



***Dhikr* in Islamic Sufism**
A Case Study: The Order of Kubrawiyya
Kübreviyye Tarîkati Özelinde Tasavvufta Zikr

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Abstract

Among various orders of Islamic Sufism, one of the common rituals is *dhikr*. While *sharīa* places significant emphasis on the repetition of different *dhikr* formulas, it does not mandate its practice. However, within the diverse orders of Sufism, *dhikr* is viewed as a fundamental aspect of conduct and a cornerstone of practical mysticism. In Islamic Sufism, disciples deem it obligatory to purify the *nafs*. Consequently, *dhikr* is regarded as a means to this end across various schools and branches of Islamic Sufism. Each order of Islamic Sufism has developed its own unique instructions and rituals for its followers. The Kubrawiyya order, one of the oldest schools of Islamic Sufism, has also established its own rituals and instructions pertaining to *dhikr* for its disciples. The primary objective of this paper is to elucidate the essence and the quality of *dhikr* in the Kubrawiyya order. This includes its importance, principles, objectives, methods, and results. The analysis is based on the materials presented in the texts of the Kubrawiyya order, supplemented by references to other sources of Islamic Sufism. This scholarly approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the role and significance of *dhikr* within the Kubrawiyya order specifically, and Islamic Sufism more broadly.

Keywords: *Dhikr*, Disciple, Islamic mysticism, Kubrawiyya, Sufism.

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Öz

İslam tasavvufunda, çeşitli tarikatlar arasında ortak ritüellerden biri zikirdir. Şeriat, farklı zikir formüllerinin tekrarlanmasına vurgu yapmakla birlikte, bunların uygulanmasını zorunlu kılmaz. Bununla birlikte, çeşitli tasavvufî tarikatlar içinde zikir, davranışın temel bir vechesi ve pratik mistisizmin temel taşı olarak görülür. İslam tasavvufunda müritler nefsi arındırmayı zorunlu görürler. Sonuç olarak zikir, İslam tasavvufunun çeşitli okulları ve kolları arasında bu amaca yönelik bir araç olarak kabul edilir. Her bir tarikat, takipçileri için kendine özgü metot ve ritüeller geliştirmiştir. İslam tasavvufunun en eski ekollerinden biri olan Kübreviyye tarikati de müritleri için, zikir özelinde, kendi ritüel ve talimatlarını oluşturmuştur. Bu makalenin temel amacı, Kubreviyye tarikatinde zikrin özünü ve niteliğini açıklamaktır. Bu amaç, zikrin önemini, ilkelerini, hedeflerini, yöntemlerini ve sonuçlarını kapsamaktadır. Analiz çoğunlukla, Kübreviyye tarikati metinleri ve zikir ile ilgili, tasavvufun diğer kaynaklarına ait materyallere dayanmaktadır. Bu bilimsel yaklaşım, zikrin özelde Kübreviyye tarikatinde, genelde ise İslam tasavvufundaki rolü ve öneminin kapsamlı bir şekilde anlaşılmasını sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Zikir, mürid, İslâm mistisizmi, Kübreviyye, tasavvuf.

Introduction

Tazkiyat al-nafs (purification of the soul), is a pivotal tool in Islamic Sufism for disciples seeking enlightenment and union with the eternal beloved. Sufi philosophy posits that refinement cannot be achieved merely through contemplation or the exertion of individual will. While a disciple's will is integral to behaviour, it is *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and *madad* (seeking assistance from God or a spiritual guide) that actualize behaviour and purification. These practices are uniquely employed across various *ṭarīqas*.

In many Sufi orders, *dhikr* is practiced in tandem with seclusion. Given the human mind's tendency for recurrent confusion, *dhikr* must necessarily be paired with contemplation in its Sufi context. While *adhkār* (plural form of *dhikr*) are generally similar across various orders, each order necessitates its own special *dhikr* to examine its purpose. Through engagement with *dhikr*, human existence is progressively refined, and the manifestations of *dhikr* effect the necessary transformation within the individual. Ultimately, human existence becomes a conduit for *dhikr*, and, by the grace of God, the individual attains the status

of *wali* (friend of God), a perpetual reciter.¹

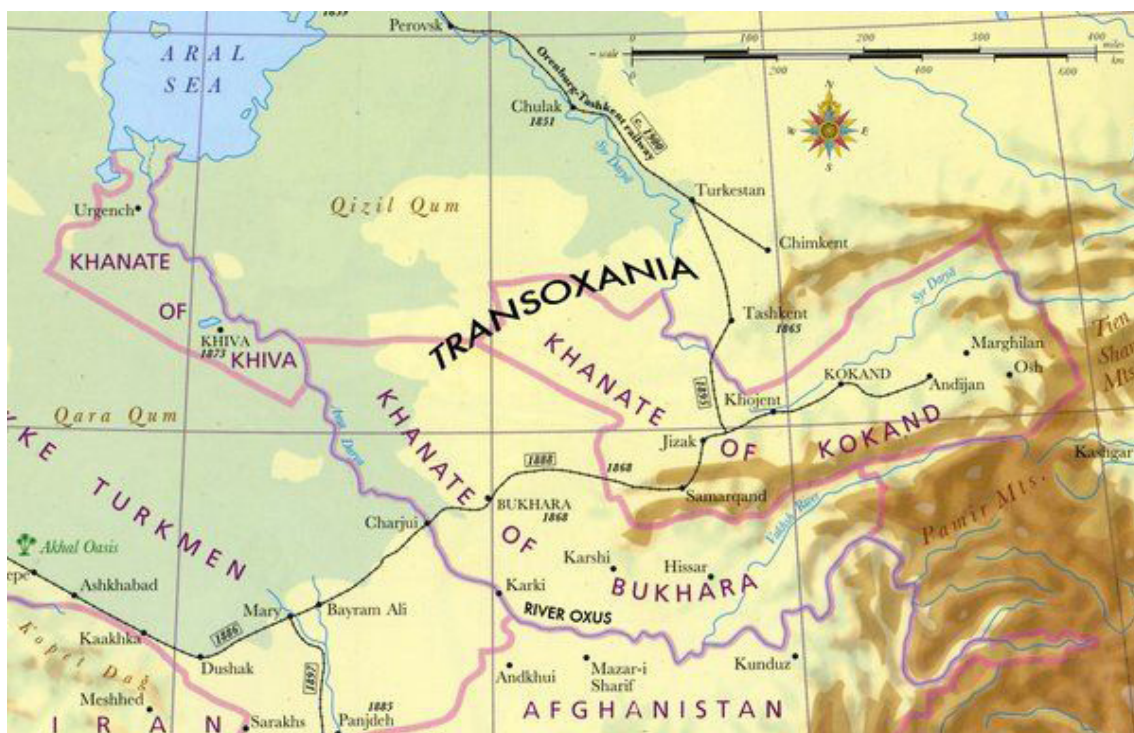
Furthermore, each Sufi order has its own *awrād* (prayer phrases, plural form of *wird*), typically a collection of Quranic sentences recited regularly in the morning and at night. The founder of the respective order usually establishes these documents. The purpose of *awrād* is to prepare the disciple for *dhikr*. In essence, the daily acts of worship for Sufis comprise *a'māl* (religious practices, especially prayer, plural form of *'amal*), *awrād*, and *adhkār*.²

