

KEEPING GOD IN THE HEART

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Description: Remembrance of God leads to peace and happiness in this life.

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One must understand this world in the context of Monotheism (Belief in the Oneness of God). The message of the prophets is simple: People were created to worship God alone.. The God of Islam is a Loving Beloved God (*al-Wadud*), a Compassionate God (*ar-Rahman*), a personal God who showers those who adhere to His way in life with love (*al-Wali*), intimate relationship with whom is based on surrender, remembrance, yearning, and polishing of the heart.



God does not need our praises and worship. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the Sovereign, and the Sustainer of everything in the whole universe. Certainly some people remembering Him on a lonely planet in an endless vast expanse of space filled with billions of galaxies is not going to benefit Him in any way, nor will it increase His Kingdom even by an atom's weight. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy of God be upon him, narrates the following on behalf of God:

"O My slaves, I have forbidden oppression for Myself and have made it forbidden amongst you, so do not oppress one another.... O My slaves, you will not harm Me nor will you benefit Me. O My slaves, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as pious as the most pious heart of any one man of you, that would not increase My kingdom in anything. O My slaves, were the first of you and the last of you, the human of you and the jinn of you to be as wicked as the most wicked heart of any one man of you, that would not decrease My kingdom in anything...."^[1]

God has prescribed His remembrance (known as *dhikr*) and other acts of worship for our own benefit. All forms of remembrance and worship, serve to remind us of God and keep us always mindful of Him. And this consciousness of God, holds us from sinning, committing injustices and oppression, and motivates us to fulfill His rights and the rights of creation. And hence by following the ways laid out for us by God, we are actually doing ourselves a favor, as it is the best possible course of action that we can take in any matter and to know that you are doing the right thing leads to contentment, peace, and happiness.

As mankind is prone to laziness and injustice, not having any set ways to remember or worship God, would make us heedless and sink us deeper and deeper into transgression and darkness until we would forget about God completely, and our roles and responsibilities in life.

"Woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of God!" (Quran 39:22)

"O you who have faith! Let not your possessions, neither your children, divert you from God's remembrance. Whoso does that - they are the losers." (Quran 63:9)

Dhikr is divided into two branches: *dhikr* with the tongue and *dhikr* in the heart when the heart contemplates God's beauty and majesty.

Just as forgetting God leads to the pain of being forgotten by Him, so also remembering God leads to the joy of being remembered by Him: **"Remember Me, and I will remember you"** (Quran 2:152). The result of remembering God is not only to be remembered by God in the next world, but also to achieve peace of heart in this world. **"Listen, the hearts find peace only in the remembrance of God."** (Quran 13:28). To call upon God in times of despair, can give you comfort and solace as you have called upon the one Who is All-Powerful and is the only One who can take you out of difficulty.

Dhikr or remembrance of God is a way of linking the heart with the Divine. It provides with the spiritual practices of remembering and re-connecting with what is most meaningful in our lives, God. Muslims find consolation, comfort and strength in the frequent repetition of sacred phrases containing the Names of God and His attributes. Sought in the proper way, *dhikr* is food for spiritual hunger.

Dhikr is a step in the way of love; when somebody loves someone, he likes to repeat his name and constantly remember him. Therefore, the heart in which the love of God has been implanted will become a dwelling place of constant *dhikr*.

Dhikr is also recommended to the faithful as a means of obtaining heavenly reward. It is considered worship and adds to one's good deeds.

The particularly attractive aspect of *dhikr* is that it is permitted in any place and at any time; its practice is restricted neither to the exact hours of Prayers (the ritual prayer) nor to a specific place. God can be remembered anywhere. This practice is as available to women as it is to men.

Special words of *dhikr* are used for healing purposes as well. Even today the recitation of some prayers taught by Prophet Muhammad and verses from the Holy Quran are used to cure the sick.

The Quran mentions the significance of *dhikr* both directly and indirectly in verses scattered throughout the Quran, "the *dhikr* (remembrance, mindfulness) of God is greater" or "the greatest thing."

The most superior form of God's remembrance is the Quran which calls itself *Al-Dhikr*, "*the Reminder*" (Quran 20:99); therefore, another name of the Quran is *Dhikr-ullah*, "the Remembrance of God." One, it is a recognition that to recite the Quran is to remember God. Two, the first chapter of the Quran, Al-Fatiha, is the central part of Muslim daily prayers. Not only that, it is also an essence of Quran's message. Three, the Quran comes from God (it is His Word) and provides the means and the methods of living a life that is pleasing to Him.

Dhikr is all embracing because to remember God is to put God at the center and everything else at the periphery. All Islamic acts of devotion and worship are performed for the sake of remembrance, to keep God at the center of spiritual life in a way. The Quran calls the ritual prayer (*salah*) itself "remembrance." After the Quran, there is a type of Remembrance of God (*dhikr*) which is sort of a voluntary extension of the ritual prayer (*salah*).

Next to the Quran, the best *dhikr*, the words God loves the most, is the profession of faith *la ilaha illa Allah* (there is no true god worthy of worship but Allah), as well as words the words *Subhan-Allah* (Far removed is God from every imperfection), *Allahu-Akbar* (God is the Greatest), and *al-Hamdu-lillah* (All praise and thanks are due to Allah).

Footnotes:

[1]

Saheeh Muslim, Ibn Majah & At Tirmidhi

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