

Knowledge Is Light

Essays in Islamic Studies
Presented to
Seyyed Hossein Nasr
by his Students
in Honor of
his Sixty-Sixth Birthday

Edited by
Zailan Moris

ABC International Group, Inc.

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Printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Morris, Zailan (Editor), Knowledge is Light
1. Islam. 2. Islamic Philosophy. I. Title. II. Autor

ISBN: 1-871031-07-9

Cover Photo: Timcheh Amin Dawlah, Kashan
Cover Design by Liaquat Ali

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Published by
ABC International Group, Inc.

Distributed by
KAZI Publications, Inc.
3023 W. Belmont Avenue
Chicago IL 60618
Tel: 312-267-7001; FAX: 312-267-7002
email: kazibooks@kazi.org

The Function of *dhikrullāh* in Sufi Psychology

Joseph E. Lumbard

“... every single man has any number of needs, but in reality all men need only one thing, which is truly to practice the remembrance of God; if they have aquired that, they will not want for anything . . .”
— al-Shaykh al-^cArabī al-Darqāwī¹

Introduction

D*hikrullāh* (the remembrance of God)² is the central rite in the spiritual method of Sufism. For the Sufis it is the axis around which all other dimensions of the spiritual life rotate. *Dhikr* assumes many forms, from the silent seclusion of spiritual retreat (*khalwa*) to the ecstatic music (*samā^c*) and communal dancing of Sufi gatherings (*majālis*); and it is experienced on many levels, from the simple utterance of the tongue to the full participation of all that one is. But no matter what the form or degree, it always remains the pivot of Islamic

fullness (*ghafla*). Man bears the burden of being God's servant (*ʿabd*) and viceregent (*khalīfa*) in this world. He is central to creation in that his function is to bear witness that "There is no God but God" (*lā ilāha illāllāh*). This unique position derives from the trust (*al-amāna*) which God bestowed upon man in establishing the covenant (*ʿahd* or *mithāq*) between man and God. Regarding this trust, the Quran says, "Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the hills but they shrank from bearing it, and were afraid of it. And man assumed it. Lo! he hath proved a tyrant and a fool" (33:72). The Quran repeatedly attests that mankind has failed to uphold the covenant and is thus subject to the punishment of hell; "and those who break the covenant of Allah after ratifying it, and sever that which Allah hath commanded should be joined, and make mischief in the earth: theirs is the curse and theirs the ill abode" (12:25). It is to this position between keeping and forsaking God's trust, between fulfilling and breaking the primordial covenant, which the Quran refers to when it says, "Verily we created man in the highest of forms, then we threw him to the lowest of the low" (95:5-6). The "highest of forms" is the primordial nature (*al-fiṭrā*) of man as the servant and viceregent of God who keeps the covenant, and the "lowest of the low" is the forgetfulness (*al-ghafla*) whereby, man fails to fulfill the covenant and thus, neglects the function for which he has been made. To be the servant and viceregent of God is the healthy state of the soul, at peace with God and surrendered to His will. Only then is one capable of fully fulfilling the primordial covenant. The illness which afflicts the soul is like a turbidity which causes man to forget and thus fail to fulfill his primordial function. The means of ameliorating the illness and reconstituting the primordial nature is through the orison—through prayer; as the Quran says, "Verily! prayer preserveth from lewdness and iniquity . . ." (29:45). Yet the most efficacious mode of orison is *dhikrullāh*; for, as the remainder of this verse says, "but the remembrance of God is far greater!"

The Sufis have never been manifest as one distinct school (*madhhab*) of thought. So, although they speak of the same realities, they do so through a multiplicity of expressions.

mysticism. As Ibn ʿAtāʾullāh al-Iskandarī (d.709/1309), the third Shaykh of the Shādhilī Sufi order and the first Sufi to write a handbook on *dhikr* writes, “The remembrance of God is the key to prosperity and the luminary of spirits . . . it is the fundamental support of the Sufi path and sustenance for the people of truth.”³ Sufis have maintained this central rite in all ages and practised many methods for deepening and extending the transforming effect which *dhikr* has upon the spiritual seeker (*al-murīd*).⁴ In this essay, we will attempt to discern the fundamental elements of *dhikrullāh* which transcend the divergences of method and doctrine. We do not wish to conflate the doctrines, for each Sufi path is a way in and of itself, but we will attempt to bring out the principles of *dhikrullāh* which are common to all Sufi paths.

***Dhikr* and Sufi Psychology**

The central function of *dhikr* is to bring the adept closer to God, a path which has many stages and which culminates in one’s complete unity with Him. This is achieved by curing the soul of all illnesses contracted through its absence from God, thereby reconstituting the individual in his primordial nature (*fiṭrā*). *Dhikr* brings relief to the suffering soul, stills the crispations of the ego (*al-nafs*) and polishes the mirror of the heart (*al-qalb*) so that it may be an undisturbed reflection of the Divine; as the Quran asserts, “*Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest*” (13:28). But to fully understand the function of *dhikrullāh* we must view it in relation to the Sufi science of the soul or Sufi psychology, for one cannot understand the necessity and function of a medicine, if one does not understand the science in accord with which it is administered.

The background of Sufi psychology is Islamic anthropology, based upon the understanding of man expounded in the Quran and *Hadīth*. In the anthropology of the Quran, man is not conceived of as a fallen being in need of a miracle or “saviour,” but as a being created in the image and likeness of God who has forgotten his theomorphic nature. The shortcomings of man are due, not to his fall, as conceived in Christianity, but his forget-

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Consequently, the terms of Sufi psychology have many variations, sometimes even within the same text. Nonetheless, the divergences are mostly on the plane of expression, the reality to which they allude is one. But rather than engaging in dispute about the variations of disparate terminology, we should follow the advice of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (d.505/1111); "he to whom the realities beneath the terms are disclosed makes the ideas primary and the terms secondary: while inferior minds take the opposite course."⁵ On the plane of terminology and logical definitions, there are many variations of Sufi psychology, nonetheless, they are based upon the same fundamental principles and focused on the same goal.