The Kubrawiyya order, one of the most significant orders of Islamic Sufism, places a special emphasis on *dhikr* and seclusion. The Kubrawiyya order was founded in the 13th century by Sheikh Najm al-Dīn Kubra (d. 618/1221), a notable mystic in the annals of Sufism. He is recognized for his pioneering work in the mystical theory of light and color.

Sheikh Najm al-Dīn Kubra mentored numerous eminent Sufi personalities. Notable figures

1 Mansour Ebadi, *al-Tasfiyah Fi Ahwaal al-Motasavvafah* (Tehran: Farhang Iran Foundation Publication, 1968), 76-78; Khaaja Mohammad Parsa, *Qudsiyah* (Rawalpindi: Persian Research Center of Iran and Pakistan, 1975), 144-151.

2 Ezzeddin Mahmoud bin-Ali Kashani, *Misbah al-Hedaye and Miftah al-Kefayeh* (Tehran: Homa Publications, 1988), 317-326.



within this order include Sayf al-Dīn Bākharzī (d. 659/1261), Saʿd al-Dīn Hamūya (d. 649/1251), Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (573/1177-654/1256), Alāʾ al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 737/1336), and Mīr Sayyīd Ali Hamadānī (d. 787/1385), also known as Ali Thānī.

The Kubrawiyya order experienced significant growth during the Mongol invasion, particularly in eastern Iran. This expansion was facilitated by the order's elders during the Khwarazmian and Ilkhanid dynasties, extending its influence from Khorasan and Transoxiana to Syria and Asia Minor.³ The order's substantial presence across all spheres in Central Asia is believed to have influenced the Mongol patriarchs' conversion to Islam, leading to the religion's resurgence in Iran. In the post-Mongol period, the Kubrawiyya order had a profound influence on Sufism, leading to the emergence of a prominent Sufi figures in Khwarazm and Khorāsān. The Kubrawiyya order's expansion from Khorāsān

3 Abdul Hossain Zarinkoob, *Sequence of Search in Mysticism of Iran*, (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publications, 1997), 81.

and Transoxiana to the Levant and Asia Minor, along with existence of its branches in India and China, adds to the importance of this order.

Within the Kubrawiyya order, several branches emerged during the tenure of Mīr Sayyīd Ali Hamadānī's successor, Khwaja Ishaq Khatlanī. The Nurbakhshiyya and Dhahabiyya orders, predominantly located in the eastern and western regions of Transoxiana respectively, are continuations of the Kubrawiyya order. However, with the rise of the Naqshbandī order in the Khanate of Bukhāra, the influence of the Kubrawiyya was confined to the territory of Khoqand. By the 16th century, they had gradually migrated from Central Asia and established their presence in Iran.⁴

Due to the importance of *dhikr* in Sufism and the importance of *dhikr* in Kubrawiyya, this article examines the importance, principles, objectives, methods and results of *dhikr* in Sufism and especially in Kubrawiyya.

4 Zarinkoob, *Sequence of Search in Mysticism of Iran*, 178-184.

In order to carry out this research, we have analyzed the materials presented in the texts of the Kubrawiyya order. Besides, we have also referred to some other sources of Islamic Sufism.

This research has the potential to enhance the understanding of Sufi practices, particularly the practice of *dhikr* within the Kubrawiyya order. It can help to dispel misconceptions about Sufism and inform the practice of *dhikr* in various Sufi orders. The topic intersects with multiple disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and religious studies, highlighting its interdisciplinary relevance. Furthermore, the research can contribute to documenting and preserving the practice of *dhikr* in the Kubrawiyya order, a necessity in a rapidly evolving world and could serve as a foundation for further exploration, stimulating new inquiries in the field.

Dhikr

Dhikr, the act of remembering God, is deemed a paramount duty in both *ṭarīqa* and *sharīa*. This concept is rooted in the divine command: *Remember me, I will remember you.* (al-Baqara 2/152). The disciple's true peace is found in the light of *dhikr*, as God Himself stated, *Indeed, it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find peace* (ar-Ra'd 13/28).

Dhikr, as presented in the Qur'ān, is a reciprocal process involving both God and humans. When a person remembers God, God reciprocates this remembrance. The divine remembrance that emanates from God to the disciple fortifies faith and facilitates the attainment of elevated states and stations. The act of remembering God is a form of communication with Him, and the entity that establishes this connection is God Himself.⁵

5 Kazem Mohammadi, *Najmuddin Kobra Pir Vali Tarash*, (Karaj: Najm Kobra Publications, 2007), 121-138.

The practice of *dhikr* is a distinguishing feature of Sufi Muslims, setting them apart from non-Sufis. The Sufi practice of *dhikr* can be viewed as a form of verbal devotion. At its core, it involves the repetition of God's names, often articulated in specific phrases. Only Arabic names and special phrases derived from the Qur'ān and *hadīth* are utilized for *dhikr*. The term '*dhikr*' and its close derivatives appear more than 270 times in the Qur'ān, and at times, *dhikr* is regarded as the pinnacle of worship.⁶

Dhikr in Sufism

In Sufism, *dhikr* is more closely associated with awareness than with outward acts, which fall under the purview of *sharīa*. A distinguishing characteristic of Sufis is their endeavor to discipline their *nafs* (the human soul or ego), using various tools, among which *dhikr* is of paramount importance. This involves remembering God through His names. Sufis posit that all theoretical teachings of Islam aim to stimulate remembrance within humans. In their interpretation of Quranic teachings, they argue that *dhikr* encompasses matters far beyond known acts of worship. A complete *dhikr* signifies the realization of all perfections latent in human nature.

