

Remembrance of God

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Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni (R) from Muhammad ibn Yahya, from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Isa, from Ibn Mahbub, from 'Abd Allah ibn Sinan, from Abu Hamzah al-Thumali, from Abu Ja'far (A) that he said, "It is written in the Torah that has not been altered that Moses (A) asked his Lord (saying): 'O Lord! (Tell me) art Thou near me, so that I should pray to Thee in whispers, or art Thou far, that I should cry out. to Thee?' Thereat God Almighty revealed to him: 'O Moses! I am the companion of one who remembers me.' Moses said: 'Who are those that shall be in Thy refuge on the day when there shall be no refuge except Thy refuge?' He replied: 'Those who remember Me, whom I do remember; those who love one another for My sake, whom I love. They are those whom I remember whenever I wish to strike [the earth's people with affliction, and consequently spare them on their account.]"^[1]

Exposition

It is shown by this noble tradition that the Torah current amongst the Jews is a corrupted and an altered one. The knowledge of the true Torah was with the Ahl al-Bayt (A). From the contents of the current Torah and Gospels it appears that they do not meet the standard of even the speech commonly acceptable of a human being (to say nothing of the criterion of Divine speech); rather, the delusions of some followers of carnal lust and desire have been incorporated in them.

The researcher and traditionist al-Majlisi (M) says, "It appears that the intention of Hadrat Musa by this question was to inquire about the etiquette of prayer, while he knew that God is nearer to one than his jugular vein, with an encompassing nearness based on knowledge, power and causal efficiency.

He meant to say, 'Do You like to be prayed to in whispers, like one speaks to someone near, or should I call You like one who calls out to someone far away?' In other words, 'When 'I look at You, I find You nearer than anything that is near, and when I look at myself I find myself .at a far distance. Thus, I don't know whether I should take into consideration Your situation in my prayer or my own condition:' And it is possible that this question was made on behalf of someone else, like the question related to the possibility of Beatific vision" (mentioned in the Qur'an, 7:148).

It is possible that Moses intended to express his feeling of loss and wonder in respect of the manner of praying. He meant to say, "O Lord! You are too immaculate and above everything for nearness and farness to be attributable to You, that I may address You as one who is near or one who is far. Hence I am at a loss in this matter, for I do not consider any manner of prayer to be suitable for Your glorious station. So permit me to pray, and show me its manner. Teach me that which is appropriate for Your sacred station." The answer came from the Source of Glory and Majesty that, "I, as the Sustainer, am present in all the manifold levels and realms of existence. All the worlds constitute My presence. Yet, I am the companion of those who remember Me and am by the side of those who call Me."

Of course, proximity and distance cannot be attributed to that Sacred Essence. It possesses the encompassment of sustenance (ihateh ye qayyumi i.e. the encompassment that God Almighty possesses over all being as its sustainer) and existential all-inclusiveness (shumul-e wujudi) over all the domains of being and all the streams of reality. However, that which is mentioned in the noble verses of the Glorious Book of God regarding the attribution of nearness and proximity to God Almighty, such as the verses, And when My servants question thee concerning Me, (tell them that) I am near to answer the call of the caller, when he calls to Me. (2:186)

And We know what his soul whispers within him, and We are nearer to him than the jugular vein. (50:16)

and others like them, constitute a kind of metaphor and allegory. Otherwise, His sacred being is above proximity and distance, physical or immaterial; for these qualities entail limitation (tahdid) and likeness (tashb'ih, i.e. to creatures) and God Almighty is beyond them. Rather, the presence of all existents in the court of His sanctity is a relational presence, and the encompassment of that Sacred Essence over the particles of the universe and the chains of existents is the encompassment of sustenance, which is something other than sensible or spiritual presence and is different from outward and inward encompassment.

From this noble tradition, and some other traditions as well, the preference for concealed remembrance (dhikr-e khafi) and the desirability of remembrance within the heart and secretly can be inferred. This is also indicated by the noble verse: Remember thy Lord in thy soul, humbly and fearfully, not loud of voice, at morn and eventide. (7:205)

In a noble tradition it is stated that the reward (thawab) of this remembrance, on account of its greatness, is known to none except God Almighty. In some circumstances and states the preference may lie with overt remembrance, like the remembrance done in front of the negligent for the sake of reminding them. Hence it is mentioned in a noble tradition of al-Kafi

that one who recalls God Almighty amongst the negligent is like one who fights against the muharibun (i.e. those who have taken up arms against God and Islam). The following tradition is mentioned in the 'Uddat al-dai of Ibn Fahd: The narrator says that the Prophet (S) said, "One who recalls God in the marketplace, with sincerity, in the midst of the people's obliviousness and their engagement in its affairs, God writes for him a thousand merits and forgives him on the Day of Resurrection with a forgiveness that has not occurred to any human heart."^[2]

