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In today's discourse, it is intended to high light an extremely important requirement which is necessitated by Islam and is common to all Muslims, irrespective of their origin, colour, social or literary status. Whereas, in the dark era of today's enlightenment, it has assumed even greater importance. It is disturbing that its realization has reduced almost to a negligible naught. I do not wish to prolong the introduction any longer so let's talk about this requirement in greater exposition.

Allah's Zikr (Remembrance) is the Most Important Requirement of Muslims

One of the Divine injunctions enjoins thus, "O ye who believe: Remember Allah with much remembrance and glorify Him early and late" 33:41-42.

When his Companions questioned the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) about the best of deeds, he replied, "that your tongue is moist with Allah's remembrance when you finally depart from this world".

In the alluded holy verse, it is only the believers who have been addressed and such address is particular to the believers alone. Throughout the Quran, no disbeliever has been commanded to perform Allah's Zikr. The disbelievers have been mentioned only indirectly, where the disadvantages of not performing Allah's Zikr have been recounted. Therefore, the Quranic concept of a believer is that he cannot be without Allah's Zikr, nor can it be conceived thus.

The research scholars have counted more than hundred Quranic verses related to Allah's Zikr. Seventy out of these contain direct commands about Zikr, whereas the remaining bear indirect

ferences, some recount the superiority of Zikr, some contain disadvantages of heedlessness, some herald glad tidings for those who perform Zikr while others mention the deprivation of those who do not. This discourse would be developed with reference to the holy verse recited in the beginning.

It shall be appropriate to analyse two basic questions which are usually raised about the call for Zikr.

First Question

The religion has been perfected. Allah confirmed this perfection during the life time of the Holy Prophet thus; "This day I have perfected your religion for you and completed My favours unto you and selected Islam as your religion" 5:3 . Since then, the tenets of religion ie Shahadah, Salat, Zakat, Saum and Hajj, stand clearly established. A Muslim offers his prayers, gives poor-due, fasts and if resourceful, performs the Hajj as well. Moreover, he recites the Quran and also glorifies his Lord. Some fortunate ones also make arduous efforts to preach the religion, while others even excel and lay down their lives for their religion, nation and country. Somehow, you don't seem to be satisfied with all this effort and want to emphasize the need for Zikr and add another burden at a time when people fail to respond to even the most important, basic requirements of the religion?

Second Question

This question is asked when one is invited to adopt the company of a particular person to learn the method of Zikr and acquire its related states. When the object is to perform Zikr, why can't every Muslim do it by himself?

Let's now discuss the essence of these questions and answers thereof.

As far as the first question is concerned, it is important to discern the reality of Allah's Zikr. It is the sole means to establish and sustain the relation between the Lord and His slave. His Transcendental Essence is beyond the scope and comprehension of human intellect and imagination. Neither can any similitude be coined for Him nor can any colour or form be ascribed to Him nor can He be accessed by any description. That is only natural because He is the Creator, while all the intellectual and literary achievements of the human beings are created. So, while the world has never been void of sages, intellectuals and philosophers, none could describe His Essence with confidence. It was only the clan of Prophets and Messengers who could speak about Him. They spoke about His Attributes, His favours, and the deeds which earned His pleasure. It is so, because such issues relate to the domain of the heart. Even the Divine revelation addresses the heart and not the head. Here 'Heart' connotes the subtle spiritual faculty and not the physical organ of the body. this fact is substantiated by the Book: "It was conveyed by the holy Spirit unto your Heart that you may be of the warners". The Ruh (spirit) is by Allah's Command which is His Attribute. Therefore, it belongs to that celestial world where Allah's Sublimity descends on it in absolute and abstract form. According to saint Rumi:—

"The states of this world can only be perceived and realized but cannot be defined or described."