Sufi texts present various classifications of *dhikr*. Some refer to the depth of concentration achieved by the disciple. Another prevalent classification distinguishes between loud and silent *dhikr*. A loud *dhikr* typically involves various forms of worship performed in different sequences. Sufi elders employ special names and chants to actualize disciples' spiritual abilities.⁷

6 William Chitick, *An Introduction to the Sufism of Islamic Mysticism*, (Tehran: Hekmat Publications, 2010), 117-129.

7 Ibid., 117-129.

Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī provides insight into this by saying: “*Dhikr* is a robust pillar in the path of Truth, and no one can reach God Almighty except through continuous *dhikr*. There are two types of *dhikr*, the *dhikr* of the tongue and the *dhikr* of the heart.”⁸

***Dhikr* in Kubrawiyya Order**

Najm al-Dīn Kubra, the leader of the Kubrawiyya order, perceives *dhikr* as a truth that eradicates one’s pleasures, as these pleasures are deemed superfluous aspects of existence that have arisen through extravagance and transgression. He regards *dhikr* as an inductive process and asserts the necessity and obligation of a mentor’s presence for its practice. According to him, the fire of *dhikr* purges the disciple of his own self, annihilates his virtual existence, and instills real existence in his heart, thereby establishing his connection with absolute existence.⁹

He views *dhikr* as a virtuous word that ascends from the crown of the head and is presented to the Almighty’s presence. God then blesses the disciple with His blessing, which signifies the import of spirituality and holy lights. The disciple is enveloped by security, desire, passion, love, faith, and mysticism, and is imbued with grace and perfection. Consequently, the disciple’s heart is liberated and shielded from any complications, and he directs his attention towards his Lord completely. At this juncture, the Almighty’s *dhikr* immerses itself in disciple’s heart. It is as if the heart is a well and *dhikr* is a bucket that is dipped into the well to draw water. Following this event, there is a surge in the limbs and unconscious movements that have never been observed before, such as

a movement that induces tremors in the body. Whenever the disciple refrains from his obligatory *dhikr*, the heart exhibits a movement in the chest akin to the movement of a fetus in the mother’s womb, resulting in the aspirant of the *dhikr*.¹⁰

According to Najm al-Dīn Kubra, *dhikr* is of three types: *dhikr* of the tongue, of the heart, and of the inmost heart (secret, *sirr*). Verbal *dhikr* does not exert much influence if it is not linked with the *dhikr* of the heart, although it can be beneficial as it is *dhikr* in itself. In *dhikr* of the heart and the secret, however, the issue is about mystical presence and absence. In the *dhikr* of the heart, the disciple, in a way, vanishes from himself, and in the *dhikr* of the secret, he transitions from absence to presence. The essence of *dhikr* is also revealed in the last two stages. The principle of *dhikr* is that the disciple initially becomes devoid of himself. Subsequently, when he is free of himself, his entire being becomes God’s presence, and he has annihilated in God. Needless to say that, attaining this state necessitates considerable self-discipline, and the disciple must engage in extensive solitude and efforts to comprehend the nature of heart and secret *dhikr*.¹¹

In Najm al-Dīn Kubra’s view, the best *dhikr* is the honorable *dhikr* of “*lā ilāha illa Allāh*,” which comprises a negation and an affirmation—the negation of us except Allah and the registration of Allah in the heart. Therefore, for this *dhikr* to be effective and to flow from the tongue to the heart, a special form and state have been designated for its performance, and its expression with a special state has been deemed effective in four beats.¹²

Mīr Sayyīd Ali Hamadānī considered the essence of *dhikr* to be connected with God

8 Abul-Qasim Abdul-Karim Ibn Hawazen al-Qushairi, *Risalah Qushairiyya*, (Tehran: Hermes Publications, 2012), 347.

9 Najm al-Din Kubra, *Fawaeh al-Jamal and Fawatheh al-Jalal*, trans. Mohammad Baqer Saedi. (Tehran, 1986), 73.

10 Najm al-Din Kubra, *Fawaeh*, 113.

11 Mohammadi, *Najmuddin Kobra Pir Vali Tarash*, 121-138

12 Ibid.

both in the hidden and in the open.¹³

‘Azīz-al-Dīn al-Nasafī categorizes disciples into two types concerning *dhikr* and meditation: an earthly type and a heavenly type. The vehicle of the earthly disciple is *dhikr*, and the vehicle of the heavenly disciple is thought. He also cites *dhikr* as one of the conditions of *mujāhadah*.¹⁴

The Importance of *dhikr* in Kubrawiyya Order

In the Kubrawiyya order, many elders have devoted years to meditation, solitude, and *dhikr* within their sheikh’s monastery.¹⁵ *Dhikr* for a disciple in this order is likened to milk for a child.¹⁶ The elders regard *dhikr*, particularly the *dhikr* of “lā ilāha illa Allāh,” as a facilitator for the disciples’ sublimity. “Lā ilāha illa Allāh” is a combination of negation and affirmation. Through negation, this *dhikr* eradicates immoral substances that stem from the disease of the heart and the problems of the soul. Furthermore, by affirming “lā ilāha illa Allāh,” the heart is treated and immorality is cured. When this occurs, the soul is illuminated by the light of its Lord, the darkness of the soul’s attributes dissipates, and the subject transforms into the object, and vice versa.¹⁷

In the act of remembering the Truth (*Ḥaqq*), the heart imbibes a type of wine that purifies it. Subsequently, the disciple advances towards the Lord, leaving his own self behind. He then perceives invisibles and hears inaudible sounds, loses himself once more, and when he

emerges from the state of remembrance, the Lord remembers him.¹⁸

In this order, forty stages are enumerated for a Sufi, with *dhikr* being the eighth stage. In this stage, the disciple knows God by heart and seeks God with his tongue, and if he becomes helpless, he knows no other path except to God’s door.¹⁹ The elders of the Kubrawiyya order consider both the external and internal aspects. The human heart is the place of inner meanings, and language is the interpretation of the external form. Its inner aspect is the realization of the meaning of *dhikr*, and its outward aspect is the utterance of “lā ilāha illa Allāh.”²⁰

Principles of *dhikr*

Given the significance of *dhikr* in Islamic Sufism, it is essential to understand its foundational principles and tenets.