Similarly, it is mustahabb to make the dhikr aloud in the adhan, in sermons, and other things. It is stated in this noble tradition that the remembrance of God and mutual love and friendship for His sake have certain characteristics. One of them, which is more important than the others, is that the remembrance of God by the servant results in God's remembering him, and this matter is also mentioned in other traditions. This remembrance stands in opposition to the neglect (nisyan) mentioned by God Almighty in relation to one who forgets God's ayat (signs, verses): He shall say, 'O my Lord, why hast Thou raised me blind, and I was wont to see?' God shall say, 'Even so it is. Our ayat came unto thee, and thou didst forget them; and so today thou art forgotten.' (20:126)

In the same way as the forgetting of the ayat and inward blindness to the manifestations of Divine glory and beauty result in blindness in the other world, so do the remembrance of the ayat, the Names, and the Attributes and the remembrance of God, His beauty and majesty strengthen the inward vision and remove the obscuring screens in proportion to the strength of the dhikr and its luminosity. When the remembrance of the ayat becomes a faculty (malakah), the inner vision becomes so strong that it begins to see Divine beauty in the ayat. The remembrance of the Names and the Attributes results in the vision of God in the manifestations of the Names and the Attributes (tajalliyat-e asma'iyyah wa sifatiyyah).

The remembrance of the Essence without the veils of the ayat, Names and Attributes removes all the veils and affords the unobstructed vision of the Beloved. And this is one of the interpretations of 'the triple victories' (futuhat-e thalathah) which make up the highest delight of the 'urafa' and alwliya': fath-e qar'ib (the nearer victory), fath-e mubin (the manifest victory), and fath-e mutlaq (the absolute victory), which is fath al-futuh, the ultimate victory.

In the same way as the threefold remembrance removes the threefold veils, mutual love for the sake of God also leads to God's love, and the result of this love is also the removal of veils, as pointed out by the illustrious urafa.

Obviously, this love (God's love) has also various degrees, for the love for the sake of God has also many levels in respect of sincerity and vitiation. Complete sincerity is that which is free even from the flaw of the plurality of the Names and Attributes (kathrat-e asma i wa sifati), and

it results in complete love. The absolute lover will not be deprived of communion in the code of love, and there will remain no obstruction between the lover and the Beloved. With this exposition, we may establish a relation between the two questions of Moses (A). For after hearing God Almighty declare that He is the companion (jalis) of one who remembers Him, and after hearing from the Beloved Himself the promise which he coveted in his heart, of the union with the Beauty, he wanted to discover the identity of those who shall achieve the union, so that he may fulfill his duty in all its aspects. Hence he asked: Who are they that shall be in Thy refuge on the day when there shall be no refuge except Thy refuge? That is, who are they who, in Thy refuge, have attained emancipation from all attachments and freedom from obstructive barriers, attaining communion with Thy supreme beauty? He is told: 'They are the two groups: those who are in My remembrance, and those who love one another mutually, who are also in My remembrance in respect of the complete manifestation of My beauty, that is man. They are in My refuge, being My companions and I theirs.' This shows that these two groups possess one great quality, which results in another great characteristic. Because God Almighty remembers them and makes them His beloved ones, the result is that they obtain His refuge on the day when there is no refuge, their companion being God in the place of absolute seclusion. The other characteristic is that God Almighty spares His creatures of chastisement for the sake of their nobility. That is, as long as they are in the midst of the .creatures, He does not send chastisement and calamities upon them for the sake of them

The Difference Between Tafakkur and Tadhakkur

Let it be known to you that tadhakkur (remembrance) is the result of tafakkur (contemplation). Hence the station of tafakkur has been considered to precede that of tadhakkur. Khwajah 'Abd Allah al-'Ansari says: Tadhakkur stands above tafakkur, for verily tafakkur is the search (of the Beloved) and tadhakkur is the attainment (of the Beloved). As long as man is on the path of search, he is separate from the searched object. With the finding of the searched beloved, he is relieved of the labor of search. The strength and the perfection of tadhakkur is dependent on the strength and perfection of tafakkur. The tafakkur whose result is complete tadhakkur of the Worshipped One does not compare with other actions in regard to merit. Accordingly, in the noble traditions, an hour of tafakkur is considered to be better than the 'ibadah (worship) of a year, or even that of sixty or seventy years. It is obvious that the ultimate goal and fruit of the 'ibadat is the attainment of the knowledge and remembrance of God, and this is better attainable through valid contemplation. Perhaps, an hour's contemplation may open to the wayfarer the door to mystic knowledge, which may

not be opened even by seventy years of 'ibadah, or it may make a human being so mindful of the Beloved that not even the austerities of several years can be able to achieve such a result. And my dear, let it be known to you, the remembrance of the Beloved and keeping the heart engaged in the memory of the Adored One have many results for all the classes of people. As to the perfect ones, the awliya' and the 'urafa', it is the ultimate goal of their hopes, under whose shadow they receive communion with the Beloved's splendor—may it do them much good! As to the ordinary people and the mutawassitun, it is the noblest of the formative agents of morality and conduct, in outward as well as inward life.

