

I of the Heart

*Texts and Studies in Honor of
Seyyed Hossein Nasr*

Edited by

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The Tranquility of Remembrance

Atif Khalil

In its most essential sense, prayer is the attempt of the soul to communicate with and forge a relationship with its Divine origin. Defined as such, there are, as Professor Nasr has observed, three modes of prayer in Islam.¹ The first of these is the canonical or ritual prayer, and involves, as is well known to anyone with even rudimentary knowledge of the faith, specific bodily movements and postures accompanied by the recitation of scriptural passages and other sacred formulas. Performed daily by devout Muslims, it may be the most ubiquitous symbol of the presence of Islam wherever it is found, especially when carried out in congregation. Beyond *ṣalāt* there is supplicatory prayer or *duʿāʾ*, the petition or articulation of a request to God, usually for the materialization of some outcome in this life or the next, and if the former, of either a spiritual or worldly nature. The Muslim authorities have warned, however, of squandering such petitions for the obtainment of purely self-centered, fleeting ends. As Rūmī (d. 672/1273) declares, since our sojourn here is nothing more than a dream, “To want worldly things is like someone who wants to eat something in a dream, which is then given to him. In the end, when he wakes up, he does not at all benefit from what he ate in the dream.”² In other words, one will have simply requested a boon no less transient than the abode in which it was sought. Nevertheless, there is a spiritual benefit even in *duʿāʾ*’s the objects of which are entirely temporal in character, since they help cement the soul’s recognition of its poverty before God, who as the Divine Benefactor remains the source of every blessing.

Finally, there is *dhikr*, literally, “remembrance,” “invocation,” “mention,” or “recollection,” the defining quality of which is usually understood to be its repetitious nature, typically involving a litany, phrase, verse, or divine name—repetition here being key, since it is precisely this that distinguishes it from *ṣalāt* or *duʿāʾ*. The concerted repetition however is simply meant to function as an aid to the much more important task of implanting and imprinting the meaning contained in the formula onto the heart. This is why Professor Nasr

¹ Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *The garden of truth*, New York: HarperOne, 2007, 99–100.

² Rūmī, *Fihī mā fihī*, trans. in Rustom, Mohammed, “Sleepers awake! Rūmī on the People of the Cave,” in *Islamic Intellectual Traditions* 1.1 (2026), forthcoming.

has described *dhikr* first and foremost as “prayer of the heart,”³ because of the deeply interiorised nature of the practice, unlike the *ṣalāt* with its potentially distracting bodily movements,⁴ and *du‘ā’* which can be motivated by the undiscerning desire of the lower *nafs* or unconscious ego, and which might thereby involve wants fundamentally detrimental to one’s ultimate welfare.⁵ This is not to say the heart is absent in canonical or petitionary prayer. Indeed, any prayer, qua prayer, is not possible without its presence. Nevertheless, *dhikr* is least removed from the innermost self, ensconced as the latter is in the outer layers of the individual psyche and body.

The most difficult element of *dhikr*, as anyone experienced in the practice will testify, is the sustained concentration it requires.⁶ The tendency of the mind is for its attention to be easily dispersed, an inevitable consequence of the Fall from Paradise and the loss of a Divine Center, a vertical descent, and a corresponding exteriorization. Concentration—etymologically a “return to the center”—is taxing precisely because one is forced to swim against internal currents that flow outward, towards multiplicity, in the opposite direction of the heart, where there is to be found, according to the famous tradition, the Throne of the All-Merciful (*qalb al-mu‘min ‘arsh al-Raḥmān*). The mind by nature is easily distracted by the ephemeral phenomena of the external world. Since *dhikr* requires an interiorization of consciousness through a “concentration on the Real,” at the psychic, mental, and even emotional levels, it can be the most arduous exercise for the mind, especially an undisciplined one. And the obstacles that stand in the way of such sustained concentration have been compounded in our day and age by the proliferation of various forms of hyp-

3 Nasr, *The garden of truth* 99–101. For a comparative treatment by Prof. Nasr of this form of prayer in Sufism and Greek Orthodoxy, see Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, “The prayer of the heart in Hesychism and Sufism,” in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 31 (1986), 195–203.

4 This is not to say that bodily movements are absent in *dhikr* as is clear from the rites of remembrance found in the various Sufi Orders. Nevertheless, at the heart of the diverse embodiments of the practice there is an inner state of concentration and awareness which remains its focal point. The integration of bodily movements always remains secondary to the much more important task of cultivating presence of heart (*huḍūr al-qalb*). This is why there are forms of *dhikr* where physical activity is entirely absent, including articulation by the tongue, as found in the silent or *khafī* remembrance of the Naqshabandis. On some of the methods of *dhikr*, see the invaluable though much neglected study by Valiuddin, Mir, *Contemplative disciplines in Sufism*, London: East-West Publications, 1980, the preface of which was written by Prof. Nasr, vii–x, and which was published after Valiuddin’s death in 1975.