• Monotheism

The foremost principle in Islam, which can also be regarded as a pivotal principle of *dhikr*, is monotheism. Consequently, the primary foundation of Sufi beliefs is monotheism. Sufis endeavor to discern the true essence of monotheism and a pathway to become really monotheistic. They seek knowledge of the singular God, who is the absolute Truth and embodies both unity and oneness. As Sheikh Maḥmūd Shabistarī succinctly encapsulated: “To see one, to say one, and to know one, this is the origin and branch of the faith.”²¹

13 Mir Seyyed Ali Hamadani, *Risalah Zikriah*, (Karaj: Najm-Kobra Publications, 2009), 18.

14 Mohammad Nasafi, *Kashf al-Haqayeq*, (Tehran: Book Translation and Publishing Company, 1980), 138-139.

15 Hamadani, *Risalah Zikriah*, 9.

16 Nasafi, *Kashf al-Haqayeq*, 135-136.

17 Najm al-Din Kubra, *Usul al-Eshrah*, trans. Abdul Ghafoor Lari, (Tehran: Mowla Publications, 2019), 57-65.

18 Ammar bin Yaser Badlisi, *Soum al-Qalb*, (Tehran: Mowla Publications, 2015), 61-62.

19 Mir Seyyed Ali Hamadani, *Forty Maqams of Sufiya*, (Manuscript, misplaced, 1501).

20 Hamadānī, *Risalah Zikriah*, 52.

21 Shamsuddin Mohammad Lahiji, *The Description of Golshan Raz*, (Tehran: Zovar Publications, 2009), 543.

• *Jalāl* and *jamāl* names

Another principle of *dhikr* in Islamic Sufism pertains to the names of God, which are divided into *jalāl* (glory, the names that demonstrate God's awe and greatness) and *jamāl* (beauty, the names that exhibit a form of God's favor) names. In Islamic belief, God possesses beautiful names and attributes, and in accordance with the requirements of *Day in and day out He has something to bring about* (al-Raḥmān 55/29), He has inherent dignities, each of which yields a name or an attribute.²² From the Sufi perspective, the divine names are essentially the same essence, and the multiplicity of names does not disrupt the unity of God. The method to truly comprehend these names is to mention them, which is consistently and particularly performed in meditation and *dhikr*.

• Divine Love

Mystics of Islam posit that the only being who merits love above all else is God. Based on this premise, love for God permeates all beings in the world and is present at all levels of existence.²³ In Sufism, divine love serves as the vehicle for spiritual journeying. All disciples strive to draw closer to God through divine love. By striving to have God-like morals and love for God's creatures, which are manifestations of God's attributes, they prepare themselves to receive God's grace. The virtue of possessing God's morals is bestowed upon the disciple by God Himself, following meditation, *dhikr*, and adherence to the authorities of conduct. In this context, the Truth, which is both unity and oneness, liberates the disciple from the realm of multiplicity and guides him

towards his connection, who is the incomparable lover.

• Belief in the *rūḥ* (spirit)

Another essential tenet that warrants discussion is the universal belief among Muslims, inclusive of Sufis, in the existence of the *rūḥ*. The *rūḥ* is the cause of life, a life that is the harbinger of consciousness and will. It is God who infuses the *rūḥ* into entities, thereby animating them according to His will. The *rūḥ* exists in various ranks and degrees: A degree of it is present in animals and non-believers, a degree of it is in believers, and at its highest degree, in prophets and messengers.²⁴ Consequently, the *rūḥ* is an integral, non-material component of human existence, serving as the source of life and distinguishing living beings from the deceased. It is a supernatural entity whose operations diverge from those of material beings, despite its perpetual connection with the material world.²⁵ In the authentic exegesis of Quranic verses, a human is not merely a body housing a *rūḥ*, but rather a *rūḥ* that temporarily inhabits a body as its vessel. The *rūḥ* only uncovers its true essence upon its departure from the body, given that the creation of the *rūḥ* enables it to sustain life independently. The *rūḥ*'s joy and sorrow reside in the spiritual realm, possessing a divine, incorruptible, and eternal essence.²⁶

Through various exercises, the non-material *rūḥ* can liberate itself from the shackles of matter. The *rūḥ* is distinct from the mind. When the mind is active, the *rūḥ* undergoes various emotions. It is only when the mind ceases activity and attains tranquility that the

22 Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, trans. Mohsen Bidarfar, (Qom: Bidar Publications, 2020), 4: 42.

23 Seyyed Mahmoud Taheri, *Collection of Letters*, (Qom: Ayat Eshraq Publications, 2009), 405-408; Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *al-Hikma al-Muttaaliyah fi al-Asfar al-Arbaeh*, (Tehran: Sadra Islamic Wisdom Foundation, 2001), 7^e: 148.

24 Mohammad Hossein Tabataba'i, *al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, (Tehran: Dar al-Kitab al-Islamiya, 1993), 2: 217-219.

25 Nasser Makarem Shirazi, *Tafsir Nemoone*, (Qom: Dar al-Kitab al-Islamiya, 2017), 12: 252.

26 Abedin Lajimi, & Reza Kohsari, "The Human Soul from the Perspective of the Qur'an," *Qur'anic Studies* 36, (2018): 123-149.

rūḥ is able to persist in its authentic form. This state can be achieved through *dhikr* during meditation, as it allows the *rūḥ* to cease its union with the mind and shed its material veils.