If man remain in the remembrance of God Almighty in all conditions and states, and see himself as present in the court of that Sacred Essence, he would of course refrain from the matters which are contrary to His good pleasure, and check the self from rebelliousness. All the calamities and afflictions brought about by the carnal self and the accursed Satan are due to forgetting God and His chastisement. The forgetting of God increases the darkness of the heart and allows the carnal self and Satan to dominate the human being, thus multiplying his afflictions day by day.

The remembrance of God gives polish and burnish to the heart and makes it a reflector of the Beloved's beauty. It purifies the soul and liberates the self of the human being from bondages. The love of the world, which is the source of all error and the fountainhead of all sin, is purged from the heart. All the anxieties and concerns are replaced by the sole concern of purifying the dwelling of the heart for the sake of the entry of the Dweller.

Therefore, my dear, whatever pains and hardships that you bear in the path of the dhikr and remembrance of the Beloved are little. Accustom your heart to the remembrance of the Beloved, so that, God willing, the heart itself takes on the form of dhikr, so that the immaculate pronouncement la ilaha illa Allah becomes the ultimate form and the furthest limit of perfection of the self. There is no better provision for the wayfarer in his journey toward God, no better reformer for the defects of the soul, and no better guide to the Divine teachings.

Hence, if you are a seeker of the formal and spiritual excellences, if you are a wayfarer of the Hereafter's path, a traveler and emigrant towards Allah, habituate the heart to the Beloved's .dhikr and knead it with the remembrance of God

The Complete Dhikr

Although the remembrance of God and the dhikr of that Sacred Essence is a quality of the heart, and if the heart is immersed in dhikr all the benefits that accrue from it are obtained by the heart, it is better that the remembrance in the heart be followed by oral dhikr. The most

perfect and meritorious of the degrees of dhikr is that it should be present in all levels of a man's existence, that its domain should extend to the outward and the inward, the manifest and the concealed realms of his being.

Thereat God, the Supreme and the Glorious, becomes manifest in the core of his being. The inward form of the heart and the soul take the form of the Beloved's remembrance, and the actions of the heart and the body take on the form of remembrance. The seven realms of corporeal being, as well as the inward domains, are conquered by the Divine dhikr and made subject to the remembrance of the Absolute Beauty.

Rather, if the inward form of the heart assumes the reality of dhikr, and the realm of the heart is conquered by it, its sovereignty extends to all the other domains. The movements and pauses of the eyes, the tongue, the hands and the feet, and the actions of all other members and faculties, are accompanied with the remembrance of God, making no move against their duties. Thereupon, their movements and pauses begin and end with the dhikr of God: In the Name of Allah shall be its course and its berthing. (11:41)

Its influence penetrates into all the realms, which are moulded as a result in accordance with the reality of the Names and the Attributes. Rather, they assume the form of the Greatest of the Names of Allah (ism Allah al-'a'zam), becoming its manifestation (mazhar). And this is the ultimate limit of human perfection and the ultimate goal of the hopes of the elect of Allah (ahl Allah). To the same degree that there is an inadequacy in this regard and a shortcoming in the influence of dhikr, to the same extent does the degree of human excellence falls short of perfection, for the inadequacies of the inward and the outward interpenetrate each other. This is because the various spheres of human existence are interrelated and subject to mutual influence. It is from here that it is known that oral remembrance (dhikr-e nutqi wa zabani), which is the lowest level of dhikr, is also beneficial. For it means, firstly, that the tongue carries out its obligation, although its movement is only formal, devoid of spirit. Secondly, there is the possibility that persistence in this dhikr, with due regard to its conditions, may become a means of opening the tongue of the heart too.

Our Shaykh, the perfect arif Shahabadi—may my soul be his ransom, would say: "The dhakir (one who performs dhikr), during dhikr, must be like one teaching words to a little child that has not yet learnt to speak. He repeats the word until the child's tongue is opened and the latter utters the word. After that the child has articulated it, the teacher follows the child and his fatigue caused by repetition is removed, as if he has received an encouraging assistance from the child. In the same way, one who engages in dhikr must teach dhikr to his heart, which has not learnt to articulate.

The point that is concealed in the repetition of the adhkar is that thereby the tongue of the heart is opened, and its sign is that thereafter the tongue follows the heart and the hardship and strain of repetition is removed. First, it is the tongue which is dhakir and following it the heart also becomes dhakir with the tongue's aid and instruction. After that the heart's tongue has learnt to articulate, the tongue follows it and becomes dhakir with the aid of the heart or

God's concealed assistance."

