SUFI TEXTS
Editors: Vahit Göktaş, Ali Tenik

ISBN978-605-4696-
1. Baskı:
Sertifika No: 13858

Mizanpaj: Tavoos
Sayfa Düzüeni: Tavoos
Kapak: TN İletişim
Baskı: Ankamat Mat.

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CONTENTS

SUFI TEXTS .............................................................................................................. 7

1. LIFE AND MYSTICAL VIEWS OF ABU BAKR MUHAMMED IBN ABU
ISHAK IBN YA’QUB AL-BUKHARI AL-KALABADHI (DIED 380/990) .... 9
Vahit GOKTAS

His Works .............................................................................................................. 14
1. Ta’arruf ............................................................................................................. 14
2. Bahr al-Fawaid ............................................................................................... 20
Mystical Views of Kalabadhi ........................................................................... 21

2. EVENTS DONE AND WORKS WRITTEN ON MEVLANA IN "2007
MEVLANA YEAR" ................................................................................................. 49
Vahit GÖKTAŞ

Works Published on Mevlana in 2007 Due to the Mevlana Year . 55

3. CATEGORIES OF SERVITUDE AND THE SENSE OF NOT FEELING
OFFENDED IN THE THOUGHT OF AKSHEMSEDDIN ................................. 67
Vahit GÖKTAŞ - Muhammed Ali YILDIZ

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 68
The Servitude Thought and Categories of Servitude in
Akshemseddin ....................................................................................................... 71
Man Who is Not Offended ................................................................................... 77
BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................. 79
Sufi texts

Sharia and tariqa are the paths for those who attain;
Haqiqa and marifa are within those
(Yunus Emre)

Sufism is the effort to live Islam at the level of “ihsan”. It is the art of becoming a slave of Allah. It is a system targeting to raise perfect men.

Sufism invites man to know himself. Man is a being comprising body and soul. Similar to foods not being ignored for the body for a healthy life, food for the soul should also not be ignored. Sufism relates to man both for his spiritual world and material aspect.

The interest in Sufism has been increasing in the West day by day. The search for meaning in the inner world of the individual mediatess people to encounter Sufism. In this regard, Sufism contributes in man’s effort to known himself. Spirituality is like an endless ocean. Man is a travel-
Abstract
This article studies the opinions of Muhammed Es’ad Erbili, who was a Master of the Kelami Dergah, and who witnessed the last period of Ottoman Empire and the first years of the Republic. Himself being a Sheikh of the Sufi Order, Es’ad Erbili has evidenced the issue through dhikr which is practiced in various Sufi paths. Es’as Efendi also takes account of the issue within the context of dhikr al-kull, the explicit dhikr, the hidden dhikr, and hatm al hajegan. In addition to this, Es’ad Efendi also mentioned about the befits of dhikr. The article also deals with the impor-
While dhikr means keeping in one’s memory, remembering, recalling, or learning by heart any given piece of information, it also holds such metaphorical meanings as reputation, honor and glory, salaah, prayer and the heavenly texts.

In Sufi terminology, dhikr is construed as “remembering, keeping in mind, and not forgetting Allah.” Dhikr is an ascetic practice whereby Sufis and members of mystic orders, be it an individual or a group, recite certain words and phrases in given quantities at various places and according to a predefined set of rules and manners. In tasawwuf, dhikr in the true sense happens when the dhakir goes ecstatic, remembering only Allah, and forgetting everything else. In dhikr, the intended target is to exert an effort for remembering what was long forgotten, and for keeping it in mind and heart for good. The outcome is a maturing of the divine connection and experience experienced internally by the individual. If one is enriched internally through dhikr, he will remember the creator of the universe with everything in it.