• Stages of the *nafs*

In the disciplines of Islamic sciences and the Qur'ān, the *nafs* is recognized as the navigator of human cognition and activities, with numerous human behaviors being shaped by adherence to one's *nafs*. Mystics have constructed comprehensive theories elucidating the nature of the *nafs* and its various stages. They have detailed the evolutionary progression of the *nafs*, identifying the lowest stage as *al-nafs al-ammārah* (Yūsuf 12/53), and subsequently discussing advanced stages such as *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* (al-Qiyāmah 75/2) and *al-nafs al-mutmainnah* (al-Fajr 89/27-28). The pinnacle of the *nafs* is perceived as a state of annihilation in divinity, followed by survival post-mortality.²⁷ The attainment of the diverse levels and stages of the *nafs* is a gradual process, facilitated by meditation and *dhikr*. This progression underscores the transformative potential of spiritual practices in elevating the state of the *nafs*.

• Divine Caliphate (Vicegerency)

The concept of divine *caliphate* holds significant importance in the realm of mystical anthropology. As per the mystics, the paramount factor that entitles an individual to ascend to the position of a *caliph* (vicegerent) of God is the attainment of the authentic source of gnosis and the intuition of the true nature.²⁸ An individual who achieves such profound insight is deemed the *caliph* of God on Earth.²⁹

27 Muhammad bin Ali Ibn-'Arabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makiyya*, (Qom: Āl-Albeyt, 2016), 2: 194-195.

28 Ahmad Ibn-Ajibah, *Al-Bahr al-Madid fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Majid*, (Cairo: Hassan Abbas Zaki, 1998), 1: 571.

29 Ibn-Ajibah, *al-Bahr al-Madid fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Majid*, 4: 210.

Najm al-Dīn Kubra posits that the divine man, upon traversing the stages of his spiritual journey towards God, arrives at a state where God adorns him with the robe of discretion, thereby establishing him as the rightful *caliph*.³⁰ It is at this juncture that he, having detached from his self, acquires authority not attributable to his *nafs*, but rather to his status as the divine vicegerent. *Dhikr* is identified as one of the most crucial instruments in realizing this objective.

Objectives of *dhikr*

• Attainment of Monotheism

All activities within Sufism, including *dhikr*, are directed towards the realization of unity, ultimately leading to the state of monotheism.

• Stabilization of the Heart

Within the Kubrawiya order, *dhikr* serves the purpose of stabilizing the tongue, which subsequently leads to the stabilization of the heart and, ultimately, the stabilization of faith. This stability implies a state where an individual is oriented towards God in all circumstances, with their entire being, and is detached from anything that is not God.³¹

• Subjugation of the Senses to the Soul

Given that all material or spiritual calamities, originate from the senses, the treatment is of paramount importance. This treatment is another objective of *dhikr*. Through continuous *dhikr*, the soul ceases to be subservient to the senses and instead, perceives the Origin of everything. Consequently, the senses become obedient to the soul, and the eight senses (five external and three internal) transform into gateways to heaven.³²

30 Ibid., 232-233.

31 Badlisi, *Soum al-Qalb*, 99.

32 Najm al-Din Kubra, *Usul al-Eshrah*, 56.

• Elimination of Foreign Elements from the Heart

Dhikr, likened to fire within this order, aims to incinerate all foreign elements within the heart, leaving nothing but God. This objective embodies one of the true interpretations of “*lā ilāha illa Allāh*.”³³

• Purification and Illumination of the Heart

Dhikr also aims to purify and illuminate the disciple’s heart. Analogous to the body’s inability to grow and attain perfection without nourishment, the heart cannot grow and reach perfection without *dhikr*. Post-*dhikr*, the impact of contemplation amplifies a hundred-fold, as “an hour of contemplation surpasses sixty years of worship.”³⁴

Within this order, individuals who recite *dhikr*, known as *dhākirs* (persons who recites *dhikr*), are categorized into four groups. A disciple does not benefit from contemplation until they reach the fourth level of *dhikr*. Upon reaching this stage, contemplation unveils its beauty, marking the disciple’s entry into Sufism. This stage is followed by the disciple’s purification from falsehood and illumination by the light of Truth. Once the disciple’s heart is cleansed and illuminated, the light of contemplation supercedes the light of *dhikr*. The disciple then ceases *dhikr* and embarks on the path of unity.³⁵

• Achieving Companionship with the Truth

In the Kubrawiyya order, any individual who recites *dhikr* for the sake of pleasure, to perceive the unseen, to acquire unusual revelations, to gain strange knowledge, or to find merits, is not considered a disciple of the path of Truth, as their intention is not aligned with the Truth.

33 Najm al-Din Kubra, *Fawaeh*, 73.

34 Muhammad Baghar bin Muhammad Taqi Majlisi, *Bi-har al-Anwar*, (Beirut: Dar Ehiya al-Torath al-Arabi, 1983), 71: 327.

35 Nasafi, *Kashf al-Haqayeq*, 164.

Genuine disciples are those who seek solitude to rectify their relationship with the Almighty, thereby eliminating their external and internal interests and attachments. Consequently, their soul perceives the knowledge of the unseen and discerns the devil’s deception.³⁶

Methods and Rituals of *dhikr*

The practice of *dhikr* necessitates adherence to the guidelines set forth by the Sheikh and is contingent upon specific conditions. The mere repetition of *dhikr*, devoid of its associated rituals and conditions, is deemed ineffective. The following conditions are integral to the practice of *dhikr*:

• Repentance and Purification of the Body

A disciple is required to repent for all transgressions. If feasible, the disciple should perform *ghusl* (a comprehensive ablution involving the washing of the entire body with ritually pure water) prior to the recitation of *dhikr*. In the absence of this possibility, a simpler ablution should be performed. The act of reciting *dhikr* is likened to engaging in combat with an adversary, a task that is challenging without the appropriate weaponry. It is often stated that “ablution is the weapon of the believer.”

