

DHIKR (Arab., "remembrance, mention") is an important Islamic concept and practice best known in the West as a form of Ṣūfī ritual. Because it signifies a kind of prayer, the term *dhikr* is usually translated as *invocation*, since it involves the repetition of a name or names of God, often within a set phrase such as "Praise belongs to God." The sources frequently discuss it in conjunction with supplication (*du'ā'*, "calling [upon God]"), which normally adds a request to the mention of a name or names; supplication may take the form of a personal prayer in any language, while *dhikr* employs Arabic names drawn from the Qur'ān. Both are fundamentally voluntary and in any case need to be distinguished from the daily prayer (*ṣalāt*), which is incumbent upon all the faithful.

Studies of *dhikr* in Western languages usually emphasize the bodily movements and the techniques for bringing about concentration that are employed by various Ṣūfī groups and thus neglect the centrality of the concept in the Qur'ān, where the term is employed, along with various closely related derivatives, about 270 times. Although techniques have certainly fascinated a number of Islamicists and travelers to the East, they have always been of secondary interest within the Ṣūfī tradition itself. Nor is it necessary to search for outside influence to explain their genesis: perseverance in remembering God—and sincere Islam is nothing if not this—will eventually entail a certain concern with the technical aspects of controlling one's thoughts and attention.

The basic meaning of the term *dhikr* can be brought out by answering three questions:

1. What is the object of remembrance? God, whose nature is defined succinctly by the first *shahādah*, or creedal statement, "Lā ilāha illā Allāh" ("There is no god but God"), and in detail by the whole range of names and attributes (*al-asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt*) mentioned in the Qur'ān.
2. Why should God be remembered? Because human beings are commanded to remember him by his revelations to the prophets and because ultimate human felicity depends upon this remembrance.
3. How can God be remembered? By imitation of the Prophet, who provides the model through his *sunnah* (practice or custom) for all religious and spiritual activity.

In short, to understand the full implications of the term *dhikr* as it is employed in the Qur'ān and the tradition one needs to have a clear grasp of the three "principles of religion" (*uṣūl al-dīn*), namely divine unity, prophecy, and the return to God (in its widest sense, embracing both the "compulsory return" through death and the "voluntary return" through spiritual practice).

QUR'ANIC SOURCES. The Qur'ān refers to itself as a remembrance (*dhikr*) or reminder (*dhikrā, tadhkirah*) more than forty times and also alludes to other revelations by the same terms (*sūrah*s 10:71, 21:48, 21:105, 40:54). God had to send a long series of prophets—124,000 according to a

ḥadīth—because Adam's children keep on falling into forgetfulness, the shortcoming of their father (20:110). If the Qur'ān is a remembrance, so also is the human response to it (here the root's fifth verbal form, *tadhakkur*, is often employed). To be human is to remember: to acknowledge and confirm the obvious. "Not equal are the blind and the seeing man, those who have faith and do deeds of righteousness and the wrongdoer. Little do you remember!" (40:58).

The ultimate object of remembrance is God, since nothing else is truly worthy of human devotion, which is to say that "there is no god but God." The Qur'ān employs the term *dhikr Allāh*, "the remembrance of God," twenty-six times in nominal or verbal form. In a number of other instances where the word *ism* ("name") is inserted into this phrase, the emphasis is placed upon the verbal mentioning of the name *Allāh*, for example, when people are commanded to remember/mention God's name before sacrificing animals (5:4, 6:118, and elsewhere), but the command to remember/mention God's name is also a general one: "And remember the name of thy Lord, and devote thyself to him" (73:8; also 2:114, 22:40, 24:36, 76:25, 87:115). In any case the remembrance of God is almost invariably interpreted to coincide with the mentioning of his name, whether vocally or mentally.