Most Sufi psychologies conceive of man according to three fundamental levels, each containing degrees within itself. These are often referred to in descending order as the inmost being (*al-sirr*), the heart (*al-qalb*) and the soul (*al-nafs*). Others conceive of these three levels as different levels of the soul. While others employ both schemes, viewing the levels of the soul as states which precede the attainment to the heart and the inmost being. The scheme with which we will begin this essay divides the human soul into three levels: the soul which commands to evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi-s-sū*²), the blaming soul (*al-nafs al-lawwāma*) and the soul at peace (*al-nafs al-muṭma²inna*). We will then examine how these three levels correspond to the soul, the heart and the inmost being.

The Three Levels of the Human Soul

The three terms for the soul are taken from the Quran. *Al-nafs al-ammāra bi-s-sū*² occurs only once: "Lo! The human soul enjoineeth unto evil, save that whereon my Lord hath mercy, Lo! My Lord is Forgiving, Merciful" (12:53). Oftentimes it is referred to simply as *al-nafs al-ammāra* (the commanding soul) which is the manner in which we will refer to it throughout this essay.⁶ At this level the soul is impure and confused, standing as a veil over man's true nature. The term *al-nafs al-lawwāma* also occurs only once in the Quran, "Nay, I swear by the accusing soul" (75:2). The remainder of the chapter speaks of the

need for the soul to take the right path. The soul which is in the process of purification in order to correct itself is the soul. The term *al-nafs al-lawwāma* is used with the meaning of "thou soul, at peace with thy Lord, pleasure! Enter the Garden!" (89:27-30) [to be at rest] with the meaning of "ever, used with the meaning of the content of which is, "Worship in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find for them, and bliss"

The goal of Sufi psychology is to purify the lower soul through the attainment of a soul at peace with the Divine. The soul is in a state of fullness which results in the body. As Najm al-Kubrāwīya Sufi orator *al-mabda² ilā l-ma²ab* this day, writes,

As the soul is purified through Kingship and the attainment of the frame, it retains the virtue of that which is lessened to the state of being enveloped by the different objects of God almighty grace—"They are When the veil is removed the cause of the necessity of the Quran, 'make it (33:41) for it to be opposites.⁷

need for the soul to discern right from wrong in order to follow the right path. The Sufis use this term to refer to the soul which is in the process of mastering the means of discernment in order to correct the negative tendencies of the commanding soul. The term *al-nafs al-mutma'inna* occurs once as well: "Ah! thou soul, at peace! Return unto thy Lord, content in His good pleasure! Enter thou among My bondsmen! Enter thou My Garden!" (89:27-30). The Quran does not use the verb *tama'anna* [to be at rest] with the soul in any other instances. It is, however, used with the heart in several instances; the most important of which is, "Who have believed and whose hearts have rest in the remembrance of Allah. Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest! Those who believe and do right: Joy is for them, and bliss the journey's end" (13:28-9).

The goal of Sufism is to still the passions stirred by the lower soul through the commanding soul so that it may become a soul at peace with God—the undisturbed reflection of the Divine. The soul is, however, veiled by the turbidity of forgetfulness which results from the attachment of the spirit to the body. As Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d.654/1256), a Shaykh of the Kubrāwīya Sufi order and the author of *Mirṣād al-^cibād min al-mabda² ilā l-ma²ād*, a Persian mystical treatise still used to this day, writes,

As the spirit passed through the worlds of Kingship and Dominion on its way to join the bodily frame, it retained a memory of all that it beheld. By virtue of that memory its remembrance of God was lessened to such an extent that some were so enveloped by the veils resulting from the memory of different objects that they totally forgot God. Then God almighty expelled them from the memory of His grace—'They forgot God and He forgot them' (9:68). When the veils of forgetfulness appeared—this being the cause of 'in their hearts is a sickness' (2:110)—of necessity God prescribed from the apothecary of the Quran, 'make remembrance of God abundantly' (33:41) for it has been said that the cure is effected by opposites.⁷

Thus, that which veils mankind from God is not something outside of himself, but something within, it is his own existence (*wujūd*).⁸ The lower soul calls one to the remembrance of that which is other than God and as one becomes absorbed in the remembrance of creation, one fails to remember God (*yadhkurullāh*), the Creator. This state of the soul, engrossed in its desires and filled with the images of creation, is the soul which commands to evil; it commands man to the greatest of sins—recognizing others next to God (*shirk*), or worse yet, in place of Him. When man is afflicted by *shirk*, he is like a rudderless ship, or a centerless circle; for he is centered upon that which is other than God, rather than recognizing God as the one true center. A circle, after all, can have only one center.

This condition of the lower soul is the root of all afflictions. As al-Shaykh al-^cArabī al-Darqāwī (d.1248/1823), the founder of the Darqāwī branch of the Shādhilī *ṭarīqah* writes, "We have no other enemy (than our soul): if we could kill it, we would kill all our oppressors with one blow."⁹ But most do not remember God, for they are distracted by the remembrance of existence:

What causes us to forget Him is the existence of ourselves, the ego. Nothing veils Him from us except our concern, not with existence as such, but with our own desires. If we were able to forget our own existence, we would find Him who is the source of our existence and at the same time we would see that we do not exist at all.¹⁰

Slaves to their desires, the majority of men seek after that which kills the heart and nourishes the carnal soul. But on the path of Sufism, one turns from the beckoning of the lower soul to seek that which nourishes the heart and calms the soul—God and the remembrance of Him. To realize the full necessity of this, one must, however, advance to the next state, that of the blaming soul, for it is at this level that one becomes aware of the dispersive nature of the soul and thus, seeks to correct it. According to Najm al-Dīn Kubrā, (d.618/1221), the founder of the Kubrāwīya Sufi order, the means by which the commanding soul becomes the blaming soul is through the *dhikr*. He

likens the lower soul to a light of the *dhikr* impure, filled with impurities by means of which He continues to descend. He Himself descends and

The blaming soul is brought through the power of the Lordship and banishes the lower soul. *Iṣṭilāḥāt as-Ṣūfiyya* Razzaq al-Kāshānī al-^cArabi, defines c

That which is such that by habit of forgetfulness becomes water which was Lordship and issues from its natural disposition overtakes it and is immersed in God the Forger

