

On the Permissibility of Congregational *Dhikr*
A Translation of the *Fatwa* of Imam al-Shawkani on the
Topic

Translated by
Jamaal Diwan



Imam al-Shawkani on the Permissibility of Congregational Dhikr: An Adapted Translation of “Congregating for the Remembrance of God and Doing So Out Loud.”

Introduction

For a long period of time I was personally under the impression that group dhikr out loud was not permissible in Islam except when necessary for teaching. This was because even the more open-minded scholars (that I knew at the time) that I had seen asked about this answered as such. Unfortunately, it is very common for people of knowledge to answer with what they have come to without referencing divergent opinions. Many years later, while studying in Egypt, I was exposed to divergent opinions on this issue, but still had hesitations.

It is very difficult to undo the initial teachings that we receive and I was still inclined to the opinions that I was initially taught. However, with time I realized the benefit of such gatherings of remembrance and their impact on the soul. Eventually I came across this treatise by Imam al-Shawkani on the permissibility of congregational dhikr out loud. This was a truly remarkable find for me as the great Imam is usually associated with many opinions related by the neo-salafi movement. His answer is simple, yet profound. I hope that it will be beneficial for those who are still on the fence as to the permissibility of this act, even though centuries of scholars have deemed it permissible.¹ Below is the text of his response to a question that was posed to him on the issue of making dhikr out loud in a group.² I have adapted it at points to facilitate its readability without changing the meaning. The major adaptation was to shorten the hadith narration analysis that al-

¹ Shaykh Abdullah Hamid Ali has a notable paper on this topic, which can be found [here](#). It is also mentioned in an article by Shaykh Faraz Rabbani that many later Hanafi scholars and Shafi'i scholars also deemed it to be permissible. That article can be found [here](#).

² The text of this fatwa in Arabic can be found in the twelfth volume of Imam al-Shawkani's published fatawa.



Shawkani does for each of the hadith in the treatise and write the conclusion and reference in the footnotes. The treatise is brief, but very detailed and convincing as to the primary evidences allowing the permissibility of congregating for *dhikr*. Let it be a reminder to those who have awareness of God to not rush to conclusions on issues of faith.

Text of the Fatwa of Imam al-Shawkani

The response to this question does not require extensive elaboration. There is enough evidence in the Noble Quran, particular to some circumstances and general to all circumstances, to be sufficient for the one who believes in God and the Last Day.

God says in the Quran,³

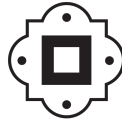
- “O you who have believed, remember God with much remembrance and exalt Him morning and afternoon. It is He who confers blessing upon you, and His angels [ask Him to do so] that He may bring you out from darkneses into the light. And ever is He, to the believers, Merciful.”⁴
- And He says, “And when the prayer [Friday congregational prayer] has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of God, and remember God often that you may succeed.”⁵
- And He says, “Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember God often and the women who do so – for them God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.”⁶
- And He says, “And when you have completed your rites [of the major pilgrimage], remember God like your [previous] remembrance of your

³ Translations of the meaning of the Quran in this work are based off of the *Sahih International* translation.

⁴ Quran 33:41-43.

⁵ Quran 62:10.

⁶ Quran 33:35.



- fathers or with [much] greater remembrance. And among the people is he who says, ‘Our Lord, give us in this world,’ and he will have in the Hereafter no share.”⁷
- And He says, “O you who have believed, when you encounter a company [from the enemy forces], stand firm and remember God much that you may be successful.”⁸
 - And He says, “So remember Me; I will remember you. And be grateful to Me and do not deny Me.”⁹
 - And He says, “Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of God. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of God hearts are assured.”¹⁰
 - And He says, “And whoever turns away from My remembrance – indeed, he will have a dismal life, and We will gather him on the Day of Resurrection blind.”¹¹
 - And He says, “And establish the prayer. Indeed, prayer prohibits immorality and wrongdoing, and the remembrance of God is greater. And God knows that which you do.”¹²
 - And He says, “O you who have believed, let not your wealth and your children divert you from remembrance of God. And whoever does that – then those are the losers.”¹³
 - And He says, “And [mention] the man of the fish, when he went off in anger and thought that We would not decree [anything] upon him. And he called out within the darknesses, ‘There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers.’”¹⁴

This is a collection of the Quranic verses that comes to mind when considering this question. In the verses there is no limitation mentioned as to being out loud or silent, in a high voice or a low voice, in a group or individually, therefore it is understood that all of those possibilities are valid and permissible.