Fifteen verses actually command the remembering of God. But beyond obedience to such commands, human beings must remember God because true life—life with God in the next world—depends on it. In Qur'anic terms, "to be forgotten by God" is to burn in the Fire; to be remembered by him is to dwell in Paradise. If we want God to remember us, we must follow the divine command to remember him: "Remember me, and I will remember you" (2:152), since God will forget those who disobey this command. Speaking of the resurrection, God says, "Today we do forget you, even as you forgot the encounter of this your day; and your refuge is the Fire" (45:34; also 20:126, 32:14, 38:26, 59:19). Such verses help explain why the Ṣūfī Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1309) can say in his well-known treatise on *dhikr*, "All acts of worship will disappear from the servant on the Day of Resurrection, except the remembrance of God" (*Miftāḥ al-falāḥ*, Cairo, 1961, p. 31).

Just as *dhikr* brings about felicity in the next world, so too it provides the way to achieve proximity to God in this world. In contrast to the hearts of the godfearing, the hearts of the unbelievers are "hardened against the remembrance of God" (39:22–23). Note the emphasis through repetition in "Those who have faith, their hearts being at peace in God's remembrance—in God's remembrance are at peace the hearts of those who have faith and do righteous deeds; theirs is blessedness and a fair resort" (13:28). The way to achieve this peace of heart (cf. the "soul at peace with God," 89:27) is to follow the Prophet, one of whose names is *Dhikr Allāh*: "You have a good example in God's Messenger, for whosoever hopes for God and the Last Day and remembers God frequently" (33:21). The Prophet is the perfect embodiment of

God's remembrance; hence, his *sunnah* provides all the details of how to remember God in every act of life. Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh quotes a short *ḥadīth* that epitomizes the pervasive rationale for the love of the Prophet: "He who remembers me has remembered God, and he who loves me has loved God" (*Miftāh*, p. 46).

HADĪTH. The *ḥadīth* literature provides a wealth of material on *dhikr* corroborating the Qur'an picture while emphasizing the practice of mentioning or invoking God's names and the benefits it provides beyond the grave. The Prophet calls *dhikr* the best act of worship. Every word a person utters in this life will be counted against him or her in the next life, except "bidding to honor and forbidding dishonor" (sura 3:11, 7:157, and elsewhere) and remembering God. When a companion of Muḥammad complained about Islam's many ordinances and asked for a single practice to which he could cling, the Prophet replied, "Let your tongue remain moist in the remembrance of God." The Prophet reported that God says, "I am with my servant when he remembers me. If he remembers me in himself I remember him in myself, and if he remembers me in an assembly, I remember him in an assembly better than his." Such "assemblies" of God's remembrance are well attested in the Prophet's time and became the model for Ṣūfī gatherings.

The *ḥadīths* make clear that the important formulas of remembrance or invocation are those still heard throughout the Islamic world on every sort of occasion: "There is no god but God," "Praise belongs to God," "Glory be to God," "God is greater," and "There is no power and no strength save in God." Only the last is non-Qur'anic, while the first, the Shahādah, is said to be the most excellent. The *ḥadīths* also make clear that all of God's names, traditionally said to number ninety-nine, may be employed in invocation and supplication, though certain names, such as *All-Merciful* or *All-Forgiving*, have always been employed far more than others, such as *Avenger* or *Terrible in Retribution*.

The idea that each name of God has a specific characteristic is already well reflected in the *ḥadīth* literature. Thus, for example, many *ḥadīths* allude to "the greatest name of God" (*al-ism al-a'zam*), the name "when called by which he answers and when asked by which he gives." Litanies (*awrād*, *ahzāb*) composed of divine names, formulas of remembrance, and Qur'anic verses have been common among Muslims from earliest times. Some of them mention the ninety-nine "most beautiful names"; others, such as *al-jawshan al-kabīr* (quoted from the Prophet in Shī'ī sources, e.g., 'Abbās Qummī, *Mafāṭīḥ al-jinān*, Tehran, 1961/2, pp. 179–207), list one thousand names of God.