The stage of the blaming soul along the spiritual path of the soul at peace is eradicated and the Lordship and the *dhikr* descend and create existence. Until this stage of spiritual recidivism is controlled by the v intermittent flashes of purities of creation banished forever, man cannot unite with God. Thus al-K

likens the lower soul to a dark and cluttered house. When the light of the *dhikr* is lit within it, one sees that his soul is impure, filled with all the dirty elements of existence. Having witnessed this, a sincere believer takes to expelling these impurities by means of invoking God the True (*dhakara al-Ḥaqq*). He continues in this stage until the Sultan of the *dhikrullāh* Himself descends and banishes all that is impure.¹¹

The blaming soul is like the intellect (*al-ʿaql*) which, through the power of discernment, separates truth from falsity and banishes the latter to make way for the former. In his *Iṣṭilahāt as-Ṣūfiya* (Technical Terms of Sufism), ʿAbd al-Razzaq al-Kāshānī (d.730/1330), a follower of the school of Ibn al-ʿArabi, defines *al-nafs al-lawwāma* as:

That which is illuminated by the light of the heart such that by this light the soul is able to realize the habit of forgetfulness (*sunnat al-ghafla*). It thus becomes watchful and begins to remedy its state which was vacillating between the direction of Lordship and that of creation. And whenever an evil issues from it, in accordance with its dark nature and its natural disposition, the light of divine awareness overtakes it so that it takes to admonishing itself and is immersed in repentance, returning to the gate of God the Forgiver, the Compassionate.¹²

The stage of the blaming soul marks a definite advance along the spiritual path, but is far from attainment to the stage of the soul at peace. Only when forgetfulness is completely eradicated and the soul ceases to vacillate between the Lordship and the realms of creation does the Sultan of the *dhikr* descend and eradicate all that remains from the filth of existence. Until this stage is reached, one remains in danger of spiritual recidivism, returning to the state of forgetfulness, controlled by the whispers of the lower soul. But when the intermittent flashes of the *dhikr* become a constant light, the impurities of creation can no longer bear its effulgence and are banished forever, making way for the soul at peace, content with God. Thus al-Kāshānī defines *al-nafs al-muṭmaʿinna* as:

That whose illumination is completed by the light of the heart such that it is ripped away from its blameworthy qualities and perfumed by praiseworthy character traits. It has turned completely in the direction of the heart, satiated by it in ascending to the honorable title 'knower of the holy,' far from the aspect of filth, preserving in obedience, dwelling in the presence of the rising of degrees until his Lord addresses him saying: 'Ah! thou soul at peace! Return unto thy Lord, content in His good pleasure! Enter thou among My bondmen! Enter thou My Garden!' (89:27-30).¹³

The soul at rest has returned to the *fiṭrā* wherein it upholds the trust and thus fulfills its covenant, for by the light of the *dhikr* it sees the true relation between the servant and his Lord. As Amir ^cAbd al-Qādir, a nineteenth century Sufi saint and a follower of the teachings of Ibn al-^cArabī, writes in a commentary on *al-nafs al-muṭmaʿinna*, "... the essential reality is 'Lord,' the exterior is 'servant.' The servant is a 'Lord' manifested in the form of a 'servant' and, in the appearance of a worshiper, it is Himself who adores Himself."¹⁴ Having cast aside the impurities of his own existence, the seeker sees that there has never been an other. His own existence simply veiled him from realizing the full reality of *lā ilāha illallāh*—that God is the reality of all things and that there is no reality besides Him.

To summarize what has preceded, through *dhikr* one reverses the process of creation by replacing the memory of images which have accumulated in the soul with the remembrance of God. The soul is filled with the knots of creation which are in effect a crystallization of images it has encountered and which constitute the veils of forgetfulness. The *dhikr* serves to break these knots and render the veils aside by countering the disease of forgetfulness—root of all ailments, thus, making the heart of he who invokes (*al-dhākir*) hospitable for He who is invoked (*al-madhkūr*)—Allah, Sultan of the *dhikr*.

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Although *dhikr* is means of alleviating edge the importance Islam, there are th other practices are tr cation (*duʿāʿ*) and *dh* objective: human sal ners of achieving thi ent faculties and nee a universal prayer between God as such canonical prayer, on but as the primordial God. *Duʿāʿ*, on the one's individual desi nalisises the crispator utter dependance u Grace. But, as the Q *greater*" (29:45). *Dhi* because it is the mea Names and then the a famous Sufi saint

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The Modes of Orison

Although *dhikr* is recognized by all Sufis as the most direct means of alleviating the illness of the soul, they fully acknowledge the importance and necessity of other modes of orison. In Islam, there are three main currents of orison of which all other practices are tributaries: canonical prayer (*ṣalāt*), supplication (*du^{ʿā}ʿ*) and *dhikr*. Each of these has the same ultimate objective: human salvation. They are, however, different manners of achieving this objective which correspond to the different faculties and needs of the human soul. Canonical prayer is a universal prayer for all humans based upon the meeting between God as such and man as such. Which is to say that in canonical prayer, one does not pray as a particular individual, but as the primordial man created in the image and likeness of God. *Du^{ʿā}ʿ*, on the other hand, is the personal expression of one's individual desires, needs and anxieties. In it, one externalises the crispation of his soul before God, thus admitting his utter dependance upon Him and opening himself to God's Grace. But, as the Quran states "*the remembrance of God is far greater*" (29:45). *Dhikr* is the most important mode of orison because it is the means whereby, one comes to know the Divine Names and then the Divine Unity. As ^ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jilānī, a famous Sufi saint of the twelfth century, asserts,

God's very words point to what should be man's principal occupation: to know the Divine Names. This is the knowledge of one's inner being. If one obtained that knowledge, one would reach the level of Divine wisdom. That is where the knowledge of the Name of Unity is complete.¹⁵

Through *dhikr* one embraces the ontological realization of God's Names and Qualities and is thereby complete, for the Names are that of which our very substance is woven. To know them is to know ourselves and to know ourselves is to know them. As the Prophet Muhammad has said, "He who knows himself, knows his Lord."

Dhikr does not, however, render *du^{ʿā}ʿ* and *ṣalāt* unneces-

sary, rather it deepens them so that ultimately all aspects of worship become as many modes of one's constant remembrance. The basic distinction is that while with *ṣalāt* and *du^cā^ṣ* the pious believer worships God and walks to paradise upon the feet of faith, in the Sufi *dhikr*, the spiritual traveler seeks to realize God and flies to Him upon the wings of certainty (*al-yaqīn*).

