

THE ETIQUETTES OF DHIKR

SHAYKH MUFTI WAJID IQBAL

Praise be to Allah ﷻ, the Lord of the Universe. May prayers and salutations shower upon our master Muhammad - the leader of all the Prophets and Messengers - his family; his companions, and the elect of his nation until the Day of Reckoning.

Know O seeker - may Allah ﷻ grant you the ability - that for a gathering of dhikr¹ it is important to observe certain etiquettes and manners (adab). These are necessary for the Shaykh, their Muqaddams², and those in attendance.

We have witnessed many who are lacking in such etiquettes. Therefore, when those leading the dhikr gatherings are unacquainted, then one can only imagine the neglectful state of those who follow them.

For this very reason we have compiled this short epistle, based on three sections and a reminder from Imam Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani (Allah sanctify his secrets). We ask Allah ﷻ to grant us all the ability to maintain the best of manners when remembering Him, the Most High:

1. THE CONDITIONS FOR GATHERING

¹ I.e. the remembrance of Allah ﷻ

² An Arabic title, which literally means 'expediter', 'facilitator', or 'assistant'. In Sufi Orders, the Muqaddam is a student of the Sufi path (a murid/dervish) who has been authorised by his/her guide (Shaykh,

➡ The state of a gathering should be such that it brings about betterment in the seeker;

➡ There should be a Shaykh, his Khalifa³, a qualified scholar, or a representative (like a Muqaddam) leading the gathering;

➡ Before the gathering, a participant should make their intention of attending solely for the sake of Allah and to gain benefit from their sitting - which should not be for worldly gain. When such intentions are prevalent in the inner, Allah will aid participants in upholding the best of manners when remembering Him, His Prophet ﷺ, and the righteous;

➡ The participant should believe that the spiritual fellowship (suhba) with their companions (brothers/sisters) will help them become righteous and upright;

➡ The dhikr assembly should not be attended if a person is tired or sleepy. Thus ensuring no attendee will fall short in their conduct during the gatherings;

➡ Attendees should refrain from light-hearted and flippant remarks, which includes - and is not limited to - joking, speaking loudly, talking about the

Pir/Murshid) to assist in teaching the path to other students.

³ Here Khalifah refers to someone who is authorised in irshad (guidance) by his Shaykh, i.e. a qualified Murshid.

worldly matters (i.e. the dunya), causing a scene, etc. The gatherings of dhikr symbolically represent the courtyard of Allah ﷻ; thus, it must be treated with the greatest of respect, and not seen as a social gathering. A participant must control their tongue, and if they are unable to audibly participate in the gathering, then they should remain silent in order to avoid ignorance;

➡ Attendees should purify themselves, both outwardly and inwardly. The outer includes: performing ghusl⁴ (if possible), or at the very least wudu⁵; wearing clean clothes that are suitable for the gathering, even more so if the assembly takes place in a masjid. The inner includes: repenting and seeking forgiveness from Allah (istighfar) before attending; and rectifying one's actions;

➡ Participants should not attend assemblages of dhikr if they hold any grudges or malice against other attendees. It is inherent that they free themselves of these traits, for these are hallmarks of pride and arrogance; something not befitting such gatherings.

2. ETIQUETTES OF THE SHAYKH⁶

➡ The Shaykh will instruct the gathering to commence with the recitation of the noble Qur'an;

➡ The Shaykh will instruct the gathering to close upon the recitation of the noble Qu'ran, followed up with a supplication (du'a);

➡ The Shaykh should not be quick to finish the gathering, especially when he

sees attendees' engrossed and synchronised in dhikr;

➡ The Shaykh should not make it hard for attendees, even more so when he sees they are tiring;

➡ The Shaykh should sit so that he addresses the entire gathering, ensuring that all participants can see him, and he is able to gaze upon them;

➡ The Shaykh should not be light hearted with attendees, even if they are his students or followers. This is a very important etiquette which must be observed throughout the time of dhikr and the praise of the Prophet ﷺ. The Shaykh represents the firmness and awe of a mountain.

3. ETIQUETTES OF GATHERING FOR DHIKR

There are many etiquettes and manners which must be observed during congregations of dhikr. We will mention but a few:

➡ Participants should attend with complete ritual purity, and should perform the best of wudu, as mentioned in the hadith of the Messenger ﷺ. Ritual purity should be maintained throughout the assembly;

➡ It is best if the gathering takes place during the night, as this a time of concealment and seclusion; an optimum environment for praying and worshipping, and thus why it is a time when prayers are accepted;

⁴ The ritual bath

⁵ Ritual ablution

⁶ In the absence of the Shaykh, his Khalifa, a qualified scholar, or a representative (like a Muqaddam) will assume this role.