• Refraining from Backbiting and Falsehoods

The disciple must abstain from backbiting and lying to earn the privilege of becoming a vessel for the Truth. A tongue tainted with lies and backbiting is incapable of truly flowing with *dhikr*, save for the negligent mention of letters. Furthermore, the disciple must shield his eyes and ears from witnessing or hearing anything that is either useless or forbidden.³⁷

36 Alaa al-Dawlah Semnani, *al-Orwa le Ahl al-Khalwa wa al-Jalwa*, (Tehran: Mowla Publications, 1983), 335.

37 Hamadani, *Risalah Zikriah*, 63-64.

• Elimination of Corrupt Substances from the Heart³⁸

A disciple engaged in the recitation of *dhikr* must purge his heart of corrupt substances and improper attributes to which his heart has become attached. Corrupt substances are those that have infiltrated the heart through the senses and have subsequently formed an attachment. Improper attributes arise in a similar manner. The removal of these corrupt substances can be achieved in several ways:

a) One method involves the soul's inherent capacity for divine attraction, a rare occurrence. Divine attraction manifests when the Almighty Truth appears to the individual in a specific form, captivating the individual and fostering an immediate interest, leading to a disconnection from other entities.

b) Another method necessitates the presence of a facilitator. Certain sheikhs regard the names of God as facilitators. They present the names of God to the individual, noting the names that resonate with him, and then engage him with those names. Others consider the blessed name "Allah" to be the facilitator, arguing that since one's breath could cease at any moment, each breath should be treated as potentially the last. Given that it is recommended to utter the blessed name of Allah with one's final breath, this form of *dhikr* is preferred. However, the majority of sheikhs opt for "lā ilāha illa Allāh" as the Prophet deemed this form of *dhikr* to be the most virtuous. An additional rationale for this choice is that this form of *dhikr* serves a dual purpose: the elimination of corrupt substances and the absorption of goodness. Other elders have suggested that in accordance with the verse, *And remember your*

38 Najm al-Din Razi, *Mersad al-Ibad Men al-Mabda ila al-Maad*, (Tehran: Sanai Publications, n.d.), 145-160.

Lord when you forgot him (al-Kahf 18/24), God commanded that when forgetfulness occurs, if something else is forgotten, one should mention Allah, and if the Truth is forgotten, then one should mention "lā ilāha illa Allāh".

• Conditions Pertaining to Clothing

According to the tradition of Prophet Mohammad, a disciple is required to wear clean clothes. The purity of clothing is subject to four conditions: it must be free from impurity, it must not be obtained through oppression, it should not be made of finery or silk, and it should not be excessively long.

• Conditions Pertaining to Location

The disciple should prepare a clean, empty, and preferably fragrant space for the practice of *dhikr*. It is recommended to sit in a cross-legged position facing the *qiblah* (the direction towards the Kaaba in the Sacred Mosque in Mecca) during the recitation of *dhikr*.

• Prohibition of Imitative *dhikr*

Dhikr should not be performed in an imitative manner. Instead, the mentor, who holds the position of *wilāyah* (a position of wide authority granted by God), should sow the seed of remembrance in the fertile ground of the disciple's heart. The *dhikr* that the mentor inculcates is the fruit of his *wilāyah*. This seed, taken from a previous holder of *wilāyah*, is nurtured in the soil of the heart with the water of *wilāyah's madad* and the radiance of the sheikh's *himmah* (intense spiritual resolve). As the seed grows and matures into a fruitful tree, the Sheikh plants it in the disciple's heart.³⁹

• Mentioning *dhikr* with the Knowledge and Indication of the Sheikh

The recitation of *dhikr* should be performed under the guidance of a perfect mentor. A disciple acting independently may not reap the

39 Razi, *Mersad al-Ibad*, 150-154.

benefits of *dhikr*, even after a thousand years. Sufis opine that *dhikr* should be inculcated in disciples, particularly new ones, by someone who holds the title of mentor and elder. They emphasize the term ‘induction’ or ‘indoctrination’, likening *dhikr* to a medicine that must be administered with care and precision.⁴⁰

• The Condition of Indoctrination

The disciple is advised by the sheikh to fast for three days. During this period, the disciple should strive to perform ablution and continuously recite *dhikr*. The disciple should maintain the recitation of *dhikr* internally, even while moving, and should limit social interactions and speech to the necessary minimum. The disciple should consume less food during *iftār* and stay awake at night with *dhikr*. After three days, the disciple should bathe as per the sheikh’s instructions. The disciple should make the intention to bathe, akin to the intention made by an individual converting to Islam. The disciple should perform a true Islamic bath according to tradition and, while pouring water, should say, “O Allah, I have cleansed with water what I could, and You also cleanse my heart, which is the sight of Your affairs, with the care of Yours.” After the night prayer, the disciple should approach the sheikh, who will make him sit facing the *qiblah*, while the sheikh sits with his back to the *qiblah*. The disciple should kneel in front of the sheikh, place his hands on each other, and prepare his heart. The sheikh will then discuss the conditions, properties of *dhikr*, and the secrets of indoctrination suitable for the disciple’s understanding. The sheikh will then say “*lā ilāha illa Allāh*” once in a loud voice, which the disciple should repeat in harmony with the sheikh’s voice. This process is repeated three times, after which the sheikh prays and the disciple says “Amen.” Following this stage, the

40 Kazem Mohammadi, *Najmuddin Kobra Pir Vali Tarash*, 121-138.

disciple should retreat to solitude, sit squarely facing the *qiblah*, and engage in the cultivation of the seed of *dhikr*.⁴¹

• Reciting *dhikr* Not Obviously

Prophet Mohammad stated that “The best *dhikr* is hidden and the best food is sufficient.”⁴² Just as overconsumption of food leads to adverse outcomes, obvious *dhikr* can result in arrogance and hypocrisy. Therefore, the disciple should mention the name of the Truth only with humility and submissiveness. The disciple should prioritize the *hadīth*, *I am the companion of the one who remembers me*⁴³ in his practice and observe politeness in the presence of God.