ṢUFĪ TRADITION. The Shī'ī *ḥadīth* literature, which includes sayings from all twelve imams as well as from the Prophet, helps to demonstrate that the remembrance of God remained central to Islamic piety in the two centuries following Muḥammad. But while the Qur'an commands the faithful to remember God, the jurists could not impose remembrance upon the community except in the form of the ritual

prayer and other outward acts of worship, since by its nature remembrance is a personal affair related more to the domain of intention than to outward activity. In general, therefore, the Ṣūfīs more than any other group emphasized the importance of the devotional practices. In the words of Khwājah Muḥammad Pārsā (d. 1420), "The root of being a Muslim [*asl-i musalmānī*] is 'No god but God,' words that are identical with remembrance." Hence, he says, the soul of the daily prayer and the other ritual practices, such as fasting and pilgrimage, is "the renewal of God's remembrance in the heart" (*Qudsīyah*, ed. Aḥmad Ṭāhīrī 'Irāqī, Tehran, 1975, p. 30). In the same way, the Ṣūfīs considered all Islamic doctrine and theory to be aimed at awakening remembrance in the soul. If on the one hand the Qur'an commands human beings to remember God, on the other it provides a full justification for the necessity of this remembrance in its teachings about human nature and ultimate felicity, as, for example, in its description of the "trust" given to human beings in preference to all other creatures (33:72).

In commenting on the Qur'anic teachings, the Ṣūfīs in particular demonstrate that remembrance of God implies far more than just the ritual activities that go by this name. Full remembrance means actualizing all the ontological perfections latent within the primordial human nature (*fiṭrah*) by virtue of its being a divine image. These perfections belong ultimately to God, the one true being, and in his case they are referred to as the divine names. Al-Ghazālī and many others speak of human perfection as "assuming the traits of the divine names" (*al-takhalluq bi-al-asmā' al-ilāhīyah*); Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240) even offers this phrase as the definition of Ṣūfīsm (*Al-furūḥāt al-makkīyah* 2.267.11). Since *Allāh* is the all-comprehensive name (*al-ism al-jāmi'*), the referent of all other divine names, the stage of full human perfection is also known as "being like unto Allāh" (*ta'allub*), or "theomorphism." For Ibn al-'Arabī and others, the remembrance of the name *Allāh* is the sign of the fully realized human individual to whom reference is made in the prophetic saying, "The Last Hour will not come as long as there remains someone in this world saying, 'Allāh, Allāh!'" (*Furūḥāt* 3.248.17, 3.438.21).

The hallmark of this potential theomorphism is the particular nature of human intelligence, which sets men and women apart from all other creatures. Turning to God—remembrance—actualizes the divine image latent within humans; ultimate felicity is nothing but the remembrance of our own true nature, or the realization of genuine human character traits, the names of God.

Ṣūfī teachings and practice can be summarized by the "best of invocations," the Shahādah: "La ilāha illā Allāh" ("There is no god but God"). The aim is to "annihilate" (*fanā'*) all "others" (*aghḥyār*) and to "subsist" (*baqā'*) in the divine. In the words of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, "No one says correctly 'No god but God' unless he negates everything other than God from his soul and heart" (*Miftāh*, p. 28). Likewise Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1256): "When one pursues the *dhikr* and

persists in it, the attachment of the spirit to other than God will be gradually severed by the scissors of *la ilaha*, and the beauty of the monarch of *illa Allāh* will become manifest and emerge from the veil of might" (*The Path of God's Bondsmen*, p. 270). For Rūmī as for many other Ṣūfīs, the fire of love drives the seeker to remember God constantly; only this can effect the final transformation: "Love is that flame which, when it blazes up, burns away everything except the beloved. It drives home the sword of *lā ilāha* in order to slay other than God" (*Mashnavī* 5, vv. 588–590).

Though many authorities agree that "Lā ilāha illā Allāh" is the most excellent invocation, others hold that the "single invocation" (*al-dhikr al-mufrad*)—the mention of only the name *Allāh*—is superior. Ibn al-'Arabī often quotes approvingly the words of one of his masters, Abū al-'Abbās al-'Uraybī, who held that this invocation is best, since in invoking "no god but God" one could die in the terror of negation, but in invoking *Allāh* one can only die in the intimacy of affirmation (*Futūḥāt* 1.329.2, 2.110.21, 2.224.34).