➡ Attendees should not sleep and should strive to remain active and vigilant throughout the assembly. Water or rose water should be made readily available, allowing participants to remain refreshed;

➡ If feasible, all attendees should pray two units of prayer at the place of dhikr. If this is not possible, then those who are tasked with organising the gathering (Khadims⁷) should pray the two units;

➡ The Khadims should arrange the attendees in such that they are facing the Shaykh⁸, sat neatly in rows, and facing the qibla⁹ (if possible);

➡ The Khadims should always be present in serving the attendees. In essence, the Khadims are tasked with ensuring the needs of all attendees are taken care of throughout the duration of the gathering. There is much blessings in serving the Awliya, the Ulema, and those who love them. Itr should be applied and miswak made available. Shoes should be neatly stowed, and water made available;

➡ Attendees must uphold the honour of the Khadims throughout the assembly. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ has proven siyadah (leadership for the Khadims) and we must honour our leaders;

➡ Participants must remain calm and tranquil during the gathering. There is no need to make noise or disturb others in the gathering. A trance should not be forced, rather attendees should wait for

the blessings and be pleased with all that comes from Allah ﷻ;

➡ Attendees should refrain from yawning and coughing (if possible);

➡ Participants must not climb over another person's head, nor disturb anyone else;

➡ Partakers must maintain good opinions of all other attendees; this will bring everyone closer to the Mercy of Allah ﷻ.

➡ The young should honour the old and the old should have mercy upon the young;

➡ Attendees should never see themselves as better than others. This is an illness found in many and especially with those who claim knowledge, yet it is the most common cause not to receive blessings and betterment in gatherings;

➡ Greeting and sending salutations (i.e. handshakes and salaam) should be offered at the beginning and end of an assembly. If the gathering has started, then a person should sit and not disturb anyone else. A person should always aim to arrive and leave on time;

➡ If guests (Shayukh, Ulema, etc.) are invited to the gathering, and their arrival time is after the assembly has started, then the Khadims are tasked with ensuring that they enter at a time when they do not disturb the gathering. The

⁷ A Khadim is a person designated by the lead of the gathering, which may be the Shaykh, his Khalifa, a qualified scholar, or a Muqaddam; *the Khadim of the nation is its leader.*

⁸ In the absence of the Shaykh, his Khalifa, a qualified scholar, or a representative (like a Muqaddam) will assume this role.

⁹ The direction of the Ka'bah.

best time for this is usually when the current speaker finishes, and in this scenario a holding room should be made available (if possible);

➡ If food is to be served, then it should be offered and distributed in the best of manners by the Khadims. There should be no worldly talk or disturbances, as it is still a time when mercy and blessings descend from Allah. Food should also be consumed according to the Sunnah;

➡ If any food remains at the end of the gathering, then a third of it should be distributed firstly to the organisers of the gathering, then the last two thirds to the poor (e.g. a soup kitchen etc.).

4. SPIRITUAL COURTESIES ASSOCIATED WITH DHIKR GATHERINGS

Imam al-Sha'rani (Allah sanctify his secrets) in his book 'Adab al-Suhba' mentions twenty-six mannerisms that should be observed during the assemblages of dhikr. He split them into three sections: Before dhikr, during dhikr, and after dhikr:

Before Dhikr

1. Sincere repentance;
2. Performing ghusl and/or wudu;
3. Applying perfume (itr) to one's clothing and using the miswak to cleanse one's mouth;
4. Purifying one's intentions;
5. Maintain and remain steadfast in the reverence of Allah.

During Dhikr

¹⁰ The tashahhud position is the portion of salah/prayer where one sits on the ground with his knees.

6. Sitting in a clean environment and in the best of positions: tashahhud¹⁰;
7. Placing one's palms on the thighs;
8. Facing the qibla if alone, or sitting in a circle during assemblies of dhikr;
9. Perfuming the place of dhikr;
10. Maintaining sincerity throughout the gathering;
11. Maintaining truthfulness throughout the gathering;
12. That the food served be lawful (halal) and that one's attire also be lawful;
13. Making the place of dhikr ambient, i.e. it is dark;
14. Closing the physical eyes when performing dhikr (and opening the spiritual eyes);
15. Focusing throughout the dhikr;
16. Concentrating solely on Allah throughout the gathering;
17. Removing all others but Allah from one's heart;
18. To perform dhikr audibly;
19. To perform dhikr with full vigour;
20. Visualising one's Shaykh¹¹;
21. Avoid, to the best of one's ability, mistakes in pronunciation during dhikr.

After Dhikr

22. Censuring oneself momentarily and highlighting your flaws to yourself;
23. Avoid drinking ¹²anything;
24. Remaining silent;
25. Await for the opening and blessings (warid) derived from the dhikr;
26. Thank Allah for granting the ability to perform dhikr, and seek forgiveness for one's shortcomings.

¹¹ This is permitted. The Shaykh will remind you of Allah.

¹² The duration taken for two or three degree to pass, around 5-10 minutes.