# Dhikr in the Qur’an: Foundations, Practice and Spiritual Transformation

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**Abstract**

This article examines selected Qur’anic passages on *dhikr* (remembrance of God), bringing together divine commands to remember God, the times and manner of remembrance, its spiritual fruits, and warnings against heedlessness. It takes the promise ‘Remember Me; I will remember you’ (Qur’an 2:152) as a point of departure for understanding the reciprocity between human remembrance and divine remembrance. The analysis considers how the Qur’an connects *dhikr* with prayer, contemplation and gratitude, and how it calls for remembrance to continue amid the occupations of daily life. Particular attention is given to the tranquillity of the heart (13:28) and to the ethical consequences of forgetting God (58:19). Read together, these passages present *dhikr* as a sustained orientation towards God that shapes worship and conduct and draws the human being towards divine proximity.

**Keywords:** dhikr, Qur’an, remembrance of God, divine remembrance, tranquillity of the heart, heedlessness, divine proximity

## Introduction

The concept of *Dhikr* (Remembrance) stands as one of the most profound, pervasive, and spiritually transformative pillars in the Holy Qur'an. Rooted in the triliteral Arabic root *dhā-kā-rā* (ذ-ك-ر), the term encompasses a spectrum of meanings: remembering, mentioning, keeping in mind, invoking, and remaining mindful of the Divine Presence. Far from being merely a ritualistic or mechanical repetition of phrases, *Dhikr* represents the active, conscious alignment of the human heart and intellect with the Absolute.

In the Quranic worldview, human forgetfulness (*ghaflah*) is portrayed as the root cause of spiritual alienation and moral decay, while *Dhikr* serves as the ultimate spiritual anchor that keeps the soul grounded, tranquil, and oriented toward its Creator. This compilation explores the multifaceted dimensions of *Dhikr*—ranging from direct divine commands and prescribed times to its psychological fruits of inner peace and the severe spiritual consequences of abandoning it.

# 1. Direct Commands to Remember Allah

### Surah Al-Baqarah (2:152)

**فَٱذْكُرُونِىٓ أَذْكُرْكُمْ وَٱشْكُرُوا۟ لِى وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ**

"So remember Me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me."

This verse highlights a divine reciprocity between humanity and God. Commentators note that human *Dhikr* (remembrance through tongue, heart, and righteous deeds) is met by Divine *Dhikr*—which manifests as mercy, guidance, forgiveness, and higher spiritual stations. Gratitude (*shukr*) is paired here with *Dhikr* as its practical culmination, guarding the soul against spiritual ingratitude (*kufr*).

### Surah Al-Ahzab (33:41–42)
**يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ ٱذۡكُرُواْ ٱللَّهَ ذِكۡرٗا كَثِيرٗا ۝ وَسَبِّحُوهُ بُكۡرَةٗ وَأَصِيلٗا**
"O you who have believed, remember Allah with much remembrance, and glorify Him morning and evening."

Unlike many religious obligations that have fixed limits or conditions (such as fasting or pilgrimage), the command for *Dhikr* is qualitative and quantitative without upper limit ("*much remembrance*"). "Morning and evening" (*bukratan wa aṣīlā*) symbolize the bookends of daily life, emphasizing continuous awareness of the Divine through the light of day and the quiet of night.

### Surah Al-Muzzammil (73:8)
**وَٱذۡكُرِ ٱسۡمَ رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلۡ إِلَيۡهِ تَبۡتِيلٗا**
"And remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself to Him with complete devotion."

*Tabattul* denotes detachment from worldly distractions to achieve sincere devotion to God alone. Exegetes explain that invoking the Name of God (*ism Rabbik*) acts as the primary tool to purify intention (*ikhlaṣ*), severing psychological attachments to created things and focusing the spirit entirely on the Creator.

### Surah Al-Insan (76:25)
**وَٱذۡكُرِ ٱسۡمَ رَبِّكَ بُكۡرَةٗ وَأَصِيلٗا**
"And mention the name of your Lord [in prayer] morning and evening."

Set within a context of night prayers and endurance during trials, this verse anchors daily routine in divine focus. Mentioning the Divine Name early in the morning aligns intentions for the day ahead, while doing so in the evening offers gratitude and spiritual accounting before rest.

## 2. Tranquillity and Greatness of Dhikr
### Surah Al-Ra'd (13:28)
**ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَتَطۡمَئِنُّ قُلُوبُهُم بِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِۗ أَلَا بِذِكۡرِ ٱللَّهِ تَطۡمَئِنُّ ٱلۡقُلُوبُ**
"Those who have believed and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of Allah hearts find rest."