The primacy of *dhikr* in this method is due to the alchemical power of the divine Word. As God says, "Remember me! I will remember you" (2:152). And as Frithjof Schuon, one of the foremost contemporary expositors of traditional spirituality writes in a statement which could almost be read as a commentary on this verse of the Quran,

. . . what with God is creative power is, with man, transmuting and deifying power; if the divine Word creates, the human word responding to it—the mentioning of God—brings back to God. The divine Word first creates, then reveals; the human word first transmits and then, addressing itself to God, transforms and deifies man; to divine revelation corresponds human transmission and to creation, deification. Speech in man has no function but transmission of truth and deification; it is either truthful discourse or else prayer.¹⁶

Although the *dhikr* is fundamentally transforming, there are degrees of efficacy within it. Mere invocation with the tongue does not transform the substance of one's being. The *dhikr* must penetrate into the heart and the inmost being (*al-sirr*). As Shaykh Aḥmad al-^cAlawī, an extremely influential Shādhilī Shaykh of the early twentieth century, writes,

Ever since thou wert created thou hast been saying *lā ilāha* . . . but when will the negation take effect? Nay, it will not take effect, for it is merely with the tongue. If thou wouldst make denial with thine Intellect, that is with thy Heart and thine innermost Secret, then the whole world would be banished from thy sight, and thou wouldst find God instead of finding thyself, let alone thy fellow creatures.¹⁷

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If the invocation permeate all aspects of spiritual penetration, the elements of invocation: the invocation of one's inmost being of the first Sufis "Invoke God with nothing other than do not contemplate your inmost being.

The invocation takes when move face and fails to This *dhikr* is of moments, for it can chatter and chatter writes in his *Iḥy Sciences*).

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The Three Fundamental Levels of *Dhikr*

If the invocation is to transform the soul, it must gradually permeate all aspects of the adept's being. Based upon this gradual penetration, many Sufis recognize three fundamental levels of invocation: the invocation of the tongue (*dhikr al-lisan*), the invocation of the heart (*dhikr al-qalb*) and the invocation of one's inmost being (*dhikr al-sirr*). As Ibn 'Atā' (d.309/922), one of the first Sufis to write a commentary on the Quran, has said, "Invoke God with your tongues until they do not move with anything other than Him! Invoke Him with your hearts until they do not contemplate any other than Him! And invoke Him with your inmost beings until they live through Him."¹⁸

The invocation of the tongue represents the first steps one takes when moved to practice *dhikr*. But it remains on the surface and fails to penetrate into the deeper levels of one's being. This *dhikr* is of little use in purging man of his negative elements, for it can only serve as a temporary distraction from the chatter and chaos of the world. As Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī writes in his *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of the Religious Sciences*).

As for the invocation of the tongue and without the presence of the heart, it is of little use. . . . The presence of the heart at one moment followed by heedlessness of God, because of occupation with worldly things, is also of little value. Rather the presence of the heart with God constantly or most of the time is the preface to the acts of worship. Nay, therein is the sanctification of the rest of worship.¹⁹

Thus, one begins with an invocation upon the tongue and then moves toward the invocation of the heart where the heart is present with God. When invocation of the heart is established, one then deepens this *dhikr* until it penetrates one's inmost being. Al-Ghazzālī does not, however, use the term *sirr*, but refers to this final stage of *dhikr* as an intimacy (*uns*) with

the invocation. When such intimacy takes place, he who invokes is severed from all that is other than God.²⁰

Najm ad-Dīn Kubrā refers to these three levels of *dhikr* as three immersions (*istighrāqāt*), for, as one proceeds in the practice of invocation, one becomes increasingly immersed in the divine mysteries. The first immersion (*istighrāq*), the invocation of the tongue (*dhikr al-lisān*), has several degrees within it. On the one hand, it can be mere idle chatter with the tongue, while on the other, when it is on the edge of proceeding into the second immersion, it becomes the *dhikr* of all creation. This occurs because man is the microcosm which reflects and contains all the elements of the macrocosm. Therefore, when the seeker proceeds beyond the idle chatter of the tongue, he may hear the voices of the entire macrocosm invoking within him.

The human being is composed of every noble and base substance, from the four elements (*arkān*), the earth and the sky and all that is between them. So these sounds are the invocations of every element (*ʿunsur*) and every principle of these substances. Thus, he who hears these voices has praised God and worshiped him with every tongue. This is among the signs of the path and this immersion is the result of invoking vigorously with the tongue.²¹

Although the invocation with the tongue is limited and represents only an elementary step in the spiritual path, the depths to which it penetrates are far beyond that of one's normal religious experience. But no matter how intense or beautiful these experiences may be, the mystic traveler (*al-sayyār*) has not at this point undergone the spiritual transformation which is the aim of the Sufi path.

The second immersion is the invocation of the heart (*dhikr al-qalb*). At this stage, the alchemical transformation of the spiritual adept begins. "Among the signs of the invocation occurring in the heart is that one witnesses a stream gushing light before him with great speed. The mystic traveler finds peace in this and becomes intimate with it."²² At this level, the

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invocation forms an opening in the right side of the invoker from which flow the lights of invocation.

The heart and the holy spirit exit from this door and the rider (*al-rāḳib*) mounts his mount (*al-markab*) though before he had been underneath it. I mean by the rider, the subtle rational being (*al-laṭifa al-nāṭiqa*), and by the mount, the body. Then the mystic traveler rises by his mount to the presence, the presence of the Real (*muḥādir al-Ḥaqq*).²³

This means that the adept has now become the master of his appetites and desires, whereas previously he served them, now they serve him. This stage marks a partial return to the primordial nature (*fiṭrā*), for, as the soul is eternal, it is the proper master of all that is transient. When the soul is weak, man misguidedly seeks nourishment from the phenomenal world (*al-dunyā*) for his transient self. But when it is purified, he looks to God for that which nourishes his heart. The body along with its appetites and desires is the steed upon which the soul rides on its journey through this world. The lower soul is obsessed with its steed and seeks to adorn it and nourish it without mounting to complete his journey, and so its servant is its master. The blaming soul, however, recognizes the proper function of the steed and mounts so that the rider may complete his journey. Having come into command of the dominion with which he was entrusted as viceregent, the servant is prepared to make the journey to his Lord.

