vocalizing it, or crying out loud in frenzy is merely a result of forgetfulness.<sup>29</sup> Allah must be remembered in order to be safe from forgetfulness and petrification of the heart. Keeping Him in mind and heart at all times will ensure balance between the soul and the body, keeping the soul in a constant state of aliveness and alertness.<sup>30</sup> In saying, "Do not belong to the forgetful," the Qur'an al-Karim requires that Allah is never forgotten, and that the dhikr of the heart is unwavering.

Dhikr is a door between Allah and His subjects, which door is open at all times. It is a word from the subject to Allah which is uttered at the time, in the place and in the language of preference of the subject. Qur'an does not talk about a specific posture for dhikr. Like all Muslim religious practices, Qur'an liberates people in relation to dhikr, without forcing them to conform to strict formalities. "Those who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth." (Ali Imran, 191) If one is still unable to enjoy dialogue with Allah, in spite of such tolerance in relation to the posture during dhikr, such person's heart is for sure "closed to divine transmitters." The practice of dhikr is an act of both the tongue and the heart which is regardless of time.<sup>31</sup>

Once dhikr is integrated with thinking and becomes automatic without the need for any effort, the stage of higher dhikr is reached, which shows that the differentiation of thought and body is overcome. When the heart is rusted for not remembering Allah, and goes astray from the divine path, its only cure is dhikr. This important cure is underlined by Qur'an as follows: "Remember your Lord often, recite His name in the morning and in the evening." (A'raf, 205) Dhikr polishes the heart, surrounds the heart shining with Allah's light with love toward the "Absolute Being." The disciple perishes against the unmatched beauty of the Beloved. Greatest desire of the

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28 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madariq al-Saliqin* trans. committee, Istanbul, 1994, ??, p. 331.

29 Same work, p. 118.

30 Elmalili, *Hak Dini*. (True Religion.), v. VII, p. 458.

31 Ibn Qayyim, same work, v. ??, p. 332.



lover is to reach that unprecedented beauty. All he wants is to be with Him, and live with Him. This state shows that the heart of the disciple is filled up to the brim with love. He surrounded by love on so many coasts that He becomes his ears, eyes, will and senses. Forgetting everything other than Allah, persons who place nothing but Allah's love in their hearts prevent both individual and social degradation.

Having a significant impact on the social formation of man, dhikr is a spiritual rebirth and the start of a brand new life. Because the first step in dhikr is to forget about the “self,” to think only about the “Absolute Being” which treats all subjects equally, and to become a recipient of the manifestation of His attributes. As dhikr is continued, the disciple feels himself with Allah alone. This is a state whereby all human wrongdoing and sins are abandoned, and one’s entire senses are filled with divine love. The disciple reaches such a level that he no more has the feeling that all of his behaviors are being witnessed. Perishing in his own dhikr, he reaches such a state that he does not go back to the nafs (the limited, carnal self). This is the traditional passage from the lower self to the universal self.<sup>32</sup> With the manifestation of Allah, he gains an universal quality which goes beyond the social being. He is now a person of higher character who embraces all people with love and caring.

Done everyday or at least one day every week, dhikr is a ritualistic activity that helps people socialize and get closer. This important activity has meanings that go beyond being a means for remembering Allah. With its unifying quality, it provides morale and motivation against degraded moral and human relations. According to some disciples, dhikr is the ability to withstand a decayed world. Dhikr is the most effective cure against the hardships and problems one encounters in the course of day-to-day life. And for some, it is the only effective way of treatment against modern-day problems like depression, deprivation of love, unhappiness, injustice and negativities experienced by most people, against disrupted human relationships, and all other social inconveniences. In the same time, dhikr stops one from spending his time on useless activities, preventing him from wasting his energy. It gives the disciple a spirit of solidarity in both internal and external relations. Reciting person gets to know his being through the power of the recited words. With dhikr, the Sufi lives in an infinite time and an eternal being. Through dhikr, the dhakir is liberated from the mundane day-to-day reality

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32 A. Riza Arasteh, *Askta ve Yaraticilikta Yeniden Dogus* (Rebirth in Love and Creativity), trans. Bekir Demirkol- Ibrahim Ozdemir, Ankara, 2000, p. 85.



