

One prominent reference to Lady Fatimah's life is a divine formula, or glorification of Allah (swt), called *tasbih*, that her father, Prophet Muhammad, taught her when she requested assistance with her heavy responsibilities. Known as 'Tasbih of Lady Fatimah', its recitation has ever since become a common practice among Muslims after each daily ritual prayer. The invocation, which is a highly recommended act, can also be performed at any time.

This book studies the merits and history of the Tasbih of Lady Fatimah, and offers reflections on the notion of glorification in light of the Qur'an and hadiths. Tasbih is a comprehensive concept that includes every type of glorification, praise, and remembrance of Allah (swt). All social efforts, charity work, and community services are instances of tasbih. It is the best way to encounter Allah (swt), to acknowledge His perfection, and to experience an enlightened life of remembering Him and allowing Him to penetrate every aspect of our lives.

Huj. Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali is a graduate of the Islamic Seminaries of Qum, Iran. After completing his BA and MA degrees in western philosophy at the University of Tehran, he earned his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Manchester. He is currently the founding director of both the International Institute for Islamic Studies and the Risalat International Institute. His publications include: *Ethical Relativism: An Analysis of the Foundations of Morality* (2001), *Self-Knowledge* (2nd edition 2006), *Discovering Shi'a Islam* (8th edition 2014), *Self Development* (2016), *Lessons on Islamic Beliefs* (2016), *Unity of God and Unity in God* (2017), *Lessons on Islamic Morals* (2nd edition 2017), and *Lessons on Imamah and Wilayah* (3rd edition 2018). He is also co-editor of six volumes on Catholic-Shi'a dialogue as well as *Faith and Modernity: A Muslim-Christian Conversation* (2018). Dr Shomali is also the editor-in-chief of *Message of Thaqalayn: A Quarterly Journal of Islamic Studies*.

Tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a)



Mohammad Ali Shomali

Tasbih
of
Lady Fatimah (a)

Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali

Tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a)

Mohammad Ali Shomali

ISBN 978-1-8380779-1-4

© Risalat International Institute, 2020

First published in Great Britain in 2020

Risalat International Institute

www.risalat institute.com

Email: info@risalat institute.com

Contents

Introduction.....	5
The Merits of the Tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a).....	7
History and Sources of the Tasbih.....	13
When and How to Perform the Tasbih.....	21
Unpacking the Meaning of the Tasbih.....	29
Tasbih in the Qur'an and Hadiths.....	41
Bibliography.....	75

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Introduction

The well-known invocation called Tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) is a common practice among believers as it is recommended to recite it frequently, especially after the daily prayers. As a result of its common practice, there is great need to know more about its significance and meaning. In this book, we are going to reflect on the performance, the merits, history, and meaning of the Tasbiḥ of Lady Fatimah (a), particularly in light of a more general discussion on tasbih, or glorification of Allah (swt), to enable us to benefit more from it in our life journey.

There are many references to this tasbih. For example, when recommended supplications after the daily ritual prayer (*taʿqībāt*) are brought up in our major hadith compilations, this tasbih is highlighted. Moreover, this tasbih is also studied in the field of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) in association with daily prayers, and in the books on early history of Islam in association with the events of the life of Lady Fatimah (a) and Imam Ali (a).

The present work was initially conceived of as a series of three lectures delivered in Feb 2019 in London on the occasion of the demise anniversary of Lady Fatimah. The lectures were

later organised and revised with references checked and bibliographical data added. Sr. Shahnaze Safieddine edited and proofread the text. I take this opportunity to thank all who helped in preparation of this book and pray for their increased and unending *tawfiq*. Last but not the least, I want to express my deep gratitude to Allah (swt) for His guidance and support, and humbly request Him to place light and barakah in this modest work.

Mohammad Ali Shomali

4 June 2020

The Merits of the Tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a)

The renowned Tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a), a rosary—like prayer Muslims are recommended to recite, consists of a unique formula of glorifications. Before discussing the details shared in the upcoming chapters, this chapter will cover some hadiths regarding the benefits of this tasbih.

The best form of praising Allah (swt) and the best gift

Imam Ṣādiq (a) says:

مَا عُبِدَ اللَّهُ بِشَيْءٍ مِنَ التَّحْمِيدِ أَفْضَلَ مِنْ تَسْبِيحِ فَاطِمَةَ (ع) وَلَا
كَانَ شَيْءٌ أَفْضَلَ مِنْهُ لِنَحْلِهِ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص) فَاطِمَةَ (ع)

Allah has not been worshiped by any kind of praise better than the tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a). Had been anything a better gift, the Messenger of Allah (s) would have instead presented that to [Lady] Fatimah (a).¹

Avoids misfortune

Addressing Abū Hārūn al-Makfūf and emphasising on the commitment of the Ahl al-Bayt (a) to reciting the tasbih, Imam Ṣādiq (a) said:

¹ Kulaynī Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 343, no. 14.

يَا أَبَا هَارُونَ إِنَّا نَأْمُرُ صَبِيَانَنَا بِتَسْبِيحِ فَاطِمَةَ (ع) كَمَا نَأْمُرُهُمْ
بِالصَّلَاةِ فَالْزَمَهُ فَإِنَّهُ لَمْ يَلْزَمَهُ عَبْدٌ فَشَقِيَ

We ask our children to recite the tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) just as we ask them to perform their *ṣalāt*. You should commit yourself to [reciting] this. No servant of Allah has been committed to this tasbih and [then] experienced misfortune (*shiqāwah*) in his life.¹

Forgiveness and protection

Imam Kāẓim (a) says:

مَنْ سَبَّحَ تَسْبِيحَ الزَّهْرَاءِ (ع) ثُمَّ اسْتَغْفَرَ غُفْرَانَهُ وَهِيَ مِائَةٌ بِاللِّسَانِ
وَآلْفٌ فِي الْمِيزَانِ وَتَطْرُدُ الشَّيْطَانَ وَتَرْضَى الرَّحْمَنُ

Whoever recites tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) and then ask for forgiveness, Allah will forgive him. What is said on the tongue is 100 words but on the scale of the deeds, they are accepted as a thousand, since it repels Satan and pleases Allah.²

This hadith confirms that this tasbih serves as a means for forgiveness for the past and a protection for possible future calamities and dangers.

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Amālī li al-Ṣadūq*, p. 579, no. 16.

² Ibid. *Thawāb al-A'māl wa 'Iqāb al-A'māl*, p. 163.

An abundant *dhikr*

Dhikr, or remembrance of Allah (swt), has no limit. Imam Ṣādiq (a) says:

مَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا وَ لَهُ حَدٌّ يَنْتَهِي إِلَيْهِ إِلَّا الذِّكْرَ فَلَيْسَ لَهُ حَدٌّ يَنْتَهِي
إِلَيْهِ

All things have limits at which they eventually arrive, except *dhikr*, which is the one and only thing that has no limit.¹

For deeds such as fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca, and giving alms there is a limit, but for *dhikr* there is no limit. In every place and at every time we should remember Allah (swt). The moment we go to sleep, when we wake up, while we eat, when we go out, during study, and so forth. *Dhikr* is recommended at any time and in any place.

In another hadith, Imam Ṣādiq (a) quotes a passage from the Torah in which Allah (swt) said to Prophet Moses:

إِنَّ ذِكْرِي حَسَنٌ عَلَى كُلِّ حَالٍ

My remembrance is good in all circumstances.²

There is much emphasis on remembrance of Allah (swt) in the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an instructs us:

¹ Kulaynī Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 498, no. 1.

² Ibid. vol. 2, p. 497, no. 8.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا

O you who have faith! Remember Allah with abundant remembrance. (33:41)

But how can we remember Him in abundance? One shortcut is to remember Him in an effective way through a specific formula. Though His remembrance can be done in any language and formula, the best are those that are *ma'thūr*—transmitted to us through the Qur'an or Sunnah—because Allah (swt), His messenger and Imams know the best or most effective way of remembering Him. For example, the mandatory daily prayer (*ṣalāt*) is the best formal way of remembering Allah (swt):

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي

...maintain the prayer for My remembrance.
(20:14)

Allah (swt) Himself designed and introduced daily prayers to us so that we can remember Him in this way.

In addition to the obligatory *dhikr*, we also have recommended *dhikr*. We have the option of constructing a *dhikr* of our choice, although the transmitted ones (*ma'thūr*) are more effective and reliable, and of course, they should be performed exactly as they are taught to us by the Qur'an and Sunnah, like a medicine that must be taken as prescribed by the physician. For those who have embarked on spiritual journey, it is important to focus on the *dhikr* prescribed by their spiritual mentors rather than that of their own choice,

just as we cannot freely take medicine off the shelf of a pharmacy without a prescription.

Along with remembering Allah (swt) in abundance, the question arises as to how we must perform it. Tasbih is not a mere action of the tongue: it is to be done with one's life. The tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) serves as a helpful invocation for Allah to be sincerely remembered in the hearts. Though this tasbih may take only a few minutes, the power it contains is so much that it is considered "an abundant remembrance" (*dhikr-i kathīr*). Imam Ṣādiq (a) said:

تَسْبِيحُ فَاطِمَةَ الزَّهْرَاءِ (ع) مِنَ الذِّكْرِ الْكَثِيرِ الَّذِي قَالَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَ
جَلَّ: «اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا»

The tasbih of Fatimah al-Zahrā (a) is from the 'abundant *dhikr*' in which Allah, the Almighty, says, "*Remember Allah with abundant remembrance.*" (33:41)¹

This tasbih is one way of having abundant remembrance, bearing in mind that it is to be recited at a reasonable pace so as to joyfully reflect on the words and their meanings. Doing so verbally and wholeheartedly enables us to be in a state of remembrance throughout the day.

¹ Kulaynī Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 500, no. 4.

History and Sources of the Tasbih

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) is *ma'thūr* as it is a *dhikr* received through the Ahl al-Bayt (a). This chapter covers several hadiths—documented in primary Sunni and Shi'a sources—on the events that led to the incident of the tasbih.

In one example, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq in his book *Man lā Yaḥḍuruḥu al-Faqīh*¹ includes a tradition in which Imam Ali (a) narrates the story while in Medina. The Imam told a man from the tribe of Banī Sa'd, “Shall I tell you about something that relates to me and daughter of the Prophet (a)?” This shows that Imam Ali (a) wanted the people to know about the origin of this tasbih.

Before continuing, let us take a step back to that era. Many people in Medina had a difficult life: not only were they afflicted with ongoing wars and attacks, but Islam was still in its nascent stages, as the community was poverty-stricken with no financial stability. Those who especially suffered were

¹ This book is a hadith collection by the famous Shi'a hadith scholar Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummī, commonly known as Ibn Babawayh or Shaykh al-Ṣadūq. This work is included among the four main books of Shi'i hadith compilations.

the new migrants from Mecca to Medina, since they left their livelihood behind to save their lives. A group of them, called the Aṣḥāb al-Ṣuffah, were homeless, sheltering themselves day and night outside the mosque in difficult weather.

During peacetime, when wars and battles were at a temporary halt, Imam Ali (a) struggled continuously to earn some income, which meant longer hours outside the home. The pressure then weighed heavily on Lady Fatimah, who also had young children to care for.¹ She was responsible for carrying the water, with the rope leaving its marks on her shoulder; kneading the flour, which strained her hands; sweeping and dusting the home when carpets, tiles, and ceramic were unavailable; and the cooking, where the ashes and smoke throughout the house left its impact on her clothes.

Returning to the hadith, after Imam Ali (a) introduces the origins of the tasbih, he describes some of the toils Lady (a) Fatimah experienced, and said:

¹It could be a reason that the Prophet (a) had suggested that outside work was the responsibility of Imam Ali (a) and inside home was the responsibility of Lady Fatimah (a). Although according to hadith, Imam Ali (a) used to help as much as he could. For example, Imam Ṣādiq (a) said:

كَانَ أَمِيرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ صَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ يَحْتَطِبُ وَيَسْتَقِي وَيَكْنُسُ وَكَانَتْ فَاطِمَةُ
سَلَامُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهَا تَطْحَنُ وَتَعْجِنُ وَتَخْبِزُ

Amīr al-Mu'minīn (a) used to collect the firewood, collect water, and sweep the floor, and Fatimah (a) would grind flour, make dough, and make bread.
[Kulaynī Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 5, p. 86]

فَقُلْتُ لَهَا لَوْ أَتَيْتَ أَبَاكَ فَسَأَلْتَهُ خَادِمًا يَكْفِيكَ حَرًّا مَا أَنْتَ فِيهِ مِنْ
هَذَا الْعَمَلِ

So I told her: Perhaps you should go to your father and asked him for a servant so as to decrease your burdens.