5 See Q 17:11, and the discussion of this danger in Khalil, Atif, “Is God obliged to answer prayers of petition? The response of classical Sufis and Qur’anic exegetes,” in *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 37.2 (2011), 103–105.

6 See Nasr, *The garden of truth* 114.

notizing digital and social media which continuously attract our attention and have in fact helped create an ADHD crisis, particularly among the young whose habits of thinking have been nurtured, moulded, and shaped by such addictive devices as the smartphone and iPad. Yet even before the advent of such spiritually corrosive modern technologies, the continuous remembrance of God was no easy task, since to be human in the *dunyā*, in this abode of exile, from the Muslim point of view, is to suffer from the diseases of heedlessness (*ghafla*) and forgetfulness (*nisyān*).⁷ One is reminded of the story of Fahreddin Efendi (d. 1386/1966), the last shaykh to preside over the Halveti-Jerrahi Order before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922. When he was nineteen, he was put into the standard *khalwa* or solitary retreat for forty days of uninterrupted invocation. At the beginning, he asked himself, “What am I doing here?” Yet by the next day, the misery of remembrance had been transformed into an indescribable joy. He would later say that even if someone were to have come at him armed with a club, he would not have been able to drive him out from his cell, because of the Divine intimacy and tranquility he experienced through the power of *dhikr*. It was as if a portal had been opened for his soul to return to Heaven.⁸

Although *dhikr* has been most often associated with the mystical dimensions of the faith, its prominence in the Quran and *ḥadīths* has conferred upon it a special place in Islamic ritual and practice. Even the most ardent anti-Sufi cannot dismiss its vital role in Muslim piety because the revelation of Islam unqualifiedly declares, “The remembrance of God is greatest” (Q 29:45), repeatedly enumerating its virtues. When a loyal student of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) such as Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) composed his *Madārij al-sālīkīn*,

7 Some have even proposed that this very word *insān* (human) is etymologically related to *nisyān*, since to be human is to forget oneself and one's origin. *Dhikr*, in this respect, helps counteract a tendency rooted in one's nature. See al-Daghistani, Raid, “Sufis: Invoking God's name and the practice of *dhikr*,” in Oliver Leaman (ed.), *Routledge handbook of Islamic ritual and practice*, London: Routledge, 2022, 186. While *nisyān* and *insān* derive from different roots (*n-s-y/w* as opposed to *'-n-s*), the relation may be established through a shifting of radicals, a possibility in Arabic that allows for the creation of either synonymous or antonymous meanings. There is also a curious Sufi saying, recounted by Prof. Nasr in a private conversation with the author, according to which when God created the human being, he was an *insān* because of his state of *uns* (intimacy) with God. After the fall, however, he was an *insān* because of his *nisyān*.

8 Blann, Gregory, *The garden of mystic love: Turkish Sufism and the Halveti-Jerrahi lineage*, Boulder: Albion-Andalus, 2017, 190–191; cf. Khalil, Atif, “Circles of remembrance: The Halveti-Jerrahis of Canada,” in Merin S. Xavier and Geneviève Mercier-Dalphonc (eds.), *Sufism in Canada: Weaving Islamic practice and contemporary spirituality*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2025, 40–65.

a commentary on the Hanbali Anṣārī's (d. 481/1089) *Manāzil al-sā'irīn*, in his lengthy chapter on *dhikr* he could not help but begin by delineating some of the numerous benefits of the practice, pooled entirely from Scripture. Among the reasons he gave for the obligations of remembrance was because God commands it be undertaken at all moments, without restriction (Q 33:41); He has prohibited its opposite, namely heedlessness and forgetfulness (Q 7:204, 59:19); it is the source of ultimate success and prosperity (*falāḥ*) (Q 7:69); it elicits Divine forgiveness (Q 33:35); to be distracted from it due to wealth and children is to enter the ranks of those who will suffer a grievous loss (*khāsirūn*) (Q 63:9); it is the seal (*khātim*) that should close every worshipful deed (Q 2:185; 2:200; 4:103, 62:10); it is the underlying spirit (*rūḥ*) of every act of godliness and piety, being the consciousness that animates it (as in its relation to ritual prayer, Q 20:14); it draws God's remembrance of the invoker (Q 2:152); and most importantly, as we have already seen, it is the greatest of all deeds (Q 29:45). It should not surprise us that he would go so far as to describe *dhikr* as the "mark of friendship with God" (*manshūr al-walāya*)⁹ and the "nourishment of hearts for the folk of God" (*qūt al-qulūb al-qawm*), adamant that the bodies of those deprived of the sacred practice are no more than graves, devoid of life.¹⁰