of matter-spirit interactions, and from the individual self, engaging in an intimate relationship with the "Absolute Being" which transcends and entirely encloses his own being. Through dhikr, which is the *sayr al-suluq* station of the journey, and through other Sufi training methods, the individual undergoes a process of social and psychological change in the earlier stages. Abandoning his former habits and forms of behavior, the disciple engages in a new practice in his life. Exercises and practices that are performed in groups help one make new practices more systematic. According to Sufi thinking, residing in man's heart, Allah causes one's divine character to manifest. Hurting, offending and humiliating other people is the greatest crime one could commit against Allah. Being tender and merciful toward people is a result of an intelligence that is acquired through the heart. If the disciple feed his heart with the remembrance of Allah, loving and respecting humans is no different from loving and respecting Allah.

Starting out from the verse, "*Remembering is for sure the greatest deed of all.*" (Ankabut, 45), Sufis hold dhikr to be more important than *salaah* and *tafaqur*. Because this deed can be performed only by higher souls. On this, the Prophet (pbuh) says that "*Best deed is dhikrullah (remembering Allah).*"<sup>33</sup> For a person to be able to perform dhikr, the heart-tongue balance must be fully in place. Being a form of invocation, dhikr happens when the tongue reveals the feelings that are held in the heart. Sufis take tongue to be the translator of the heart.<sup>34</sup> It is therefore that one cannot sincerely perform dhikr without harmony between the tongue and the heart. Sincere dhikr protects the individual from deviations and from making mistakes against Allah. This process of protection is among the most important tasks of the Sufi. The Sufi must remember and keep in mind Allah at all times. When He is remembered, the heart will be steered by Him and will be safe from slips. It is therefore that a continuous benefit is to be found in reminding. Because Allah says, "*Remind, because there is good in reminding for true believers*" (Zariyah, 55).

The evergreen desire of the Sufis is to reach Allah. Longing to become one with Allah, Sufis want to reach Allah as soon as possible. Reaching happens as a product of love for Allah. The love for the Beloved increases even more as His name is recited. Every time the lover remembers the Beloved, his heartbeats will accelerate, he will get excited and start sweating. Remembering the beloved causes an increase in the for Him. If it is not for dhikr, love connection will not form between Allah and the subject. Thanks

33 Ibn Maja, Adab, 53; Tirmizi, Daawat, 6.

34 Ibn Qayyim, *Madariq*, p.332.

to love, thanks are given to Allah, helping the heart find lasting peace. This peace is explained by Qur'an as follows: "*They alone are true believers whose hearts are deeply moved when they hear Allah's name and whose faith is strengthened when its laws are communicated to them,*" (Anfal, 2). On the Sufi path, truths are found only through love. If one wants to remember Allah in the true sense, he must fulfill his biddings, and constantly serve with Him in his mind. One can understand a person better only when his love for such person is deepened.<sup>35</sup> Just like the lover needs to perish in the love of the beloved in order to reach her, the subject also needs to perish in Allah's love for becoming one with Him.<sup>36</sup> Dhikr is to forget about everything other than the subject of dhikr. That means excluding from himself all physical universe which is not Allah. Dhikr is the first step on the path of love; because if one loves another, he always wants to spend time with and remember and recite the beloved. As a result of such remembrance, heart filled with love for Allah will become the house of dhikr every moment, achieving true happiness. Allah explains the same as follows: "*Be awake, for hearts find satisfaction only through the remembrance of Allah.*" (Ra'd, 28)

A sincere Sufi remembers Allah at all times in order to cleanse his soul, to have his sins pardoned, to perish in the being of eternal God, and to go ecstatic with the virtues of divine love. Remembering Allah happens first by closely watching Him and His works. Witnessing Allah's works in an attentive and continuous manner, that is to say observing his signs in the physical plane is called muraqabah. In doing muraqabah of small and big things, it is also dhikr to understand all aspects of the created, being alert and attentive as to their evidences, to take lessons and to think about and remember the Creator. In the history of tasawwuf, we find in the lives of many Sufis a great desire for becoming one with Allah. They wanted to be with Allah at all times and places. The last wish of Rabia, whose name has come to be associated by Sufis with the love for Allah, was to be with Allah.<sup>37</sup> Yunus asked that the limited being be taken away from him, and he be filled with Allah's being. Similarly, many Sufis asked that the "*being*" between Allah and themselves be lifted. Sufis believe that man is alone but Allah when he dies and is placed in the grave, and that spouses, children, relatives or friends are not there in the grave, and that the only thing that does not leave one alone in the grave is dhikr. Dhikr is such a prescription for salvation that it gives man both worldly happiness and gives him his Beloved in the after-