The verse links faith with the tranquillity (*ṭumaʾnīnah*) that the heart finds in remembering God. The particle *alā* (‘indeed’) draws attention to the declaration that follows, while the placement of *bi-dhikri Allāh* (‘through the remembrance of God’) before the verb gives particular emphasis to the source of that tranquillity. The shift from ‘their hearts’ in the first clause to ‘hearts’ in the second gives the declaration a

more general form. As the heart turns towards God in remembrance, it finds a steadiness that can endure amid the changing circumstances of life.

**Surah Al-Ankabut (29:45)**
**ٱتْلُ مَآ أُوحِىَ إِلَيْكَ مِنَ ٱلْكِتَـٰبِ وَأَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ ۖ إِنَّ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ تَنْهَىٰ عَنِ ٱلْفَحْشَآءِ وَٱلْمُنكَرِ ۗ وَلَذِكْرُ ٱللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ**
"Recite what has been revealed to you of the Book and establish prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of Allah is greater. And Allah knows what you do."

While ritual prayer (*Ṣalāh*) guards against immorality, the inner reality of prayer—the Remembrance of Allah (*Dhikrullah*)—is described as "greater" (*akbar*). Classical scholars interpret this in two ways: either *Dhikr* is the ultimate soul and purpose of prayer, or God's remembrance of the servant is far greater than the servant's remembrance of God.

**Surah Az-Zumar (39:23)**
**...ثُمَّ تَلِينُ جُلُودُهُمْ وَقُلُوبُهُمْ إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ ٱللَّهِ...**
"...then their skins and their hearts soften at the remembrance of Allah..."

This verse describes the physical and spiritual impact of Quranic revelation on believers. The initial awe (*khashyah*) softens the body and heart, transforming spiritual rigidity into receptivity. *Dhikr* melts the hardness of the heart, allowing divine mercy and light to penetrate deeply.

# 3. Manner and Times of Dhikr

**Surah Al-A'raf (7:205)**
**وَٱذْكُر رَّبَّكَ فِى نَفْسِكَ تَضَرُّعًا وَخِيفَةً وَدُونَ ٱلْجَهْرِ مِنَ ٱلْقَوْلِ بِٱلْغُدُوِّ وَٱلْـَٔاصَالِ وَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ ٱلْغَـٰفِلِينَ**
"And remember your Lord within yourself in humility and in fear without being aloud in speech - in the mornings and the evenings - and do not be among the heedless."

This verse lays down the etiquette (*ādāb*) of secret and silent *Dhikr*. It commands inward remembrance (*fī nafsika*) marked by humility (*taḍarru'an*), reverence (*khīfatan*), and quietude. Exegetes highlight that quiet remembrance protects against ostentation (*riyā'*), fostering deep inward sincerity.

**Surah Al-Imran (3:191)**
**ٱلَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ ٱللَّهَ قِيَـٰمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِى خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ...**
"Who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth..."

Here, *Dhikr* is integrated with intellectual reflection (*tafakkur*). True believers combine verbal/heart invocation with contemplation of nature and cosmology. Remembering Allah in all physical postures—standing, sitting, or lying down—signifies a state of perpetual awareness unaffected by changing circumstances.

**Surah An-Nisa (4:103)**

**فَإِذَا قَضَيْتُمُ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ فَٱذْكُرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ قِيَـٰمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِكُمْ...**
"And when you have completed the prayer, remember Allah standing, sitting, or [lying] on your sides..."

Revealed in the context of prayer during fear/war (*Ṣalāt al-Khawf*), this verse instructs that even after formal prayer ends, the awareness of God must continue seamlessly. Spiritual warfare and daily trials require unceasing vigilance rooted in *Dhikr*.

### Surah Al-Jum'ah (62:10)
**وَٱذْكُرُوا۟ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا لَّعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ...**

"...and remember Allah much that you may succeed."

Following the completion of the Friday congregation, believers return to their economic and worldly pursuits. The Qur'an instructs that commercial activity should not suspend divine remembrance; rather, carrying *Dhikr* into the marketplace is declared the secret to true ultimate success (*falāḥ*).

## 4. High Status and Reward for People of Dhikr
### Surah Al-Ahzab (33:35)
**وَٱلذَّٰكِرِينَ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَٱلذَّٰكِرَٰتِ أَعَدَّ ٱللَّهُ لَهُم مَّغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا...**
"...and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward."

This foundational verse establishes gender equality in spiritual rank and reward. Men and women who engage in abundant *Dhikr* are jointly promised dual blessings: divine forgiveness (*maghfirah*) wiping away past flaws, and a great reward (*ajran 'aẓīmā*) elevated in Paradise.

