

## Dhikr at-Tasbih

### [“Subhan Allah” {glory be to Allah}](#)

While in *ruku‘* and *sujud*, the person praying glorifies God.

When the verse, “*So celebrate the Name of your Lord, the All-supreme,*”<sup>1</sup> was revealed, the Prophet (S) thus said: “Apply this command to your *ruku‘* and say:

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْعَظِيمِ وَ بِحَمْدِهِ

*Subhana rabbiya’l-‘azim wa bihamdih.*

“Glory be to my Lord, the Great, and praise belongs to Him.”

And when the verse, “*You are laboring toward your Lord, the Most Exalted,*”<sup>2</sup> was revealed, he (S) said: “Apply this command to your *sujud* and say:

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْأَعْلَى وَ بِحَمْدِهِ

*Subhana rabbiya’l-a’la wa bihamdih.*

“Glory be to my Lord, the Exalted, and praise belongs to Him.”<sup>3</sup>

### [The station of tasbih](#)

Glorifying {*tasbih*} and exalting {*tanziyyah*} God are the root of all authentic Islamic beliefs and thoughts:

*Tawhid* means regarding God as free from any taint of polytheism: “*Clear is Allah of any partners that they may ascribe {to Him}!*”<sup>4</sup>

Justice {*‘adl*} means considering God as free from any form of injustice: “*They said, ‘Immaculate is our Lord! We have indeed been wrongdoers!’*”<sup>5</sup>

Prophethood {*nubuwwah*} and Imamate {*imamah*} mean treating God as immune from the lack of the purpose, the program and the means delivering the people from the sea of desire and inclination:

﴿ وَمَا قَدَرُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ قَدْرِهِ إِذْ قَالُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ بَشَرٍ مِّن شَيْءٍ ﴾

***“They did not regard Allah with the regard due to Him when they said, ‘Allah has not sent down anything to any human’.”***<sup>6</sup>

The Return {*ma‘ad*} means knowing God not to have made creation in vain and knowing that the end of the world is not annihilation:

***“O Lord, You have not created this in vain! Immaculate are You!”***<sup>7</sup>

***“Did you suppose that We created you aimlessly, and that you will not be brought back to Us?”***<sup>8</sup>

Yes, God is guiltless of this futile and vain act.

Glorification of God is not only the fountainhead of Islamic beliefs but also the source of enormous spiritual and moral excellences:

*Subhan Allah* is the source of satisfaction {*rida*}. If we regard Him as free from any defect, it means that we are satisfied with His decrees and submit to the wisdom behind His will.

*Subhan Allah* is the fountainhead of *tawakkul* {reliance on God}. It is only logical that we have to trust and rely on the One who is free from any need and immune from any weakness and inability:

***“Immaculate is He! He is the All-sufficient.”***<sup>9</sup>

*Subhan Allah* is the source of love for God. The Essence that is clear from any defect and shortcoming is loved by man.

*Subhan Allah* is the preliminary part of praise and eulogy to God—praise and eulogy for the Essence that is free from filth and unpleasantness. Thus, in the *Tasbihat al-Arba‘ah*,<sup>10</sup> “*subhan Allah*” comes first before “*al-hamdulillah*”.

*Subhan Allah* is the key to salvation from all superstitions and man-made creeds: ***“Clear is Allah, the Lord of the Throne, of what they allege {concerning Him}.”***<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps, it is for these reasons that the command for *tasbih* {glorification of Allah} has been mentioned more frequently compared to other *adhkar* {forms of remembrance to God}. The command for *tasbih* has been repeated 16 times; for *istighfar* {asking forgiveness from Allah} eight times; for the remembrance of Allah {*dhikr*} five times; and for *takbir* {to say, “*Allahu akbar*”} twice. Besides, the command for *tasbih* is meant for all times and conditions so that man should always remember God and

regard Him as free from any form of defect and shortcoming:

﴿ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ غُرُوبِهَا وَمِنْ آنَاءِ اللَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْ وَأَطْرَافَ النَّهَارِ ﴾

***“And celebrate the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the sunset, and glorify Him in watches of the night and at the day’s ends.”***<sup>12</sup>

You also glorify God at the moment of victory and joyfulness: ***“When Allah’s help comes with victory... then celebrate the praise of your Lord.”***<sup>13</sup>

In addition, glorify God in the depths of vicissitudes and adversity for the *tasbih* is the source of deliverance: ***“And had he (Jonah) not been one of those who celebrate Allah’s glory, he would have surely remained in its belly till the day they will be resurrected.”***<sup>14</sup>

Yes, on account of man’s many limitations, he can never comprehend God. So, it is better for him to admit his own weakness and say, “As You are beyond the scope of the intellect and imagination, You are guiltless of and above what others ascribe to You”: ***“Immaculate is He, and greatly exalted above what they say!”***<sup>15</sup>

Only the sincere servants of God, through divine guidance and succor, can describe God:

﴿ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ \* إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ ﴾