35 Suzregelman, Inayat Khan, Fernandez, *Jungian Psychology and Sufism*, Istanbul, 1994, p. 31

36 Ghazali, *Ihya.*, v. ?, p. 428

37 Smith, Margaret, *A Woman Sufi: Rabia*, trans. Ozlem Eraydin, Istanbul, 1990, p. 110.

life. He tasted all pleasures and joy through dhikr, reaching the long desired thanks to dhikr. On a day that everybody else has deserted him, he is with Allah, which is the one Person that all men want to be with on that day.

In brief, dhikr is the only sword the disciple can thrust at perils on his journey.<sup>38</sup> At times, dhikr is a sledgehammer for crushing petrified hearts. Dhikr is a brush for polishing Sufi hearts. For the dhakir, Allah is food for the heart, which food comes through dhikr. Apart from being the food for hearts, dhikr is also the most important pillar on the path leading to Allah.<sup>39</sup> To them, dhikr is freedom from disasters, troubles,<sup>40</sup> a garden of Eden in which they can stroll around with joy and laughter. To be brief, no one can find peace without remembering Him, and reciting His name. Dhikr cleans the heart from all worldly desires, polishing and filling it with love of Allah. It is the only protection against the attacks of the Satan.

While Islam does not impose any limitation of time or place for remembering Allah, the “official” dhikr in orders must be done after certain preparations are in place.<sup>41</sup> The sheikh decides which type of dhikr is appropriate for the spiritual station of the disciple. There are different types of dhikr depending on the spiritual status of the disciple: There is the “*dhikr al-lisani*,” which is performed by just the tongue without the participation of the heart; or there is the “*dhikr al-qalbi*,” which is performed in the heart; or there is the dhikr that is performed by both. In addition to these, there is the *dhikr al-sirr*, *dhikr al-khafi*, and *dhikr al-akhfa*. The last one being the most difficult of all, it can be duly performed only by those who are in advanced stages of the journey.<sup>42</sup> The disciple is obliged to fulfill the dhikr within the rules set by his sheikh. He must make an effort to control and beautify his behaviors and morals. As a ritualistic activity, dhikr sessions both help “remember Allah,” and also have many unifying and socializing functions. These

38 Qushayri, *Al-Risalah*, p.37.

39 Schimmel, A., *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, trans. Ender Gurol, Istanbul, 1982, p. 151; Necmuddin Kubra, *Tasavvufi Hayati* (His Sufi Life), ed. Mustafa Kara, Istanbul, 1980, p. 79.

40 Qushayri, *age.*, p. 221.

41 See Abdurrahman Memis, *Halid Bagdadi ve Anadolu'da Halidilik* (Khalid Baghdadi and the Khalidiyyah Order in Anatolia), Istanbul, 2000, p. 269-272; Dilaver Gurer, *Abdulkadir Geylani: Hayati, Eserleri, Gorusleri* (Abd al-Qadir al-Gaylani: His Life, Works and Views), Istanbul, 2000 p. 338; Himmet Konur, *Ibrahim Gulseni: Hayati, Eserleri, Tarikati* (Ibrahim Gulseni: His Life, Works, and Order), Istanbul, 2000 p. 160; Sadik Vicdani, *Tarikatlar ve Silsileleri* (Orders and Their Lines of Descent), simp. Irfan Gunduz, Istanbul, 1996 p. 39; Rahmi Serin, *Islam Tasavvufunda Halvetilik ve Halvetiler* (Khalwatiyya Order and Khalwatis in Islamic Mysticism), Istanbul, 1984, p. 132; H. Kamil Yilmaz, *Aziz Mahmud Hudayi ve Celvetiyye Tarikati* (Aziz Mahmud Hudayi and the Jalwatiyya Order), Istanbul, 1980, p. 188-197.