Yet Ibn al-Qayyim did not simply provide a cursory outline of the eminence of remembrance drawn through a purely literal reading of the Quran and *ḥadīths*. He delved into the psychology and interior states of *dhikr* through a meditation on its higher stages, which for him culminated in various degrees of annihilation (*fanā'*). The feeling one gets from reading his treatment is that he was writing not from the perspective of a disengaged scholar but from *dhawq*—direct tasting or personal experience. On the relation between *dhikr*, the *dhākir* (subject of *dhikr*), and the *madhkūr* (object of *dhikr*), he wrote:

In the first stage the *dhākir* is annihilated from what is other than the *madhkūr* but not from himself. In the second stage, he is annihilated from himself but not his remembrance. In the third stage, he is annihilated from himself and his own remembrance. Finally, after this there remains the fourth stage where he is annihilated from every kind of remembrance through the Real's remembrance of him. And this is because he did not remember God except after God remembered him, for God's remembrance of the servant preceded the servant's remembrance of God. In this

9 Here Ibn al-Qayyim is simply repeating a description found in earlier Sufi texts. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Abū 'Abdallāh Shams al-Dīn, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, 3 vols., ii, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1918, 440–445.

10 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn* ii, 440–445.

fourth stage, he witnesses the Attributes of the *madhkūr* alongside His remembrance of His servant, being annihilated through it from witnessing his own remembrance.¹¹

In inverting the order of *dhikr*, where the remembrance of the Real precedes and catalyzes the *dhikr* of the human being, Ibn al-Qayyim was being no less faithful to the Quran (cf. Q 2:152), which often retraces human guidance, piety, and virtue to Divine grace and *tawfiq* (cf. Q 5:16, 24:35, 76:30).¹² What is particularly interesting about the passage, however, is how closely it resembles standard Sufi inquiries into the self's annihilation in God in the act of remembrance, including the manner in which he places "witnessing" at the summit of the ascent, and also how he situates human *dhikr* in between the two arcs of Divine *dhikr*. To quote Ibn al-Qayyim again on this latter relation:

The remembrance of the servant lies enclosed in between two remembrances of His Lord of him: a remembrance that precedes his through which the servant remembers Him, and a remembrance that follows his, through which he becomes the object of God's remembrance, as He most high has said, "Remember Me and I will remember you" (Q 2:152), and as He has said—as recounted by His Prophet, on whom peace and blessings—"He who remembers Me alone, I remember him alone, and he who remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a gathering more eminent than their gathering." As for the remembrance through which God remembers His servant after His servant's remembrance of Him, it is of a different type than the remembrance of God that precedes the servant's remembrance of Him.¹³

The final part of the passage is slightly tricky in the original Arabic since it is not immediately clear to whom the pronouns are referring: God or the human being? Upon closer scrutiny, however, it becomes evident that Ibn al-Qayyim is differentiating between two modes or types (*anwā'*) of remembrance of which God is the subject (an ambiguity removed in the translation above). He admits that discerning the precise nature of this difference, however, may prove theo-

11 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn* ii, 450.

12 For a treatment of this theme within the context of *tawba*, see Khalil, Atif, *Repentance and the return to God: Tawba in early Sufism*, Albany: SUNY Press, 2018, 44–45, 62, 89–90, and 117–118.

13 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn* ii, 451.

logically challenging for some, and he encourages those whose minds are perplexed by the distinction to occupy themselves with matters easier to grasp.¹⁴

One important feature of Ibn al-Qayyim's discussion is his adamant that the annihilation of the *dhākir* in the Divine *madhkūr* involves not his being but his will. In other words, it is not his existence that becomes effaced in God's being but rather his volition that becomes effaced in His pre-eternal will. In this respect, he tries to steer clear of a trap he felt other Sufis had fallen into in their blurring of a distinction that, in his eyes and that of his teacher Ibn Taymiyya, must forever separate the Divine and human orders. In fact, it does not seem to be out of the question that his own perspective on the subject would provide some precedent for the later doctrine, enunciated by an Indian figure such as a Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1624), of *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, developed as an alternative to *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Yet aside from the question of ontology, and a few interpretations of Scripture offered by Anṣārī to which he objected (and courteously so, since his veneration for the spiritual master of Herat runs throughout the *Madārīj*), his ideas about remembrance overlap noticeably with similar inquiries in other comparable Sufi texts, and at least part of the reason for this was because of the indisputable pride of place *dhikr* enjoys in the Quran and *ḥadīths*.