Zikr by the Heart

Though it is an established fact that the intellect of the Holy Prophet is the best and most perfect of all the human intellects, yet it was his holy heart which was blessed with His Nearness, because it is the heart and not the mind which is endowed with this faculty and propensity. Such is the status of heart! Similarly, this fact too cannot be refuted that life of the heart is contingent upon Allah's

Zikr, as proclaimed by Allah, "Lo the hearts find peace in Allah's Zikr". If Allah is ever annoyed with anyone, the severest punishment inflicted on him is that his heart is made neglectful of Allah's Zikr. Such a person is rendered absolutely worthless, as enjoined in the Quran, "And follow not the one whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance". What a great misery and misfortune! Consider the style of admonition, "whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance". It implies that this neglect has been inflicted on him as a sequel of his evil deeds. This establishes that Allah's Zikr is the only method to sustain the connection between the human heart and its Lord. If this goes, that snaps.

Salat (Prayers) and Allah's Zikr

Now let's see prayers, fasting and the other forms of worship. These all are the members and forms of Allah's Zikr and included therein. In fact, any act performed according to the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet is included in Allah's Zikr. Despite this, the repetition of the personal Name of the Gracious Lord is not only necessary but constitutes the essential essence of all such deeds. Thus, the Lord enjoined, "Establish Salat (prayers) for My remembrance".20:14 Remembrance is an act of the heart, for which the necessary life is Allah's Zikr. It has, therefore, been commanded, "after you finish the Salat, remember Allah, standing, sitting and lying down on your sides". Though Salat was also His remembrance, it has finished but the Zikr continues.

Hajj and Allah's Zikr

Similar is the case of Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca). It has been commanded, "Remember Allah like the remembrance of your forefathers or even more".2:200 That is, perform Allah's Zikr with

the same or even greater frequency and attention with which you remembered your fathers during the days of old. In those days, this ritual of unduly praising the forefathers received maximum attention, therefore it was ordained to divert this emphasis to a really deserving practise of Allah's Zikr. Similar instruction was issued to perform the Zikr in the Inviolable Precinct also.

Fasting and Allah's Zikr

No different is the case of fasting. One of the Holy Traditions informs us thus "the fast is for Me". Fasting does not denote only physical abstenation from food or drink but it connotes spiritual control over the desires and deeds. The tongue is seemingly an insignificant body organ but the Holy Prophet has thus warned about its improper use. "If a man does not restrain his tongue from falsehood during the fast, Allah does not care about his hungry day". Even the fast demands that the tongue should not be polluted with indecent discourse but should be continuously engaged in Allah's Zikr.

Jehad and Allah' Zikr

Look at Jehad (War/Effort) in the cause of Allah. What a grand worship and what a great sacrifice! Even then, it has been enjoined, "O you who believe, when you face a host, remain steadfast (because the believers know that life and death is in the Hands of Allah, so flee not. And in the heat of battle where bodies are being beheaded, fountains of blood gush forth and you are fighting vigorously) remember Allah much (even under these environments) so that you may be successful".8:45 Now, one can analyse the necessity and importance of Allah's Zikr. The repeated emphasis on frequent Zikr imply that a human being should perform the Zikr more than everything else in life, otherwise the Zikr would not be frequent. Two of the most frequent actions

performed by the body are breathing and beating of the heart. The Zikr would only be 'frequent' if it is performed more than once during each breath and each heart throb. May Allah grant us the capability!

Tableegh (Preaching) and Allah's Zikr

Preaching and propagation is one of the basic religious obligations and no Muslim is exempted from it. It is mandatory for one to communicate to others according to one's knowledge. The ignorant must learn from the learned. However, some people are prone to a misconception in this regard. They maintain that preaching is superior to even Allah's Zikr and by preaching alone, they are fulfilling all religious obligations. The fact, however, is that preaching is only the means and not the end in itself. The end or the goal is Allah's Zikr. You may be aware of the difference between the two and also the fact that the means are never superior to the end. This was a secondary discussion, now let us see a scene of exemplary preaching from history.

