

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya's Traditionalist Ways of *Dhikr*

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Abstract

This study investigates Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya's (d. 751/1350) conception of *dhikr* (remembrance of God) as a central element of his traditionalist thought within the Ḥanbalī school. Although commonly portrayed as a disciple of Ibn Taymīya (d. 728/1328) and critic of philosophical Sufism, Ibn al-Qayyim's writings reveal a positive and practical engagement with *dhikr*. Through an analysis of *al-Wābil al-ṣayyib*, *Madārij al-sālikīn*, and *Ṭarīq al-hijratayn*, the paper elucidates his systematization of *dhikr* as a spiritual discipline. Rejecting innovations (*bid'a*) such as *dhikr* performed solely with the Divine single name ("Allah") or the personal pronoun ("huwa"), Ibn al-Qayyim argued that these practices lack Qur'ānic foundation and stem from a misinterpretation of Qur'ān 6:91. Instead, he emphasized grammatical and rhetorical accuracy in maintaining devotional and ethical integrity. By prioritizing *baqā'* (subsistence in God) over *fanā'* (annihilation in God), Ibn al-Qayyim articulated a "sober" spirituality grounded in transmitted knowledge and faithful contextual exegesis. His theory of *dhikr* thus reflects distinctive characteristics as a Ḥanbalī traditionalist in dealing with Sufis' spiritual journey.

Keywords: *dhikr*, traditionalism, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, Ḥanbalī school, Sufism

Introduction

In recent years, the ways in which Sufism was treated within the circle of Ibn Taymīya (d. 728/1328) have been actively debated. This is largely because neither did Ibn Taymīya leave a monograph devoted specifically to Sufism, nor did he engage in activities that would clearly mark him as a Sufi in historical sources. Consequently, scholarly attention has increasingly turned to other figures surrounding Ibn Taymīya. Within this trend, one of the most representative studies has been conducted by Arjan Post, who has engaged in studies on 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ba'labakkī (d. 734/1333) and 'Imād al-Dīn al-Wāsiṭī (d. 711/1311) [Post 2016; 2020].¹

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (d. 751/1350) is widely known as a prominent disciple of Ibn

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1 Among them, al-Wāsiṭī is said to have developed his own distinctive Sufi thought that reflected the doctrines of the *Shādhilī* order within Ibn Taymīya's teachings, since he himself had been a *Shādhilī* Sufi before joining Ibn Taymīya's circle.

Taymīya.² Therefore, previous studies have often employed his works in a manner that complements Ibn Taymīya's thought [Kokoschka and Krawietz 2013]. Yet Ibn al-Qayyim developed a distinctive intellectual position of his own, which diverged from that of his master, and this is also evident in his treatment of Sufism. However, previous studies on his views of Sufism have primarily focused on his critical assessments of Sufism or his explanations of Sufi terminology [Anjum 2010; Schallenbergh 2013; Sharaf al-Dīn 2004]. In other words, his theoretical reflections on the practice of Sufism have not been sufficiently examined.

Against this background, the present paper focuses on Ibn al-Qayyim's views regarding the Sufi practice of *dhikr*, with the aim of clarifying which Sufi practices he regarded as legally permissible and commendable. Although Ibn al-Qayyim discusses Sufism in various works, he has written a monograph specifically on *dhikr*. This makes his treatment of *dhikr* particularly significant, as it provides a vital perspective for understanding his theoretical reflections on Sufi practice.

As is well known, *dhikr* refers to a Sufi discipline consisting of the recitation of the Divine name or related phrases. Its precise origin is uncertain, yet, as will be discussed when analyzing Ibn al-Qayyim's traditionalist ways below, both the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth provide textual grounds for the practice.³ In its original sense, the term signifies the remembrance or mention of God, and such practice long predates the rise of Sufism. Over time, Sufis who sought a more intimate communion with God came to systematize *dhikr* as a discipline aimed at sustained remembrance and, ultimately, union with Him.

Thus, *dhikr* constitutes for Sufis fundamental and secret practices. Among those who have elaborated upon it, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) is particularly well known; in his magnum opus, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), he has provided a systematic account of *dhikr* [cf. Nakamura 1971]. Moreover, each *ṭarīqa* developed its own method, often producing manuals that codified the practice. In this sense, we can understand the distinctions among *ṭarīqas* as corresponding directly to distinctions in their approaches to *dhikr*. However, while previous studies on *dhikr* have examined Sufi theories and practices, comparatively little attention has been paid to the methodological reflections of the traditionalist scholars.