The final immersion is the invocation of the inmost being (*dhikr al-sirr*). Here the invoker (*al-dhākir*), the invocation (*al-dhikr*) and the invoked (*al-madhkūr*) become one.

The third immersion is the descending of the *dhikr* into one's inmost being. This is the disappearance of the invoker from the invocation in the invoked, for the invocation of it is due to passionate love for it and complete immersion in it. Among the signs of this stage is that when you leave the *dhikr*, it does not leave you. This is the flying of the invocation within you calling you from mystical trance to pres-

ence of mind. Among its signs is that the invocation exerts pressure upon your head and all your members such that it is as if you were bound in chains and shackles. And among its signs is that its flames do not abate, when its lights come you always see lights rising and others descending and there are pure flames around you, blazing and burning.²⁴

Being united with God, the *faqīr* sees nothing but God in all things, before all things and behind all things. The flame of the invocation burns constantly within him, fueled by his love for God and banishing all that is other than Him. He appears to others as if he is among them and participating in their world. But in reality, he dwells in the presence of God and participates in the uncreatedness of existence. The whole of creation is immersed in the Divine and he sees all things as they truly are: signs of God (*āyāt Allāh*)—faces of the Absolute; for “*whithersoever ye turn, there is the Face of God*” (2:115).

Each level of immersion can be experienced as a spiritual state (*ḥāl*) or realized as a spiritual station (*maqām*). The former is a fleeting glimpse of spiritual verities, while the latter is the actual attainment of the spiritual depth which pertains to such verities. When speaking of the spiritual path, it is the stations with which one is mostly concerned. For no matter how intense the spiritual experience, it is of little importance next to the full ontological realization necessary for attainment to a spiritual station. Nonetheless, the states can function as glimpses which help to deepen the seeker’s understanding and thus prepare him for the attainment of a station.

From what has preceded, it should be evident that these three levels of *dhikr* correspond to the three levels of the soul. *Dhikr al-lisān* is the only invocation of which *al-nafs al-ammāra* is capable of, for the depth of its spiritual penetration is limited to commanding the soul to turn away from the earth and towards heaven. *Dhikr al-qalb* corresponds to *al-nafs al-lawwāma* because it is a light in the heart by which the reality of the human condition becomes apparent and glimpses of the Divine become possible, thus enabling the soul to overcome falsehood with truth and so ameliorate its condition. And *dhikr*

al-sirr corresponds to the innermost being is the true nature. To attain the return to one’s true self to the *nafs, al-na* all others being a co

The Varieties

Having outlined the varieties of *dhikr*, we now examine the varieties of these. These range from the simple invocation of the Name (*Allāh*), to the more complex invocations (*majālis*), the ecstatic outpourings of the heart, and the various modes correspond to the position. Though seen as the dispersed elements of the transforming the call of the spiritual man until he reaches the primordial man.

As regards the varieties of a Divine Name or invocation, we regard as the most effective *dhikr*, but the two most common are the *shahādah* (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*) and the invocation of the *shahādah* path, and his discipl

By *lā ilāha illāllāh*, His majesty pursues this discipline of the spirit with the invocation of *lā ilāha*, and will become manifest in His might.²⁵

‘Alā’ al-Dawlānī, Kubrā’s and Rāzī’s *shahādah* is more efficacious than the *shahādah*. It therefore

al-sirr corresponds to *al-nafs al-mutma'inna* because the inmost being is the seat of the Divine which constitutes man's true nature. To attain to the soul at rest is nothing other than the return to one's true nature for although there are many levels to the *nafs*, *al-nafs al-mutma'innā* is its only natural state, all others being a corruption of it and a veil over it.

The Various Modes of *Dhikr*

Having outlined the basic stages of Sufi psychology, we can now examine the various modes of *dhikr* employed by the Sufis. These range from the silent invocation of the Supreme Divine Name (*Allāh*), to the recitation of litanies (*wird*) in Sufi gatherings (*majālis*), the recitation of the Quran (*qirā'a*) and the ecstatic outpourings of Sufi concerts (*samā'*). The various modes correspond to different aspects of man's spiritual composition. Though seemingly diverse, they work together to pull the dispersed elements of the human soul back to their center, transforming the cacophony of fallen man into the harmony of spiritual man until there is nothing but the constant *dhikr* of primordial man.

As regards the central form of *dhikr*, the verbal repetition of a Divine Name or formula, the Sufis differ as to what they regard as the most effective *dhikr*. There are many formulas of *dhikr*, but the two most common are the Supreme Name and the *shahādah* (*lā ilāha illallāh*). Najm al-Dīn Kubrā lists the invocation of the *shahādah* as one of the eight principles of the path, and his disciple Najm al-Dīn Rāzī writes,

By *lā ilāha*, other than God is negated, and by *illallāh*, His majestic presence is affirmed. When one pursues this *dhikr* and persists in it, the attachments of the spirit will be gradually severed by the scissors of *lā ilāha*, and the beauty of the monarch of *illallāh* will become manifest and emerge from the veil of might.²⁵

°Alā' al-Dawlā al-Simnānī (d.736/1336), who follows in Kubrā's and Rāzī's spiritual lineage, claims that the *shahādah* is more efficacious because the Name is contained within the *shahādah*. It therefore has the advantage of negating plurality

and affirming Divine Unity, while the Name only affirms Divine Unity.²⁶ But the superiority of the *shahādah* relates to the need for the novice to focus upon a formula which can strike out the inherent polytheism of the lower soul. Once this has been achieved, the spiritual adept can move from the *shahādah* to the Name. At this stage, the Name of God is sufficient because the adept has traveled from the human realm (*‘ālam al-nasūt*) to the Realm of Sovereignty (*‘ālam al-malakūt*) in which the heavenly plurality does not have the dispersing effect of earthly plurality and thus, there is no need to emphasize negation. When the mystic has traveled further, to the Realm of Omnipotence (*‘ālam al-lahūt*), he can invoke the word *Huwa* (He) which corresponds to the divine Essence and is therefore more adequate for relating the nature of the Divine.²⁷ Thus, Simnānī perceives a hierarchy among formulas of invocation which corresponds to the various stages of the spiritual path. Nonetheless, many Sufis maintain that because the *shahādah* contains all truth, it is sufficient on any spiritual level.