The Pharaoh is ruling the country with all his grandeur and might. He is great dictator of a vast kingdom. An oppressor and a despot of such a class, that today, the word Pharaoh is used as a symbol of oppression and tyranny. The Quran has quoted him as an example. He is approached by Prophet Moses 'peace be upon him' who neither possesses any wealth and money nor any guards and army. He has only his brother to assist. Following his Lord's Commands, he approaches the Pharaoh in a plight that he wears a coarse raiment of goat hair and holds a forked staff in his hand. While despatching them for this important mission, the special instruction issued by the Gracious Lord is 'Do not be unmindful of My remembrance', 20:42 implying that during the course of your preachings, the accumulated effect of Pharaoh's grandeur and the apprehension of his reaction may create a situation resulting in

relatively lesser attention towards My Zikr. Allah be glorified! Both brothers are prophets and it is a prophetic attribute that he cannot forget Allah's Zikr. There was, however, a chance of diversion of greater attention towards Pharoah than Allah's Zikr. So He forewarned that while propagating the Lord's Word, you should not relegate His Zikr to a lesser priority than Pharoah. The point to ponder is whose preaching effort can match that quality. Where is the arrogant oppressor like Pharoah and who is a preacher like Prophet Moses? Even when he was commanded to place Zikr before tableegh, then how can our preaching be superior to Allah's remembrance? The fact is that Zikr is the life of tableegh also. It is because of this realization that the founder of "Tablighee Jamaat" premonished:—

- (1) If you do not lay due emphasis on religious knowledge and Allah's Zikr, your entire effort would be fruitless. Knowledge and Zikr are like two wings without which this universe cannot be traversed.
- (2) Knowledge and Zikr have not yet been acquired by our preachers. I am deeply worried about that. The only way is to despatch them to the erudite scholars and the sufis. There they should propagate under their guidance and also benefit from their company.
- (3) To set out for preaching without religious knowledge and Allah's Zikr is meaningless.

Shaikhul Hadith, Maulana Muhammad Zakaria (may Allah bless him) stated thus:—

- (1) What is the protective fort for the Ruh (spirit)? It is Allah's Zikr, which is the life of all forms of worship including jehad and the six fundamentals of preaching.
- (2) The significance of knowledge and Zikr should never be lost sight of. Special arrangements should always be made for their acquisition or else your preaching effort would be reduced to mere aimless wandering.

(3) All deeds have, in fact, been made obligatory only for Allah's Zikr.

Here deeds connote noble acts and various forms of worship.

There are relative positions amongst the human beings and the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) ranks the highest and the most exalted of all, similarly there are relative degrees of worship also. No one can dare deny the fact that the accumulated worship of the entire Ummah cannot match the quality of worship of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). It is he, who bestowed the choicest blessing of Allah's gnosis on the human beings and instructed them in the method and manner of their Lord's worship. Even the Creator appreciated his worship, endeavour and the effort "every rising sun brings along the message of renewed effort and toil for you". At an other place, "We have not revealed the Quran unto thee that thou should be distressed". 20:2 According to the most truthful lady of the universe, Hadhrat Aisha (May Allah be pleased with her) the worship of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) consumed so much of his time and effort that his holy feet would swell while keeping vigil at nights, his tears would drench his holy beard and subsequently suffuse his holy bosom. Despite that, he was ordained, "O thou wrapped up in thy raiment— — — and chant the Quran in measure... remember the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself with a complete devotion". 73:1-8 These verses belong to Surah Muzammil, which is the second Chapter in the order of revelation. Allah be glorified! This injunction, firstly assigns definite meanings to Zikr that it symbolizes the repetitive incantation of the Name of the Lord or it simply means remembering Allah frequently. Secondly, when the exalted personage of the Holy Prophet is not absolved from this obligation, who else in the world can claim any exemption. Another point to appreciate is that, whereas Allah and His messenger have assigned definite form, frequency, time and quantity to other forms of worship, no such description have been prescribed for Allah's Zikr.