***“Clear is Allah of whatever they allege {about Him}, –{all} except Allah’s exclusive servants.”***<sup>16</sup>

## **The reward for tasbih**

Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) narrates that the Messenger of Allah (S) said that when a servant of God utters, “*Subhan Allah*,” whatever is under the Divine Throne glorifies God along with him and 10 times the reward shall be given to him. When he recites, “*Al-hamdulillah*,” God shall grant him the blessings of the world till he meets Allah and enters into the blessings of the hereafter.<sup>17</sup>

## **Practical tasbih**

Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) said: “One of the most difficult and important things that God has made necessary for creation is “abundant remembrance” {*dhikr al-kathir*}.” He (‘a) then said: “What it means is not the recital of “*Subhan Allahi wa’l-hamdulillahi wa la ilaha illallahu Allahu akbar*” {Glory be to Allah; praise be to Allah; there is no god but Allah; Allah is greater} although it is also part of them. What it means is ‘to remember Allah as to what is lawful {*halal*} and what is unlawful {*haram*}’.”<sup>18</sup>

That is, to remember God when acting; if a certain task means obedience to Him, it has to be undertaken; if it earns His displeasure, it has to be abandoned.

## Repetition of tasbih

Someone came to the house of Imam as-Sadiq (‘a). He saw the Imam (‘a) in a state of *ruku* glorifying God and repeating the *tasbih* 60 times. While in the state of *sujud*, the Imam repeated the *tasbih* 500 times.<sup>19</sup>

The repetition of *tasbih* is discussed not only in prayer but in the *Hajj* rites as well. At the time of looking at the Black Stone {*hajar al-aswad*}, during the *sa’i* between Safa and Marwah, and in other cases, the repetition of *tasbih* has been recommended.

For instance, in the prayer, apart from the *dhikr* in *ruku* and *sujud*, *Tasbihat al-Arba’ah* can also be repeated in the third and fourth *rak’ahs*. Based on both Sunni and Shi’ah traditions, what is meant by the *baqiyat as-salihat* {“lasting righteous deeds”}<sup>20</sup> in verse 46 of *Surah al-Kahf* is this *Tasbihat al-Arba’ah*.<sup>21</sup> As stated by Hadrat ‘Ali (‘a), the *dhikr* of Hadrat Ibrahim (‘a) at the time of constructing the *Ka’bah* was “*Subhan Allahi wa’l-hamdulillahi wa la ilaha illallahu Allahu akbar*”.<sup>22</sup>

## Remembrance of God {dhikr Allah} in Islamic culture

Let us take a brief look at the remembrance of God {*dhikr Allah*} in Islamic culture:

When surprised and amazed, our faithful ancestors would say: “*Masha’ Allah*” {what Allah has willed!} or “*subhan Allah*” {glory be to Allah!}; when entering the house: “*Ya Allah*” {O Allah!}; when separating from each other: “*Khoda hafiz*” {may God protect (you)!}; when standing: “*Ya ‘Ali!*” {O ‘Ali!}; to remove fatigue while working: “*Khoda quwwat*” {may God give you power!}; in reply to the inquiry after one’s health: “*Al-hamdulillah*” {All praise belongs to Allah}; when offering food: “*Bismillah*” {In the Name of Allah!}; and at the end of a meal, they would recite appropriate prayers and thanks to God.

Grandmothers would start their storytelling: “*Yeki bud; yeki nabud*” {There was once nobody except Him}.

It is clear that to live in such an atmosphere and to be reared in such an environment would encourage the remembrance of God to flow in the heart and His Name to flow from the tongue at any time and in any place.

## The tasbih of other creatures

All of creation—the seven heavens and the earth and whatever there is between them—glorifies God.<sup>23</sup> The animals such as the birds, inanimate objects such as the mountains,<sup>24</sup> thunder and storm<sup>25</sup> do so

and that too is out of consciousness and instinct!

﴿ كُلُّ قَدِّ عِلْمٍ صَلَاتُهُ وَتَسْبِيحُهُ ﴾

**“Each knows his prayer and glorification.”[26](#)**

The *tasbih* of the angels is so pervasive that the Prophet (S) said: “There is not a single layer of the heavens except that therein is an angel in the state of prayer and *tasbih*.”[27](#)

Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) says: “Whenever Hadrat Dawud (‘a) would read the *Zabur*, there was no mountain, stone and bird that did not recite it with him.”[28](#)

In the traditions, we are admonished not to strike a blow on the face of four-footed animals for they are glorifying God.[29](#)

گر تو را از غیب چشمی باز شد

با تو ذرات جهان همراز شد

نطق آب و نطق خاک و نطق گل

هست محسوس حواس اهل دل

جمله ذرات عالم در نهان

با تو می گویند روزان و شبان

ما سمیعیم و بصیریم و هوشیم

با شما نامحرمان ما خاموشیم

*If you could see the unseen, to you would be revealed the secret behind every particle of the world.*

*The voice of water, soil and mud can be heard by the gnostics.*

*All the particles of the world say secretly to you during the day and night:*

*“We are hearing, discerning and vigilant. We are silent with you the strangers.”*

A group of chirping sparrows passed by in front of Imam as-Sajjad (‘a). The Imam (‘a) turned to those who were near him and said: “Every morning the birds glorify Allah and pray for power for the day.”<sup>30</sup>

Some people have said that what is meant by the *tasbih* and *sujud* of other creatures is allegorical and not literal. Just as a beautiful painting and a collection of poems respectively testify to the enormous talent of the painter and the inborn disposition of the poet, the mysterious constitution of other creatures bears witness to the knowledge, power, wisdom, and precision of God, declaring Him immune from any sort of defect and shortcoming. This is the very meaning of the *tasbih* of other creatures.