In addition to the question of what to invoke, there is the question of how to invoke. The first choice is between audible invocation (*al-dhikr al-jahrī*) and silent invocation (*al-dhikr al-khafī*). Most Sufis recognize the efficacy of both, but maintain that the silent invocation is superior, for with it, one allows the invocation to take place in the heart and the inmost being. Audible invocation is reserved for those at the beginning of the path because it serves to chase away the cacophany of the mind. But once the seeker has stilled his dispersive nature, this is no longer a necessity and he should employ a silent invocation, for as the Prophet Muḥammad has said, "Hidden remembrance is seventy fold better than the remembrance which the guardian angels hear."²⁸ *Al-dhikr al-jahrī* is often employed in Sufi gatherings (*majālis*) though they usually end with a silent invocation, thus symbolizing the move from exteriority to interiority which is so central to the spiritual life.²⁹

The most important practice of *dhikr* is that of the spiritual retreat (*khalwā*), for "nothing is more useful to the heart

than solitude . . ." ³⁰ The meaning of the spiritual path in which he engages in length can vary anywhere though the most common break with society facilitates one's inward breakthrough. Furthermore, the ceremony serves to awaken the adept. As al-Shaykh says, "Many things, you do not attach to it, for ever it enhances spirituality and Najm al-Dīn Kubrā begins with *jalāl*,

Oh my beloved, what you see. If you are in error. Nay, you are in the city of the darkness and you will not find it. If you find it, you will lose it although you are the thing of your existence. The path of dimness is a warfare. The measure of effort in the path (*al-aghyār*), exist

The initial shutting of the heart with which one begins is in the proximity of darkness. It is the inner realities unattainable by the weapons with which one fights the three enemies: existence, time, and space. At the beginning of his initial *khalwā* the *faqīr* is at war with himself. After the initial *khalwā* returns to the *khalwā* such duration as the practice of spiritual retreat

than solitude . . . ”³⁰ Most Sufi orders require that at the beginning of the spiritual path, the adept makes a spiritual retreat in which he engages in nothing but the invocation of God. Its length can vary anywhere from four hours to a thousand days, though the most common duration is forty days. The outward break with society facilitated by this retreat reflects and facilitates one’s inward break with the passions of the lower soul. Furthermore, the complete severing of all external senses serves to awaken the inner senses which in most men lay dormant. As al-Shaykh al-Darqāwī writes, “if you wish for sensory things, you do not desire the spirit and your heart is not attached to it, for everything that strengthens the sense, weakens spirituality and vice-versa.”³¹ It is for this reason that Najm al-Dīn Kubrā begins his *Fawā’ih al-jamāl wa fawātih al-jalāl*,

Oh my beloved! Shut your eyelids and look at what you see. If you say you see nothing now, you are in error. Nay, you see, but due to the extreme proximity of the darkness of existence to your vision, you do not find it. If you wish to find it and see it in front of you although your eyes are shut, then dispel something of your existence and remove something from it. The path of diminishing it and removing it is spiritual warfare. The meaning of spiritual warfare is the exertion of effort in dispelling and killing what is other (*al-aghyār*), existence, the soul and Satan.³²

The initial shutting of the eyes symbolizes the initial *khalwa* with which one begins the spiritual path. Gradually the proximity of darkness is lifted, the inner senses awakened and the inner realities unveiled. These senses then serve as the weapons with which one fights the spiritual war against the three enemies: existence, the soul and Satan. From the moment of his initial *khalwa* until his death, be it spiritual or bodily, the *faqīr* is at war with all that is other than God (*al-aghyār*). After the initial *khalwa*, he invokes several times a day and returns to the *khalwa* periodically, though it need not be of such duration as the first. One must never abandon the practice of spiritual retreat, for in it, the shield of certitude is forti-

fied and the sword of discernment is sharpened. Were they to weaken or become dull, this would serve as an invitation for the enemies to return. While many Sufis list other conditions of the spiritual retreat, they all function as supports for the *dhikr* which is its central focus.

If the spiritual retreat is viewed as an act of spiritual contraction (*qabḍ*), then its expansive (*bast*) complement is found in the ecstatic sessions of song and dance (*al-samāʿ*) employed by many Sufi orders. Foremost among the Sufis who insist upon the significance of music as an aid to spiritual realization is the famous Persian Sufi poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), for whom music is an essential element of the spiritual path because it is an echo of celestial music which beckons the soul to remember its divine origins. As he writes in these well-known verses of the *Mathnawī*:

The sages have said that these melodies,
We have acquired from the rolling spheres,
The faithful say that the effects of paradise,
Turn into sweetness every ugly sound.
We are all parts of Adam
And had heard these melodies in paradise.
Although water and clay have cast doubt upon us,
Some echo of them lingers in our memory.
Oh, music is the nourishment of lovers,
Who harbor in their mind the thought of union.
The fire of love becomes intensified through these melodies,
Much like the fire generated by small nuts.
(*Mathnawī*, IV, 733)³³

Rumi thus equates Sufi music with the music heard upon the day of man's primordial covenant with God (*yawm al-mithāq*). Participation in *samāʿ* calls man back to the covenant and thus, to his primordial, Adamic nature which is non-other than the true self.