According to the hadith, she then went to see the Prophet (s) and found him speaking with a group of men. Since she was too modest to go to the Prophet (s) at this time, she returned home. The Prophet (s), who had noticed her arrival, went to her home the next day and asked her:

يَا فَاطِمَةُ، مَا كَانَتْ حَاجَتُكَ أَمْسٍ عِنْدَ مُحَمَّدٍ

O Fatimah! What did you want yesterday from Muhammad?

Imam Ali (a) then spoke on her behalf, and explained to the Prophet (s) that Lady Fatimah (a) was finding it difficult to keep up with the work overload and was physically drained, so he recommended that she ask the Prophet for a helper. The Prophet then said:

أَفَلَا أَعَلَّمُكُمْ مَا هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ مِنَ الْخَادِمِ

Shall I teach you something which would be better for you than having a servant?

When the Prophet (s) explained the invocations that make up this unique tasbeeh, Lady Fatimah (a) said:

رَضِيتُ عَنِ اللَّهِ وَعَنْ رَسُولِهِ

I am pleased with Allah and His messenger.¹

From then on, this tasbeih was known as Tasbeih of Lady Fatimah (a).

¹ Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Man lā Yahḍuru al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, pp. 320-321, no. 947. The full hadith in Arabic is as follows:

وَرَوَى أَنَّ أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (ع) قَالَ لِرَجُلٍ مِنْ بَنِي سَعْدٍ: أَلَا أُحَدِّثُكَ عَنِّي وَعَنْ فَاطِمَةَ الزَّهْرَاءِ أَنَّهُمَا كَانَتَا عِنْدِي فَاسْتَقْتِ بِالْقُرْبَةِ حَتَّى أَثَرُ فِي صَدْرَهَا وَطَحْنَتْ بِالرَّحَى حَتَّى مَجَلَّتْ يَدَاهَا وَكَسَحَتِ الْبَيْتَ حَتَّى اغْبَرَّتْ نِيَابُهَا وَأَوْدَعَتْ تَحْتَ الْقَدْرِ حَتَّى دَكَنْتْ نِيَابُهَا فَاصَابَهَا مِنْ ذَلِكَ ضَرْ شَدِيدٍ فَقُلْتُ لَهَا لَوْ أَتَيْتِ أَبَاكَ فَسَأَلْتَهُ خَادِمًا يَكْفِيكَ حَرًّا مَا أَنتَ فِيهِ مِنْ هَذَا الْعَمَلِ. فَأَتَتْ النَّبِيَّ (ص) فَوَجَدَتْ عِنْدَهُ حُدَاثًا فَاسْتَحْيَتْ فَانْصَرَفَتْ فَعَلِمَ (ص) أَنَّهَا قَدْ جَاءَتْ لِحَاجَةٍ فَعَدَا عَلَيْنَا وَنَحْنُ فِي لِحَافِنَا فَقَالَ: السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ! فَسَكَنَّا وَاسْتَحْيَيْنَا لِمَكَانِنَا ثُمَّ قَالَ: السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ! فَسَكَنَّا ثُمَّ قَالَ: السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ! فَخَشِينَا إِنْ لَمْ نَرِدْ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَنْصَرِفَ وَكَانَ يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ فَيَسْلُمُ ثَلَاثًا فَإِنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ وَإِلَّا انْصَرَفَ فَقُلْنَا: وَعَلَيْكَ السَّلَامُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ادْخُلْ! فَدَخَلَ وَجَلَسَ عِنْدَ رُءُوسِنَا ثُمَّ قَالَ: يَا فَاطِمَةُ مَا كَانَتْ حَاجَتُكَ أُمْسَ عِنْدَ مُحَمَّدٍ فَخَشِيتُ إِنْ لَمْ نُنَجِّهِ أَنْ يَقُومَ فَأَخْرَجْتُ رَأْسِي فَقُلْتُ: أَنَا وَاللَّهِ أَخْبِرُكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ إِنَّهَا اسْتَقْتِ بِالْقُرْبَةِ حَتَّى أَثَرُ فِي صَدْرَهَا وَجَرَّتْ بِالرَّحَى حَتَّى مَجَلَّتْ يَدَاهَا وَكَسَحَتِ الْبَيْتَ حَتَّى اغْبَرَّتْ نِيَابُهَا وَأَوْدَعَتْ تَحْتَ الْقَدْرِ حَتَّى دَكَنْتْ نِيَابُهَا فَقُلْتُ لَهَا لَوْ أَتَيْتِ أَبَاكَ فَسَأَلْتَهُ خَادِمًا يَكْفِيكَ حَرًّا مَا أَنتَ فِيهِ مِنْ هَذَا الْعَمَلِ. قَالَ: أَفَلَا عَلِمْتُمَا مَا هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمَا مِنَ الْخَادِمِ إِذَا أَخَذْتُمَا مَمَامَكُمَا فَكَبِيرًا أَرْبَعًا وَثَلَاثِينَ تَكْبِيرَةً وَسَبَّحًا ثَلَاثًا وَثَلَاثِينَ تَسْبِيحَةً وَاحِدًا ثَلَاثًا وَثَلَاثِينَ تَحْمِيدَةً. فَأَخْرَجْتُ فَاطِمَةَ (ع) رَأْسَهَا وَقَالَتْ: رَضِيتُ عَنِ اللَّهِ وَعَنْ رَسُولِهِ رَضِيتُ عَنِ اللَّهِ وَعَنْ رَسُولِهِ.

This narration also is mentioned, for example, in Ibn Bābiwayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *ʿIṭāl al-Sharāʿī*, vol. 2, p. 366; Ṭabarsī, Faḍl ibn Ḥasan, *Makārim al-Akhḥlāq*, pp. 280-281.

Lady Fatima's beaming expression and quick acceptance of the tasbih as a solution to her struggles demonstrated her comprehension of - and trust in - the Prophet's recommendations. Instead of insisting on a helper or asking him for the outcome of this dhikr, she happily accepted this gift as that which is better than what Imam Ali initially proposed as a possible solution. Perhaps for laypeople at the time, it was not possible to see the impact of this invocation in the future, when hundreds of millions of people were to benefit from it. Perhaps it was Allah's plan that inspired Imam Ali (a) to suggest to Lady Fatima to ask the Prophet (s) for a helper and was gifted this exceptional tasbih instead.

The incident of the Tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) is also cited in Sunni sources with subtle differences in its account. For example, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj in his book *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, narrates from Imam Ali (a):

أَنَّ فَاطِمَةَ اشْتَكَتْ مَا تَلْقَى مِنَ الرَّحَى فِي يَدِهَا وَآتَى النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى
 اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ سَبِيًّا فَأَنْطَلَقَتْ فَلَمْ تَجِدْهُ وَلَقِيتُ عَائِشَةَ فَأَخْبَرَتْهَا
 فَلَمَّا جَاءَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَخْبَرَتْهُ عَائِشَةُ بِمَجِيئِ
 فَاطِمَةَ إِلَيْهَا

Fatimah complained about the pain caused to her hand by the mill. Some captives [slaves] had been brought to the Prophet (s). Fatimah went [to see the Prophet] but did not find him, but she met 'A'ishah and informed her. When

the Prophet (s) came, ‘A’ishah informed him about Fatimah coming to her.

The Prophet (s) then went to their home at night when they were about to go to sleep, and told them:

أَلَا أَعْلَمُكُمْ خَيْرًا مِمَّا سَأَلْتُمَا إِذَا أَخَذْتُمَا مَضَاجِعَكُمْ أَنْ تَكْبِرَ اللَّهُ
أَرْبَعًا وَثَلَاثِينَ وَتُسَبِّحَهُ ثَلَاثًا وَثَلَاثِينَ وَتَحْمَدَهُ ثَلَاثًا وَثَلَاثِينَ
فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ مِنْ خَادِمٍ

Shall I not teach you something better than what you asked for? When you go to your bed, say *Allahu Akbar* thirty-four times, say *alḥamdulillāh* thirty-three times, and say *subḥānallāh* thirty-three times. That is better for you than a servant.

After this hadith, Muslim mentions several other narrations of this event, in which Imam Ali (a) added to one of them at the end:

مَا تَرَكْتُهُ مِنْذُ سَمِعْتُهُ مِنَ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قِيلَ لَهُ وَلَا
لَيْلَةَ صِفِّينَ قَالَ وَلَا لَيْلَةَ صِفِّينَ

I have never failed to recite it ever since. Somebody asked, “Even on the night of the Battle of Şifffin?” He said, “Not even on the night of the Battle of Şifffin.”¹

¹Al-Nayshābūrī, Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Dhikr wa al-Du‘ā, Bāb 19, no. 2727.

This narration also is mentioned for example, in: Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū ‘Abdillāh, *Musnad al-Imam Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, p. 130, Musnad Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, no. 1141; Al-Tirmidhī, Muhammad ibn Isā, *al-Jamī‘ al-Kabīr*, vol. 5, no. 3408; Bukhārī, Muhammad ibn Ismā‘īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb-u Farḍ al-Khumus, Bāb-u al-Dalīl ‘alā anna al-khumus li nawā’ib Rasūl al-Allah (s) wa al-masākīn. The full hadith in Arabic is as follows:

حَدَّثَنَا عَلِيٌّ: «أَنَّ فَاطِمَةَ عَلَيْهَا السَّلَامُ اشْتَكَتْ مَا تَلْقَى مِنَ الرَّحَى مِمَّا تَطْحَنُ فَبَلَغَهَا أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَتَى بِسَبِيٍّ فَاتَتْهُ تَسْأَلُهُ خَادِمًا فَلَمْ تُوَافِقْهُ فَذَكَرَتْ لِعَائِشَةَ فَجَاءَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَذَكَرَتْ ذَلِكَ عَائِشَةُ لَهُ فَاتَانَا وَ قَدْ دَخَلْنَا مَضَاجِعَنَا فَذَهَبْنَا لِنَقُومَ فَقَالَ: عَلَى مَكَانِكُمَا حَتَّى وَجَدْتُ بَرْدَ قَدَمَيْهِ عَلَى صَدْرِي فَقَالَ: أَلَا أَدُلُّكُمَا عَلَى خَيْرٍ مِمَّا سَأَلْتُمَا إِذَا أَخَذْتُمَا مَضَاجِعَكُمَا فَكَبِّرَا اللَّهَ أَرْبَعًا وَ ثَلَاثِينَ وَ أَحْمَدًا ثَلَاثًا وَ ثَلَاثِينَ وَ سَبِّحَا ثَلَاثًا وَ ثَلَاثِينَ فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمَا مِمَّا سَأَلْتُمَا.

Al-Nisā’ī in his book *Sunan al-Nisā’ī al-Kubrā*, vol. 9, p. 63, no. 9898, mentions some narrations about the recommendation of doing this *tasbīḥ* after the prayer. He also mentions another narrative about this *tasbīḥ* in which the Prophet (s) mentions the merits of this *tasbīḥ* to some poor people who complained to him that their poverty is causing their inability to perform their obligations as well as wealthy people can:

جَاءَ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالُوا: ذَهَبَ أَهْلُ الدُّثُورِ مِنَ الْأَمْوَالِ بِالدرَجَاتِ الْعُلَى وَ النَّعِيمِ الْمُقِيمِ. يُصَلُّونَ كَمَا نُصَلِّي وَ يَصُومُونَ كَمَا نَصُومُ وَ لَهُمْ فَضُولُ أَمْوَالٍ يَحْجُونَ مِنْهَا وَ يَعْتَمِرُونَ وَ يُجَاهِدُونَ وَ يَتَصَدَّقُونَ قَالَ: «أَلَا أُخْبِرُكُمْ بِأَمْرٍ إِنْ أَخَذْتُمْ بِهِ أَدْرَكْتُمْ مِنْ سَبَقِكُمْ وَ لَمْ (يُدْرِكْكُمْ) أَحَدٌ بَعْدَكُمْ وَ كُنْتُمْ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَنْتُمْ بَيْنَ (ظَهْرَانِيهِ) إِلَّا أَحَدًا عَمِلَ مِثْلَ أَعْمَالِكُمْ تَسْبِيحُونَ وَ تَحْمَدُونَ وَ تُكَبِّرُونَ خَلْفَ كُلِّ صَلَاةٍ ثَلَاثًا وَ ثَلَاثِينَ».