1 The Peace and Tranquility of Remembrance

While the mystical authorities of Islam have differed considerably throughout Muslim history on the precise methods of remembrance most conducive to realizing its final aims, such as whether it should be performed silently or audibly, individually, or collectively,¹⁵ what they did not disagree over was the profound tranquility and serenity that was its fruit. After all, the Quran declares,

14 Part of the problem as he explains is how a temporally defined creature such as the human being can have an "effect" on God, i.e., how the *muḥdath* can influence the *qadīm*, a dilemma stemming from the fact that God's second *dhikr* is a response to human *dhikr*. The answer Ibn Taymiyya gave Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and which he recounts after the passage quoted above, is that the conditions that lead to human *dhikr* (or any other virtuous act) are themselves made possible by God, so that the influence on Him is not through an external, temporally bound creature, but His own will and creation. Naturally, the position leaves the question of human agency and free-will unresolved, a theological question over which Muslim authors have spilled considerable ink. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārīj al-sālikīn* ii, 451. The only resolution to the problem seems to lie in the argument that the human being, as *imago dei*, has a divine character, a position that neither Ibn al-Qayyim nor Ibn Taymiyya would not be willing to concede.

15 On some of these debates, particular around silent vs. audible invocation, see Lumbard,

“Are not hearts at peace in the remembrance of God?” (Q 13:28). And there is the Divine report (*ḥadīth qudsī*) where we are informed that no group of people gather for *dhikr* except that “tranquility descends upon them” (*nazalat ‘alayhim al-sakīna*).¹⁶ This is the same tranquility or *sakīna* about which we read in Sura al-Faṭḥ, the chapter on Victory, “He it is who sends down *sakīna* into the hearts of the believers” (Q 48:4), and which appears in four of its five other instances in the Quran in a similar syntactic construction, as a being, entity or feeling which comes down upon the faithful from God (Q 9:26, 9:40, 48:18 and 48:26; cf. 2:248).

What exactly is this *sakīna* so intimately bound to remembrance? The classical scholar, ethicist, and lexicographer al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502/1108) noted that some of the commentators identified it as an angel (*malak*) that provides solace, comfort, and security to the heart.¹⁷ For others, it referred to God’s Mercy, an inner light, patience, the peace that ensues from denying the passions, or heavenly support, not to mention feelings of dignified calmness (*waqār*), safety, and freedom from fear, with none of these views being mutually exclusive.¹⁸ It is also worth noting in this context that according to the companion Zayd b. Thābit (d. 45/665–666 or 48/668–669), the Prophet would “became enveloped in *sakīna*” during his revelations, with the profound tranquility he would experience being intimately bound, according to Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311), to his *ghayba*, to his momentary absence from the world of the senses, and beyond that himself.¹⁹ Nor can we ignore the word’s Hebrew cognate, the *Shekhina*,²⁰ which particularly in Jewish mysticism refers to Divine immanence, the feminine side of God, as well as His “indwelling presence” in

Joseph E., “The function of *dhikrullāh* in Sufi psychology,” in Zailan Moris (ed.), *Knowledge is light: Essays in honour of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, Chicago: ABC Press, 1999, 266.

16 Muslim, no. 2700.

17 Al-Iṣfahānī, al-Rāghib, *Mufradāt alfāz al-Qur’ān*, ed. Najīb al-Mājidi, Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 2006, “s-k-n.”

18 These are just a few of the interpretations offered in the tradition. See Ibn Manẓūr, *Līsan al-‘Arab*, 18 vols., Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1997, “*sakīna*” (under s-k-n); al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt*, “s-k-n”; Lane, *Arabic-English lexicon “s-k-n.”* See also the commentary in Nasr, Seyyed Hossein et al. (eds.), *The study Quran: A new translation and commentary*, New York: HarperOne, 2015, on the *sakīna* verses and the excellent essay by Pourjavady, Nasrollah, “The concept of *sakīna* in Suhrawardī,” in Ali Gheissari, John Walbridge, and Ahmed Alwishah, *Illuminationist texts and textual studies: Essays in Memory of Hossein Ziai*, Leiden: Brill, 2018, 96–112.

19 Ibn Manẓūr, *Līsan al-‘Arab*, “s-k-n.” Cf. al-Jurjānī, ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, *Kitāb al-Ta’rīfāt*, Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawqīfiyya, 2010, 100 (“*sakīna*”).

20 Firestone, Reuven, “Shekhina,” in Jane McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*, iv, Leiden: Brill, 2004, 589–591.

the world.²¹ All may be encountered through the act of remembrance, especially in Sufi metaphysics which often conceptualizes God's very nearness as an expression of His *jamāl* or beauty, an intimate, feminine, maternal quality associated with Mercy, as opposed to His *jalāl*, a distant, masculine, paternal quality associated with Justice.²²

The etymology of the term helps us better grasp its precise meaning. *Sakīna* derives from a trilateral verbal root (*s-k-n*) which means to become still or motionless after movement, and this sense is conveyed by many of the words that form the semantic field around it. Thus, a knife is called *sikkīn* because it brings the animal it is used to sacrifice to rest. A *maskan* is a tent, dwelling place, or home since it is where one remains stationary. *Taskīn* is "pacification," and *musakkīn*, "a pacifier." The *sukūn*, moreover, is a grammatical term used to designate the halting of sound when two letters are joined, being the "vowellessness of a medial consonant."²³ And the Quran employs the word *sakan*, "a place of rest," when it says, "God has ordained for you a place of rest in your dwellings" (Q 16:80), or that "He has made the night for repose (*sakan*)" (Q 6:96). All these words capture the underlying ideas of quiet stillness, calmness, tranquility, peace, serenity, and repose contained in the root, defining features of that *sakīna* which is the gift of remembrance.