Among previous scholars who studied Ibn al-Qayyim's views of *dhikr*, Schallenbergh compares Ibn al-Qayyim's moderate approach to *dhikr* with that of 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī (d. 690/1291)'s monistic manner [Schallenbergh 2010: 355–368]. Such research, however, has focused primarily on the analysis of terminology and debates over the legality of this Sufi

2 Although Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzīya is known to have had some association with the *Qādirī* order, his relationship with any *ṭarīqa* remains unclear. In the sources used by al-Maqdisī, Ibn al-Qayyim is linked to the *Qādirī* order through Ibn Taymīya, with al-Wāsiṭī playing no intermediary role [Makdisi 1973].

3 For the argument about the scriptural proofs of *dhikr*, see [al-Daghistani 2022].

practice. Consequently, little attention has been paid to Ibn al-Qayyim's typology of *dhikr* or to the forms he regarded as ideal. Fitzgerald and Slitine, in their partial translation of Ibn al-Qayyim's *al-Wābil al-ṣayyib min al-kalim al-ṭayyib* (The Heavy Shower of Goodly Words), observe that he employed *dhikr* with various nuances remembrance of God, mention of God, and recitation of God's names [Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya 2000]. However, the methodological framework grounded in his traditionalist orientation remains unclear. Similarly, recent surveys on Islamic spirituality that briefly reference Ibn al-Qayyim [Honerkamp 2023: 63–64; Lawrence 2023: 37–38] have not situated his reflections within the context of Sufism. This study, therefore, seeks to analyze Ibn al-Qayyim's theorization of *dhikr* and clarify the traditionalist methodology underlying it.

1 Ibn al-Qayyim and *Dhikr*

1.1 *Dhikr* in His Biography

Biographical accounts of Ibn al-Qayyim frequently report elements related to Sufism.⁴ His direct disciple Ibn Rajab (d. 795/1393),⁵ for instance, praised him regarding Sufism, as he was familiar with “the science of the spiritual path, the discourses of people of Sufism, and their allusions and subtleties” [Ibn Rajab 1417/1997: vol. 2, 368]. Ibn Rajab further recounts:

During his imprisonment he devoted himself to reciting the Qur'ān by contemplating and meditating (*bi al-tadabbur wa al-tafakkur*). Thereupon many good things were disclosed to him (*fa futiha 'alay-hi min dhālik khayr kathīr*) and he gained a large portion of the correct tastes and exaltations (*al-adhwāq wa al-mawāḥid al-ṣaḥīḥa*). Consequently, he mastered the discourse of sciences of people of the mystical knowledge (*al-kalām fī 'ulūm ahl al-ma'ārif*) and gained access to their concealed issues (*al-dukhūl fī ghawāmiḍ-him*), and his writings are full of that. [Ibn Rajab 1417/1997: vol. 2, 369]⁶

Such statements indicate that Ibn al-Qayyim's knowledge of Sufism drew, at least in part, upon his mystical experiences during his imprisonment, and that the prototypes of these experiences, together with the insights they produced, are woven throughout his works.

Similarly, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852/1449), one of the most prominent scholars in the

4 For his biographical accounts, see [al-ʿImrān ed. 2021].

5 He is well known as a ḥadīth scholar and jurist. His biography of the Ḥanbalī school is an important source regarding the scholars' activities.

6 I used Krawietz's translation as a reference but changed some of the expressions [Krawietz 2006: 25–26].

14th–15th century, refers to Ibn al-Qayyim's practice of *dhikr* in his biographical dictionary, *al-Durar al-Kāmina*, which has a collection of the accounts of the notable scholars of the eighth century of the Hijra. He records:

When he performed the dawn prayer, he would remain seated in his place, engaging in the remembrance of God (*dhikr Allāh*) until the sun had risen high and he said "This is my lunch. If I did not sit and devote myself to it, my strength would diminish." [Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī 1418/1997: vol. 3, 244]

From this biographical information, we can, to some extent, confirm Ibn al-Qayyim's commitment to the practice of *dhikr*. However, the biography offers limited insight into what kind of *dhikr* he regarded as ideal, or which practices he criticized. Therefore, the following analysis shall focus on the passages in his own writings.