The poor [emigrants] came to the Messenger of Allah (s) and said, “The wealthy have gone with the highest ranks and lasting bliss. They offer *ṣalāt* (prayer) as we offer it; they observe fast as we do; (and as they are wealthy) they perform *hajj* and ‘umrah, and go for *jihād*, and they spend in charity but we cannot, and they free the slaves

Today, hundreds of millions of people recite and benefit from this “abundant” *dhikr*, titled by the Ahl al-Bayt as Tasbih of Lady Fatimah, which is considered the best form of praising Allah and that which staves off misfortune and offers a protection. The Lady happily received this gift from the Prophet, which exhibited her deep trust in her father’s recommendations during a difficult era when such a solution seemed far-fetched. The above-mentioned hadiths from both Shi’a and Sunni sources give an account of the incident of this unique *dhikr*. The upcoming chapter covers when and how to perform the tasbih.

but we are unable to do so. “The Messenger of Allah (s) said, “Shall I not teach you something with which you may overtake those who surpassed you and with which you will surpass those who will come after you? None will excel you unless he who does which you do. You should recite: *tasbīḥ*, *tabkīr* and *taḥmīd* thirty-three times after each *ṣalāt*.”

When and How to Perform the Tasbih

After mentioning the narrative behind this tasbih and its sources in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on the recommended times to recite it and the accurate method in doing so, including its number and order.

A) When to recite the tasbih

This tasbih is known as one of the best *ta‘qībāt*.¹ Imam Ṣādiq (a) said:

تَسْبِيحُ فَاطِمَةَ (ع) فِي كُلِّ يَوْمٍ فِي دُبْرِ كُلِّ صَلَاةٍ أَحَبُّ إِلَيَّ مِنْ
صَلَاةِ أَلْفِ رَكْعَةٍ فِي كُلِّ يَوْمٍ

[To recite] every day after every *ṣalah*, the tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) is better to me than [saying] one thousand *rak‘ah* of recommended prayers every day.²

The phrase “after *ṣalāt*” by itself may mean immediately after the ritual prayer, a few minutes after it, or half an hour

¹ Al-Khū‘ī, al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim, *al-Urwah al-Wuthqā*, vol. 1, p. 523:

الثاني [من التعقيبات للصلاة]: تسبيح الزهراء (صلوات الله عليها) وهو أفضلها على ما ذكره جملة من العلماء.

Ta‘qībāt are supplications and invocations that are recommended to be done after ritual prayers.

² Ḥurr ‘Āmilī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Wasāil al-Shr‘ah*, vol. 6, p. 444.

afterwards. To clarify what is meant by “after *ṣalāt*,” we refer to another hadith from Imam Ṣādiq (a):

مَنْ سَبَّحَ تَسْبِيحَ فَاطِمَةَ الزَّهْرَاءِ (ع) قَبْلَ أَنْ يَنْثِي رِجْلَيْهِ مِنْ صَلَاةِ
الْفَرِيضَةِ غُفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُ وَلَيَبْدَأُ بِالتَّكْبِيرِ

Whoever says tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) before flexing his legs, Allah would forgive him. The tasbih should be begin with takbir [*Allahu Akbar*].¹

In other words, we are to recite it immediately or at least soon after prayer finishes, before we move away or stand up for another prayer.

It is noteworthy that this tasbih is not exclusive to the obligatory daily prayers: it is recommended to be done after any ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*).² For example, Shaykh Ṭūsī in *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* mentions a hadith from Imam Ṣādiq (a) in which the Imam (a) explained a recommended prayer to be recited in the Month of Ramaḍān, after which the tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) should be recited.³ It is also mentioned by Shaykh

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 3, p. 342.

² Al-Khū‘ī, al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim, *al-Urwah al-Wuthqā*, vol. 1, p. 523:

أَنَّ الظَّاهِرَ عَدَمَ اخْتِصَاصِهِ بِالْفَرَائِضِ بَلْ هُوَ مُسْتَحَبٌّ عَقِبَ كُلِّ صَلَاةٍ.

³ Ṭūsī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, vol. 3, pp. 66-67. The Arabic text is as follows:

فَإِذَا سَلَّمْتَ فِي الرُّكْعَتَيْنِ سَبَّحْ تَسْبِيحَ فَاطِمَةَ الزَّهْرَاءِ (ع) وَهُوَ اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ أَرْبَعًا
وَتَلَاثِينَ مَرَّةً وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ تَلَاثًا وَتَلَاثِينَ مَرَّةً وَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ تَلَاثًا وَتَلَاثِينَ مَرَّةً
فَوَاللَّهِ لَوْ كَانَ شَيْئًا أَفْضَلَ مِنْهُ لَعَلَّمَهُ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ (ص) إِيَّاهَا.

Tūsī that this tasbih should be done after the recommended prayer after reciting one of the Salutations (*Ziyārah*) of Imam Ḥusayn (a).¹

In fact, the whole concept of *ta'qibāt* - recitations after the daily prayer - is a beautiful one. When we have respected guests, we do not merely wait for them to enter our home and just say goodbye when they leave. We go outside of our homes to welcome them, and at the end respectfully escort them to the door or even to the road. *Ṣalāt* is like this: it is so important that we should prepare ourselves to welcome it. To show our respect, we begin with *adhān* and *iqāmah*, which is a kind of welcome. And when the *ṣalāt* ends, instead of immediately leaving the prayer mat, we joyfully linger while reciting some *ta'qibāt*, because it demonstrates our respect for prayer and allows for the light we achieved in that prayer to penetrate. Performing *ta'qibāt* somehow completes the prayer.

It is moreover interesting that Muslims are taught that the best of *ta'qibāt* of *ṣalāt* is the tasbih of Lady Fatimah, which is another way we display our respect for her. Hence, we glorify

¹ Tūsī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Tāhḏhīb al-Aḥkām*, vol. 6, p. 64. The Arabic text is as follows:

ثُمَّ انْصَرَفْ إِلَى عِنْدِ الرَّأْسِ فَصَلِّ رَكَعَتَيْنِ. تَقْرَأُ فِي الْأُولَى مِنْهُمَا فَاتِحَةَ الْكِتَابِ
وَسُورَةَ الرَّحْمَنِ وَفِي الثَّانِيَةِ فَاتِحَةَ الْكِتَابِ وَبِئْسَ فَإِذَا سَلَّمْتَ فَسَبِّحْ تَسْبِيحَ
فَاطِمَةَ الزَّهْرَاءِ (ع).

Allah (swt), and we also remember the Lady (a) because this was gifted to us through her.

Apart from being a highly recommended (*mustahab mu'akkad*) act after *ṣalāt*, the tasbih of Lady Fatimah is by itself an independent recommended act that can be performed anytime.¹ It is also one of the supplications and invocations recommended by the Ahl al-Bayt (a) before going to sleep.²

B) How to perform the tasbih

The tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) consist of three phrases:

- *Allahu Akbar* (takbir - 'Allah is greater' [than any description])
- *Alḥamdulillāh* (tahmid - 'Praise be to Allah')
- *Subḥānallāh* (tasbih - 'Glory be to Allah')

¹ Al-Khū'ī, al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim, *al-'Urwah al-Wuthqā*, vol. 1, p. 523:

والظاهر استحبابه في غير التعقيب أيضاً بل في نفسه نعم هو مؤكّد فيه

² Tūsī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām*, vol. 6, p. 64. The Arabic text is as follows:

امام باقر (ع): إِذَا تَوَسَّدَ الرَّجُلُ يَمِينَهُ فَلْيَقُلْ «بِسْمِ اللَّهِ اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْلَمْتُ نَفْسِي
إِلَيْكَ وَ وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِي إِلَيْكَ وَ فَوَضَعْتُ أَمْرِي إِلَيْكَ وَ أَلْبَسْتُ ظَهْرِي إِلَيْكَ
تَوَكَّلْتُ عَلَيْكَ رَهْبَةً مِنْكَ وَ رَغْبَةً إِلَيْكَ لَامِلِجاً وَ لَا مَنَاجِي مِنْكَ إِلَّا إِلَيْكَ
أَمَنْتُ بِكِتَابِكَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلْتَ وَ بِرَسُولِكَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلْتَ» ثُمَّ يُسَبِّحُ تَسْبِيحَ فَاطِمَةَ
الزَّهْرَاءِ (ع)

In several hadiths, these phrases are mentioned in various orders, especially *alḥamdulillāh* and *subḥānallāh*. For example, in one version of the hadith regarding the event in which the Prophet (s) gifted this tasbih to Lady Fatimah (a), the order is: “*Subḥānallāh* - *Alḥamdulillāh* - *Allahu Akbar*.”¹ However, another hadith states the following order:

أَفَلَا أَعْلَمُكُمْ مَا هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ مِنَ الْخَادِمِ إِذَا أَخَذْتُمْ مَنَاكُمْ
فَكَبَّرَ أَرْبَعًا وَثَلَاثِينَ تَكْبِيرَةً وَ سَبَّحَا ثَلَاثًا وَ ثَلَاثِينَ تَسْبِيحَةً وَ
أَحْمَدَا ثَلَاثًا وَ ثَلَاثِينَ تَحْمِيدَةً

Shall I tell you a thing which is better than what you asked me for? When you go to your beds, recite *Allahu Akbar* 34 times, *subḥānallāh* 33 times, and *alḥamdulillāh* 33 times.²

Another hadith is narrated by Mohammad ibn ‘Udhāfir who, with his father, went to Imam Ṣādiq. He says that in response to his father’s question about tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a), the Imam said:

¹ Ibn Bābiwayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, ‘*Ilal al-Sharā’i’*, vol. 2, p. 6. The full text is Arabic is as follows:

أَفَلَا أَعْلَمُكُمْ مَا هُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ مِنَ الْخَادِمِ إِذَا أَخَذْتُمْ مَنَاكُمْ فَسَبَّحَا ثَلَاثًا وَ
ثَلَاثِينَ وَ أَحْمَدَا ثَلَاثًا وَ ثَلَاثِينَ وَ كَبَّرَا أَرْبَعًا وَ ثَلَاثِينَ

² Ibn Bābiwayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Man lā Yaḥḍuruḥu al-Faqīh*, vol. 1, pp. 321-322, no. 947.

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ حَتَّى أَحْصَى أَرْبَعًا وَثَلَاثِينَ مَرَّةً ثُمَّ قَالَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ حَتَّى
بَلَغَ سَبْعًا وَسِتِّينَ ثُمَّ قَالَ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ حَتَّى بَلَغَ مِائَةً يُحْصِيهَا بِيَدِهِ
جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً

Allahu Akbar until it reached 34 times, [recite] *alḥamdulillāh* until it reached 67 (together with *Allahu Akbar*), and then *subḥānallāh* until it became 100. He counted them with his hand as one unit [of hundred].¹

In another hadith, Abū Baṣīr narrates from Imam Ṣādiq (a) regarding this tasbih:

تَبْدَأُ بِالتَّكْبِيرِ أَرْبَعًا وَثَلَاثِينَ ثُمَّ التَّحْمِيدَ ثَلَاثًا وَثَلَاثِينَ ثُمَّ التَّسْبِيحَ
ثَلَاثًا وَثَلَاثِينَ

You begin with *takbīr* 34 times, *taḥmīd* 33 times after that, then tasbih 33 times.²

To verify the authenticity and determine the meaning of differing hadiths on the order of this tasbih, we refer to the jurists (*mujtahids*). At least thirteen of contemporary marāji' (mujtahids that can be referred to and followed in practical rulings of Islam) have recommended the common order,

¹ Hurr 'Āmilī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, vol. 6, p. 444, no. 8398.