42 Hacı Muharrem Hilmi Efendi, *Kadiri Yolu Saliklerinin Zikr Makamlari ve Zakirlere Hediye* (Dhikr Stations of Qadiri Disciples and Gift to Dhakirs), ed. Suleyman Ates, Istanbul, 1982, p. 139.

are environments where their members interact at individual and society level.

#### *Categories of dhikr*

Sufis have categorized dhikr in various ways. For example, at one place dhikr is discussed in three forms; the first one is dhikr performed by the tongue with a forgetful heart. This is called dhikr in numbers. This is regarded as the dhikr of the commoners. The second is dhikr performed with peace of heart, which is done for servitude. Being the dhikr of the chosen ones, the fruit of this dhikr is good deeds. The third is dhikr performed by all organs, which is the dhikr of the chosen of the chosen, the outcome of which is inexplicable. The true nature of this kind of dhikr, which belong to those subjects who are madly in love with Allah, can only be appreciated by the Haqq. Being the opposite of forgetfulness, if dhikr cannot eliminate forgetfulness, it means that dhikr is not properly performed. According to Him, love between God and the subject is mutual because He says, "...remember Me, I will remember you." (Baqara, 152). Therefore the disciple must observe time in remembering Allah continuously. Remembering Allah means taking part in conversations about Him, which conversation is the most virtuous of all. All deeds are defined to remember Allah and only Allah, to keep him in mind, and to not be attracted to anything but Him. Because Allah says: "...keep up prayer for My remembrance..." (Ta Ha, 14.)

#### *Tafaqqur (Reflection)*

Tafaqqur is an advance state for the maturing of reflection. As Sufis also point out, the truth of dhikr is distant to letters and sounds; it is the affection in one's essence of heart toward the One Truth (Haqq). Qur'an invites one to tafaqqur as well as to dhikr. Qur'an defines dhikr and tafaqqur as an inseparable whole that is the most important virtue of a true believer. "*Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day there are signs for men who understand. Those who remember Allah standing and sitting and lying on their sides and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth: Our Lord! Thou hast not created this in vain! Glory be to Thee; save us then from the chastisement of the fire: Our Lord! surely whomsoever Thou makest enter the fire, him Thou hast indeed brought to disgrace, and there shall be no helpers for the unjust.*" (Ali Imran, 190–192).

Referenced Qur'anic verses suggest that there is a very close relationship between dhikr and tafaqqur, and one could think that tafaqqur is an upper

state of dhikr. In support of this notion, the Prophet (pbuh) points out that one moment of tafaqur equals sixty years spent in any other form of religious practice.<sup>43</sup>

The most important outcome of dhikr the purification of the heart from limited self identification of the ego, excessive desire and avarice, and to disappear in the Truth (Haqq). In this case, an important precondition of peaceful heart is dhikr. Peaceful heart means freedom of heart from ignorance and lowly morality. This means a surrendering of the heart to Allah, finding peace in facing away from attributing partners to Allah, and from lowly desires and worldly conversation.<sup>44</sup>

Qur'an saying that hearts can be satisfied only through the remembrance of Allah<sup>45</sup> is a clear indicator that the heart can be saved and fed through dhikr, which suggests that diseases of the heart can be remedied only through dhikr. Because in mental diseases, the root cause of the disease is negligence of the fundamental needs of the soul<sup>46</sup>. In the same way, love, which is the most fundamental need of human beings finds its deserved place through dhikr. Because it creates a special connection between Allah and the subject, and the subject develops ability toward the blessing and granting of Allah. At the same time, dhikr enlightens one on the inside and outside, while eliminating the mass and density of the physical structure. But in order to achieve such outcome of dhikr, one needs to be able to protect the heart from assaults of memories and apprehension. It may not be possible to salvage one's self from this situation in the beginning. Therefore until peace and spiritual integrity is ensured, the task of the disciple will be to do his best to keep memories and apprehensive feelings out of the heart, and to obtain the consciousness of benefaction.