Interestingly, as Reuven Firestone as observed, all instances of the term in the Quran appear within a direct or indirect military context,²⁴ which from a mystical perspective, attentive to the various layers of meaning of scripture, may be interpreted to imply that in the inner life of the soul, the descent of *sakīna* is the consequence of the spiritual *jihād* to imprint *dhikr* on to the heart, against the grain of the psychic forces of worldly distraction and heedlessness. A tradition in al-Bukhārī is relevant. A man was once reciting Sura al-Kahf. As he proceeded a cloud came over him and his horse and continued to draw close, arousing the horse, which was tied down, but not the man. The next morning, he went to the Prophet to inform him of what had happened. He was told, "that

21 In the words of Raphael Patai, "The Shekhina (*sh'khīnāh*) is an abstract noun derived from the biblical verb *shakhan* and literally meaning 'the act of dwelling' In actual usage, the term *Shekhina*, when it first appears, means that aspect of the deity which can be apprehended by the senses." See Patai, Raphael, "The Shekhina," in *The Journal of Religion* 44.4 (1964), 275. On its importance on Jewish mysticism, see Smith, Chani, "The symbol of the Shekhina: The feminine side of God," in *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 19.1 (1985), 43-46.

22 See Chittick, William and Sachiko Murata, *The vision of Islam*, St. Paul: Paragon Press, 1995, 43-131 (ch. 3 on *tawhīd*).

23 Hans Wehr, *A dictionary of modern written Arabic*, "s-k-n."

24 Firestone, "Shekhina" 590.

was *sakīna* which descended because of the Quran” (*tilka l-sakīna tanazzalat bi-l-Qurʿān*).²⁵ In this context, it should not be forgotten what the revelation says of itself: “it is naught but a *dhikr* for the worlds” (Q 38:87).

The lexical and exegetical authorities almost unanimously bring up the close relation of *sakīna* to its near synonym, *ṭumaʿnīna*,²⁶ literally “a state of rest,” “quietness,” “peace,” “tranquility,” and “freedom from disquietude.”²⁷ It is this latter term which appears in its verbal form in the verse quoted earlier, “Are not hearts at peace (*ṭatmaʿnū l-qulūb*) in the remembrance of God?” (Q 13:28).²⁸ Like *sakīna*, its underlying meaning is that of stillness after movement,²⁹ and like *sakīna*, it too is intimately bound to the act of remembrance. In his commentary on Q 13:28, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) explains why this is so, offering three overlapping reasons.³⁰ In the process of doing so, he reveals his own profound sensitivity to a practice that in the words of Prof. Nasr “constitutes the central reality of the life of the Sufis.”³¹

Al-Rāzī begins by stating that there are three kinds of existents (*mawjūdāt*). First, there is that entity which is affected by others but has no such influence of its own. These are material bodies (*ajsām*), directed and controlled by beings of another nature, their unique quality being their receptivity. Second, there is that existent which affects others but remains free of being affected (*muʿaththir lā yataʿaththar*). This is God. Finally, there are those beings which stand in the middle, both influencing and affecting and themselves being influenced and

25 Al-Bukhārī, no. 5011.

26 Al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Taʾrīfāt*, “*sakīna*.” Cf. al-Saḥmarānī, Asʿad (ed.), *Mawsūʿat al-taṣawwuf*, Beirut: Dār al-Anfās, 2015, 93–94 (“*sakīna wa-l-waqār*”).

27 Lane, *Arabic-English lexicon*, “*ṭ-m-n*.” Cf. Badawī, Elsaïd and Muhammed Abdel-Haleem, *Arabic-English dictionary of Qurʾānic usage*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, “*ṭ-m-n*.” See also al-Iṣfāhānī, *Mufradāt*, “*s-k-n*.”

28 I am following here the *Study Quran*, although the translators simply render the passage as a declarative statement, without any significant alteration to its meaning: “Truly it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find peace” (Abdel Haleem); “For without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction” (Yusuf Ali); “Verily, in the remembrance of God (men’s) hearts do find their rest” (Muhammad Asad); “No doubt in the remembrance of God are hearts at rest” (Laleh Bakhtiar); “Verily in the Remembrance of Allah the hearts are composed” (Ghali); “Truly, hearts find peace in the remembrance of God” (Safi Kaskas); “Surely in Allah’s remembrance do hearts find rest” (Maududi); “Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest” (Muhsin Khan); “Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest” (Marmaduke Pickthall).