² Ibid. p. 445, no. 8399.

which begins with takbir, then tahmid, and ends with tasbih. They also say it is accepted to recite tasbih before tahmid.¹

There are also some hadiths in which it is recommended to recite “*lā ilāha illallāh*” [there is no god but Allah] once after the tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) finishes. Of course, this is not part of the tasbih. For example, in a hadith from Imam Ṣādiq (a) we read:

مَنْ سَبَّحَ اللَّهَ فِي دُبُرِ الْفَرِيضَةِ تَسْبِيحَ فَاطِمَةَ الزَّهْرَاءِ (ع) الْمَائَةَ
مَرَّةً وَاتَّبَعَهَا بِلَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ غُفِرَ اللَّهُ لَهُ

Whoever glorifies Allah after each obligatory *ṣalāt* with the tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) –

¹ Marājiʿ, *Tawdīḥ al-Masāʾil (marājiʿ)*, compiled by Uṣūlī, Iḥsān and Banī Hāshimī, Muhammad Ḥasan, vol. 1, p. 606-607, no. 1122. The full text translated into English is as follows:

It is recommended (*mustaḥab*) that after prayers one engages himself in *taʿqībāt*, i.e. saying *dhikr*, reciting *duʿā*’s, and reciting the Qur’an. It is better that he recites *taʿqībāt* facing *qiblah* before he moves from his place and before his *wuḍūʿ*, *ghusl*, or *ṭayammum* becomes invalid. It is not necessary that the *taʿqībāt* be in Arabic, but it is better to recite what has been instructed in the books of *duʿā*’s. One of the *taʿqībāt* that has been highly recommended is the tasbiḥ of Lady Fatimah al-Zahrā (a) which must be said in this order: thirty-four times *Allahu Akbar*, then thirty-three times *alḥamdulillāh*, and then thirty-three times *subḥānallāh*. It is possible to say the *subḥānallāh* before *alḥamdulillāh*, but it is better to say it after it.

which is hundred – and after that recites *lā ilāha illallāh*, he would be forgiven.¹

The Tasbih of Lady Fatimah—which consists of reciting “*Allahu Akbar*” 34 times, “*alhamdulillāh*” 33 times, and “*subhanllāh*” 33 times—is a highly recommended glorification after the ritual prayers and before going to sleep. It is indeed a blessing and a gift to Muslims to recite in the *ta’qibāt* of salat not only to demonstrate respect and love for Allah by remaining longer on the prayer mat, but also as a way to display our respect and love for Lady Fatimah (a).

¹ Kulaynī, Muhammad, *al-Kāfī*, vol.3, p. 342.

Unpacking the Meaning of the Tasbih

In order to understand better why so much emphasis has been put on reciting tasbih of Lady Fatimah we need to know more about the whole notion of tasbih in Islam. This chapter covers the literal and technical meanings of tasbih, tahmid and takbiir and their relations. The final chapter will delve more into the notion of tasbih from a Qur’anic perspective.

a. The meaning of ‘tasbih’

The term ‘tasbih’ has been used in different forms and derivatives in the Qur’an. It comes from the root ‘*sa-ba-ḥa*’ which means ‘to swim’ or ‘to move fast in the water.’¹ It is a kind of smooth movement as that of a swimmer. It may be that that this root has been used in the Qur’an for the movement of the sun and the moon:

وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ كُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ

“...the sun and the moon, each swimming in an orbit.” (21:33)

¹ Rāghib, Ḥusayn, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur’an*, p. 392:

السَّبْحُ: المَرَّ السَّرِيعُ فِي الْمَاءِ، وَفِي الْهَوَاءِ

The link between the literal and technical meanings of tasbih may not be simple to understand, but it can be that a person who is in the state of glorification shows no resistance towards Allah (swt). He is so attracted to Allah while remembering Him, and knows Him for all His perfections that he just wants to move smoothly towards Him. Thus, tasbih stands for our smooth and voluntary movement towards Allah (swt).

Of course, everyone is going towards Allah (swt), as the Qur'an says:

إِنَّا لِلّٰهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

Indeed, we belong to Allah, and to Him do we indeed return. (2:156)

However, doing so voluntarily would be with ease and without pain, and this helps us become closer to Him. Allah says regarding those who do not voluntarily do so:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ

O man! You are laboring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him. (84:6)

Hence, there are those who find it a heavy task to move towards Allah and do so with pain or even force, since they will undoubtedly meet Him on the Day of Judgment regardless of their achievements or lack thereof. Because they have not equipped themselves with virtuous traits and deeds,

they are not prepared and willing to meet Him, and Allah, in turn, is not pleased with them.

On the whole, there are people who move towards Allah (swt) unwillingly and those who move towards Allah (swt) joyfully and easily, like swiftly swimming, allowing themselves to be taken by the water of Allah's mercy.

With regards to the technical meaning, according to Arabic and the Qur'anic dictionaries, tasbih means “*tanzīh*,” which means ‘to disassociate anything bad from Allah (swt).’¹ In other words, the action of tasbih is disassociating anything that is a matter of imperfection or immorality from Allah. For example, tasbih means that Allah (swt) is not a physical object (*jism*), does not have a particular time or location and does not do any act of injustice.

¹For example, refer to the following:

Rāghib, Ḥusayn, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'an*, p. 392:

التسبيح تنزيه الله تعالى

Ibn al-Athīr, Majd al-Dīn, *al-Nihāyah fī al-Hadīth wa al-Athar*, vol. 2, p. 331:

اصل التسبيح: التنزيه و التقديس و الثبوت من النقائص، ثم استعمل في مواضع
تقرب منه اتساعاً، يُقال سُبِّحَ، أُسَبِّحَ تسبيحاً، فمعنى سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ: تنزيه الله

Al-Jawharī, Ismā'il, *al-Ṣiḥāḥ, Tāj al-Lughah wa al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-'Arabīyyah*, vol. 1, p. 372:

و التَّسْبِيحُ: التنزيه. و سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ، معناه التنزيه لله، نُصِبَ عَلَى الْمَصْدَرِ كَأَنَّهُ
قال: أَبْرَأُ اللَّهَ مِنَ السُّوءِ بَرَاءَةً.

Ṭarīḥī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *Majma' al-Baḥrayn*, vol. 2, p. 369:

التَّسْبِيحُ: الْأَصْلُ فِيهِ التَّنْزِيهِ وَ التَّقْدِيسُ وَ الثَّبُوتُ مِنَ النِّقَاطِصِ

b. The meaning of ‘hamd’

To understand the relation between tasbih and hamd, we need first to explore the meaning of hamd.

When we do tasbih, we are actually doing two things: one is to negate bad things and another is to affirm good things. When it comes to qualities that are a matter of limitations like having parts, partner, time, and space, we negate them from Allah (swt). When it comes to qualities like knowledge, power, and will, we affirm that Allah (swt) has all these qualities. We cannot think of a being which does not have negative qualities and at the same lacks their opposite perfections. So we have two wings when it comes to Allah’s attributes: the wing of glory, *jalāl*, and the wing of beauty, *jamāl*. As taught in theology (*aqā'id*), divine attributes are divided into two: attributes of beauty (*ṣifāt al-jamāl*) and attributes of glory (*ṣifāt al-jalāl*). Here is where hamd comes in.

Hamd pertains to those things that are attributes of beauty. Hamd is normally defined as ‘uttering a praise about something good and beautiful that someone has out of their own choice and decision.’¹

¹ Al-Najafī, Muhammad Ḥasan, *Jawāhir al-Kalām fī Sharḥ Sharā’i‘ al-Islām*, vol. 10, p. 100. The original text is as follows:

هو الثناء باللسان على الجميل الاختياري

Hamd requires that I praise you for your good qualities and good actions provided that you played some role in acquiring them. But if I show my appreciation for something that you have been gifted by Allah (swt) and you had no role in achieving it, such as having a beautiful face or voice, technically this is not called hamd; rather, it is called *madḥ*. The same applies when I praise an object, such as a flower; it is *madḥ*, and not hamd.¹

¹In this regard, Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī commenting on Surah al-Fāṭiḥah says:

It has been said that *al-ḥamd* is to praise someone for a good acquired by his own intention. *Al-madḥ* (also translated as praise) is more general and is used to praise even that good which someone is given without his will and power. If you praise someone for his benevolence, you may use either word *al-ḥamd* or *al-madḥ*, but if you want to praise a pearl for its lustre, you may use the verb driven from *al-madḥ*, but not *al-ḥamd*, because the pearl has not acquired that lustre by its own will and power...

Allah says, “*That is Allah, your Lord, the Creator of everything*” (40:62). Whatever there is, is created by Allah. Again, He says, “*Who made good everything that He has created*” (32:7). Everything is good because it has been created by Allah and is attributed to Him. In other words, a thing becomes good because it is created by Allah; and everything created by Him is good. Every creature is good and beautiful because Allah has made it so; and every good and beautiful thing is created by Allah, attributed to Him. Allah says, “*He is Allah, the One, the Subduer (of all)*” (39:4) and “*And the faces are humbled before the Living, the Self subsistent Allah*” (20:111). In other words, He has created the creatures by His own knowledge, power and will, and not because He was compelled by someone else to do so. Therefore, everything is His own good work, done by His own will.

It is noteworthy that the praise, or hamd, that we do for others with good qualities and actions does not necessarily have to relate to us or benefit us to be deemed a ‘praise.’ If I see, for example, someone who studies well, raises good children, or offers educational services while I am not benefiting from them personally, hamd can still be applied. However, for something that has benefited us, in addition to hamd, we can also apply *shukr*, or gratitude, although hamd must be performed with the tongue, while gratitude can be done with the tongue, heart, or organs through actions.

What, then, is the relationship between hamd and tasbih?

For praising Allah (swt), we mainly use hamd to have maximum recognition of the beautiful qualities and actions of Allah (swt), whether we are personally benefitting from them

The above discourse was about Allah’s action. Regarding His names, He said, “*Allah is He besides Whom there is no Allah; His are the very best names*” (20:8) and “*And Allah’s are the best names; therefore, call on Him thereby, and leave alone those who violate the sanctity of His names*” (7:180). Allah is good in His names and good in His actions; and that every good and beauty emanates from Him.

Therefore, Allah is praised for His good names as He is praised for His good actions. Every praise uttered by any speaker for any good deed is addressed to Allah only; because every good (which is the object of praise) emanates from Him only. In short, to Him belongs the species of the praise and all and every praise. [Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’an*, vol. 1, p. 19]

or not. Moreover, His good deeds and qualities are not forced on Him or granted to Him from the outside: it is His benevolent essence that is the source and origin of all the good that we acknowledge in the world.

When a believer looks at Allah (swt) and His creation, he does not see anything bad: he sees everything to be beautiful as everything reflects the knowledge, wisdom, and the mercy of Allah (swt). Hence, a believer does both *hamd* (praise) and *tasbih* (*tanzih*; glorification).

As believers, our lives should be an embodiment of *tasbih* and *hamd*. We should tune ourselves to Allah (swt) so that we bring good to the world and stop the corruption from ourselves and then around us. Each of us should be a source of light, a source of morality and virtues, and at the same time a barrier and obstacle for someone who wants to do mischief, which is ‘enjoining good’ (*amr bi al-ma‘rūf*) and ‘prohibiting evil’ (*nahy ‘an al-munkar*). It may start with tongue, but our whole existence should do *amr bi al-ma‘rūf* and *nahy ‘an al-munkar*. A good believer is the one whom, when people see him, they feel embarrassed to do prohibited actions (*ḥarām*). And a better believer is someone whom when people even think of him or remember him, they are motivated to refrain from *ḥarām*. It is not uncommon that if you have a pious mother or father, as soon as you remember them, you would refrain from doing wrong. A good believer not only does good things, but his words, actions, and even his

remembrance invite people and encourage them to do good. This is the real case of doing hamd and tasbih. The prophets are excellent examples of this, and we are responsible to strive to become like this as much as possible.

c. The meaning of ‘takbir’

The first part of the tasbih of Lady Fatimah is the takbir. Regarding the meaning and significance of this phrase, we turn to several hadiths. In one tradition, Imam Ṣādiq (a) indicates the value of takbir:

أَكْثَرُوا مِنَ التَّهْلِيلِ وَالتَّكْبِيرِ فَإِنَّهُ لَيْسَ شَيْءٌ أَحَبُّ إِلَى اللَّهِ مِنَ
التَّهْلِيلِ وَالتَّكْبِيرِ

Say *tahlīl* and takbir in abundance because there is nothing more loveable to Allah than *tahlīl* and takbir.¹

In another hadith, Imam Ṣādiq (a) asked the narrator (Jumay’ ibn ‘Umayr), “From what Allah is greater?” He replied, “Allah (swt) is greater than everything.” The Imam then said, “Is there anything next to Allah that Allah is greater than it?”² The narrator asked Imam (a), “So what is the meaning of *Allahu Akbar*?” Imam (a) replied:

¹ Hurr ‘Āmilī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Wasāil al-Shrāh*, vol. 7, p. 190.