Ṣūfī masters employed various names methodically to bring out the spiritual potentialities and shape the character traits of their disciples. Many Ṣūfī works provide information on names that can be appropriately invoked—though never without the permission and inculcation (*talqīn*) of a master—by disciples at different stages of spiritual growth. Works on the "most beautiful names," such as al-Ghazālī's *Al-maḡṣad al-asnā* (partially translated by R. Stade, *Ninety-nine Names of God*, Ibadan, 1970), often discuss the moral traits and spiritual attitudes that reflect each of the individual names on the human level. Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh devotes several pages to the properties of various names and their influence on disciples at different stages of the path. He points out, for example, that the name *Independent (al-Ghanī)* is useful for a disciple who seeks disengagement (*tajrīd*) from phenomena but is unable to achieve it (*Miftāḥ*, p. 35). Nonetheless, those who invoke the name *Allāh* should not be interested in specific benefits but should exemplify the attitude expressed in the famous prayer of the woman saint Rābī'ah al-'Adawīyah (eighth century): "O God, if I worship thee for fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I worship thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me from Paradise; but if I worship thee for thy own sake, grudge me not thy everlasting beauty" (A. J. Arberry, *Muslim Saints and Mystics*, London, 1966, p. 51).

Some Ṣūfīs wrote of transcending *dhikr*, since in the last analysis it is an attribute of the seeker and is therefore "other than God," a veil concealing God from sight (al-Kalābādhī, *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, p. 107). Ibn al-'Arabī explains that there can be no invocation after the veil has been lifted and contemplation (*mushāhadah*) takes place, for "invocation disappears in the theophany of the invoked" (*Futūḥāt* 2.245.21). According to al-Nūrī (d. 907), true invocation is "the annihilation of the invoker in the invoked" (Rūzbihān, *Mashrab al-arwāḥ*, ed. Nazif H. Hoca, Istanbul, 1974, p. 139). Ibn al-'Arabī's foremost disciple, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 1274) writes that the Ṣūfī must gradually

abandon all invocation, both outward and inward, until total emptiness is achieved (*Al-risālah al-ḥādīyah al-murshidīyah*, MS; cf. M. Valsan, "L'épître sur l'orientation parfaite," *Études traditionnelles* 67, 1966, pp. 241–268). But the final word for most seekers remains with Ibn al-'Arabī: "Invocation is more excellent than abandoning it, for one can only abandon it during contemplation, and that cannot be achieved in an absolute sense" (*Futūḥāt* 2.229.24).

Many classifications of types of *dhikr* can be found in Ṣūfī works. Some of these refer to the depth of concentration achieved by the disciple, such as invocation of the tongue, of the heart, of the innermost mystery. Another common classification distinguishes between loud or public and silent or private *dhikr*. The former was usually performed in groups according to various ritual forms that took shape within the different Ṣūfī orders. Sessions of public invocation range from the reserved to the ecstatic; some groups, such as the Mawlawīyah, or "whirling dervishes," considered music and dance aids to concentration, while others banned anything but sober recitation. Most Ṣūfīs would probably agree that public sessions are really a secondary form of Ṣūfī practice, since the individual's progress on the path, to the extent it does not derive totally from God's grace, depends upon his or her own efforts. Thus Sa'dī (d. 1292) is not speaking metaphorically when he says at the beginning of his famous *Gulistān*: "Every breath taken in replenishes life, and once let out gives joy to the soul. So each breath contains two blessings, and each blessing requires thanksgiving." It is the silent and persevering remembrance of God with each breath or each heartbeat, always within the context of the prophetic *sunnaḥ*, that takes the seeker to the ultimate goal.

SEE ALSO Attributes of God, article on Islamic Concepts; Shahādah; Sufism.

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DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS. Etymologically, the word *dialogue* (Gr., *dialogos*) means simply “conversation,” although in Western intellectual history its dominant meaning has been “a piece of written work cast in the form of a conversation.” In the history of religions, “conversations” about the meaning of beliefs, rituals, and ethics have no doubt been taking place, though informally and unrecorded, from the very beginning, or at least from the first encounter of divergent belief systems. However, the phrase *dialogue of religions* has become common in various religious traditions only since the second half of the twentieth century.