29 According to al-Iṣfāhānī, along with *ṭmiʿnān* it refers to “rest after having been stirred up” or “rest after disturbance” (*sukūn baʿd al-inzīʿāj*). Al-Iṣfāhānī, *Mufradāt*, “*ṭ-m-n*.”

30 Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *al-Taḥfīr al-kabīr aw Miḥṭāḥ al-ghayb*, 32 vols., xix, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1990, 39–40 (commentary on Q 13:28).

31 See Nasr, *The garden of truth* 114.

affected. In other words, they are both causes and effects. And these, states al-Rāzī, are spiritual entities or existents (*al-mawjūdāt al-rūḥāniyya*), occupying an intermediary zone between God and physical bodies. Now, when these spiritual realities turn towards the world of bodies, they seek through an intrinsic quality of their own to exercise dominion, since “the world of spirits is ruler (*mudabbir*) over the world of bodies.”³² However, when these same existents turn upwards towards God, they become passive and receptive, receiving the emanations of His ordinances and decrees. Al-Rāzī then says that when you understand this, you will grasp why it is that when the heart—a spiritual existent—directs its attention toward the world of bodies, it becomes restless and agitated, since it is overcome by a desire to control the outcome of events and appropriate for itself whatever lies in that realm. Conversely, when it turns towards the Divine Presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-ilāhiyya*), it receives the lights of God, thereby “becoming still (*sākin*), and this is why He said, *Are not hearts at peace in the remembrance of God?*”³³

Al-Rāzī is specific that the lights that descend are not just of any kind. They are *anwār al-ṣamadiyya*, lights of God in so far as He is *al-Ṣamad*. The Divine Name may be translated “Self Sufficient,” “Ever Sufficient,” or as we find in the *Study Quran*, “Eternally Sufficient unto Himself,” with each of these renditions emphasizing His pre-eternal and everlasting independence from creation, His freedom from want and need.³⁴ This would make *anwār al-ṣamadiyya* something akin to “the lights of God’s eternal self-sufficiency.” In his exegesis, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), brought out some of the meanings of the Divine Name to highlight some of the theological nuances of Q 112:2, the only place in the revelation where, as a *hapex legomenon*, the term appears. We are informed that among the pre-Islamic Arabs, *ṣamad* could refer to a chief, lord or master (*sayyid*) on whom people relied but who himself relied on no one, standing at the summit of the tribal hierarchy.³⁵ It could also designate that which has no stomach, hollow, or interior activity (*jawf*), having no need for food and drink.³⁶ This is why in early Sufi literature, the fast was sometimes described as an act that allowed one to experience the Divine Name, since it entailed an

32 Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr* xix, 40 (commentary on Q 13:28).

33 Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr* xix, 40 (commentary on Q 13:28).

34 Al-Ghazālī defines *al-Ṣamad* as “the Needless One (*al-Ghanī*) on whom what is other than Him depends,” relating the quality to His absolute oneness and unity. Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥamid, *Minḥāj al-‘arīfīn*, in *Majmū‘ al-rasā’il li-l-imām ḥujjat al-islām*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1994, 91.

35 Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān fī taḥsīn al-Qur‘ān*, 30 vols., xxxiv, Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Kubrā l-Amīriyya, 1904–1911, 223–224 (commentary on Q 112:2).

36 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān* xxxiv, 223–224 (commentary on Q 112:2).

abstention from what the body requires most for its own survival, that which chains it (unlike God) to the world of generation and corruption.³⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) went so far as to describe Ramadan as the month of *ṣamadāniyya* (= *ṣamadiyya*), being a period of the year when the Divine Name reveals itself in an unprecedented annual plenitude and fulness to the Muslim community, which through its ritualized regimen of fasting becomes a locus for the disclosure of *al-Ṣamad*.³⁸ When al-Rāzī states that through remembrance one experiences the light of God’s *ṣamadiyya*, He intention is to stress the freedom of the *dhākir* from everything other than God, for however long her *dhikr* may last. The feeling of independence, detachment, and tranquility that ensues from the heart’s single-minded concentration on the Real comprises its *ṭuma’nīna*.³⁹

Al-Rāzī continues by stating that the objects of our craving in the world are such that they can never fully satisfy the heart. Whatever it may be that one gains control of or acquires, there will always be something seemingly more attractive towards which one’s attention will turn, reinvigorating the soul’s covetousness. “There is no felicity (*sa’āda*) to be found in the world of bodies,” he writes, “except that beyond it (i.e., the felicity one realizes), there is another which is sweeter and more delightful”—this being the reason for the heart’s underlying restlessness and discontentment. The cure lies in remembrance, the tranquility of which is made possible by the penetration of the lights of Divine *ṣamadiyya* into the heart, along with the gnosis that accompanies them, leaving no room for dissatisfaction. “This is why there is no happiness loftier and more complete.”⁴⁰ It would be a mistake to presume that al-Rāzī is denying there might be levels of *dhikr*, which each more advanced stage eliciting a deeper and more lasting serenity. Instead, his argument is that the unquenchable thirst of desire, and the suffering that accompanies it like a shadow, produced by our complex relationship with all that exists in the *dunyā*, is absent in remembrance.