² This meant that in His level, there is no one or nothing *with* Him. Everything is *under* Him. This comparison is wrong. We cannot compare anything with Allah (swt) and say that thing is great (*kabīr*) and Allah is greater (*akbar*).

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ أَنْ يُوصَفَ

Allah is greater than any description.¹

It means Allah (swt) is too great to be described.

In another hadith, a person uttered *Allahu Akbar* next to Imam Ṣādiq (a). The Imam (a) asked him, “Allah is greater than what?” He answered, “Than everything.” Then the Imam (a) said: “(by saying that He is greater than everything) You have defined and limited Him.” Then he asked, “What should I say?” Imam (a) said, “Allah is greater than any description.”²

Allah (swt) is not one of us so that we can compare Him with us, and claim that He is greater than us. The Qur’an itself says that it is wrong to assert that “*Surely Allah is the third of the three.*”³ But the Qur’an also says:

¹ Ibid. p. 191. The full text in Arabic is as follows:

أَيُّ شَيْءٍ اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ فَقُلْتُ اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ فَقَالَ وَكَانَ ثُمَّ شَيْءٌ فَيَكُونُ
أَكْبَرَ مِنْهُ فَقُلْتُ فَمَا هُوَ قَالَ اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ أَنْ يُوصَفَ

² Hurr ‘Āmilī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Wasāil al-Shrāh*, vol. 7, p. 191.

The full text in Arabic is as follows:

قَالَ رَجُلٌ عِنْدَهُ: «اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ» فَقَالَ: «اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ؟» فَقَالَ: «مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ» فَقَالَ أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ (ع): «حَدِّثْهُ» فَقَالَ الرَّجُلُ: «كَيْفَ أَقُولُ؟» قَالَ: «قُلِ
اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ أَنْ يُوصَفَ»

³ The Qur’an, 5:73: «ثَلَاثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ»

مَا يَكُونُ مِنْ نَجْوَى ثَلَاثَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ رَابِعُهُمْ وَلَا خَمْسَةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ سَادِسُهُمْ

There is no secret talk among three, but He is their fourth, nor among five but He is their sixth. (58:7)

The depth of the Qur'an is amazing. Allah being the third of three is wrong, and yet Allah as the fourth of three is correct. If you say third of three, it means there are two things and Allah is third, referring to Allah (swt) as separated from them. But there is no group of people whispering unless Allah (swt) is *with* them as the fourth of three. He is not *in* their level: not the fourth of four, or the third of three.

Hence, there is nothing that we can compare with Allah (swt), even with His messenger and angels, and say Allah (swt) is greater, more merciful, more kind, and so forth. All these comparisons are in our level of creation.

We cannot attempt to even describe Him. Who are we to describe Him? We can describe something when we have understood it, and there are things that we cannot describe even if we understand or experience them. For example, can you describe love of a mother for her child? Or can you describe love in general? Mawlawī¹ says:

¹ Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (1207 – 1273), also known as Mawlawi, was a 13th century Persian poet, jurisprudent, theologian, and Sufi mystic originally from Greater Khorasan.

No matter what description I am going to give,
I am embarrassed when I am thinking of love.
My description falls short.¹

There are concepts that we understand and are able to describe, and there are things that we understand, and yet cannot describe. But how can we describe something we cannot understand? Even the Prophet (s) cannot understand Allah (swt) perfectly:

سُبْحَانَكَ مَا عَرَفْنَاكَ حَقَّ مَعْرِفَتِكَ

Glory be to You! We did not understand You
as You should be understood.²

The only one who knows Allah (swt) perfectly is Himself. Therefore, when *Allahu Akbar* means ‘He is greater than any description’, the practical impact of it would be that He is also greater than any other aim that we may choose for our lives. How can we replace Allah (swt) with money, power, position, or fame? Nothing other than Allah (swt) can be chosen as the ultimate goal for our lives. Imam Sajjād (a) said in his prayers:

¹ Mawlawī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *Mathnawī Mawlawī*, daftar awwal:

هرچه گویم عشق را شرح و بیان چون به عشق آیم خجل باشم از آن

² Ibn Jumhūr, Muhammad, ‘*Awālī al-Li’ālī al-‘Azīziyyah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Dīniyyah*’, vol. 4, p. 132, no. 227.

يَا أَمَلِي وَبَغْيَتِي وَيَا سُوْلِي وَمَنْيَتِي

O my hope and my aim! O my wish and my want!¹

He is the only thing that we can think of as a goal and aim. This is the true meaning of *Allahu Akbar*.

The three praises that make up the Tasbih of Lady Fatimah are tasbih, hamd, and takbir. Tasbih is one who swiftly and joyfully moves towards Allah (swt), permitting themselves to be taken away by Allah's vast mercy; hamd is a praise for everything that reflects Allah's knowledge and wisdom; and takbir is attesting to Allah's greatness, not in comparison to His creation, but in comparison to any description.

¹ Majlisī, Muhammad Bāqir, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, p. 406, *The Whispered Prayer of the Repenters (Munajat al-Ta'ibīn)*

Tasbih in the Qur'an and Hadiths

Tasbih is one of those important Qur'anic concepts that occur in numerous verses and have the potential of being assembled to come up with a system built around them. The other examples are concepts of truth, light, mercy, and life. This chapter covers the glorifiers mentioned in the Qur'an, general reflections on the comprehensiveness of tasbih, and tasbih in hadiths.

Tasbih in the Qur'an

There are many verses in the Qur'an that relates to tasbih. In what follows we will refer to the verses that indicate those who glorify Allah (swt) or do tasbih.

Who does tasbih?

1. Everything in the creation

In a general way, the Qur'an tells us that every creature does tasbih:

تَسْبِيحٌ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ
إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا

The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth too, and whoever is in them. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Indeed, He is all-forgiving, all-forgiving. (17:44)

The Qur'an informs us that there is nothing in the creation that does not glorify and praise Allah (swt); it is us who do not understand their glorification. We assume they do not understand because they seem "silent," although they are actually not so. In the same vein, the Qur'an says:

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالطَّيْرِ
صَافَّاتٍ كُلُّ قَدْ عَلِمَ صَلَاتَهُ وَتَسْبِيحَهُ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ

Have you not regarded that Allah is glorified by everyone in the heavens and the earth, and the birds spreading their wings. Each knows his prayer and glorification, and Allah knows best what they do. (24:41)

There is another beautiful verse in this regard mentioned at the beginning of three chapters of the Qur'an:

سَبِّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

Whatever there is in the heavens glorifies Allah and whatever there is on the earth and He is the All-mighty, the All-Wise. (57:1; 59:1; 61:1)

Thus, every creature—living and non-living—glorifies Allah (swt).

A question then arises: How is the tasbih of every creature performed? Many discussions have been held among exegetists, theologians, philosophers, and mystics in this regard.

First probability: Some scholars hold that the tasbih of the living and non-living is not in the sense that they actually glorify Allah (swt), since it is more of generative glorification.¹ It means that every creature by its very being is glorifying its creator, because any perfection a being has is from its cause, that is, its creator. The glorifiers do not attribute to their creator any negative quality because their own negative traits are due to their own limitations and capacity and not from Allah (swt), who has unlimited treasures of all the good things and is most gracious and most merciful. On the other hand, since all of their good qualities indeed do come from their originator, they praise and glorify Him with their very being.

By looking at every being, we realise that there is a creator who is perfect. 'The creatures' existence is a sign of the greatness of Allah (swt). Whatever perfection exists in them, such as beauty, knowledge, power, and design, they show the greatness of its creator and that He is not weak, ignorant, or incompetent. Thus, their tasbih is a potential glorification, rather than a real one. According to this view, the creatures'

¹ *al-tasbīḥ al-takwīnī*

tasbih is something that we can understand by merely observing them.

This opinion is something that by itself is true, but it seems that this is not what the Qur'an means when it says, "*Allah is glorified by everyone in the heavens and the earth.*" It seems it does not only mean that if we reflect philosophically or theologically, we come to this understanding that every effect is praising and glorifying its cause. If this was what is meant, then everyone could understand, so why does the Qur'an say, "...but you do not understand their glorification"?

It seems that all creatures have a kind of glorification that we are unaware of and are incapable of understanding. They do another kind of glorification that is unknown to us. Thus, it must be something more than just some scholarly reflections on the relation between an effect and its cause.

Second probability: Some mystics and philosophers such as Mullā Sadrā have another idea. They say every being shares certain characteristics with other beings. For example, every

¹ Tabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 13, pp. 111-112:

فإن الخطاب في قوله: «وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ» إما للمشركين وإما للناس أعم من المؤمنين والمشرك و هم على أى حال يفقهون دلالة الأشياء على صانعها مع أن الآية تنفى عنهم الفقه... فالحق أن التسبيح الذى تنبته الآية لكل شيء هو التسبيح بمعناه الحقيقى و قد تكرر فى كلامه تعالى إثباته للسموات والأرض و من فيهن و ما فيهن و فيها موارد لا تحتمل إلا الحقيقة.

being has an understanding of Allah, holds love for Him, and glorify Him. They believe that this is the essential characteristic of existence shared by all ranks of beings. Every being in this universe has these qualities.

The question then arises: How do non-living beings have this love and understanding and perform tasbih while we, as human beings, are unable to feel or notice their glorification? They reply: Either it is because the human beings' understanding is weak or the non-living beings' level of intelligence, love, and glorification is weak, or a combination of both. For example, when someone speaks loudly enough, we can understand; but if he speaks quietly, we may not. So, either because of lack of understanding on our side, or because of low quality of their understanding, knowledge, and love; or a combination of both, we have difficulty in understanding them. This is what some mystics and philosophers have said.

Third probability: Perhaps a more reasonable view is that we have two different worlds, or dimensions of the creation: the physical world (*‘ālam al-mulk*), which is facing us; and the kingdom of Allah (*malakūt*), which is facing Allah (swt) and manifests the divine sovereignty and lordship.

When the Qur'an says everything is glorifying and praising Him, it is from that aspect that is facing Allah (swt). For us to be able to understand that, we should go beyond this physical

border and get access to divine kingdom, the other face of the heavens and the earth which are divine and hidden. If we get access into that side, then we would see a world full of life, understanding, and recognition of Allah's perfection in the condition of glorifying and praising Him.

We have no access to that world, although people such as the Prophets and Imams do have access to it. For example, we read in the Qur'an regarding Prophet Abraham:

وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَ الْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ

Thus, did We show Abraham the dominions of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who possess certitude. (6:75)

Elsewhere, the Qur'an states that when Prophet David was glorifying Allah (swt), the mountains and birds responded to him and accompanied him in glorification:¹

¹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 14, p. 312:

أن معنى تسخير الجبال و الطير مع داود يسبحن معه أن لهما تسبيحا فى نفسهما و تسخيرهما أن يسبحن مع داود بمواطاة تسبيحه

Commenting on this verse, Fayḍ Kashānī, in his book *Tafsīr al-Ṣāṭi*, mentions the following hadith from Imam Ṣadiq (a):

إِنَّ دَاوُدَ خَرَجَ ذَاتَ يَوْمٍ يَقْرَأُ الزُّبُورَ وَكَانَ إِذَا قَرَأَ الزُّبُورَ لَا يَبْقَى جَبَلٌ وَلَا حَجَرٌ وَلَا طَائِرٌ وَلَا سَمْعٌ إِلَّا جَاوَبَهُ.

Fayḍ Kashānī, Muhammad Ḥasan, *Tafsīr al-Ṣāṭi*, vol. 3, p. 349.