At every place absolute Zikr has been enjoined. This freedom encompasses every method and manner of Zikr within the prescribed limits of Shariah and any such form which is not explicitly prohibited by the Sunnah would be considered as permitted and correct.

Therefore, in various sufi Orders, different methods of Zikr are employed, but despite this variation, every one's purpose is the initiation of the heart onto performance of Allah's Zikr. This is manifest from the Hadith quoted in the beginning. It is an every day observation that during unconsciousness or a state of oblivion, the events embedded in the mind are involuntarily relayed by the tongue. A businessman would speak of business and the farmer about his agriculture, the occupations which consumed most of their attention and effort. But if Allah's Zikr received priority above all mundance affairs, then in a similar state the tongue would involuntarily incant His name. This is the interpretation of the saying of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) that you should leave this world in a state where the agony of death cannot divest you of His name. May Allah grace every zakir with this blessing. I do not intend to prolong the issue otherwise it is difficult, if not impossible to cover all Quranic verses and the Hadith about Allah's Zikr. It is now established that Allah's Zikr is the first as well as the last requirement of every one. If, however, one cannot appreciate this requirement that's different.

Second Question.

The beneficance being received by the human beings from the august person of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is of two types, his teachings and his blessings.

Teachings of the Holy Prophet: These are the instructions of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) which contain the information and knowledge of Transcendence to corporeal and of the unseen to

the visible. These also contain the commands and prohibitions. The informations regarding the Divine Being, His attributes, realm of creation, realm of command, human life and its relationship with realm of commands, terrestrial life, ismuth (life after death) and Ressurrection, belief about the Hereafter, angels, heaven and hell, the ways to approach the Heaven and avoid the Hell are all encompassed by his teaching and are related to the belief and practice of the human beings.

Blessings of the Holy Prophet: It is a sublime state radiated by the noble self of the Holy Prophet. Any one who received a scintilla thereof was captivated for ever while the deprived heart ultimately lamented. The Word of Lord points towards this fact thus: "The Messenger of Allah recites the revealed verses unto them" .62:2 This call towards Allah is meant for one and all. The Messenger reforms the one who answers this call and makes him grow. This process is followed by bestowal of the knowledge of the Book and wisdom generating discernment and perception of the meanings and mission of the Book. It implies that the sayings of the Holy Prophet and his call were meant for and received by all but the knowledge of Book and Wisdom was only vouchsafed to those who had answered the call were subsequently purified. This reformation is the state imbued by the blessings of the Holy Prophet and the one who did not partake of these blessings could never benefit from the teachings of the Holy Prophet. The discourses of the Holy Prophet which verbalized exquisite intrinsic and extrinsic beauty were heard even by the infidels and the idolators of Mecca but these only caused to multiply their aversion and animosity. Every human being is naturally endowed with the aesthetics to appreciate beauty in its every form whether it manifests itself in an animal or a stone. Beauty does attract attention and appreciation. If the speaker is blessed with grace and is aided by the beauty of his speech and oration, the effect is multiplied manifold. The exalted personage of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) encompasses the total beauty, his holy self being a unique paragon, his oration being the

sweetest and the contents being the absolute truth, yet why were the idolators averted and not attracted. It is because they were unfortunate not to derive even an iota from his blessings.

The blessings of Holy Prophet which were radiated in his august company possessed such an overwhelming and revolutionary effect that any believer who was seen by the Holy Prophet or could cast a single glance at his holy self, was immediately elevated to the rank of a companion. Now, companion is not merely a word but it symbolizes a status which is the highest after prophethood in the entire humanity. It signifies that within a moment he was reformed to the highest conceivable level.