While, during the process of dhikr, all sorts of memories, thoughts and apprehension will naturally haunt the disciple, dhikr will bear its fruits in time as a result of zeal and hard work. In this context, Ibn Ataullah mentions that dhikr consist of two shells and one nucleus. This could be explained as follows: the dhikr that the disciple engages in the beginning is a verbal form of dhikr (recitation). Even if the heart is not synchronized with this dhikr, it should at least approve of it so that the verbal dhikr can be sound. In time, the heart will grow harmonious to the verbal recitation, which completes the shell. And at the third stage, dhikr starts to spread

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43 Shah Waliullah Dahlawi, *Hujjatullah al-Baaligha*, Cairo, ts, II, 591.

44 See Fahr al-Din Rhazi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb al-Tafsir al-Kabir*, Beirut, 1990, v. XXIV, p. 130.

45 Rad, 13/28.

46 Fromm, Erich, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, trans. A. Aritan, Istanbul 1982, p. 19.

from the heart to the organs. Virtually each organ starts remembering Allah in its own way. This completes the nucleus, which is the essence, and one will achieve a state of constant remembrance in time.<sup>47</sup>

This suggests that, until one is fully matured through dhikr and becomes a man of caution, fana and baqa will follow one another, and there may be alternating states of jazba and sakr experienced along the way. But one can again be saved by dhikr from such transitional states as it is stated in Qur'an: "When you forget, remember your Lord."<sup>48</sup> That is to say, even in the state of dhikr, one is invited to a target state whereby he achieves lasting dhikr of the soul and the heart in the true sense. Dhikr is a milestone in contacting the Creator. Because Allah will not grant the taste and joy of engaging in dhikr and its thought to those whom he does not favor, and to those to whom he will not give his blessings. That is to say, if one loves Allah, a good indicator is that he keeps himself busy with dhikr. An indicator of Allah's love for His subject is that the subject gets to spend time with Him. In the verse, "...remember me, and I will remember you..." one can understand how the subject remembers Haqq, but how does Haqq remember the subject? According to Sufis, when Haqq remembers His subject, he makes his remembering subject constantly ascend to the top of his station of dhikr, enabling him to continue with His dhikr, which greater than every thing else. And this is the greatest blessing. What is emphasized here that one, during his spiritual journey, gets to know his nafs depending on the unfolding created by dhikr, and becomes the recipient of his Lord's contentment and intimate friendship by alizing himself, that is to say, discovering and realizing the potential he holds.

Dhikr has both worldly and heavenly aspects. From a worldly point of view, true dhikr occurs when one reflects with all organs,<sup>49</sup> eliminates forgetfulness from his heart, and removes all but Allah from the domain of the heart. Heavenly aspect of dhikr is the blessing, honor and highness one is endowed in the afterlife, the nature of which is obscure to limited intellect like ours.

During the dhikr of the Sufis, exercises like holding, increasing the pace of or moving (vibrating) the breath function in a way that is similar to the halotropic breathing techniques employed in psychology. Such halotropic breathing exercise automatically resolve any troubling feelings and physical appearances that are rooted in the subconscious.<sup>50</sup> It is observed that dhikr

47 Eskandari, Ibn Ataullah, *Miftah al-Falah wa Misbah al-Arwah*, Cairo 1993, pp. 9-10.

48 Kahf, 18/24.

49 Rushdi, *Malfuzat, Qulliyat al-Baki Billah*, Lahor 1967, pp. 19-68.

50 Grof, Stanislav, *Psychology of the Future*, trans. Sezer Soner, Izmir 2002, p. 269.

helps overcome certain phobias and consuming negative emotions, resulting in an increase in self-confidence and self-respect; observation also suggests that chronic infections (sinusitis, angina, bronchitis) are improved and serious psychosomatic headaches like migraine are not experienced after the new on-charge of energy opens blood circulation in the body.<sup>51</sup> Every psycho-spiritual system that has studied the nature of man since the beginning of history has regarded breath as a vital bond connecting the body, mind and the heart.<sup>52</sup> In Sufi training of dhikr, manner and order of breathing is critical for activating both the physical and the subconscious structure.

Badr al-Din Kashmir of the Sufis<sup>53</sup> (10<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century) lists a separate piece of intelligence for each stage of the practice of dhikr, which is done by holding one's breath and hitting it against the qalb (heart). For instance, pulling the captured breath upward under the belly, the sword of "La..." cuts the physical and psychological ties that have an influence on the heart. Pulled upward, the breath melts being against the heart. When saying "...ilaha...", the breath on the right side transforms being into nothingness against the heart. When saying "...illallah," hitting the breath on the heart from right to left will affect the other body organs as well. When the physical universe disintegrates into nothingness, the heart becomes the recipient and the place of peace in proving the Truth. So one could say that this Sufi method is one that is valid for all people.