### Surah Al-Nur (24:36–37)
**فِى بُيُوتٍ أَذِنَ ٱللَّهُ أَن تُرْفَعَ وَيُذْكَرَ فِيهَا ٱسْمُهُۥ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُۥ فِيهَا بِٱلْغُدُوِّ وَٱلْـَٔاصَالِ ۝ رِجَالٌ لَّا تُلْهِيهِمْ تِجَـٰرَةٌ وَلَا بَيْعٌ عَن ذِكْرِ ٱللَّهِ...**
"[Such is conducted] in houses which Allah has ordered to be raised and that His name be mentioned therein; exalting Him within them in the mornings and the evenings [are] men whom neither commerce nor sale distracts from the remembrance of Allah..."

These verses describe the sacred spaces (mosques and sanctified hearts) filled with God's light. The noble souls within them engage in trade and business, yet their spiritual core remains uncorrupted by material distractions. Their outward commerce never veils their inward *Dhikr*.

### Surah Al-A'la (87:14–15)
**قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن تَزَكَّىٰ ۝ وَذَكَرَ ٱسْمَ رَبِّهِۦ فَصَلَّىٰ**

"He has certainly succeeded who purifies himself, and mentions the name of his Lord and prays."

The Qur'an outlines a three-stage spiritual trajectory: purification of the soul (*tazakkā*), invocation of God's Holy Name (*dhakara isma Rabbih*), and formal prayer (*ṣallā*). *Dhikr* serves as the vital bridge linking internal purification to outward worship.

# 5. Warnings Against Neglect / Turning Away from Dhikr

### Surah al-Taha (20:124)

**وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِى فَإِنَّ لَهُۥ مَعِيشَةً ضَنكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُۥ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ أَعْمَىٰ**

"And whoever turns away from My remembrance - indeed, he will have a depressed [difficult] life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind."

Turning away from *Dhikr* (and the Divine Revelation) results in spiritual and psychological constriction (*ma'īshatan ḍankā*) in this world, regardless of outer material wealth. In the Hereafter, this spiritual blindness to truth manifests as literal physical blindness during the Assembly.

### Surah Al-Munafiqun (63:9)

**يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ لَا تُلْهِكُمْ أَمْوَٰلُكُمْ وَلَآ أَوْلَٰدُكُمْ عَن ذِكْرِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ وَمَن يَفْعَلْ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْخَٰسِرُونَ**

"O you who have believed, let not your wealth and your children divert you from the remembrance of Allah. And whoever does that - then those are the losers."

Wealth and family are divine gifts, but when they transform into distractions that cause one to forget the Giver, they become spiritual liabilities. True loss (*khusrān*) is defined not by financial debt, but by trading eternal awareness for temporary worldliness.

### Surah Al-Zukhruf (43:36)

**وَمَن يَعْشُ عَن ذِكْرِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ نُقَيِّضْ لَهُۥ شَيْطَٰنًا فَهُوَ لَهُۥ قَرِينٌ**

"And whoever is blinded from the remembrance of the Most Merciful - We appoint for him a devil as a companion."

Willfully ignoring or remaining blind (*ya'shu*) to the remembrance of the Most Merciful creates an inner spiritual vacuum. This vacuum is inevitably filled by negative spiritual influences (*shayṭān*), which become an inseparable, destructive companion (*qarīn*) misguiding the soul.

### Surah Al-Mujadila (58:19)

**ٱسْتَحْوَذَ عَلَيْهِمُ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنُ فَأَنسَىٰهُمْ ذِكْرَ ٱللَّهِ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ حِزْبُ ٱلشَّيْطَٰنِ...**

"Satan has overcome them and made them forget the remembrance of Allah. Those are the party of Satan..."

The verse presents forgetfulness of God as a consequence of Satan's gaining sway over people. The connective *fa-* in *fa-ansāhum dhikra Allāh* ('and so he made them forget the remembrance of God') links Satan's ascendancy with their loss of remembrance. The expression *ḥizb al-shayṭān* ('the party of Satan') describes their

allegiance, while the closing words of the verse identify the loss to which it leads. Read alongside the preceding verses (58:16–18), this forgetfulness has an ethical dimension. The passage depicts people who use their oaths as a shield and persist in falsehood. In this context, forgetting God means losing sight of one's accountability to Him in speech and conduct.

## Conclusion

The verses dedicated to *Dhikr* in the Holy Qur'an weave a cohesive and transformative narrative regarding the relationship between the Creator and the created. Ultimately, *Dhikr* is not merely an obligation imposed upon humanity; it is a divine privilege and a mercy. As encapsulated in the eternal promise, *"Remember Me; I will remember you"* (2:152), the act of remembrance creates a sacred reciprocal bond, elevating the human being from spiritual oblivion to divine proximity.

Whether practiced through silent invocation, collective reflection, or the daily establishment of prayer, *Dhikr* remains the ultimate sanctuary for the human heart. It offers an enduring antidote to anxiety, materialism, and existential drift, ensuring that the believer navigates worldly life with enduring clarity, gratitude, and peace.

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