1.2 Works on *Dhikr*

Among the works in which Ibn al-Qayyim discusses *dhikr*, *al-Wābil al-ṣayyib min al-kalim al-ṭayyib* (The Heavy Shower of Goodly Words) is the monograph on *dhikr*. In this treatise, he examines the occurrences of *dhikr* and its derivatives in the Qurʾān and ḥadīth—regardless of their connection to Sufism—and expounds upon the spiritual benefits that result from its performance. He also addresses *dhikr* in two of his more representative works on Sufism: *Ṭarīq al-hijratayn* (Path of the Two Hijras) and *Madārij al-sālikīn* (Ranks of the Wayfarers). The former contains many topics, including critiques of "mystical" Sufis, such as Abū al-ʿAbbās Ibn ʿArīf (d. 526/1141). The latter is chiefly a commentary on ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī's (d. 481/1089) *Manāzil al-sāʾirīn* (Stations of the Travelers); it is a classical work on Sufism in which Ibn al-Qayyim likewise censures "mystical" and "philosophical" arguments while advancing his own theory of spiritual wayfaring during the journey. Although these two works are written in his later period, both refer approvingly to his early work *al-Wābil*, suggesting that Ibn al-Qayyim maintained a consistent view of *dhikr* throughout his career.

2 Classification of *Dhikr*

Ibn al-Qayyim employs the term *dhikr* in a broad sense, ranging from the general meaning to the more technical Sufi usage. To begin, examining his classification of *dhikr* would be useful. Drawing on Qurʾānic and ḥadīth precedents, he distinguishes three categories: (1) *dhikr* of the Divine names, attributes, and their meanings (*al-asmāʾ wa al-ṣifāt wa maʾānī-hā*), by which God is praised (*al-thanāʾ ʿalā Allāh bi-hā*) and affirmed as one (*tawḥīd Allāh bi-hā*);

(2) *dhikr* of God's commands and prohibitions and of what is lawful and unlawful; and (3) *dhikr* of God's blessings, grace, favor, and aid [Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya 1440/2019: 216–221; 1441/2019: vol. 2, 219]. This classification, which Ibn al-Qayyim bases on the ways in which the Prophet himself engaged in *dhikr* as mentioned in the Qur'an and ḥadīth, implies no hierarchy among the categories. On the contrary, he maintains that the most excellent form of *dhikr* is one that combines them all [Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya 1440/2019: 220].

Regarding the benefits of such *dhikr*, *al-Wābil al-ṣayyib* enumerates them in detail. When organized, these benefits include overcoming satanic temptation, cultivating self-discipline against lethargy, and deepening inner knowledge (*ma'rifa*), among many others. In other words, through *dhikr*, the believer may attain an intimate relationship with God that yields such benefits. These fruits are not reserved for Sufis alone; rather, they are to be encouraged among Muslims more generally. Indeed, when Ibn al-Qayyim writes about *dhikr*, he does not restrict himself to a Sufi framework but situates it within a broader context.

In addition to these classifications, Ibn al-Qayyim also classifies the performance of *dhikr* as follows: (1) *dhikr* in which the heart and tongue correspond, (2) *dhikr* only by the heart (*qalb*), and (3) *dhikr* only by the tongue (*lisān*) [Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya 1440/2019: 221].⁷ The first one is the most ideal *dhikr*, in which both the tongue and heart correspond. The next best approach is to perform *dhikr* by heart, in silence. According to his explanation, one can acquire many benefits through this form of *dhikr*, but the last one, uttering *dhikr* to praise God without the heart, does not bring such merits at all.

The way of practicing *dhikr* encouraged by Ibn al-Qayyim seems to differ widely from al-Qushayrī's (d. 465/1072) dichotomy: *dhikr* by the heart and tongue [Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī 1974: vol. 2, 466].⁸ Furthermore, he does not mention any body part other than the tongue, such as the limbs, which are frequently referred to by *ṭarīqa* manuals. In this manner, he tries to avoid committing only to the arguments of elite Sufis but also offers his teaching more widely.