The central function of music in Rumi's vision of the Sufi path is revealed in the first lines of the *Mathnawī* where he writes:

Hearken to this reed
Breathing ever since
From its rushy bed
of impassioned love
(Nicholson's translation)

The reed is that
made. The music of
"Who taught by the
Mathnawī are like
that they seek to attain
towards the fulfillment
human hands and the
the *Mathnawī* are that
after the Divine reed
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creates and reveals,
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Hearken to this reed forlorn,
Breathing ever since twas torn
From its rushy bed a strain,
Of impassioned love and pain.
(Nicholson's translation)

The reed is that from which both the pen and the lute are made. The music of the lute is thus akin to the word of God "Who taught by the pen" (96:4) and these opening lines of the *Mathnawī* are like the first words of the Islamic revelation in that they seek to affirm the covenant and thus draw mankind towards the fulfillment of it. Yet the *Mathnawī* is written by human hands and the Quran is the Word of God. The words of the *Mathnawī* are thus of the human reed which is fashioned after the Divine reed, and in whose song is found the human transmuting and deifying power which responds to the creative and revelatory power of God. As the Word of the Divine reed creates and reveals, the song of the human reed transmits and deifies. In the reed, one finds the dual nature of man. Its vertical shape is like that of God's vicegerent who stands erect as a symbol of God's Majesty, while the emptiness by which the air is able to pass and thus sing of God's praises, is like man's servitude, whereby he is completely submissive before God. To hearken to the reed is thus to return to one's true self by listening to the music of his own reed, which is in truth the music of the Divine reed.

Accompanying Sufi music, many Sufi orders employ a mystical dance. The most famous of which is that of the "whirling dervishes" of the Mawlawī order founded by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. This dance begins with a somber stately procession in which the mystic's arms are crossed over his breast and his hands clasp his shoulders. At this stage he is in the state of *qabḍ* (spiritual contraction). Then, as the music plays, the dancers file one by one in a procession towards their Shaykh. When a dancer comes to the Shaykh, he begins to twirl and slowly unfolds his arms until they are stretched out on either side. He is now in the state of *bast* (spiritual expansion). The right foot is centered, while the left foot extends so as to produce the whirling motion.

The right hand is extended upward, so as to receive the grace of heaven, while the left points downward, so as to transmit the grace of heaven to earth.³⁴ The position of the feet reflects the primordial state of man, centered upon the remembrance of God, yet still proceeding forth into the world, while the hands reflect his transcendent state serving as the bridge between heaven and earth. Participating in this ritual, the dervish stills his soul and enacts an alchemical process which burns the veils of forgetfulness, bringing the soul from the periphery of existence, where it takes up illusory centers, to its one true center. By performing this dance in which the body reflects the axis of the universe, the dervish is drawn to that very axis by his recollection of it.

Another form of dance is that performed by many branches of the Shādhilī order. This dance is composed of three movements. In the first, the participants stand in a circle with arms at the side. In rhythm with the drum, they bend down pronouncing the *naḥī* (negation) of the *shahādah*, "*lā ilāha*" ("There is no god") and then return to a standing position while saying the *ithbāt* (affirmation) "*illāllāh*" (except God). This movement reflects the two fundamental stages of the spiritual path. The downward prostration accompanied by the *naḥī* is the annihilation (*fanā*³⁵) of one's existence in the Divine Unity, while the *ithbāt* is the reaffirmation of God and thus the annihilation of the annihilation (*fanā*³⁵ *al-fanā*³⁵) which is the state of eternal dwelling in God's presence (*baqā*³⁵). In the second movement, the Sufis turn left and right, again pronouncing the *shahādah*. With the *naḥī*, they turn left and with the *ithbāt* they turn right in one fluid motion. This movement reflects the state of the primordial man centered upon God and thus rotating upon his one true axis in the supreme states of *fanā*³⁵ and *baqā*³⁵. In the third movement, the Sufis go beyond the stages of *fanā*³⁵ and *baqā*³⁵ to complete immersion in the Divine Presence. All movements are reduced to the essential movement which is man's verticality while all words are reduced to the essential sound, that of the breath which is the Divine Essence.³⁵ The *fuqarā*³⁵ perform a simple vertical movement from the knees and breathe in a corresponding rhythm. The breath is said to correspond to the "h"

of the word "*Huwa*" breathes the *fuqarā* and breathed, like which are united in t

These three move of the *faqīr* into the ritual benefits of the the last. But as many mental and spiritual they gradually preceding movements. T Darqāwīya, which on

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. . . its purpos fullest sense of tion of all the f represented by mula . . . rhyt. Repose, motion Immutability. be transcended only in Peace of Peace in some of which the *dhik* rhythm is part possess it instir not.³⁶

The sessions of s attend without havin Abū Madyan (d.594/1 the master of Abū ³⁶ should not be present his carnal soul with union and standing him to be present an

of the word "*Huwa*" (He); it is the Divine Essence which now breathes the *fuqarā*². They are thus, one as breather, breath and breathed, like the *dhākir*, the *dhikr* and the *madhkūr* which are united in the *dhikr al-sirr*.

These three movements represent the gradual reintegration of the *faqīr* into the Divine Presence. In principle, all the spiritual benefits of the first two movements are contained within the last. But as many are not able to immediately move into the mental and spiritual presence required for the last movement, they gradually prepare themselves for it by conducting the preceding movements. There are, however, some orders such as the *Darqāwiya*, which only practise the last movement.

Although such ecstatic dancing may seem to be at odds with the silent contemplative *dhikr*, its only function is to deepen and extend it. As Martin Lings reports on a teaching he received from a disciple of Shaykh al-^cAlawī,

. . . its purpose is simply to facilitate *dhikr* in the fullest sense of remembrance, that is, the concentration of all the faculties of the soul upon Divine Truth represented by the Supreme Name or some other formula . . . rhythm is a bridge between agitation and Repose, motion and Motionlessness, fluctuation and Immutability. Fluctuation, like multiplicity, cannot be transcended in this world of perpetual motion but only in Peace of Divine Unity; and to partake of this Peace in some degree is in fact the very concentration which the *dhikr* aims at. Knowledge of this virtue of rhythm is part of man's primordial heritage, all men possess it instinctively whether they are aware of it or not.³⁶

The sessions of *samā*² are of such power that one cannot attend without having attained the proper spiritual degree. As Abū Madyan (d.594/1198), the Shaykh of Ibn Mashīsh who was the master of Abū ¹l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī writes, "The beginner should not be present at ecstatic sessions until he has mortified his carnal soul with fasting, performing the fast of intimate union and standing [in prayer]. Only then is it allowable for him to be present and is [participation] permissible for him."³⁷

The reason for this is that "audition (*al-samāʿ*) is both a truth and a lie; one who "hears" with his heart is confirmed [in his state], while one who "hears" in his carnal soul becomes a heretic.³⁸ In other words, to be qualified for the spiritual expansion facilitated by *samāʿ*, one must first submit oneself to spiritual contraction in the spiritual retreat.