To close his commentary, al-Rāzī draws on the symbolism of alchemy. We are informed that just as an elixir transforms the base metal of copper into the sublime metal of gold, so too does the remembrance of God function as a means through which the heart is brought into contact with the elixir of Divine

37 Khalil, Atif, “Fasting in early Sufi literature,” in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 35.2 (2024), 223–225.

38 Khalil, Atif, “White death: Ibn al-‘Arabī on the trials and virtues of hunger and fasting,” in *JAS* 141.3 (2021), 580–582. See also Shahzad, Qaiser, “Transcending the forms from within: The mystical interpretation of fasting in Sufism, with special reference to Ibn ‘Arabī,” in *Ma‘ārif-i Islāmī* 12.2 (2013), 10–22.

39 Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-kabīr* xix, 40 (commentary on Q 13:28).

40 Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn al-kabīr* xix, 40 (commentary on Q 13:28).

Majesty (*Jalāl*), which then transforms it into a pure, luminous substance.⁴¹ In other words, *dhikr* sets in motion an alchemical process altering the very configuration of the organ of higher perception, or expressed differently, cleansing it of the dross and contamination of forgetfulness, heedlessness, and attachment to the world of bodies. The purity and luminosity of the heart is the source of the soul's peace.⁴²

The heart's cathartic transformation, made possible by *dhikr*, and which is intimately bound to its serenity, calls to mind the famous *ḥadīth*, "For everything there is a polish, and the polish of hearts lies in the remembrance of God."⁴³ By virtue of this purification, the soul is able rise through its own internal tripartite hierarchy, from a level where at the bottom of the rung of its spiritual possibilities it "calls to evil" (as *al-naḥs al-ammāra bi-l sū'*; see Q 12:53), to an intermediate "self-reproaching" stage (as *al-naḥs al-lawwāma*; see Q 75:2), usually associated with repentance and the beginning of its return to God, culminating finally in *tuma'nīna*, which the Quran identifies both with the soul's own contentment, satisfaction, and good-pleasure (*riḍā*), as subject, and with God's contentment, satisfaction and good-pleasure of it, as object (Q 89:27–28). In other words, it experiences its own *riḍā* with God and all that ensues from His Will and is also on the receiving end of Divine *riḍā*. No less importantly, this penultimate stage is that of "the soul at peace" (*al-naḥs al-muṭma'inna*), with *dhikr* playing an essential role in its ascension towards beatitude and serenity. It is not irrelevant that when the Quran refers to the *sakīna* that was contained in the Ark of the Covenant of the Israelites (the *tābūt*; Q 2:248), one interpretation (offered by Ibn 'Abbās) was that it was a "basin of gold brought from Paradise in which the hearts of the prophets were washed,"⁴⁴ underscoring the intimate relation between tranquility and inner purity.

We have already encountered the verse, "The remembrance of God is greatest." The exegetical tradition interpreted the grammatical *idāfa* or possessive genitive construction (the "of" in the statement) in two ways, neither of which were mutually exclusive. The passage could mean that the human being's remembrance of God is greater than any other act that she might perform (as we have read the verse thus far), or that God's remembrance of the human

41 *Jawharan ... ṣāfiyan nūrāniyyan*. Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥsīn al-kabīr* xix, 40 (commentary on Q 13:28).

42 To be clear, as a proponent of the orthodox Islamic belief in the resurrection of bodies, for al-Rāzī there are also bodies in the afterlife. However, by *'ālam al-aḥsām* he means the phenomenal world in which we live.

43 *Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ*, no. 2286. The tradition appears in Bayhaqī.

44 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān* ii, 386 (commentary on Q 2:248). Cf. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Madārij al-sālikīn* ii, 526.

being is greater than the latter's remembrance of Him. Recall that for Ibn al-Qayyim, *dhikr* lies in between the two arcs of God's *dhikr*, a position for which there is ample Quranic evidence, and one which percolates throughout Sufi meditations on the subject. In his *Minhāj al-ʿarīfīn*, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) brought to light this second meaning and argued that it was in fact the real reason for the serenity of the *dhākir*. After all, how can there be any commensurability between the remembrance of a finite and impoverished creature, and One Who as *al-Ṣamad* is infinite and independent of all others? Drawing attention to the reverence and veneration the seeker should cultivate as he enters the sanctuary of remembrance, al-Ghazālī gave the following advice:

Make your heart the *qibla* of your tongue and feel in your remembrance the bashfulness of servitude and awe of Divine lordship. Know that God most high is aware of the secret of your heart, sees the outward form of your actions, and hears your intimate conversations. Wash your heart with sadness and kindle in it the fire of fear, for when the veil of heedlessness is raised from your heart, your remembrance of Him will join His remembrance of you. He said, "The remembrance of God is greatest," because He remembered you, in His needlessness of you, while you remembered Him, in your need of Him. He said, "Are not hearts at peace in the remembrance of God?" This is because peace (*iṭmi'nān*) of heart lies in His remembrance of you.⁴⁵