3 *Dhikr* as a Station: Commentary on al-Anṣārī's *Manāzil*

In Sufi terminology, *dhikr* is not only an act of worship and remembrance of God but also counted among the spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*).⁹ Al-Anṣārī, whose major work systematizes

⁷ The above classification of the methods of *dhikr* follows that of his master Ibn Taymīya. However, Ibn al-Qayyim's exposition can be considered more systematic and practical in comparison [Ibn Taymīya n.d., vol. 10, 566–567].

⁸ Given the historical context, it is likely that the “voiced *dhikr* (*dhikr jahrī*)” and “silent *dhikr* (*dhikr khafī*)” practiced by the *Naqshbandī* order are unrelated.

⁹ Ibn al-Qayyim uses *manzila* (pl. *manāzil*), *madraja* (pl. *madārij*), and *martaba* (pl. *marātib*) as synonyms of *maqām*.

one hundred such stations, assigns *dhikr* the forty-seventh place.¹⁰ In his work *Manāzil*, each station is introduced with a verse from the Qur'ān,¹¹ and in the case of *dhikr* he cites, “and remember (*udhkur*) your Lord when you forget” (18:24). Al-Anṣārī explain this verse as follows:

It (the verse) means when you forget other than Him and forget yourself in your remembrance (*dhikr*), and then you forget your remembrance in your remembrance, and then you forget any other remembrance in God's remembrance (*dhikr al-Ḥaqq*). [‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī 1408/1988: 70–71]

Ibn al-Qayyim criticizes this interpretation as erroneous and a departure from the traditional exegetical framework, dismissing it as a form of allegorical indication (*ishāra*). Furthermore, he points out that what al-Anṣārī describes as the “station of *dhikr*” in fact outlines the progressive stages that culminate in *fanā'* (annihilation in God) [Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya 1441/2019: vol. 2, 219224].

Following his exegetical introduction to this station, al-Anṣārī explains that the station of *dhikr* comprises three levels [‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī 1408/1988: 71].¹² The first is the “manifest *dhikr*” (*al-dhikr al-ẓāhir*), consisting of praise (*thanā'*), invocation (*du'ā'*), and care (*ri'āya*). The second is the “hidden *dhikr*” (*al-dhikr al-khāfī*), which entails release from fetters (*quyūd*, originally described as lassitude, *futūr* in *Manāzil*), subsistence in the witness (*baqā' ma' al-shuhūd*), and remaining in intimate talk (*musāmara*). The third and final level is the “true *dhikr*” (*al-dhikr al-ḥaqīqī*), characterized by the witnessing of God's remembrance of the servant, liberation from witnessing your own *dhikr*, and realization of the rememberer's falsity (*iftirā' al-dhākir*) in his subsistence (*fī baqā'-hi*) with *dhikr*.

Ibn al-Qayyim provides a commentary on each of the three levels [Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya 1441/2019: vol. 2, 224–230]. For the first “manifest *dhikr*,” he cites examples and Prophetic traditions to clarify what is meant by praise, invocation, and care. He concludes that when such acts of remembrance occur through the tongue in harmony with the heart, they represent the best practice of the three types of *dhikrs* previously described. The “hidden *dhikr*,” in his perspective, is the remembrance of the heart arising from divine inspirations (*wāridāt*), and it results from the first level. Here, “release from fetters” means liberation from negligence and forgetfulness of God; “subsistence in the witness” refers to persisting in the awareness of God's presence, such that contemplation leads to beholding Him; and “remaining in intimate talk” denotes the continuation of the heartfelt conversation (*munājāt al-qalb*) with

10 In al-Anṣārī's Persian work *Ṣad Maydān*, the station of *dhikr* is placed thirtieth.

11 Al-Anṣārī was also known as a sign of Qur'ānic exegesis (*āya al-tafsīr*).

12 Similarly, al-Anṣārī describes every station by 3 stages in *Manāzil*.

God. As for the “true *dhikr*,” al-Anṣārī describes it as the state of *fanāʾ*, in which the Sufi’s consciousness of performing *dhikr* is effaced, and the subject-object relation is inverted: the servant no longer remembers God, but God remembers the servant, who thus becomes the object of remembrance. Ibn al-Qayyim, however, counters this by arguing that *baqāʾ* (subsistence with God) is more perfect than such state of annihilation, and he concludes his commentary with this point.