As for that which has reached us from the Purified Sunnah, if it only consisted of the following hadith it would have been sufficient. The Messenger of God said, “God says, ‘I

⁷ Quran 2:200.

⁸ Quran 8:45.

⁹ Quran 2:152.

¹⁰ Quran 13:28.

¹¹ Quran 20:124.

¹² Quran 29:45.

¹³ Quran 63:9.

¹⁴ Quran 21:87.



am with My servant as they remember Me. If they remember Me to themselves, I remember them to Myself and if they remember Me in a gathering, I remember them in a gathering which is even better.”¹⁵ This tradition indicates the permissibility of the remembrance of God (*dhikr*) out loud or silently, in congregation or individually.

The Messenger of God¹⁶ also said, “The example of one who remembers their Lord and the one who does not remember their Lord is like the living and the dead.”¹⁷ And in another version, “The example of a home where God is remembered and a home where God is not remembered is like the living and the dead.”¹⁸ This hadith indicates that there is no distinction between *dhikr* out loud or silently because, as the scholars of *Usul al-Fiqh* have stated, “the absence of elaboration in speech is an indication of its generality.”¹⁹

In another hadith the Prophet said, “A group of people does not sit in the remembrance of God except that the angels surround them with their wings, mercy envelops them, tranquility descends upon them, and God mentions them to those in His presence.”²⁰ This hadith indicates the permissibility of gathering for remembrance whether out loud or silently. In fact, its indication is stronger towards the permissibility of doing so out loud because that is what is understood from their gathering together. Another hadith that indicates a similar meaning is when the Prophet said, “Verily God has angels dedicated to scouring the earth in search of the people of remembrance. When they find a group of people remembering God they call one another saying, ‘Come to what you are searching for!’ Then they surround them with their wings reaching all the way up to the heavens.”²¹

¹⁵ Narrated in [al-Bukhari and Muslim](#) as well as a number of other hadith collections such as al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah.

¹⁶ The peace and blessings of God be upon him. It is assumed of the believer that they will read this to themselves after each mentioning of the name of the blessed Prophet.

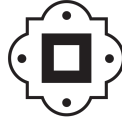
¹⁷ Narrated by [al-Bukhari](#).

¹⁸ Narrated by [Muslim](#).

¹⁹ “*tark al-istifsal yanzilu manzilah al-umum fi al-maqal.*”

²⁰ Narrated by [Muslim](#).

²¹ Narrated by [al-Bukhari and Muslim](#).



In another tradition the Prophet came upon a group of his companions who were sitting in a circle. He asked them, “What is it that brought you together?” They said, “We sat to remember God out of gratitude for the guidance He has bestowed upon us and the bounties He has given us.” He said, “By God, is that the only reason you are gathered together?” They said, “By God, it is so.” He said, “I did not make you to swear as an accusation against your honesty. It is Archangel Gabriel who informed me that God is boasting about you to His angels.”²²

It has also been narrated that the Prophet said, “If you pass by the gardens of Paradise, feast therein.” They said, “And what are the gardens of Paradise?” He said, “The circles of remembrance.”²³ The indication of this hadith is the same as that which preceded it.

The Prophet also said, “The one who remembers God in the presence of those who are heedless of Him has the same position as the one who remains patient when others are fleeing the battlefield.”²⁴ This hadith has the strongest indication of the permissibility of raising one’s voice in remembrance because the heedless person is not made aware except by hearing the voice of the one who is engaging in remembrance.

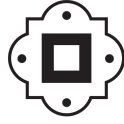
The Prophet also said, “Engage in so much remembrance of God that the people declare you to be insane.”²⁵ This hadith indicates clearly the permissibility of making remembrance out loud.

²² Narrated by [Muslim](#), [al-Nasai](#), and others.

²³ Narrated by [al-Tirmidhi](#) and others. There is some debate around its reliability but al-Manawi said that the combination of its chain of narration and its supporting narrations indicate its reliability.

²⁴ Narrated by al-Haythami in *Majma al-Zawaid* with a reliable chain of narration.

²⁵ Narrated by al-Tabarani and al-Hakim. The latter considered its chain of narration sound. Ibn Hajar also narrated it in his *Amali* and declared it to be a good hadith. The combination of those is sufficient to repel the claim of Abu Ya‘lā that the hadith is weak.



Know that the hadith that indicate what has already been indicated are too many to be encompassed in a small treatise like this one. What has been mentioned is sufficient for those who have guidance. And God is the provider of providence.

End of translation.