وَسَخَّرْنَا مَعَ دَاوُدَ الْجِبَالَ يُسَبِّحْنَ وَالطَّيْرَ

*And We disposed the mountains and the birds
to glorify Us with David. (21:79)*

In addition to the Prophets and Imams, many mystics reported being able to hear every being glorifying Allah (swt) and praising Him. For most of us, there are currently veils on our eyes and a blockage in our ears that do not let us understand. However, sometimes for an awakening to occur and to tell us that there is something greater than the physical world that we must go and discover Allah (swt) temporarily opens some windows to that world for some people so that they can see something and then inform others. For example, in a hadith we read that some heard a kind of voice of tasbeih from the food that Prophet Muhammad (s) was eating from or from the sand held in his hand.¹

Nonetheless, in this author's humble opinion these two sides and dimensions are to be distinguished and this seems to be more compatible with the overall Islamic view. We should hold the idea that in this world there are some living and non-living beings. Among the living, there are a) plants that grow

¹ Ibn Shar Āshūb Māzandarānī, Muhammad, *Manāqib Āl Abī Tālib (a)*. The full hadith in Arabic is as follows:

عَلَقَمَةُ وَابْنُ مَسْعُودٍ كُنَّا نَجْلِسُ مَعَ النَّبِيِّ (ع) وَنَسْمَعُ الطَّعَامَ يُسَبِّحُ وَرَسُولُ
اللَّهِ يَأْكُلُ وَآتَاهُ مَكْرَزُ الْعَامِرِيِّ وَسَأَلَهُ آيَةُ قَدْعَا تَسْعُ حَصَاةً فَسَبَّحَنَ فِي يَدِهِ
وَفِي حَدِيثٍ فَوَضَعْنَهُ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ فَلَمْ يُسَبِّحَنَّ وَسَكَنَنَّ ثُمَّ عَادَ وَأَخَذَهُنَّ
فَسَبَّحَنَ.

and reproduce and need nutrition, but do not have sensitivity or voluntary motion, and b) animals who have sensitivity and voluntary motion, along with some animals who have reasoning. We should keep all these distinctions and not claim that every being in this physical and *mulki* world has understanding and love, and glorifies Allah (swt) in their own language.

2. *Angels*

The Qur'an also highlights the tasbih of angels. The main function of angels is that they constantly remember Allah (swt) and do tasbih, and this is their greatest act. Before Allah (swt) created Adam, He told the angels:

إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

Indeed, I am going to set a viceroy on the earth.
(2:30)

The angels then questioned as to how a human being can be a vicegerent of Allah (swt) and undertake this role. How is it that this position is going to be given to human beings while they may do mischief and shed blood? Of course, they did not have any issue with the creation of Adam, but either because of their understanding of the nature of human beings - who are a combination of intellect (*'aql*) and lower desires (*shahwah*) - they could foresee that they are going to do this; or, according to some narrations, angels may have witnessed

some lineage of human beings who existed before Adam and assumed they would behave similarly.¹

To make their case clear, the angels mentioned two vicious acts of human beings i.e. making mischief and shedding blood, which demonstrate great injustice (*zulm*) to themselves and others:

قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ

They said, 'Will You set in it someone who will cause corruption in it and shed blood'? (2:30)

Moreover, the angels knew of the greatness of tasbih and therefore they referred to it as the core of their performance which could perhaps qualify them to become vicegerents of Allah (swt):

وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ

...while we celebrate Your praise and glorify Your sanctity? (2:30)

¹Ibn Bābiwayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Khiṣāl*, vol. 2, p. 652. There is a hadith which Jabir ibn Yazīd narrates from Imam Bāqir (a) in which Imam (a) answering Jabir's question regarding verse 15 of Surah Qāf ("Were We exhausted by the first creation? Rather they are in doubt about a new creation") says:

لَعَلَّكَ تَرَى أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ إِنَّمَا خَلَقَ هَذَا الْعَالَمَ الْوَاحِدَ وَتَرَى أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ لَمْ يَخْلُقْ بَشَرًا غَيْرَكُمْ بَلْ وَاللَّهِ لَقَدْ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى أَلْفَ أَلْفِ عَالَمٍ وَأَلْفَ أَلْفِ آدَمَ أَنْتَ فِي آخِرِ تِلْكَ الْعَوَالِمِ وَأُولَئِكَ الْأَدَمِيَّينَ

According to this hadith, before our world there were one million other worlds and before Prophet Adam, there were one million other Adams and we are in the last of those worlds.

This demonstrates the significance of tasbih. Moreover, Allah (swt) did not say, ‘Tasbih is not enough’ or ‘Tasbih is not counted.’ He instead said:

قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

... *‘Indeed, I know what you do not know.’*
(2:30)

In other words, Allah is telling them, ‘Though you are right in doing tasbih and that human beings may do mischief and shed blood, human beings have something that you are unaware of, and that is their unlimited capacity for knowledge. You are not seeing the whole picture.’ We read in the Qur’an:

وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

And He taught Adam the Names, all of them; then presented them to the angels and said, ‘Tell me the names of these, if you are truthful. They said, ‘Immaculate are You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed You are the All-knowing, the All-wise.
(2:31-32)

The angels then said:

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ
... *‘Glory to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, You are the All-knowing, the All-wise.* (2:32)

Even here, to not appear as those who object without knowing, they did tasbih first: they said “*subḥānaka*” (*Glory to You*), and continued with reassuring that they will not object as they knew only what He had taught them. Of course, they did not know more because they did not have capacity for it.

It should also be noted that the angels do tasbih with tahmid: “*We celebrate Your praise and glorify Your sanctity.*” There are many verses in the Quran about this action. For example, the Qur’an says:

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ
بِهِ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا
فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ وَقِهِمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ

Those who bear the Throne, and those who are around it, celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him, and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful ‘Our Lord! You embrace all things in mercy and knowledge. So forgive those who repent and follow Your way and save them from the punishment of hell.
(40:7)

This verse shows that the angels did not develop any enmity, hatred, or dislike for human beings. They instead tried to help by asking for Allah’s forgiveness on their behalf. This demonstrates the beauty of the angels’ character.

The question then arises as to whether tasbih, tahmid, and *istighfār* are three separate tasks? Or does tahmid and *istighfār* fall under tasbih? This will be discussed later in this chapter.

The difference between humans and angels in remembering Allah (swt)

Human beings are recommended to do tasbih because unlike most of the creation, they do not automatically do tasbih. Every cell of our body and every drop of our blood is doing tasbih since these are created by Allah (swt), but when it comes to our soul in its entirety and with human volition. This is where we may or may not remember Him. Forgetfulness (*nisyān*) and negligence (*ghaflah*) happen only to human beings as well as the jinn, who are similar to human beings in this regard. Forgetfulness or negligence are not traits of any other creatures. Thus, the concept of remembrance (*dhikr*), which is opposite to forgetfulness and negligence, is not used for other creatures, such as angels. If someone constantly remembers someone or something, *dhikr* cannot be applied. This is why the Qur'an applies tasbih or tahmid for angels, but not *dhikr*.

Then the question may arise as to what is meant by Allah (swt) using *dhikr* for Himself:

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ

Remember Me and I will remember you.
(2:152)

This verse actually complies with the above-mentioned idea that *dhikr* is used for beings who are prone to forgetting or neglecting. *Dhikr* of Allah (swt) are two types: 1) His inclusive remembrance of all His creatures, which is always available and never ceases, and 2) His remembrance with favor. The instruction to “*Remember Me and I will remember you*” actually refers to Allah’s remembering us with favor, which is a special remembrance that is sometimes offered and sometimes not, depending on our condition.

Thus, *dhikr* is not used for angels because they do not forget so that they need to do *dhikr* or bring remembrance: they are constantly conscious of Allah (swt) by their very nature. *Dhikr* is also not used for the tasbih the human organs perform. If mountains, trees, and flowers all do tasbih, our cells also do so. Whether I am believer or no, my cells are obedient to Allah (swt). It is you and me in our voluntary lives, with our hearts and minds, who are capable of choosing to remember Allah (swt) or not. Remembering Him requires an active and conscious decision.

3. Inhabitants of heaven

The inhabitants of heaven very much resemble angels. In Surah Yūnus, Allah (swt) explains what the people of heaven do inside heaven, including their tasbih when engaged in any conversation or speech:

دَعَاؤُهُمْ فِيهَا سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ وَتَحِيَّتُهُمْ فِيهَا سَلَامٌ وَآخِرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ
 أَنْ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Their call therein will be, “O Allah! Glory to You!” and their greeting therein will be, “Peace!” and their concluding call, “All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.”
 (10:10)

Their call is tasbih. In other words, tasbih forms the content and even the style of their speech. And when they greet each other, they say ‘*salām*¹’ ending with hamd: “*All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.*” Thus, their main speech is tasbih. This is very similar to what angels do—tasbih and hamd—and also similar to an important verse that contains a powerful invocation:

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ الْعِزَّةِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ وَ سَلَامٌ عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ وَ
 الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

¹ Thus, “*salām*” is not only the greeting of the people of the earth; it is also the greeting of the people of heaven as well as the greeting of the angels:

الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّيهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ طَيِّبِينَ يَقُولُونَ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ادْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ
 تَعْمَلُونَ

—those whom the angels take away while they are pure.
 They say to them, “*Salām!*” Enter paradise because of what you used to do (16:32).

and as well as the way that Allah greets the people because even Allah (swt) says, *Salām*:

سَلَامٌ قَوْلًا مِنْ رَبِّ رَحِيمٍ

Salām! a word of salutation from the all-Merciful Lord
 (36:58).

Glory to your Lord, the Lord of Might, of whatever they allege concerning Him. Peace be to the apostles! All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all the worlds. (37:180-182)

It contains the exact order regarding the people of Heaven: tasbih, *salām*, and hamd, rendering this order possibly sacred and very effective.

4. *Muqarrabūn*

In several verses, the Qur'an refers to a group of people who constantly remember Allah (swt), and, in particular, they continuously glorify Him. They are the '*muqarrabūn*,' those who have reached the highest levels of nearness to Allah (swt).¹ It is for this reason that the Qur'an says they are near (*inda*) their Lord:

فَإِنْ اسْتَكْبَرُوا فَالَّذِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ يُسَبِّحُونَ لَهُ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْأَمُونَ

But if they disdain the worship of Allah, those who are near your Lord glorify Him night and day, and they are not wearied. (41:38)

¹ For more explanation, you may refer e.g. to the commentaries on this verse:

وَالسَّابِقُونَ السَّابِقُونَ أُولَئِكَ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ

And the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones, they are the ones brought near to Allah (56:10-11).

Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī in *al-Mizān* says that although some scholars have thought this verse to be only about angels, it is actually a description of both the angels and people who are near Allah (swt) (*muqarrabūn*).¹

Elsewhere in the Qur'an we read again that those who are near Allah (swt) constantly glorify Him:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَيُسَبِّحُونَهُ وَلَهُ
يَسْجُدُونَ

Indeed, those who are stationed near your Lord do not disdain to worship Him. They glorify Him and prostrate to Him. (7:206)

In the chapter *Light* (*al-Nūr*), Allah (swt) mentions His light, and then makes a parable of a lamp to elucidate. He says that this lamp can be found in those houses that Allah (swt) has permitted to be elevated because the people who live there constantly remember Allah (swt) and glorify Him:

فِي بُيُوتٍ أَذِنَ اللَّهُ أَنْ تُرْفَعَ وَيُذْكَرَ فِيهَا اسْمُهُ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ فِيهَا بِالْغُدُوِّ
وَ الْآصَالِ رِجَالٌ لَا تُلْهِيهِمْ تِجَارَةٌ وَلَا بَيْعٌ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ
الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ يَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا تَتَقَلَّبُ فِيهِ الْقُلُوبُ وَالْأَبْصَارُ
In houses Allah has allowed to be raised and wherein His Name is celebrated, He is glorified therein, morning and evening, by men whom

¹ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 17, p. 393.

neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of Allah, and the maintenance of prayer and the giving of zakat. They are fearful of a day wherein the heart and the sight will be transformed. (24:36-37)

Materialistically speaking, in this world (*dunyā*), a house becomes important when it features quality design and architecture, spaciousness, or a good location, for example. But spiritually, the value of a house depends on its inhabitants. The best houses are those whose inhabitants continuously remember and glorify Allah (swt) without being distracted by anything.

The above verses inform us of those who do not forget Allah (swt), even when they are engaged in trading and business - which usually needs serious attention. Buying and selling require due diligence in not losing money, not disregarding others' rights, or both. These verses also remind us that it is possible to maintain our regular daily activities and still be mindful of Allah (swt), as it is also possible to pray while not being mindful of Him.

5. Allah (swt) Himself

It seems tasbih is the best encounter that anyone can have with Allah (swt). This includes Allah (swt) Himself because even He Himself does tasbih:

فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ حِينَ تُمْسُونَ وَحِينَ تُصْبِحُونَ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي
السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَعَشِيًّا وَحِينَ تُظْهِرُونَ

*To Him belongs all praise in the heavens and
the earth, at nightfall and when you enter
noontime. So, glory be to Allah when you enter
evening and when you rise at dawn. (30:16-17)*

Commenting on these verses, ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī says that here tasbih and tahmid are not an instruction for human beings to do; rather, it is about the performance by Allah (swt) Himself. Then ‘Allāmah mentions the verses in which Allah (swt) does tasbih and tahmid.¹

Thus, the act of tasbih is not limited to the creatures: it is the best way of encountering and acknowledging Allah’s perfection. Of course, we cannot do tasbih in the way that angels do, and angels cannot do tasbih in the way that Allah (swt) Himself does. There are different levels of tasbih.