4 *Dhikr* as an Innovative Practice

4.1 Criticism Regarding Missing the Context of the Qurʾān

Thus, in *al-Wābil al-ṣayyib* and *Madārij al-sālikīn*, Ibn al-Qayyim discusses the classification of *dhikr* and the manner in which it ought to be practiced. It has become clear that, with regard to the possible experience of *fanāʾ* arising during *dhikr*, he rejects its superiority and instead maintains that the Sufi must ultimately attain *baqāʾ* after *fanāʾ*. However, no explicit view concerning the erroneous forms of *dhikr*, except *fanāʾ*, can be discerned from these discussions. Turning, therefore, to *Ṭarīq al-hijratayn*, one finds passages in which Ibn al-Qayyim addresses the *dhikr* that he regards as an innovation (*bidʿa*). In the context of criticizing those Sufis esteemed as the “elect (*khaṣṣ*),” Ibn al-Qayyim explains the problem as follows:

The correspondence of this quotation of theirs (those regarded as the elect) to the words of the Exalted is as follows: “You were taught that which neither you nor your forefathers knew. Say: ‘*Allāh*.’ Then leave them to their vain discourse” (6:91). Some among them went so far as to deem the *dhikr* by the singular name (*al-dhikr bi al-ism al-mufrad*)—“*Allāh, Allāh*”—superior to the *dhikr* by the composite sentence (*al-dhikr bi al-jumla al-murakkaba*), such as: *subḥāna Allāh* (“Glory be to God”), *al-ḥamd li Allāh* (“Praise be to God”), *lā ilāh illā Allāh* (“There is no god but God”), and *Allāh akbar* (“God is most great”). [Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya 1429/2008: 738]

Ibn al-Qayyim first cites Qurʾān 6:91, a verse invoked by the Sufi elect as a basis for *dhikr*. From the phrase within it, “Say: ‘*Allāh*’” (*qul Allāh*), he explains that there arose people who came to imagine that uttering the single name “*Allāh*” as a formula of remembrance was superior to other forms of *dhikr* composed as complete sentences, such as “*subḥāna Allāh*.” He then proceeds to clarify why such a view is defective:

And this is corruption built upon corruption (*wa hādhā fāsid mabnī ‘alā fāsid*). For

dhikr by the single name is not legal (*ghayr mashrūʿ*) originally, is nothing beneficial, is not a sentence originally, does not indicate praise and there is no glorification [of *Allāh*], nor does faith attach to it, nor does it have any reward [by performing this *dhikr*], and the *dhākir* (the one who performs *dhikr*) is not fully incorporated into the covenant of Islam (*ʿaqd al-Islām*). Hence, if a disbeliever (*kāfir*) were to recite “*Allāh, Allāh*” from his beginning to his end, he would not thereby become a Muslim. Not to mention [*dhikr* by single name] is a part of the phrase of *dhikr*, or one of the best *dhikrs*. And some among them even claim the following about that: “The *dhikr* by the personal pronoun (*al-dhikr bi al-ism al-muḍmar*) is superior to the *dhikr* by the manifest name (*al-dhikr bi al-ism al-ẓāhir*).” Thus [in their sense] *dhikr* by that saying “*huwa, huwa* (He, He)” is better than *dhikr* by their saying “*Allāh, Allāh*.” All of this among types of absurd and Mahdist obsession[s] and fantasies by its folk [leads] to types of delusions. Hence, this is the corruption of this collapsing building. [Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya 1429/2008: 739]

According to Ibn al-Qayyim, uttering “*Allāh*” indeed constitutes one of the established formulae of *dhikr*, and it is praiseworthy. However, as the Sufi elect claim, its basis cannot be found in the Qurʾān, and it was therefore not originally present within the teachings of Islam. The name “*Allāh*” of course refers to God, yet reciting it alone does not constitute the praise of God. Hence, Ibn al-Qayyim explains that a disbeliever would not become a Muslim merely by performing *dhikr* by the single name. Furthermore, Ibn al-Qayyim censures the development whereby *dhikr* by the single name has evolved into *dhikr* by the personal pronoun (*al-dhikr bi al-ism al-muḍmar*), to the point that some Sufis no longer even recite the name of *Allāh*. For him, the practice of such *dhikr* leads people into error.¹³

Finally, he addresses the question of whether it is appropriate for them to cite Qurʾān 6:91 as a basis for *dhikr*.