Through repetition of these dhikrs, the inner structure of man is settled. Because there is creative power in the vibration of a voice. For instance we call each other things like "sugar, honey, angel," and these words create a positive impact on their addressees, and in this way, said person will start displaying that respective quality<sup>54</sup>. Weakening words like "sneaky, evil, liar, difficult, bloody..." decrease our psychological energy every time we utter them, creating images in our mind that diminish enthusiasm. Strong words like "secret, love, respect, help..." strengthen our soul, and modify our feelings.<sup>55</sup> Through repeated dhikrs, we make references to our subconscious, rising from unawareness to higher planes of consciousness and awareness.<sup>56</sup>

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51 Same work, p. 279.

52 Same work, p. 256.

53 Kashmiri, Badr al-Din Ibn Abd al-Salam Husseini, *Siraj al-Salihin*, ed. Sayyid Siraj al-Din, Islamabad 1376/1997, pp. 157-158. See Tosun, Necdet, *Bahaeddin Naksband Hayati, Gorusleri, Tarikati* (Bahaeddin Naqshband: His Life, Views and Order), Istanbul 2002, pp. 304-305.

54 Fernandez, Tasnim, "In Search Of A Name," *Jungian Psychology and Sufism*, trans. Kemal Yazici-Ramazan Kutlu, Istanbul 1997, p. 33.

55 Bozdag, Mohammed, *Dusun ve Basar*, Istanbul 2000, p. 70.

56 Dorst, Brigitte, *Jungian Psychology and Sufism (Sufi Relations Today)*, trans. Kemal Yazici-Ramazan Kutlu, Istanbul 1997, p. 22.



As the Upanishads say, in time “a person will turn into what he thinks.” We identify with the purpose of our thought, and now our thoughts are our own property, our own characteristic.<sup>57</sup> In this way, dhikr serves as a key to enable us feel Allah internally, being painted in His colors. Through the positive energy of dhikr, the heart is conquered and the virus of conceit is killed. And it becomes possible to defeat the *nafs al-ammarah*, which is a soldier of the Satan.

On the other hand Stanislav Grof explains: “a person whose existence is limited to the boring level of day-to-day consciousness, who has never accessed the transcendent and awe-inspiring experience of reality, will have a great deal of difficulty in conquering the deeply-penetrated fear of death, and find a deeper meaning in life. Under such circumstances, a major part of everyday behavior will be directed by the needs of the false ego, resulting in the meaningful aspects of life becoming reactive, and not authentic. It is therefore that we need to integrate political activities with certain systematic spiritual practices that offer experiential access to transcendent planes.”<sup>58</sup>

In tasawwuf, such spiritual practices usually refer to dhikr in the general sense. Through dhikr, one grasps the meaning of life and the purpose of existence. Because dhikr helps us access the inner depths of our souls, which come from Allah, giving us an understanding of the backstage of existence. A person who has reached the true reality will gradually break free from false identities, and will, after a while, become authentic by realizing himself. In other words, he reverts to his original self. In this context, J. Paul Sartre says, as one of the fundamental principles of existentialism, that “a person is such as he makes himself.”<sup>59</sup> In this very sense, a Sufi uses dhikr to direct his being to Allah to be Allah-like, to educate himself with Allah’s moral values, to paint himself in His colors. Because he constantly bombards the sub-conscious with Allah through dhikr. To the extent of his sincerity, this practice of dhikr shape his inner contingencies in an Allah-like manner. Hadith al-Sharif says the following on this matter: “... *We become his seeing eye and hearing ear...*”<sup>60</sup>

In conclusion, dhikr is the most important elixir for the making of the Perfect Man. Taking root in man’s heart with dhikr, Allah’s love universalizes all acts and thoughts of man (by means of taking root in time). It causes

57 Tweedie, Irina, “Sufi Spiritual Training Is The Universal Process Of Becoming An Individual”, *Jungian Psychology*, p. 103.