• The Practice of *dhikr*

During the practice of *dhikr*, the disciples are required to position their hands on their thighs, prepare their heart, close their eyes, and commence the recitation of the phrase “*lā ilāha illa Allāh*” with a profound bow. The words of *dhikr* should be uttered with utmost vigor, as if “*lā ilāha*” ascends from the navel and “*illa Allāh*” descends into the heart, thereby allowing the influence and potency of *dhikr* to permeate the organs. However, it should not be vocalized loudly. The disciple should strive to muffle their sound and refrain from raising their voice. The *dhikr* should be repeated in the heart while contemplating its meaning. The concept of negation should be considered in such a manner that every thought that enters the heart is negated in “*lā ilāha*,” signifying that the disciple desires nothing and has no intention except for God. This process should continue until the heart is gradually emptied of

41 Nasafi, *Kashf al-Haqayeq*, 135-136; Razi, *Mersad al-Ibad*, 150-154.

42 Abolqasem Payandeh, *Nahj al-Fasaha*, (Tehran: Do-niaye Danesh, 2003), 1: 466.

43 Mohammad bin Yaqoob Koleini, *Osul Kafi*, (Tehran: Qaim Al Mohammad Publications, 2006), 2: 496.

all other beloved and familiar entities.⁴⁴

• The Specific Head Movement

In the Kubrawiyya order, a unique head movement is performed while reciting the *dhikr* of “*lā ilāha illa Allāh*.” By uttering “*lā ilāha*”, they negate everything that is not God, and by saying “*illa Allāh*”, they affirm the love of the Divine Truth in their hearts. It is believed that if the head is not moved, the power of remembrance will not reach the heart, and as long as the warmth of remembrance does not permeate the heart, the *dhikr* remains superficial, yielding no internal expansion or benefit to the disciple.⁴⁵

• Performing *dhikr* with One’s Entire Being

Dhikr should be performed with the entirety of the disciple’s being. The disciple should be cognizant of the name and attribute they employ and understand with whom or what they are communicating.⁴⁶ In this order, there is a significant emphasis on the continuity and frequency of *dhikr*.⁴⁷

• Remembering God through Intuitional *dhikr*

In the Kubrawiyya order, the disciple is required to remember God in truth and acknowledge Him as a singular entity, so that God reciprocates this remembrance. Importantly, God should be remembered through intuitive mention, not linguistic mention. In intuitive mention, the existence of the disciple is forgotten, as there is no one in the realm of existence except the Divine. However, linguistic mention is not associated with the components and elements of human existence and is therefore merely described as a linguistic attribute, failing to reach the realm of the heart and inspi-

ration from the physical world.

As stated in al-‘Alaq 96/19, *prostrate and draw near* implies physical prostration, but a return to the Divine Truth with one’s heart, bearing witness, and drawing closer.⁴⁸

Among *dhikr*, the disciple should focus on the Divine Truth with their entire being. Paying attention to God with one’s entire being involves transcending everything that distracts the individual from God, to the point where there is nothing desirable, beloved, or intended except the Almighty Allah.⁴⁹

Levels of Reciters

a) The first group consists of those whose recitation is limited to the language, and their hearts remain oblivious. It is common for these individuals to let their minds wander, perhaps to a garden or a market, even while they are engaged in recitation. The impact of such recitation is weak, but it is not entirely without merit.

b) The second group includes those whose recitation is verbal, but their hearts are intermittently present due to duty. After being present, the heart will again become absent. The righteous often find themselves in this state during prayer and recitation. There is a risk of contemplating sin in this state.

c) The third group encompasses those whose recitation is both verbal and heartfelt. The recitation has taken hold of the heart, bringing calm and settling it. They can only divert their attention to other tasks by force. This means that they can engage the heart in other tasks only when it is necessary to do something else. Attaining this level is a significant achievement, and only a few individuals reach this level. Those

44 Razi, *Mersad al-Ibad*, 150-154.

45 Semnani, *al-Orwa*, 315-325.

46 Mohammadi, *Najmuddin Kobra Pir Vali Tarash*, 121-138.

47 Najm al-Din Kubra, *Usul al-Eshrah*, 57-65.

48 Badlisi, *Soum al-Qalb*, 61-62.

49 Najm al-Din Kubra, *Usul al-Eshrah*, 66-70.

who have achieved this level should understand how to maintain it to avoid squandering it through inappropriate speech.

d) The fourth group is consist of those whose hearts are filled with the remembrance of God, not through recitation. There is a distinction between a heart filled with the Friend or filled with the name of the Friend. The ultimate goal is to cleanse the heart of the remembrance and awareness of the Friend, leaving only the Friend himself. A disciple's heart will become the Friend, and nothing else will remain within him.⁵⁰

The Results of Continuous *dhikr*

• Turning Away from People

The initial sign in a sincere disciple, indicating the awakening of their desire and will to conduct, is their growing intimacy with meditation and *dhikr*. A certain degree of fear of people emerges within them, leading them to distance themselves from everyone and seek refuge in *dhikr*.⁵¹

• Passion

The disciple's state during *dhikr* is highly variable and indescribable, yet it is accompanied by enthusiasm and happiness. This emotional state stems from the disciple's eager anticipation of meeting the beloved, filled with great hope and confidence.⁵²

• Non-Interruption of *dhikr* in Sleep

Dhikr does not cease with the onset of sleep. The sleeper continues to recite *dhikr*, even though the act of *dhikr* is not typically performed during sleep.

50 Nasafi, *Kashf al-Haqayeq*, 167.

51 Razi, *Mersad al-Ibad*, 150-154.

52 Yahya Yathrebi, *Practical Mysticism*, (Tehran: Bostan Kitab, 2011), 283-300.

• Reaching the Position of Obedience

If the seeker engages in continuous *dhikr* with *mujāhadah* (striving in the path of Allah for purifying the *nafs*) and effort, they will eventually gain insights. At this point, the verbalization of *dhikr* ceases. As long as the seeker is engaged in *dhikr* and it dominates their consciousness, they remain in the world of forms and senses. When they cease *dhikr* and thoughts take over, they transition from the world of forms to the world of the soul. When thought subsides and inspiration takes over, they move from the world of reason to the world of love. When inspiration ceases and manifestation takes over, they transition from the world of love to the position of obedience. In this state of submission, they can be described by any attribute they choose. Thus, the disciple is first dominated by *dhikr*, then by thought, followed by inspiration, and finally by manifestation. Here, the seeker reaches the position of submission and is freed from temptation.⁵³