And as for the corruption built upon it, it is that which they considered to be the words of the Exalted: “Say: ‘*Allāh*,’” that is, “Say: this name.” That is to say, “Say: ‘*Allāh, Allāh*.’” This arises from people’s misunderstanding of the Book of *Allāh* (*Kitāb Allāh*). For the name of *Allāh* here [which is commanded to be said] is a response to His words: “Say: ‘Who sent down the Book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to men? You put it into parchments, revealing them, and hiding much’” (6:91). This is a response to “Say: ‘*Allāh*.’” That is, “Say: ‘*Allāh* sent it down (*Allāh*

13 It should be noted that, unlike Ibn al-Qayyim, Ibn Taymīya links this personal-pronoun *dhikr* to Ibn ʿArabī’s (638/1240) doctrine of *waḥda al-wujūd* (oneness of being) and develops his criticism accordingly [Ibn Taymīya n.d.: vol. 10, 565]. Ibn al-Qayyim’s critique, by contrast, omits this aspect and does not address the ontological arguments caused by *dhikr*. Regarding Ibn ʿArabī’s view on *dhikr*, see [Kamada 1983].

anzala-h).” For the question was answered within the response and contains it (the predicate part); it was omitted. Just as when you ask, “Who created the heavens and the earth?” it is said, “*Allāh*.” That is, “*Allāh* created both.” The act corresponding to the indication of the question is omitted. Hence, this is the meaning of the verse (*āya*) and nothing else is implied. [Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya 1429/2008: 739]

Here, Ibn al-Qayyim provides a rhetorical explanation of the context in which the phrase “Say: *Allāh*” in Qur’ān 6:91 is uttered. In the scriptural context, it responds to the question, “Who sent down the Book?” In other words, it means “Say: *Allāh* [sent down the Book],” with the predicate merely omitted. Consequently, ignoring this context and treating this verse as the scriptural basis for *dhikr* was, for Ibn al-Qayyim, interpretively impossible.

4.2 The Target of Ibn al-Qayyim’s Criticism

The above arguments clarify Ibn Qayyim’s traditionalist approach and his criticism toward erroneous *dhikr*, but the question remains: who is the target? Although Ibn al-Qayyim maintained silence about those who practiced that kind of *dhikr*, his opinion was likely directed toward the Sufis of the *Shādhilī* order, as many Sufis practiced *dhikr* by reciting “*Allāh*” or “*huwa*.” What is particularly noteworthy here is the scriptural basis they invoke. Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh (d. 709/1310), the third shaykh of the *Shādhilī* order, in his manual on *dhikr*, *Miftāḥ al-falāḥ* (The Key to Salvation), cites Qur’ān 6:91 while explaining both *dhikr* by the single name and *dhikr* by the personal pronoun.

Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh categorizes *dhikr* into five types: (1) “*lā ilāh illā Allāh Muḥammad Raṣūl Allāh* (There is no god but God, Muḥammad is the Messenger of God),” (2) “*lā ilāh illā Allāh*,” (3) *dhikr* expressing *tanzīh* (God’s transcendence), (4) *dhikr* solely uttering “*Allāh*,” and (5) *dhikr* uttering “*huwa*.” [Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh 1421/2000: 64-69] Among these, types (1), (2), and (3) are permitted by Ibn al-Qayyim and are indeed the forms of *dhikr* he encourages. However, as has been observed, the problematic cases are types (4) and (5). We have already examined Ibn al-Qayyim’s criticism of these forms, so below we shall see how Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh engages in these arguments.