58 Grof, Stanislav, cited work, p. 398.

59 Sartre, J. Paul, *Existentialism*, trans. Asim Bezirci, Istanbul 1980, p. 57.

60 Tirmizi, Daawat, 80.

a structuring toward awareness of servitude and perfection in one's behaviors. In brief, dhikr shoulders a vital role in the making of the Perfect Man.

### *Solitude and dhikr*

Sufis are people who enlighten themselves by turning into light the feeling that gives birth to "solitude," which is nothing like the loneliness created and invented internally by others. As they live, they give meaning to life rather than oppose it. One could conclude that men catch the disease of "loneliness" only when they forget that "they are not alone," or forget about the Rule of the Creator. This brings us back to the dhikr ritual of the Sufis, which means "remembering at all times in order not to forget."

According to Western psychologists, people who live in solitude lead more organized lives, in terms of self-realization and communication, compared to the population of peers who live together.<sup>61</sup>

Otherwise it is not a physical separation and seclusion from people. Here, the Sufi turns to dhikr and deep reflection for increasing intimacy with Allah with whom he is left alone, abstracting his heart from people in order to enjoy the heart connection established with his Lord.<sup>62</sup> This inner separation will bring one happiness at both individual and society level. Turning his back to offending language and actions, he will stand, in his individual and social life, against all words and deeds that are to the detriment of people. Sufis emphasize the importance of uzlat from the continuance of deeds point of view. He believe that those who discontinue uzlat and get back with the people are doomed to a shameful end.<sup>63</sup> According to Mawlana, darkness of a water well is preferable to the darkness of a crowd. Because those who are stuck in the crowd cannot save themselves.<sup>64</sup>

During the period of *uzlat* (isolation) or *halwat* (seclusion) spent with dhikr, the heart of the Sufi will be filled with grace and refinement, because hearts of those who remember the Lord taste the divine light.

Some Sufis like Ataullah al-Eskanderi (d.1309) saw uzlat as a cure for the heart. They believe that there is no other act that is comparable to uzlat in enlightening the heart of the Sufi with love, tafaqqur and dhikr. It is only through uzlat that Sufis can dive deep into the world of tafaqqur, or reflection in order to find one's own self, and to stay in solitude with and be inspi-

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61 Katharina Zimmer, *The Art of Living in Solitude*, trans. Bilgehan Karatas, Gendas Kultur, Istanbul, 2005, p.16.

62 Maqqi, *Qut al-Qulub*, v. I, 97.

63 Al-Isfahani, *Hilyah al-Awliyya*, v. II, 381.

64 Mawlana, *Masnawi*, v. I, 1299.

red by God.<sup>65</sup> Cut off from everything else, he stays out of sight in the company of Haqq,<sup>66</sup> in a state of exchange through dhikr and tafaqur. Being alone with God, the subject cleanses his heart from all other things, after which he can focus on the ideation of Allah with a peaceful heart and mind.<sup>67</sup> Dhikr sessions are places of uzlat. Because the Sufi is with Him day and night. And the Sufi engages in uzlat because those sessions are promising of Haqq. The Sufi searches for solitude with his Lord amidst masses. In circles of Haqq, such solitude is not to be found. He is in constant search of a friend who can understand him and share his secret at all times.

#### *Marifah (Gnosis)*

The Sufi must acquire *marifah* (gnosis) through sincerity and consciousness of Allah, asceticism, nafs training and continuous dhikr in his deeds and practices. Another important means for acquiring *marifah* is to constantly keep Allah in mind, which is also possible through dhikr. Man will achieve *marifah* if he is able to suppress the animalistic feelings inside, that is to say, if he trains and keeps under check the primal feelings that he was created with. He sees dhikr and the *ilm al-wuslah* as two main cornerstones. He regards both as vital for the initiated/disciple, and expects that they do it constantly. There are three main points to help realize the contiguity of the Sufi, which cannot be discussed separately. These are the main principles in the maturing, suluq, and reaching Haqq of the Sufi, which are dhikr/tafaqur, *marifah* and *muhabbah*, which concepts are severally connected to one another. Due to this philosophy, the Sufi has to keep Haqq in mind for the enlightenment of his inner world. The station of the Gnostic depends on this enlightenment, and not on becoming an expert of the Arabic language, or mastering other forms of wisdom. Because since the Gnostic stands closer to Haqq and away from the people, namely the nature, things of the physical world are not dear or interesting to his heart. The being, as it is related to anything other than Haqq, holds no value compared to Him. To the Sufi, dhikr means realizing the constant "moment" in order to access the secret of participating in the everlasting being, and to live with the creating power.<sup>68</sup> Because realizing the moment for the Creator in this sense, that is