¹ Ibid. vol. 16, p. 60:

و من هناك يظهر: أولاً: أن التسبيح و التحميد في الآيتين إنشاء تنزيه و ثناء منه تعالى لا من غيره حتى يكون المعنى: قولوا سبحان الله و قولوا الحمد لله فقد تكرر في كلامه تعالى تسبيحه و تحميده لنفسه كقوله: «سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ الْعِزَّةِ» (الصافات: 180) و قوله: «تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْفُرْقَانَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ» (الفرقان: 25.1) و ثانياً: أن المراد بالتسبيح و التحميد معناهما المطلق دون الصلوات اليومية المفروضة كما يقول به أكثر القائلين بكون القول مقدراً. و المعنى: قولوا سبحان الله و قولوا الحمد لله.

6. *Tasbih as an instruction for human beings*

In addition to introducing those who do tasbih, the Qur'an also refers to instructions to do tasbih. For example, the Qur'an refers to an instruction from Allah (swt) to Prophet Muhammad (s) for tasbih:

إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ
أُفْوَاجًا فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَاسْتَغْفِرْهُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ تَوَّابًا

When Allah's help comes with victory, and you see the people entering Allah's religion in throngs, celebrate the praise of your Lord, and plead to Him for forgiveness. Indeed, He is all-clement. (110: 1-3)

Allah (swt) tells the Prophet (s) that when he sees the help of Allah (swt), victory, and the embrace of faith by a massive number of people, he should glorify and praise Allah (swt) and ask for forgiveness for any shortcomings or mistakes. Tasbih is then needed more than ever, especially since the obstacles for doing tasbih have been removed during this era better than any other.

And tasbih is what Allah (swt) asks the believers to do so that they can elevate themselves to the position of the people of heaven and the angels:

وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ غُرُوبِهَا وَمِنْ أَنَاةِ
الَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْهُ وَأَطْرَافَ النَّهَارِ

*...and glorify your Lord by the praising of Him
before the rising of the sun and before the
sunset and glorify Him in watches of the night
and at the day's ends. (20:130)*

Moreover, in the genuflections (*rukūʿ*) in our daily prayer, we recite:

سبحان ربِّي العظيم و بحمده

Glory be to my lord, the great, and praise
belongs to Him.

And when we prostrate (*sajdah*), we say:

سبحان ربِّي الأعلى و بحمده

Glory be to my lord, the Exalted, and praise
belongs to Him.

If our ritual prayers are properly done, it would help us experience a heavenly life illuminated with glorification and praise of Allah. Prayer is meant to engage us—at least a few minutes a day—in a moment of peace, similar to what the people of heaven experience. Then it should continuously extend to every part of our lives. Our responsibility is to change our ordinary lives—which every so often is extended to our prayer—to allow prayer to shape our daily lives instead. This requires a series of struggles in the beginning until the

true experience of glorifying and praising Allah in every aspect of our lives becomes a habit and a state of our hearts.

Tasbih: a comprehensive concept

According to the Qur'an, tasbih is a very comprehensive concept. It includes every type of remembrance of Allah (swt), such as hamd, takbir, tahlil, and even *istighfār*. Moreover, the good that we do or intend to do, the good that we believe in or give attention to, and our overall good attitude are considered tasbih. All social efforts, charity work, and community services are instances of tasbih. The following provides evidence for this from the Qur'an:

Tasbīh includes the night prayer

In the chapter *Man*, Allah says:

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَاسْجُدْ لَهُ وَسَبِّحْهُ لَيْلًا طَوِيلًا

...and prostrate to Him for a watch of the night and glorify Him a long [part of] the night.
(76:26)

Many commentators of the Qur'an assert that tasbih here refers to prayer before dawn (*ḥajr*).¹ Moreover, in a hadith from Imam Riḍā (a), when someone asked him about the

¹ For example, Fayḍ Kashānī, Muhammad Ḥasan, *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 5, p. 265; Tabāṭabā'ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an*, vol. 20, p. 141:

المراد بالتسبيح صلاة الليل

meaning of tasbih in this verse, the Imam (a) replied, “The night prayer.”¹

Tasbih includes hamd

In our previous discussion we referred to the following verse on the glorification of Allah by everything, and that we do not understand their glorification:

تُسَبِّحُ لَهُ السَّمَاوَاتُ السَّبْعُ وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَنْ فِيهِنَّ وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ
إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حَلِيمًا غَفُورًا

The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth too, and whoever is in them. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Indeed, He is all-forgiving, all-forgiving. (17:44)

The word tasbih or “glorification” in the phrase “...*you do not understand their glorification*” must include hamd as well; otherwise, Allah would have said, ‘you do not understand their tasbih (glorification) and hamd (praise).’

As mentioned earlier in Surah Yūnus, Allah (swt) speaks about the people of heaven:

¹ Tabarsī, Fadl ibn Ḥasan, *Majma‘ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur‘an*, vol. 10, p. 626: The full hadith in Arabic is as follows:

روى عن الرضا (ع) أنه سأله أحمد بن محمد عن هذه الآية و قال: ما ذلك التسييح؟ قال: «صلاة الليل».

دَعَوَاهُمْ فِيهَا سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ وَتَحِيَّتُهُمْ فِيهَا سَلَامٌ وَأَخِرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ
 أَنْ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Their call therein will be, ‘O Allah! Glory to You!’ and their greeting therein will be, ‘Peace!’ and their concluding call, ‘All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of all the worlds.’ (10:10)

Like angels, the people of heaven do tasbih. When they greet each other, they say ‘peace’ (*salām*) and their speech concludes with, “*Alḥamdulillāh-i Rabb al-‘Ālamīn.*”

In the beginning, the verse says that their call is, “*Subḥānaka*” (*Glory be to You*) and then later it says that the last part of their call is “*Alḥamdulillāh*” (*All praise belongs to Allah*). Since the end of something is certainly part of it, then *hamd* which is the last part of their call is included in *tasbih*.

Tasbih includes *tahlīl* and *istighfār*

After Prophet Yūnus faced various challenges, especially when he witnessed the society’s lack of appreciation, he left them while holding some resentment in his heart. Upon embarking a ship, he eventually ended up in the stomach of a whale after a big storm. As he resided in there in absolute darkness - or perhaps also a spiritual darkness - he realized

that he did not make the best of the choices.¹ In that difficult moment of regret, he repented:

فَنَادَى فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ سُبْحَانَكَ إِنِّي كُنْتُ مِنَ
الظَّالِمِينَ

Then he cried out in the darkness, "There is no god except You! Glory to You! Indeed, I did wrong to myself!" (21:87)

Allah (swt) then says:

فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْغَمِّ وَكَذَلِكَ نُنْجِي الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

So, We answered his prayer and saved him from the agony; and thus do We save the believers. (21:88)

This verse indicates that He saves any believer similarly. It is a rule, not an exception, that believers can be saved with this *dhikr*. Here there are three elements:

- *tahlīl*: “There is no god except You!”
- *tasbīh*: “Glory be to You!”
- *istighfār*: “Indeed, I did wrong to myself!” which involves confessing and admitting the wrong done and asking for forgiveness. Of course, he did not commit any sin in its ordinary or *fiqhī* sense, but for

¹ Scholars call it *tark-i awlā*, which means he did not do the best of what he could do in that difficult moment.

someone like him, when he did not do the best job,
he considers this a kind of *ẓulm* (injustice)

The Qur'an refers to the same story in another chapter:

فَلَوْلَا أَنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُسَبِّحِينَ لَلَبِثَ فِي بَطْنِهِ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

*Had he not been one of those who celebrate
Allah's glory, he would have surely remained in
its belly till the day they will be resurrected. (37:
143-144)*

This means that what actually rescued Prophet Yunus was the fact that he made tasbih; otherwise he would have been in the belly of the whale until the end of his life.

Thus, *Dhikr Yunusi* has three parts: *tahliḷ*, tasbih, and *istighfār*, although Allah (swt) considers all three as tasbih. The pillar is tasbih: it is tasbih that saves us, with the blessing of Allah (swt), from all problems, including grief and imprisonment.¹

¹ Allah (swt) says “*So, We answered his prayer and saved him from the agony.*” Thus, by saying this *dhikr*, Allah (swt) saved him from the grief and sadness. And then He says, “*...and thus do We save the believers.*” In the same way we save the believers. It means that Allah (swt) has made this a means of solving our problems and a means of getting rid of sorrow and grief. So, it was not only a historical event that happened once and finished. This is something that Allah (swt) is telling us that we can also try this as an offer when we are in deep sadness and grief; when we are really desperate, when we feel we are disconnected from Allah (swt), we can say this *dhikr*: “*There is no god except You!, Glory to You! I have indeed been among the wrongdoers!*” and we hope that it works for us

Tasbih includes *tabligh*

Any personal, social, communal, or political work of a true believer falls under the category of tasbih. The mission of Prophet Moses is an obvious case, proving tasbih to involve any good work. Allah (swt) said to Prophet Moses:

اَذْهَبْ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ

Go to Pharaoh. He has indeed rebelled. (20:24)

As soon as he was given this task, Prophet Moses realized the greatness of this mission, and that it was not possible to be carried out without certain elements. Prophet Moses was a courageous person, and at the same time humble. He did not think that because he was chosen by Allah (swt) and was given this command, he could do it independently. He humbly and wisely requested for few things:

Openness of the chest

رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي

He said, 'My Lord! Open my breast for me.'
(20:25)

Prophet Moses knew he needed his chest to “open,” which refers to asking Allah for a big heart that prevents him from anything unwise, such as despairing, surrendering to the enemy, or becoming reactionary due to difficult tasks and

too and we can benefit from it. This is called *Dhikr-i Yūnusīyyah*, an important dhikr emphasized by many mystics.

hostility from others. Prophet Moses wants the patience that enables him to have forbearance when being wronged, or becoming angered which may ruin the mission, or eventually giving up. This patience is very much needed, especially for a guide or a leader.

Make the task easy

وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي

Make my task easy for me. (20:26)

Asking for ease in delivery of the mission in order to save more people, energy, time, and resources is part of wisdom.

Remove the hitch from my tongue:

وَاحْلُلْ عُقْدَةً مِّن لِّسَانِي يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي

*Remove the hitch from my tongue, [so that]
they may understand my speech. (20:27-28)*

Prophet Moses asked Allah (swt) to remove the blockage from his tongue. It seems that it was not a matter of physical blockage; rather, he asks for clear and concise speech that flows smoothly so as to grasp their attention and understanding.

Since Prophet Moses was brought up in the palace of Pharaoh, he must have had the best of training and education. He mastered their language because he was brought up in that context from childhood. However, this did not keep him from worrying about his inability to deliver the message of

Allah (swt) in a way that they could deeply understand and appreciate.¹

An assistant from himself

وَأَجْعَلْ لِّي وَزِيْرًا مِّنْ أَهْلِ هَارُونَ أَخِي اشْدُدْ بِهِ أَزْرِي وَأَشْرِكْهُ
فِي أَمْرِي

*Appoint for me an assistant from my family,
Aaron, my brother. Strengthen my back
through him and make him my associate in my
task. (20:29-32)*

Due to the heavy responsibility of approaching Pharaoh, the fourth request of Prophet Musa from Allah (swt) was to appoint an assistant from himself, his elder brother Aaron. He was three years older than Moses, with a tall stature, a well-proportioned body, an eloquent tongue, and excellent apprehension.² As the Qur'an says, he held an esoteric light which rendered him an enlightened person who was able to easily discern truth from falsehood:

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى وَهَارُونَ الْفُرْقَانَ وَضِيَاءً وَذِكْرًا لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ
*Certainly, We gave Moses and Aaron the
Criterion, a light and reminder for the
Godwary. (21:48)*

¹ This is an important requirement for anyone who wants to do any social work, whether it be *tabligh*, charity, or activism—to be able to speak eloquently and clearly or work with those who can do so.