Regarding the *dhikr* of reciting “*Allāh*,” Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh justifies it by citing Qur’ān 6:91, as we have seen in Ibn al-Qayyim’s criticism. Moreover, Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh also invokes the words of al-Siblī (d. 334/946), an important figure from the classical period in the history of Sufism. In a conversation with someone concerning *dhikr*, al-Siblī states:

Because Abū Bakr gave all his wealth to the point where not a thing remained with him. Then he took off a garment in front of the Prophet. So the Messenger of God

said, "What did you leave for your family?" He answered, "*Allāh*." Likewise, I say "*Allāh*." [Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh 1421/2000: 67]¹⁴

Through this example, al-Siblī provides a basis for the *dhikr* of reciting "*Allāh*." He further adds: "I am afraid that I will die during the negation of the phrase before reaching the affirmation" [Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh 1421/2000: 67–68]. This remark explains that in reciting "*lā ilāh illā Allāh*," one may lack sufficient time to fully remember, praise, and invoke God. This is because there is a concern that one might die while still uttering the negation "*lā ilāh*," which could inadvertently distract the heart from complete devotion to God. In this way, reciting just "*Allāh*" is presented as a simpler and more efficacious method of devotion, leading to a better form of faith.

As for the pronoun-based *dhikr* "*huwa*," Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh notes that while some people believe a predicate, such as *qā'im* or *qā'id*, is necessary, others maintain that "*huwa*" is the end of the verification (*nihāya al-tahqīq*) and no further explanation regarding this *dhikr* is required [Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh 1421/2000: 68–69]. The latter perspective is the position supporting *dhikr* by personal pronoun, and proponents of this approach consider themselves the chosen. Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh asserts that each type of *dhikr* corresponds to a distinct superior spiritual station (*maqām*) or state (*ḥāl*). Sufis in different stages or conditions of practice can engage with the form of *dhikr* most suited to them.

In sum, Ibn al-Qayyim's criticisms of *dhikr* presented above demonstrate his traditionalist concern for maintaining the Qur'ānic context and prophetic precedent. By rejecting the Sufi practice of reciting only "*Allāh*" or "*huwa*" as independent formulas—particularly those justified through a misreading of Qur'an 6:91—he sought to reaffirm a scripturally grounded and theologically sound remembrance of God. His arguments reveal not a rejection of *dhikr* itself, but an attempt to redefine its legitimacy within the bounds of revelation, contrasting sharply with the interpretive latitude of Sufis such as Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion examined Ibn al-Qayyim's views on *dhikr*. In contrast to his generally negative stance toward *samā'* (audition), Ibn al-Qayyim regarded *dhikr* in a fundamentally positive light. Regarding the proper manner of *dhikr*, he emphasizes that its best form is that in which the heart and tongue are in harmony. This suggests that *dhikr* is not merely a mental act of remembrance, but one that should also be verbally expressed, highlighting its practical and embodied character. It may thus be understood as a critique both

¹⁴ I used Danner's English translation of *Miftāḥ* as a reference but changed some expressions [Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh 1996: 91].

of Sufis who confine *dhikr* to the heart alone, and of those who, conversely, focus excessively on the outward etiquette of practice without genuine inward attentiveness.

In his commentary on *dhikr* as one of the spiritual stations previously set forth by Ḥanbalī Sufi ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī, Ibn al-Qayyim criticized its Qur’ānic exegesis as mystical rather than traditionalistic. He further argued that al-Anṣārī’s understanding of *dhikr* was oriented toward *fanā*’ (annihilation), whereas *baqā*’ (subsistence) represented a higher and more praiseworthy state. Moreover, Ibn al-Qayyim explicitly rejected the idea that the utterance of the Divine name alone (“*Allāh, Allāh*”) or of the personal pronoun “*huwa*” constituted the most excellent form of *dhikr*, or that such practices found justification in Qur’ān 6:91. He contended that the so-called *dhikr* by the single name was based on a misreading of the sacred text and lacked any textual foundation, while *dhikr* by the pronoun was nothing more than a delusional innovation, entirely absent from the Qur’ānic corpus. Such criticism would be directed toward Sufis of the *Shādhilī* order, since their *dhikrs* by the single name and personal pronoun are found in the manual of Ibn ‘Aṭā’ Allāh, the third shaykh of the order.

Taken together, these analyses reveal Ibn al-Qayyim’s traditionalist orientation, rooted in a literal and contextual reading of the Qur’ān and ḥadīth. Additionally, he does not see *dhikr* as a tool to reach the ecstatic experience of *fanā*’, and it should not be the ultimate goal of a Sufi’s spiritual journey. Instead, he recognizes *baqā*’, which occurs after *fanā*’, as the better spiritual state for wayfarers, indicating his preference for a “sober” Sufi path.

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