Although the term means ‘remembering, reciting’ in the Qur’an al-Karim, it is also employed in ways to mean salaah, Qur’an, men of wisdom, advice, and tafaqqur (reflection) sometimes. In the Qur’an al-Karim, the word dhikr is mentioned in two hundred and ninety-one places together with its derivatives. Emphasized by the Qur’an al-Karim as well, dhikr is one of the crucial functions of the heart. Because it is dhikr that brings about the peacefulness of the heart (Fath, 4). Dhikr is used within the Qur’an al-Karim in the following meanings: Qur’an (Hijr, 9), salaah (Juma, 9; Ankabut, 45), people of the book (Anbiyya, 7), and remembering Allah. (Baqara, 152; Anbiyya, 20, Ahzab, 35, 41, 42). In addition, while dhikr bears such meanings as abstaining from evil, being just, not falling for the world, and always remembering Allah’s orders (A’raf, 205; Kahf, 24; Munafiqun, 9; Nur, 37; Rad, 28; Ta Ha, 24), it is also used for religious practices like hajj (pilgrimage) and other similar practices (Baqara, 198-203).

The Qur’an says: “They remember Allah standing up, sitting down and lying on their side.” Accordingly, one understands that dhikr is not restricted in terms of time and state. Anoth-

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3 Ankabut, 45/9.
4 Hijr, 15/9.
5 Nahl, 16/43; Anbiyya, 21/7.
6 A’raf, 7/3; Isra, 17/41; Nahl, 16/43-44.
7 Baqara, 2/269; Ra’d, 13/19.
er verse says: “Remember Me, so that I remember you,”\(^\text{10}\) which points at the honor and pride that dhikr would bring.

On the importance of dhikr, the Prophet (pbuh) says: “The relation between the one who remembers Allah and the one who does not is like that between an alive person and a dead person.”\(^\text{11}\) Another account is as follows: “How would you like if I told you that the most beneficial deed of all is to remember Allah.”\(^\text{12}\)

Bearing a broader meaning across the Qur’an, this word is attributed a different and outward meaning by the commentators then that attributed by mystics. Commentators usually construe relevant verses in a way to mean “remembering Allah, observing His orders in one’s acts,” and they do not perceive it as a recital of certain predefined words and phrases, either individually or in groups, in accordance with some normative rules. They hold dhikr equivalent to remembering Allah and all other religious deeds like praying, fasting and helping the poor.\(^\text{13}\) On top of that, it is also recognized as dhikr when one waives an opportunity to commit wrong deeds. According to commentators, happiness occurs when salaah is fulfilled in a genuine manner. When salaah is performed in a genuine way, one will be safe from all vice.\(^\text{14}\) If one thinks that he is in the presence of Allah during salaah, he will realize his inner connection with salaah. Otherwise, salaah is isolated from his soul, which is forgetfulness. Being the opposite of forgetfulness, if dhikr is incapable of eliminating forgetfulness, one has to assume that dhikr is not taking place properly. Denouncing those that perform the salaah in forgetfulness (Ma’un, 4-5), Allah praises those who do it in deep reverence (Mu’minun, 1-2). Having Allah in mind during salaah will affect the soul, bringing the performer of the salaah closer to good deeds, driving him away from evil.\(^\text{15}\)

According to commentary writers, another important point meant by dhikr is the Qur’an al-Karim itself. Hearts will find peace only in reciting and performing duties defined by the Qur’an al-Karim. Man can achieve psychological and physical happiness only by surrendering to the Qur’an al-Karim, which is the greatest remembrance of Allah. Remembering Allah means reciting His name in every moment, and surrendering to Him with the full understanding that one is under His control.\(^\text{16}\)

Dhikr is one of the most fundamental requirements in tasawwuf, and a strongest principle on the path to Greatest Truth.\(^\text{17}\) According to Sufis, the essence of dhikr, which is the opposite of forgetfulness, is to keep Mawla present in the heart at all times, and to avoid anything that may cause one to forget about Him. Sufis take the performing of farz (obligatory), wajib (essential) and sunnah (act of the Prophet) deeds as the greatest forms of remembering Allah, in which way

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\(^{10}\) Baqara, 2/152.

\(^{11}\) Bukhari, Daawat, 66.

\(^{12}\) Tirmizi, Daawat, 6.


\(^{16}\) Mawdudi, age., v. V, p. 236.