Al-Ghazālī goes on to say that the soul's experience of its own remembrance of God is that of awe and fear—this being the meaning of the verse, "Those whose hearts tremble with awe (*wajilat qulūbuhum*) when God is remembered (*dhukira*)" (Q 8:2). Yet God's remembrance of the servant produces, as we have seen, the opposite effect. To be clear, al-Ghazālī was certainly not the first nor the only thinker to propose such a distinction. To give but one example, in the Quran commentary of al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), a similar view is ascribed to the early Sufi Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (d. 320/932), a contemporary of Junayd (d. 298/910), in an aphorism where he too retraces the peace of remembrance to the effect of God as *dhākir* on the human *madhkūr*.⁴⁶

45 Al-Ghazālī, "*Minhāj al-ʿarīfīn*" 47. The translated passage ends, "His remembrance of him," but is altered here for idiomatic purposes since al-Ghazālī's style is intimate.

46 Al-Sulamī, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn, *Tafsīr al-Sulamī wa-huwa ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr*, ed. Sayyid ʿImrān, 2 vols., i, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2000, 333–334 (commentary on Q 13:28).

The bliss that is the fruit of remembrance has been a recurring theme in Islam, from the revelation of the Quran all the way down into the modern period. As Mūlay al-Darqāwī (d. 1329/1823), the Shadhili master wrote in one of his letters, “It is said that by the invocation of God a person of faith attains such peace of soul that the great terror of the Resurrection cannot sadden him. How then could he be disturbed by whatever trials and misfortunes may befall him in this world?”⁴⁷ And ‘Umar b. al-Sa‘īd al-Fūṭī (d. 1280/1864), the West African Tijani scholar, Sufi shaykh, and anti-colonial resistance leader gave his readers the following counsel in his remarkable book, the *Kitāb al-Rimāh*: “Through the perpetual remembrance of God the sorrows and anxieties that afflict people in this world are vanquished, for they arise in proportion to one’s heedlessness of God most High.” He adds, “The servant should only blame himself if he is followed by sorrows and anxieties, for they are the consequence of turning away from God most High. Let him who wishes to remain perpetually in bliss remain perpetually in remembrance.”⁴⁸ And as we saw earlier, the Ottoman Halveti-Jerrahi Fahreddin Efendi experienced a similar state of ineffable joy in the *dhikr* of his forty-day solitary retreat.

Yet the Sufi tradition has also recognised the dangers inherent in such blissful states (*aḥwāl*; sg. *ḥāl*), since it was understood that they could metastasize into the underlying motivation behind the aspirant’s remembrance as he traversed through the sludge and sediment of the psyche’s internal resistance to concentration on the Real. It should not surprise us that al-Wāsiṭī once described the serene or even euphoric feelings produced by spiritual practice as a “poison,” since they could contaminate the sincerity of the devotee.⁴⁹ For similar reasons Abū l-‘Abbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287) distinguished between two kinds of seekers: those who were servants of their states and those who were servants of the One who conferred on them such states. The litmus test he offered to know where one stood was to see if one felt grief or remorse at the passing away of an elevated *ḥāl* or whether they remained an underlying sense of equanimity, regardless of what feelings or emotions transpired.⁵⁰

47 Al-Darqāwī, Muḥammad al-‘Arabī, *Letters of a Sufi master*, trans. Titus Burckhardt, Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1998, 36 (with minor edits).

48 Al-Fūṭī, ‘Umar b. Sa‘īd, *Kitāb Rimāh ḥizb al-rahīm ‘alā nujūm ḥizb al-rajīm: Accompanying Jawāhir al-ma‘ānī wa-Bulūgh al-ma‘ānī* by ‘Alī al-Ḥarāzīm, 2 vols., i, Morocco: Dar al-Rashād al-Ḥadītha, 2016, 424. He is quoting an earlier Sufi authority, but it remains unclear where the quote ends and his commentary continues.

49 Al-Iskandari, Ibn ‘Ata’ Allah, *The subtle blessings in the saintly lives of Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi and his master Abu al-Hasan*, trans. Nancy Roberts, Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2005, 278.

50 Al-Iskandari, *The subtle blessings* 273.

One's sincerity could also be gauged by how constant one remained in *dhikr*, by whether one's fortitude continued even through periods of contraction (*qabḍ*), through "dark nights of the soul." In the final order of things, the ideal was for remembrance to be catalysed by the categorial imperative of the Quran, "O ye who believe, remember God with frequent remembrance" (Q 33:41), an injunction that summoned the soul to realize its highest teleological purpose: to love and to know God, and to submerge itself in the ocean of His being.

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