² Makārim Shīrāzī, Nasīr, *Tafsīr Nimūmih*, vol. 13, p. 188.

Prophet Moses requested for openness of the chest, ease of his task, smooth and eloquent speech, and an assistant from himself not merely because he wanted to save the Children of Isrā'īl and guide people, which he did; rather, he requested for something that was all-encompassing:

كِيْ نُسَبِّحَكَ كَثِيْرًا وَنَذْكُرَكَ كَثِيْرًا

...so that we may glorify You greatly and remember You greatly. (20:33-34)

Prophet Moses task of delivering the message of Allah (swt) to Pharaoh, guiding the Children of Isrā'īl, and liberating them through actions such as taking them across the river, were a kind of tasbih. He wanted Allah's help for an openness of his chest, an ease of his affairs, smooth speech, and Aaron as his assistant so as to perform more tasbih. Thus, tasbih is something far-reaching and not merely the utterance of a few words.

Rational Argument

After reflecting on the verses of the Qur'an, we turn to a rational explanation as to why tasbih is a general concept that includes hamd. The point is that we cannot do proper tasbih (*tanzīh*) if we only negate bad characteristics from Allah (swt). If someone does not do anything bad, and fails to do good, he or she still has a problem. For example, if someone does not do injustice, and also does not help anyone, it reveals a problem. Thus, proper *tanzīh* involves hamd as well.

Therefore, when tasbih is used alone, it can also include *taḥmīd*, *tahlīl*, and *takbīr*. But when it is mentioned with other things, then we focus for every notion on its own initial and primary meaning. There are terms that when mentioned together, they each have their own meaning. But when mentioned separately, they can also take the meaning of the other one.

Thus, tasbih is a broad and far-reaching notion that relates to one's general attitude to Allah during one's life. This is why the title Tasbih of Lady Fatimah (a) is coined, rather than the '*takbīr* or *taḥmīd* of Lady Fatimah (a)'. Tasbih is all-encompassing.

Tasbih in hadiths

Having discussed the significance of tasbih in the Qur'an, we now turn to reflecting on narrations regarding tasbih.

Someone asked Imam Ṣādiq (a) why the Ka'bah is called 'Ka'bah'. The Imam (a) replied, "Because Ka'bah is cubic." The person asked, "Why is it cubic?" The Imam (a) said, "Because the Ka'bah is beneath *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr*.¹ Then the Imam (a) explained that *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr* has four corners, so it is cubic. The questioner continued to ask why *al-Bayt al-*

¹ The Ka'bah is a kind of reconstruction of *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr* where angels do circumambulation around it. Of course, their *ṭawāf* is not physical. When we perform *ṭawāf* around the Ka'bah, we are actually following what the angels do around *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr*.

Ma'mūr is cubic, and the Imam (a) replied it is under the Divine throne (*al-'arsh*),¹ which has four pillars consisting of:²

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَلَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ

Glory be to Allah, Praise be to Allah, There is no god but Allah, Allah is greater

Anything we need to know about Allah, the world, ourselves, our relation, and our duties, all go back to these four. The entire journey of our studies, reflection, and experiences is to learn how to bring everything out of these four, and how to make our life in line with them.³

Tasbih is not a mere spiritual utterance done in a corner, in a cave, or on the prayer mat a certain number of times while committing wrong actions such as lying and backbiting: it

¹ 'Arsh is the closest thing to Allah (swt).

² Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Ilal al-Sharā'i'*, vol. 2, p. 398. The full text is Arabic is as follows:

وَرَوَى عَنِ الصَّادِقِ (ع) أَنَّهُ سُئِلَ لِمَ سَمَّيْتَ الْكَعْبَةَ كَعْبَةً. قَالَ: لِأَنَّهَا مُرَبَّعَةٌ فَقِيلَ لَهُ وَلِمَ صَارَتْ مُرَبَّعَةً قَالَ لِأَنَّهَا بِحِذَاءِ الْبَيْتِ الْمَعْمُورِ وَهُوَ مُرَبَّعٌ فَقِيلَ لَهُ وَلِمَ صَارَ الْبَيْتُ الْمَعْمُورُ مُرَبَّعًا قَالَ لِأَنَّهُ بِحِذَاءِ الْعَرْشِ وَهُوَ مُرَبَّعٌ فَقِيلَ لَهُ وَلِمَ صَارَ الْعَرْشُ مُرَبَّعًا قَالَ لِأَنَّ الْكَلِمَاتِ الَّتِي بَنِيَ عَلَيْهَا الْإِسْلَامُ أَرْبَعٌ وَهِيَ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَلَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ.

³ In the third and fourth unit (*rak'ah*) of *ṣalāt*, we have a choice to recite Surah al-Ḥamd or to say the four *tasbīḥāt* (*Subḥānallāh, alḥamdulillāh, lā ilāha illallāh* and *Allahu Akbar*). It means that this tasbih has so much power that its recitation in this context is somehow equal to that of Surah al-Ḥamd, which is a summary and opening of the Qur'an.

must have an impact on our daily lives. Some mistakenly do tasbih day and night and send *ṣalawāt* while continuing to commit wrong actions as they please. However, the reality is that there is no way to do tasbih, hamd, tahlil, or takbir properly unless we truly reflect and change our actions for the better. Doing tasbih is not mere utterance: we can do tasbih in the most beautiful way countless times without attaining any of the benefits of tasbih. Real tasbih requires true reflection on the fact that Allah (swt) is glorified.

We cannot praise Allah (swt) for His beauties, His blessings, His acts of kindnesses (*iḥsān*) and then commit injustice or be unkind. This is not hamd. Rather, it is cheating. How can I praise Allah (swt) for something that I disregard or do not respect? If this good quality or action is really praiseworthy, how do we not try to do the same? How can a thief praise a guard? It is impossible for a thief to honestly praise the guard whose job is not to let the thieves enter the property. How can a person who purposely spreads a disease also praise doctors and nurses? It is impossible for someone who pollutes the water to praise environmentalists and health workers. How can I praise Allah for the beauty He spreads in the world and then commit ugly actions?

Thus, doing tasbih, both uttering praises along with doing abundant good, requires that we also do not commit anything immoral. In a well-known hadith, Imam Ṣādiq (a) said:

مِنْ أَشَدِّ مَا فَرَضَ اللَّهُ عَلَى خَلْقِهِ ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ كَثِيرًا ثُمَّ قَالَ لَا أَعْنِي
 سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَلَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ وَإِنْ كَانَ مِنْهُ
 وَلَكِنْ ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ عِنْدَ مَا أَحَلَّ وَحَرَّمَ فَإِنْ كَانَ طَاعَةً عَمِلَ بِهَا وَ
 إِنْ كَانَ مَعْصِيَةً تَرَكَهَا

One of the greatest obligations is to remember Allah (swt) in abundance.’ Then he added, ‘I do not mean to [just] say *Subhānallāh*, *alḥamdulillāh*, *lā ilāha illallāh* and *Allahu Akbar*, though these are part of it. Rather, it is to remember Allah (swt) with respect to what He permitted and prohibited. If they come across an act of obedience, they would bring it, and if they come across an act of disobedience, they would leave it.¹

If I am ill and repeat the name of a doctor one thousand times, I would not be healed, just as beautifully reciting the name of a medicine will not cure me. In *Dua Kumayl*, we say:

يَا مَنْ اسْمُهُ دَوَاءٌ وَذِكْرُهُ شِفَاءٌ

O the One whose name is medicine, and whose remembrance is healing.

Allah’s names are a medicine. For healing our spiritual illnesses, we need to take this medicine in the form of remembering Him and not merely repeat the names of the medicine on the prescription. Remembrance of Allah (swt) is the cure. Allah (swt) says there is nothing in the creation that

¹ *Al-Kaḥf*, vol. 2, p. 80.

does not glorify Him: the angels, inhabitants of heaven, the *muqarrabun*, and Allah Himself do tasbih. Tasbih is the best way to encounter Allah (swt), to acknowledge His perfection, and to experience an enlightened life with prayer as an act to engage us in glorification, allowing it to penetrate every aspect of our lives.

Bibliography

Al-Jawharī, Ismā'īl, (1990), *al-Ṣiḥāḥ, Tāj al-Lughah wa al-Ṣiḥāḥ al-‘Arabīyyah*, (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm al-Malāyyīn)

Al-Khūṭī, al-Sayyid Abū al-Qāsim, *al-‘Urwah al-Wuthqā*, (al-Mu’assisah al- Khūṭī al-Islāmīyyah)

Al-Najafī, Muhammad Ḥasan, (1983), *Jawāhir al-Kalām fī Sharḥ Sharā’i’ al-Islām*, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Thurāth al-‘Arabī)

Al-Naysābūrī, Muslim al-Ḥajjāj, (2006), *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, (Riyadh: Dār Tayyibah)

Al-Nisā’ī, Aḥmad, (2001), *Sunan al-Nisā’ al-Kubrā*, (Beirut: Mu’assisah al-Risālah)

Al-Tirmidhī, Muhammad ibn Isā, (1996), *al-Jami’ al-Kabīr*, (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī)

Bukhārī, Muhammad ibn Ismā’īl, (2012), *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (Cairo: Dār al-Ta’ṣīl)

Fayḍ Kashānī, Muhammad Ḥasan, *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfi*, (Tehran: Maktabh al-Ṣadr)

Ḥurr ‘Āmilī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Wasāil al-Shr‘ah*, (Qum: Mu’assisah Āl al-Bayt (a) li Iḥyā’ al-Thurāth)

Ibn al-Athīr, Majd al-Dīn, (1963), *al-Nihāyah fī al-Hadīth wa al-Athar*, (Egypt: al-Maktabah al-Islāmīyyah)

Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad, (1413 A.H.), *Man lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, (Qum: Daftar Intishārāt Islāmī)

Ibn Bābawayh, Muhammad, (1997), *Amālī li al-Ṣadūq* (Tehran: Kitabchī)

Ibn Bābiwayh, Muhammad, *‘Ilal al-Sharā’i’*, (Qum: Dawarī)

Ibn Bābiwayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Khiṣāl*, (Qum: Jami’ih Mudarrisīn)

Ibn Bābiwayh, Muhammad ibn Ali, *Thawāb al-A‘māl wa ‘Iqāb al-A‘māl*, (Beirut: Dār al-Sharīf al-Raḍī)

Ibn H̄anbal, Abū ‘Abdillāh, (1998), *Musnad al-Imam Aḥmad ibn Hanbal*, (Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkār)

Ibn Jumhūr, Muhammad, (1403 A.H.), *‘Awālī al-Li’ālī al-‘Azīzīyyah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Dīnīyyah*, (Qum: Sayyid al-Shuhadā’)

Ibn Shar Āshūb Māzandarānī, Muhammad, *Manāqib Āl Abī Ṭālib (a)*, (Qum: Mu’assisah ‘Allāmah)

Kulaynī Muhammad, (1407 A.H.), *al-Kāfī*, (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al- Islāmīyah)

Majlisī, Muhammad Bāqir, *Zād al-Ma‘ād*, (Lebanon: Mu’assisah al-A‘lamī li al-Maṭbū‘āt)

Makārim Shīrāzī, Nasīr, (1992), *Tafsīr Nimūmih*, (Qum: Dar al-Kutub al-Islāmīyyah)

Marāji’, *Tawḍīḥ al-Masā’il*, compiled by Uṣūlī, Iḥsān and Banī Hāshimī, Muhammad Ḥasan, (Qum: Jami‘ih Mudarrisīn)

Mawlawī, Jalāl al-Dīn, *Mathnawī Mawlawī*

Rāghib, Ḥusayn, (1412 A.H.), *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur’an*, (Beirūt: Dar al-Shāmīyyah)

Ṭabarsī, Faḍl, *Majma‘ al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’an*, (Tehran: Naṣir Khusru)

Ṭabarsī, Faḍl, *Makārim al-Akhlāq*, (Qum: al-Sharīf al-Raḍī)

Ṭabāṭabā’ī, Sayyid Muhammad Ḥusayn, (1390 A.H.), *al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur’an*, (Beirut: Mu’assisah al-A‘lamī li al-Maṭbū‘āt)

Ṭarīḥī, Fakhr al-Dīn, (1996), *Majma‘ al-Baḥrayn*, (Tehran: Murtaḍawī)

Ṭūsī, Muhammad ibn Ḥasan, *Taḥdhīb al-Aḥkām*, (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al- Islāmīyyah)