\(^{17}\) Qushayri, Al-Risalah, p. 110.
they universalize the domain of dhikr by making it the common denominator of all religious deeds. Qushayri says the following about this: “One of the important characteristics of dhikr is that it is not restricted to a certain time. The subject is obliged to remember at all times. There is no time when dhikr is not performed as a farz or nafilah (voluntary). While salaah is the most honorable of all deeds, it is not allowed at certain times. Yet, dhikr done in the heart can continue regardless of time or place.”

Therefore, dhikr is a broad concept which, according to one’s intention, can transform any physical or non-physical act into a religious deed.

According to Sufis, kalimat al-tawhid is the most virtuous of all dhikrs as it holds in itself the very essence of religion. There is no other means or way that is this effective for cleansing and taming the carnal self. This dhikr helps one strengthen his faith, enlighten his heart, and grow more mature; it helps achieve the attraction of Qayyumiyyah al-Zatiyyah, and spiritual awareness and caution. Tawhid is a dhikr that renews the faith of believers. It is a ritual that eliminates all doubts and conflicts from the heart of the Sufi. Any person who performs the dhikr of tawhid in a sincere manner will achieve union with the Beloved without the need for an intercessor or a mediator. Any person that joins the circle of tawhid has made friends with Haqq. The dhikr of tawhid is the most effective among the self-control disciplines that the Sufi chooses in order to unite with the One.

The greatest of all names and recitals is the name Allah. All names and attributes are brought together in this name. Performing dhikr with this name helps one achieve the virtue of reciting Allah with His unlimited number of names and attributes. Those who recite the name Allah frequently will experience a state of extreme spiritual enthusiasm. Such state is balanced by a teacher who has perfected himself. In this sense, Ibrahim Hakki of Erzurum explains that, during dhikr, the dhakir dives deep into an ocean of ecstasy, where he sometimes cannot stand the full splendor of the dhikrullah, going into a state of lunacy. Just like it is impossible to make good again a rotten egg, reversing such disturbance is impossible even for ordained saints. As one can understand, each dhikr affects the spiritual structure of an individual in a different way depending on its inherent quality. Out of these, the kalimat al-tawhid has no adverse effects on the spiritual structure of man. Getting deeper in this dhikr, the structure of consciousness gets more peaceful, and one’s soul journeys toward perfection. But if those dhakirs who recite the name Allah, which is like a summary of all names, recite this name too much without being aware of his own spiritual capacity, he may experience some spiritual instability. This dictates that dhikr be within the limits of one’s individual capacity. Because any overload that is beyond one’s limits will, just like circuit breakers in a power circuit, trip the switches in one’s spiritual world, seriously disrupting the spiritual balance. At this very point, the perfected murshid (teacher) plays a crucial role in tasawwuf as he defines which disciple should en-

18 Same work, p. 368.

ers. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) received this order by understanding its essence through the Gabriel, and then carried out the dhikr by tongue and heart. Following the path of the Prophet is only dependent on the dhikr performed by tongue and heart. For that reason, it is a well known reality that there is a clear need for such remembrances. Es’ad Erbili, who considers dhikr as a requirement of the human essence, and, as opposed to what is asserted by many, claims that the origin of the Sufi orders and the dhikr is the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and who thus ties this basis to the Quran, presents us the systemized form of the dhikr in his works. According to Es’ad Efendi, the only friend is His remembrance. Although the person might be away from Allah, he is with Allah with his heart and spirit.

As regards the “hidden dhikr” (dhikr al khafi) and “openly dhikr” (dhikr al khafi) Es’ad Efendi says that the verse in Quran “Remember your Lord by begging to and fearing from him, in the mornings and evenings, with a slow voice, and do not be among the ignorant”25 implies the importance of the hidden dhikr. He also says that the following verse in quran reminds us of the openly dhikr: 26 “Pray your lord by begging and hiddenly. Because he does not love those who exceed the limits ”27 According to him, this verse allows for the openly dhikr.28