This view is put forward when, in the first place, we have no proof and evidence substantiating this notion. Secondly, we have to resort to allegorical interpretation {*ta’wil*} and analysis when the apparent meaning of a word poses an impossibility such as the verse, “**The hand of Allah is above their hands,**”<sup>31</sup> in which it is impossible for God to have a hand and so we say that what is meant by “the hand of Allah” is divine power. However, in case where we cannot comprehend the meaning, we have no right to resort to allegorical interpretation.

How could we resort to allegorical interpretation when the Qur’an itself says,

﴿ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ ﴾

**“There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification”?**<sup>32</sup>

How could we resort to allegorical interpretation when the Qur’an declares,

**“And you have not been given of the knowledge except a few {of you}”**<sup>33</sup>?

We read many times in the Qur’an that the Prophet (S) who has access to eternal knowledge, said: “**I do not know.**”<sup>34</sup> So what if we also say, “We do not know” and “We do not understand”?

What is interesting is that God has explicitly declared to us our ignorance and lack of knowledge: “**But you do not understand their glorification.**”<sup>35</sup> But the proud man is not ready to say: “I do not understand the secret of creation among which is the *tasbih* of other creatures.

Does not the Qur’an categorically disclose that the hoopoe was aware of the sun-worshipping practice of the people of Sheba and reported the same to Hadrat Sulayman (‘a), saying: “The ruler of Sheba is a woman who is sitting on a large throne and her people are worshipping the sun.”<sup>36</sup>

The hoopoe’s knowledge of the peculiarities of the environment and the name of the land, and its ability

to distinguish woman from man, ruler from subject, polytheism from monotheism, and the like are all signs of the intelligence of other creatures.

Does not the Qur'an say that one of the ants said to the others,

***“Enter your dwellings, lest Solomon and his hosts should trample on you while they are unaware”?***<sup>37</sup>

In these verses, understanding the movement of human beings, their names (Solomon), their occupation (military), their inattention to where they step, and the ant's concern for the other ants are among the issues that makes us aware of the capacity and power of discernment of other creatures.

Now, if we accept the existence of instinct as we have to accept the text of the Qur'an, then there is no more need to justify and analyze the *tasbih* of other creatures.

1. Surah al-Waqi'ah 56:74.
2. Surah al-A'la 87:1.
3. Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 19, p. 160.
4. Surah at-Tur 52:43.
5. Surah al-Qalam 68:29.
6. Surah al-An'am 6:91.
7. Surah Al 'Imran 3:191.
8. Surah al-Mu'minun 23:115.
9. Surah Yunus 10:68.
10. Tasbihat al-Arba'ah: literally, the four tasbihs; it refers to the recital of "Subhan Allahi wa'l-hamdulillahi wa la ilaha illallahu Allahu akbar" {Glory be to Allah; praise be to Allah; there is no god but Allah; Allah is greater}. {Trans.}
11. Surah al-Anbiya' 21:22.
12. Surah Ta Ha 20:130.
13. Surah an-Nasr 110:1, 3.
14. Surah as-Saffat 37:143-144.
15. Surah al-Isra' (or Bani Isra'il) 17:43.
16. Surah as-Saffat 37:159-160.
17. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 7, p. 187.
18. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 80.
19. Al-Wafi, vol. 2, p. 107.
20. Surah al-Kahf 18:46: "Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of the world, but lasting righteous deeds are better with your Lord in reward and better in hope."
21. Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 13, p. 540.
22. Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah, vol. 4, p. 1207.
23. Surah al-Jum'ah 62:1: "Whatever there is in the heavens glorifies Allah and whatever there is in the earth, the Sovereign, the All-holy, the All-mighty, the All-wise."
24. Surah al-Anbiya' 21:79: "And We disposed the mountains and the birds to glorify {Him} with David, and We have been the doer {of such things}."
25. Surah ar-Ra'd 13:13: "The Thunder celebrates His praise."
26. Surah an-Nur 24:41.
27. Tafsir al-Qurtubi, vol. 8, p. 5581.
28. Tafsir Nur ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 3, p. 444.
29. Tafsir Nur ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 3, p. 168.

[30.](#) Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 13, p. 206.

[31.](#) Surah al-Fath 48: 10.

[32.](#) Surah al-Isra' (or Bani Isra'il) 17:44.

[33.](#) Surah al-Isra' (or Bani Isra'il) 17:85.

[34.](#) This sentence was repeated four times in the Qur'an among which is in Surah al-Anbiya' 21:109.

[35.](#) Surah al-Isra' (or Bani Isra'il) 17:44.

[36.](#) Surah an-Naml 27:22-27.

[37.](#) Surah an-Naml 27:18.

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