Written dialogues on religion and on philosophical subjects have a long history. The most celebrated Western examples are no doubt the dialogues of Plato, and particularly those in which the teaching methods of Socrates are presented on a question-and-answer basis. Within many religious traditions, dialogues between teachers and their pupils were recorded as a means of communicating and deepening insights. But in virtually all such cases the neophyte occupied a position of submission to the teacher, whose authority derived from what he had learned orally from his mentor and proved in practice. This type of dialogue is especially marked in the Indian traditions, Hindu and Buddhist alike. A relationship of faith and trust is set up between master and disciple, whereupon the disciple receives instruction, often in response to respectful questioning. Many of the Upaniṣads are cast in dialogue form, as is the *Bhagavadgītā* and a portion of the Buddhist Pali canon. The Judeo-Christian tradition likewise contains much instruction in dialogue form: the Law (Torah) is interpreted orally by rabbis to the circle of their disciples, whereas the teachings of Jesus are often placed in the context of conversations and instruction sessions within the company of followers. It is hardly possible in any of these instances to speak of a dialogue between equals, since the disciple or pupil comes seeking the insights that only that particular teacher can provide. In the Socratic dialogue the pupil is made to play a more active role, certainly, but the presence of the master is what guarantees that insights will emerge.

Artificial or imaginative dialogues on religious and metaphysical subjects also occur frequently in Western literature, following the pattern established in classical antiquity. An early medieval example of the genre was the Icelandic Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* (early thirteenth century), in which Gangleri asks three informants about the contents of Norse mythology. Later examples are very numerous, and include works as diverse as David Hume's *Dialogues Concern-*

ing Natural Religion (1779), R. A. Vaughan's *Hours with the Mystics* (1856), and Ninian Smart's *A Dialogue of Religions* (1960). This type of dialogue relates closely to the conventions of the theater and the novel, which may serve a similar purpose and of which this type of dialogue is a didactic offshoot. Less artificial were attempts to record the conversations and informal statements of literati and religious leaders—Martin Luther's *Tischreden* (*Table Talk*, 1566), Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791), *Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead* (1954), and, from India, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (1897).

Imaginative dialogue has also served the cause of inter-religious controversy—for example, by convincing an imaginary opponent of the error of his ways. An early missionary example was K. M. Banerjea's *Dialogues on Hindu Philosophy* (1861), which set Indian traditions against one another in the interests of Christianity. This apologetic method was, however, short-lived.

Common to the older forms of didactic or controversial dialogue was the assumption that religious truth is to be arrived at rationally, by reasonable discourse and the weighing of evidence and proofs. Doubtless there were cases in which this actually happened. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, contacts between religious traditions increased rapidly, and along with them actual (as opposed to imaginary) conversational encounters between believers. How often these followed an ideally rational course must remain a moot point: one suspects they seldom did so. But since during this same period the Western countries were politically and economically dominant, and the Christian missionary enterprise was experiencing its greatest successes, conversations usually involved Christians, and were seldom between equal partners. Where other traditions were concerned, for instance in confrontations between Hindus and Muslims in India, there could be a level of mutual suspicion that prevented constructive conversations from taking place at all. The West was, however, becoming steadily better informed on matters concerning other religious traditions, while the rapid onset of theological liberalism was modifying the terms in which Western religion was expressed. Before World War I, the dominant concepts were “sympathy” and “fulfillment,” and although innumerable conversations took place, no one applied to them the word *dialogue*.

Apologetics and controversy aside, in the late nineteenth century began a serious attempt to bring the religious leaders of the world together in a spirit of reconciliation, concentrating on what united them rather than what kept them apart. The pioneer assembly was the World's Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893; its original impulse came from Swedenborgians, yet it gathered under the banner of a common theism. The parliament at least attracted delegates from every major tradition, and although it dismayed the orthodox of many creeds (especially within evangelical Christianity), it established many important contacts. It also marked the beginning of the modern Hindu “mission” to the