While not all Sufi orders employ *samāʿ*, they all have some form of litany (*wird*) which is recited both communally and in private. This varies from order to order, but its basic outline remains the same. Like the dance of the Shādhilī, the *wird* is composed of three movements, each movement is a formula usually said a hundred times though sometimes shortened to thirty three repetitions.³⁹ The first formula is the supplication of forgiveness (*al-istighfār*): "*astaghfirullāh*" (I ask forgiveness of God). This is a formula employed by all Muslims, but for the Sufis, it has an added depth. They do not simply ask forgiveness for the sins of this world, but for the dispersion of existence in which they participate. It is thus a complete renunciation of all notions of otherness, whereby they sever themselves from the passions of the soul.

The second formula of the litany is a prayer upon the Prophet, "Oh God! May Your peace and blessings be upon our Lord Muḥammad, Your servant and Your Messenger, the unlettered Prophet and upon his family and his companions" (*Allāhumma ṣalli ʿalā sayyidinā Muḥammadin ʿabdika wa rasūlika al-nabbiyi al-ʿummīyi wa ʿalā ʿālihi wa ṣaḥbihi wa sallim*).⁴⁰ This prayer is like an expansion (*baṣṭ*) after the contraction (*qabḍ*) of the *istighfār*. While the *istighfār* purifies by drawing the heart away from the false plenitude of the world, the Muḥammadan blessing redirects the expansive nature of the soul towards the Divine Plenitude. As Martin Lings observes, the initial *qabḍ* of the first formula is not so difficult. It is actually the *baṣṭ* of the second formula which provides a measure of spiritual development; for when one is freed from *qabḍ*, one can see to what degree worldly habits remain. As Lings writes, ". . . no virtue can be said to have been definitely acquired if it recedes when *qabḍ* recedes, nor has a fault been

eradicated if it reappears when *qabḍ* is taken off."⁴¹

The third stage of the spiritual path is the Kingdom, His is the Kingdom, (lā ilāha illallāh u lahu al-ḥamdu wa lillah al-mulk wa lillah al-jalāl wa lillah al-illazīm) the spiritual degree of the first half, "lā ilāha illallāh" is the first half of the spiritual path, thus prefigured by the second half, "lahu al-mulk wa lillah al-jalāl wa lillah al-illazīm" is, the affirmation expressed in the Divine. From the beginning of the spiritual path reflected in the supplication of the prayer upon the Prophet is the first formula.

These three formulas of the spiritual path. The first formula is without which no spiritual path is possible which the blaming of the soul for evil. The prayer upon the Prophet and thus corresponds to the Prophet is understood as the logos from which the spiritual path originates of which all other spiritual paths originate which is even the Divine Unity is the spiritual path both *samāʿ* and the *istighfār*. These three stages of the spiritual path when he reaches the end of the spiritual path in virtuality, he pre-

As we have seen,

eradicated if it reappears when the pressure of *qabḍ* has been taken off."⁴¹

The third stage of the litany is a formula of Divine Unity, "There is no god but God, alone, no sharer unto Him; His is the Kingdom, His is the praise and He is powerful over all things" (*lā ilāha illāllāh waḥdahū lā sharīka lah, lahu al-mulku wa lahu al-ḥamdu wa huwa ʿalā kulli shayʿin qadīr*). In this formula, the *qabḍ* and *baṣṭ* of the first two formulas are raised to the spiritual degrees of *fanāʿ* and *baqāʿ* respectively.⁴² The first half, "*lā ilāha illāllāh waḥdahū lā sharīka lah*" is like the first half of the *shahādah*, a negation of any otherness and thus prefigured by the *qabḍ* of the *istighfār*. While the second half, "*lahu al-mulku wa lahu al-ḥamdu wa huwa ʿalā kulli shayʿin qadīr*" is, like the second half of the *shahādah*, an affirmation expressing the total and absolute presence of the Divine. From the initiatic perspective, the Divine Plenitude is reflected in the substance of the Prophet Muḥammad. The prayer upon the Prophet thus prefigures the *baqāʿ* of this last formula.

These three formulas represent the three main stages of the spiritual path. The *istighfār* is the turning away from the world without which no spiritual path is traveled. It is the point at which the blaming soul rebukes the soul which commands to evil. The prayer upon the Prophet is the perfection of the soul and thus corresponds to the state of the soul at rest. Here, the Prophet is understood in his esoteric and universal function as the logos from which comes all of creation. He is thus the totality of which all other men are a fragmented reflection and the origin which is every man's final destiny. The formula of Divine Unity is the union of the soul at rest with God. Through both *samāʿ* and the recitation of the *wird*, the *faqīr* re-enacts these three stages of the spiritual path. This is not to say that he reaches the end of the path, but by participating in its stages in virtuality, he prepares his soul to attain them in actuality.

Conclusion

As we have seen, *dhikr* is not only the fundamental spiritu-

al exercise of the Sufi way, but the axis of Sufism itself. It works on different levels for different souls, but is efficacious at each. Furthermore, it assumes disparate modes which, however, work in concert to integrate the various dimensions of the human soul. When this integration is achieved, the discordant tones of the lower soul are harmonized to become the song of the soul at rest, singing of its love for the Beloved. But in truth, this is the song which the Beloved Himself sings while manifest in the form of the lover. Thus the *dhākir* sees that he has always been one with the *dhikr* and the *madhkūr* and never other. He has been drawn into the presence of the Lord and knows that he is none other than the Lord manifest in the form of the servant. As the well known *ḥadīth qudsī* asserts,

My servant ceases not to draw near unto Me with supererogatory devotions until I love him; and when I love him, I am the hearing with which he hears, the sight with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps and the foot upon which he walks.

—*Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Kitāb al-riqāq: 38.*

Wang D of China Islam¹

Sachiko Murat

Chinese Islamic problems that write in English in modern times. Here we to justify their adherence to a language that was not there were a limited One was the Greek, Indian (Hindu and The Greek tradition carried over into various Christianity, and Islamic Indian languages, circles of Islamic thought languages mainly to poetry.