And it should be known that the outward and formal actions don't have the capacity of life in the world of the ghayb or malakut except when they received assistance from the inward realm of the spirit and the heart's core, which bestows on them a spiritual life (hayat-e malakuti). That spiritual breath, which is the form of the sincerity of intention and sincere intention, is like the inward soul, following which the body too is resurrected in the realm of malakut and permitted entry into the Divine court.

Therefore, it is stated in the noble traditions that the acceptability of (physical) deeds is in accordance with the measure of the heart's receptivity and responsiveness (iqbal-e qalb). In spite of it oral dhikr is desirable, and it ultimately leads man to reach the Truth. Accordingly, in the traditions and reports, oral dhikr has been greatly extolled and there are few topics regarding which there is as much a great number of traditions as the topic of dhikr. It has also been greatly extolled in the noble verses of the Glorious Book, although most of them pertain to inward dhikr (dhikr-e qalbi), or the dhikr possessing soul. The remembrance of God is lovable on whatever level that it takes place. At this stage we conclude this discourse by mentioning some noble traditions at the end for the sake of tabarruk and tayammun

Some Traditions Concerning Dhikr

In al-Kafi, it is reported with a sahih chain of transmission from al-Fudayl ibn Yasir that Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A) said, "There is no gathering in which the virtuous and the sinful come together and thereafter stand up to leave without mentioning God Almighty except that it would be a cause of regret to them on the Day of Resurrection."^[3]

It is obvious that when man discovers the great results of the dhikr of God on the Day of Resurrection and finds himself deprived of them, he will realize the irreparable loss of the bounties and delights incurred by him. As a result he will be seized with regret and remorse. Hence, as long as there is opportunity, a human being must take advantage of his gatherings and assemblies, letting them not remain empty of God's remembrance.

In al-Kafi, it is reported with a muwaththaq chain of transmission from Imam al-Baqir (A) that he said, "Whoever desires to receive the full measure (of God's blessing) should say while

standing up after a gathering: 'Free is thy Lord, the Lord of Glory, from what they describe. And peace be upon the Messengers; and praise belongs to God, the Lord of all being.'^[4] And it is narrated from Imam al-Sadiq that Amir al-Mu'minin (A) said: Whoever wants to receive the full measure of recompense on the Day of Resurrection should read these noble verses following every salat.^[5]

Also it is reported in a mursal tradition from Imam al-Sadiq (A) that recitation of these verses at the time of the end of a gathering is an atonement for sins.^[6]

Al-Kafi, in a marfu' hadith, narrates with its chain of transmission from Ibn Faddal, from one of the Imams (A) that he said, "God Almighty said to Jesus (A), 'O Jesus, remember Me in thy self, so that I may remember thee within My self. Mention Me in thy assembly so that I may mention thee in an assembly better than the assembly of men. O Jesus, soften thy heart for Me and remember Me much in thy solitude. Know that My delight lies in thy doing tabasbus toward Me. And be alive in that and don't be dead.'^[7]

Tabasbus means the dog's wagging of its tail, out of fear or hope, and this alludes to the intensity of eagerness and humility. By 'life' in remembrance is meant the presence and attention of the heart.

Imam al-Sadiq (A) said: Verily God Almighty has said, "One who is kept by My remembrance from asking something of Me, I bestow upon him the best of what I have bestowed upon any petitioner that has asked anything of Me."^[8]

Ahmad ibn Fahd narrates in 'Uddat al-Dai from the Messenger of Allah (S) that he said, "The best of your acts near God and the purest and sublimest of them in degree and the best thing upon which the sun has shone is the remembrance of God Almighty. Verily He has informed you, saying, 'I am the companion of him who remembers Me.'"^[9]

The traditions concerning the excellence of dhikr, its manner, etiquette and conditions are so many that to mention them is beyond the capacity of these pages. .And praise is God's at the beginning and the end, inwardly and outwardly

Notes:

[1] Al-Kulayni, al-Kafi, ii, kitab al-du'a', bab ma yajib min dhikr Allah fi kulli majlis, hadith No.4.

[2] Ahmad ibn Fahd, 'Uddat al-dai, 242.

[3] Al-Kafi, ii, kitab at-du'a', bab ma yajib min dhikr Allah fi kulli majlis, hadith No. 1.

[4] Al-Kafi, ii, kitab at-du'a', bab ma yajib min dhikr Allah fi kulli majlis, hadith No. 3.

[5] Jami' al-'ahadith, kitab al-salat, hadith No. 3487.

[6] Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, xv, hadith No. 28901.

[7] Al-Kafi, ii, kitab al-du'a', bab dhikr Allah fi al-sirr, hadith No.3.

[8] . Ibid., bab al-'ishtighal bi dhikr Allah, hadith No.1.

[9] 'Uddat al-da'i, 238