

# THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD

The Outcome of Contemplation  
over Loud *Dhikr*

(*Natījatu al-fikr fīl-jahri bil-dhikr*)



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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

WE LIVE IN a time when there is a growing interest in understanding Islam not only by Muslims but also by people of other faiths and even by people of no faith. Books that were once available only in the Arabic language are being translated into English, though as yet these translations represent only a scant fraction of the realms of knowledge open for us to explore. While Muslim scholars, sages, and legal experts often expounded their philosophies in multi-volume epics,<sup>1</sup> no comparison could be found in medieval Europe. It is the intention of Amal Press to make available to people in the West these illuminating texts that have been taught and passed down from teacher to student for generations in the Muslim lands.

Far from being the torchbearers of intellectual inquiry, the Muslim world of today bears little resemblance to the past civilization that so many Muslims passionately talk of. The Islamic discourse is highly politicized, leaving ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions to become marginalized and neglected. It is because of this remarkable contrast between the classical period and the modern that Amal Press seeks to address the reasons for the current state of malaise in the Muslim world. One thing is certain: the Islamic discourse of the past was never determined by those whose mission was to destroy and wreak havoc. Whereas classical Islam offered a religion to live for, contemporary expressions of Islam seem to create a religion to die for. It is no coincidence that such proponents or movements do not have scholars in their ranks, nor do they produce anything near the intellectual output of their spiritual forefathers.

The Islamic tradition is rooted in knowledge that is carried and transmitted by inheritors of the prophets who possess a light in their hearts, a light that is passed on to others; illuminating and intoxicating

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all those who come into contact with it. Tragically, this divine gift has become mutated and distorted, so rather than seeking enlightenment from its deep spiritual tradition, some Muslims have transformed Islam into a rabid ideology—one that hardens the hearts and is unable to provide equilibrium in the turmoil and agitation that surrounds us all. These modern manifestations of Islam are quick to condemn the West, but they embrace its technology and readily use its weapons of mass destruction.

*Dhikr*, that is the remembrance of God,<sup>2</sup> is the cure for forgetfulness. While humankind was created weak, constantly falling and slipping into a state of heedlessness, prophets were sent to *remind* humankind of their divine spark and the ability to reach great heights; to be great people and transcend their lower desires.

This publication is a translation of a legal response (fatwa) to a specific question on “Remembering God” (*dhikr* Allah) aloud and in a group of people. Written by the renowned Egyptian scholar, historian, biographer, hadith master, jurist, and probably one of the most prolific of all medieval Muslim scholars, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) it should decisively end all disputes surrounding a blessed act of communal worship.

At a time when people of violence are invoking God, we learn from this major scholar the benefits of remembering God and chanting His names. Its effect is to instill tranquility and a sense of calm within the one who recites blessed words, qualities that seems to be absent from many people today. Were people to remain in the state they achieve through *dhikr*, the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said that, “The angels would come to see you to the point that they would greet you in the middle of the road.”<sup>3</sup>

In countless prophetic traditions (hadiths), we are told how the remembrance of God is “the best of all deeds,” and how gatherings of *dhikr* are akin to both the “gardens of paradise,” and the “gatherings of angels.” It comes as no surprise that when the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was asked, “Which of the servants of God is best in rank before Him on the day of resurrection?” he responded, “The ones who remember Him much.”<sup>4</sup> The heart that pulsates to the testimony of God’s majesty begins to rust through the absence of the remembrance of God, and it is only *dhikr* that can once again “polish”<sup>5</sup> the hearts.

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The state of the heart is of utmost importance for the believer, for it is neither the status of man nor his outward form that will be of any benefit to him on the day that all will be come to know the fruits of their actions, except that is, those who bring God *a sound heart* (Qur'an 26:88–89).

The purification of the heart is conditional on the purification of the tongue and while today many Muslims seek to enrich the mind, they do so to the neglect of the heart. Too few know the science of the attributes of the heart and thus fail to recognize the praiseworthy and blameworthy traits. Our tongues speak with such carelessness and impunity that we fail to understand the consequences. How often did the Prophet ﷺ say to guard and restrain our tongues? His advice was to use it only to speak good (or to remain silent)<sup>6</sup> and to keep it busy with the remembrance of God.<sup>7</sup> The heart is the core of the human creature and it is by constant *dhikr* that it becomes trained, humbled, and purified.