• Stability of the Tongue

One of the outcomes of *dhikr* is the stability of the tongue, which manifests in two forms: outward stability derived from knowledge, and inward stability resulting from gnosis. Outward stability is such that a person speaks only with the permission of their knowledge, remains silent on matters that should not be spoken of, and refrains from speaking impulsively as long as they possess knowledge. Inward stability is when the tongue becomes subservient to the heart, akin to a door that can only be opened with the heart's permission.⁵⁴

• Attaining the State of Unity

When the tree of *dhikr* takes root in the disciple's entire being and reaches perfection, initial observations gradually give way to revelations,

53 Nasafi, *Kashf al-Haqayeq*, 141.

54 Badlisi, *Soum al-Qalb*, 106.

and the tree begins to bear fruit. One of these fruits is attaining the state of unity (*tawhīd*), which, according to the mystics and Sufis of this order, is the purpose of creation. Each disciple comprehends this unity according to their *himmah* (aspiration) and strength, leading them to prosperity.⁵⁵

• Severing the *nafs* from the World and the Devil

Since the principle of *dhikr* is to prevent the senses from being captivated by the sensible, one of its outcomes is that the soul's reliance on the world and the devil is severed. This is because every temptation and calamity that has afflicted the soul and strengthened it, has originated from the senses.⁵⁶

• Mortality of the *dhākir* in the Truth of *dhikr*

As the disciple continues with *dhikr*, the deity causes the false gods to become mortal for them and elevates them to a level where they forget all familiar things to such an extent that the disciple does not even perceive themselves. At this stage, it is said: *The truth has come and falsehood has vanished* (al-Isrā' 17/81). At this time, the truth of *Everything is bound to perish except He Himself* (al-Qaṣaṣ 28/88) is revealed, and the Absolute Truth appears with the attribute of unity.

• Emergence of Intuitions

Whenever the seekers begin to perform *dhikr* and purify their heart, intuitions from the unseen emerge that are appropriate to their status. These observations sometimes occur in dreams and sometimes during wakefulness, a state referred to as *waqi'ah*. The *waqi'ah* takes place between sleep and wakefulness.⁵⁷

55 Razi, *Mersad al-Ibad*, 150-154.

56 Najm al-Din Kubra, *Usul al-Eshrah*, 53.

57 Razi, *Mersad al-Ibad*, 162.

• Mystical Conquests

Through the practices of *dhikr* and meditation, the disciple may gain insights into unseen events and currents, as well as acquire knowledge about the deeds of individuals, prophets, saints, and the concepts of heaven and hell.⁵⁸ These practices can potentially lead to mystical conquests, opening the disciple's perceptual faculties to previously unseen realms.⁵⁹

• The Influence of Divine Names and Attributes on the Seeker

The disciple's journey is influenced at all stages by divine attributes and names. As the disciple advances in meditation, he begins to recognize the specific names and attributes that have an impact on him. While this recognition may not be comprehensive, the disciple acutely senses the influence of these divine names and attributes and gains a certain level of understanding of each.

• The Annihilation of the Self and Union with the Divine

As the disciple progresses in *dhikr*, he eventually reaches a stage where he experiences signs of self-annihilation. This state of annihilation paves the way for union with the divine, leading the disciple to renounce his ego and selfish desires. The disciple's heart becomes a sanctuary for the divine, devoid of anything else. As the disciple advances in various stages and succeeds in purging his mind of extraneous thoughts and his heart of other names and memories, he realizes that his sole aim and purpose is the pursuit of the Ultimate Truth. The disciple experiences the profound realization that without this goal, he is nothing; but with it, he possesses everything and lack nothing.⁶⁰

58 Yathrebi, *Practical Mysticism*, 283-300.

59 Razi, *Mersad al-Ibad*, 150-154.

60 Yathrebi, *Practical Mysticism*, 283-300.

• Perception of Colors and Lights

One of the significant mystical theories proposed by Najm al-Dīn Kubra is the theory of colors and lights, which is based on his personal experiences. Other disciples may also have similar experiences. For instance, he posits that in the initial stage, the disciple is drawn towards infinite darkness. As a glimmer of purity and light emerges, it manifests as a dark cloud. When the disciple's existence is under the sway of negative forces, it appears in a red hue.⁶¹ It is evident that these are observations made during the practice of *dhikr* and meditation.

Conclusion

This paper explores the pivotal role of *dhikr* within the Kubrawiyya order, a distinguished tradition within Islamic Sufism. The research offers an elaborated exploration of *dhikr*, scrutinizing its significance, principles, objectives, methodologies, and outcomes. The Kubrawiyya order's distinctive approach to *dhikr*, which accentuates monotheism, divine love, faith in the spirit, stages of the *nafs*, and divine *caliphate*, is brought to the fore. The transformative potential of *dhikr* for disciples is underscored, with goals spanning from the realization of monotheism to the attainment of companionship with the Divine Truth.

The research delineates the methods and rituals of *dhikr* within the Kubrawiyya order, encompassing practices such as repentance, bodily purification, abstaining from slander and falsehoods, and stipulations pertaining to attire and location. The nature of *dhikr* in the Kubrawiyya order is further accentuated by the specific head movement and the practice of engaging in *dhikr* with one's entire being. The study also probes into the tiers of reciters and

the outcomes of continuous *dhikr*, unveiling the profound spiritual metamorphoses that can transpire through consistent practice.

In summary, the practice of *dhikr* within the Kubrawiyya order stands as a testament to the enduring potency and influence of Sufi traditions in shaping spiritual experiences. The Kubrawiyya order's emphasis on *dhikr* and seclusion, its *awrād* and *adhkār*, and its adaptability to diverse spiritual needs and contexts are underscored. This research sheds light on the central role of *dhikr* within the Kubrawiyya order and its potential to foster spiritual growth and transformation.

The interdisciplinary relevance of this subject matter, intersecting with fields such as psychology, sociology, and religious studies, also can be seen. As the world continues to evolve at a rapid pace, the importance of preserving and documenting practices like *dhikr* within the various Sufi orders is evident. This research contributes to a broader understanding of Sufi practices and serves as a springboard for further exploration in the field, underscoring the enduring relevance and richness of Sufi traditions.

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