A companion is a model of human excellence. He combines such a pinnacle of all sublime human virtues like faith, abstinence, honesty and truth that no non-companion can ever match him. This grand title and rank cannot be attained except through the blessings of the Holy Prophet's company. Though the qualities of worship, jihad, martyrdom, acquisition and distribution of knowledge, each bears greatness in itself and it is quite possible that a non-companion may be able to emulate a companion in any of these but he cannot attain the status of companionship. The reality of the excellences of companionship attained through the blessings of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) be inquired from the Book of Allah, which from the beginning to the end, asserts their virtue and greatness like the twinkling of stars on the sky. The blessings of the Holy Prophet were directly radiated and distributed till his corporal presence in this terrestrial abode but even after his departure to the celestial abode this chapter of greatness has not been closed. Just as the riches of his teachings are still being distributed far and wide, similarly the opulence of his blessings is also being transmitted omni-directionally with the same intensity. However, there is a definite difference of status. Those who followed could not become companions but became *Tabaeen* due to blessings of the

companions and similarly the *Taba Tabaeen*. One of the attributes of the companions described in the Book is that their hearts and their skins (ie from the inner most to the outer most), every cell of their body resonated at the frequency of Allah's *Zikr*. When the heart becomes *zakir* through the blessings of company, it starts beating at the frequency of *Zikr* and saturates the entire body with it. Such a person is able to fulfil the Divine obligation of performing frequent *Zikr*. This beneficance was handed down by the companions to *Tabaeen*, then to *Taba Tabaeen* and finally to the *Aulia* (lit: friends, cloq: savants: sages). The fortunate ones who benefitted from this blessing are divided in two categories, the ones who confined these to themselves and those who were entrusted to convey them to others as well. The second category came to be known as *Shaikhs* (the spiritual leaders) and the various means employed for such communication were called *Sulook* and *Sufi Orders*. This communication of the blessings is perfectly analogous to the propagation of teachings of the Holy Prophet. Some partook of the teachings only to acquire faith and virtuous conduct, while some went ahead and undertook the propagation of these teachings. The category came to be known as *Ulema* (religious scholars) and those who attained specialization in the fields of interpretation, traditions and jurisprudence were called *Muffasir* (interpreters), *Muhaddis* (traditionists) and *Faqih* (jurists) respectively.

The point to remember is that there are no variations in the states. Therefore, even with different methods and occupations, everyone acquired same states. It may also be remembered that the recipient of the blessing never stayed bereft of the teachings of the Holy Prophet. On the contrary, the one who stayed content with the teachings alone, could not receive the blessings by himself, without the company of an accomplished *Shaikh*. It is a principle, therefore, that every *Wali* (sufi) is an *Alim* (religious scholar) but not vice versa. After acquisition of exoteric knowledge, one has to adopt the

company of a Shaikh to acquire esoteric beneficance. It is only the characteristic of this bygone era when people have stopped acquiring religious knowledge and the ones who make an effort, do not proceed beyond a couple of initial lectures. Then, instead of acquiring the blessings, they embark upon denying this aspect of the Prophetic beneficance. They escape the obligations of self purification and feel content that their knowledge is the climax of human attainment. The abstract of faith was received in some form, even by those who believed in the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) but died before his deputation. It was also received by those, to whom his teachings reached in some form, but perfect faith was vouchsafed to only those who found his blessed company also.

In the end, I want to submit about bai'at (oath of alligiance and initiation) and the institution of Shaikhdом and discipleship. The reality and the sole purpose of bai'at is the achievement of this excellence. It is correct to seek the bai'at of a religious scholar for the sake of outward reformation, but the bai'at of the one ignorant about the basic religious obligations is simply prohibited. The Bai'at-e-Sulooke-o-Tasawwuf (the rite of initiation unto the Path) may only be taken at the hands of the one, who not only initiates the hearts to Zikr but also possesses the ability to initiate the Ruh (spirit) unto the sublime Path and ushe it to the audience of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). This is known as Fana-fir-Rashool extinction of one's self in the exalted personage of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). If this is not possible, then such Bai'at yields nothing except wastage of time and also conceals the danger of delusion.

May Allah bless all Muslims with religious understanding, the capacity to practice and with true love of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). Ameen.