65 See Ataullah al-Eskanderi, Abu al-Abbas Taj al-Din Ahmad Ibn Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Karim Ibn Ala al-Allah (1309), *Al-Hikam al-Ataiyyah*, Cairo (Bulak), 1868.

66 Asim Efendi, *Kamus Tercumesi*, v. III, p. 805.

67 Necmuddin-i Kubra, *Tasavvufi Hayati: Usulu Asere Risale ile'l-Haim, Fevaihu'l-Cemal* (His Sufi Life: Usul al-Ashara Risale ila al-Haim, Fawaihu al-Jamal), trans. Mustafa Kara, Dergah Yay., Istanbul, 1980, p.76.

68 Qushayri, *Al-Risalah*, p. 5.

to say living "the moment" constantly is only possible through saving the self from being limited and veiled by the past and the future, which is done by remembering/reciting Allah at all times. The Sufi school of thought names this as "*wakf*," in other words, fulfilling the rule of the current time, or experiencing "the moment" constantly by remembering the Creator at all times. In fact, the Sufi remembers God in everything he sees on an "*ayn al-yaqin*" basis, living with Him at all times. When the Sufi hears the sound of animals, the crackling of trees, the splashing of waters, the chirping of birds, the blowing of the wind, or the sound of the thunder, he is reminded by all these of the singleness of the Creator, providing evidence for His unmatched beauty.<sup>69</sup> Because dhikr is the most effective of all the paths that lead to Allah.<sup>70</sup> Any moment that goes by without remembering him is wasted. Dhikr is such a practice that it penetrates into the whole being of the Sufi. In this state, he remembers of nothing. Any person who remembers Allah will forget about others in that moment of remembering. Because to them, Haqq is worth everything.<sup>71</sup> Through dhikr, the Sufi will be so intimate with Allah that he will even forget about his own dhikr. That is true dhikr.<sup>72</sup>

The opening of the third eye, and the acquisition of the knowledge of yaqin (certainty) is also through dhikr. Dhikr is neither something passive, nor a mere unaware repetition of Haqq's name. According to him, dhikr is when the disciple remembers his creator with his whole being. Dhikr is also when the disciple orientates his entire self toward Allah for the purpose of communication, loses himself in Him, focusing all receivers on divine will and divine transmitters. Dhikr is the moment when the disciple experiences togetherness with Allah at a level of perfection, is not forgetful of Him, and is cut off from everything else. It is the moment when love, enlightenment and ecstasy reach the highest level, drowning the dhakir (he who remembers) in a sea of love. To the disciple, Haqq is not an insipid, dull or loveless divinity stuck between the beads of a rosary. He manifests in all beings in the eyes of a love-struck disciple.<sup>73</sup>

In conclusion, dhikr is not a form of asceticism that is restricted to Islam or tasawwuf only; it has an important place in other religions and faiths. Throughout the course of history, man felt the need to believe in a higher power. Believing is a natural need for humans. They tried to saturate this

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69 Isfahani, *Hilyah*, v. IX, 942.

70 Qushayri, *Al-Risalah*, p.35.

71 Attar, *Tazkirat al-Awliyya*, p.411.

72 Sarraj, *Luma*, p.220.

73 Nicholson, *Mystics*, p. 83.

need by believing in God or another power. Be it heavenly or not, there is a power that people take as sacred, attach value to, and even die for. Many rituals and religious practices were done, and sacrifices made for such sacred powers. One cannot deny these forms of belief which are actually experienced, adopted by people, and have become institutionalized with their practices, moral values and belief systems. In heavenly religions, there are many approaches that take one to divine power, one of which is the mystical way. Mysticism is the inner dimension of all religions, and it is a common characteristic in heavenly religions which share the same single source. For the whole course of human history, similar my