Es’ad Erbili considers dhikr as a necessity for the awakening of the ten “letaif”, for the enlightenment of the whole...
As it is put by the Prophetic saying: “Remembrance of Allah is the healing of the hearts”\textsuperscript{33}, the spiritual ascension to reach the high levels of the paradise will not be accomplished unless the heart is healed.\textsuperscript{34} Some of the diseases of the hearts are as follows: Jealousy, hypocrisy, arrogance Es’ad Efendi considers dhikr as a polish of the heart. Es’ad Erbili explains the connection between dhikr and praising God as follows: “The first of praise is the one done for the benefit of the nation of Mohammad, which deserves mercy. The second should be the dhikr and thinking made with the ten spiritual powers.\textsuperscript{35}

The purification of the self and cleaning of the heart are the two important targets of the dhikr at the beginning. Es’ad Erbili takes the love as the basis in dhikr and in rabita and in many other issues. As a matter of fact, the dhikr of Allah arises at the heart of the believer when the love becomes real. This complies with the following verse of Quran: “There are men who could not be ignored of the remembrance of Allah, neither by trade nor any shopping”\textsuperscript{36} and thus the heart finds its peace and tranquility. According to Esad Efendi, what is instructed in the Prophetic saying““My eyes sleep, but my heart not”\textsuperscript{37} is that one should not be ignorant of the remembrance of Allah even for a moment.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{29} Ibn, s.48.
\textsuperscript{30} Erbili, Risale-i Es’adiyye, s. 25.
\textsuperscript{31} Ahzab 33/41.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 42-43.

\textsuperscript{33} Beyhakî, Deylemi, Keşfül-hafî, c.1 s.505.
\textsuperscript{34} Erbili, Mektûbat, Dersaadet, İstanbul 1341, 1343. (matbaa-i Ahmet Kâmil), s.116.
\textsuperscript{35} Erbili, Mektubat, s.156.
\textsuperscript{36} Nur 24/37.
\textsuperscript{37} Buhari, Teheccüd, 16.
\textsuperscript{38} Erbili, Es’ad, Kenzül-Irfan, s.46.
According to Es’ad Efendi, the Kalima al-Tawhid (since it constitutes the basis for iman) is the most perfect of the dhikrs, and praise (since it is a means to increase the blessings of Allah) is the most perfect of the prayers.

Es’ad Efendi also shows the order in the verse: “Oh those who believe! Remember Allah abundantly!” as being applicable in general to all men and women as in the case of prayers (salat), obligatory alms and fasting. He states that this is expressly stated in the 35th verse of the Surat al-Ahzam which ends with “men and women who remember Allah abundantly” and thus that the men and women are both ordered to remember Allah. Es’ad Efendi shows the verse “Stay patient with those who beg him in the mornings and evenings asking for the assent of their Lord” as an evidence of the circular performance of Khatm al-Khacegan. And again according to Es’ad Efendi, the dhikr is more valuable than the jihad and non obligatory fasting.

Es’ad Efendi shows the verse: “Oh those who believe! Remember Allah abundantly” as an evidence for the “dhikr al Kull” which is known as a station in the Sufi path, implying the obligation to get connected with a Sufi master and to make “rabita” with him, which is questionable in quranic terms.

Relying on the verse which states: “Those who remember Allah while standing, sitting and sleeping on their sides”, he made explanations about whether the dhikr is to be performed standing or sitting.

The ultimate result of dhikr is the “muraqaba” According to Es’ad Efendi, the “muraqaba al-maiyya” in the Sufi paths is not something that is different from the practices of the Prophet (PBUH).

As a conclusion, Es’ad Efendi aims at creating the consciousness of dhikr in an individual. In order for the person to live every moment of his life in a meaningful manner, he needs to keep in memory the being to which he is affiliated. For that reason, according to him, dhikr is a requirement of the human nature. Dhikr is necessary for the satisfaction of the soul. For that reason, the personality that is desired is the one “which could not be distracted from the dhikr of Allah by anything”. Thus he is the human who has the highest capacity of sensitivity among the beings and he could thus maximize his capacity. The dhikr, which has been performed in Sufi paths in a systematic manner for the heart, the letaif and muraqaba, is a way of teaching for this.

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44 Erbilî, Mektûbât, s. 71.
39 Ahzâb 33/41.
40 Kehf 18/28.
41 Erbilî, age., s. 12.
42 el-Ahzâb 33/41.
43 Al-i Imrân 3/191.