253005 - Virtues of Dhikr

the question

“and they do not remember Allah but little” [An-Nisa’ 4:142] – this phrase is from a verse which speaks of the hypocrites. My question is: is remembering Allah (Dhikr) obligatory? If I do not remember Allah, but I pray and do all the obligatory duties, am I a hypocrite? Is everyone who remembers Allah little a hypocrite?

Summary of answer

Remembering Allah (Dhikr) brings great benefits, such as spiritual well-being, tranquility and softening of the heart. By Dhikr the Muslim attains great reward by doing a small deed, which is simply moving one’s lips and reciting a few words. Dhikr is required from everyone, and it is encouraged in all circumstances, apart from exceptional situations. The believer who loves Allah and His Messenger, and is certain of the truth of His religion, inevitably remembers Allah all the time. Even if he only recites a little Dhikr, he cannot be a hypocrite, but he is missing out on a great deal of reward.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The Importance of Dhikr in Islamic Practice

Remembering Allah, may He be Exalted, may be obligatory, as in the case of Takbirat Al-Ihram (the Takbir said when starting the prayer), or it may be recommended.

It says in Al-Mawsu`ah Al-Fiqhiyyah Al-Kuwaitiyyah (21/222):

The ruling on Dhikr Allah, may He be Exalted:

Remembering Allah (Dhikr, pl. Adhkar) is something that is liked and is required from everyone, and it is encouraged in all circumstances, apart from exceptional situations as mentioned in Islamic teaching, such as when sitting to relieve oneself, when listening to the Khutbah (sermon at Friday prayers) and so on.

The evidence for it being encouraged (recommended) is the fact that Allah has enjoined it in many verses, and He has forbidden its opposite, namely heedlessness and forgetfulness. He has connected success to constantly remembering Him a great deal. He has praised those who do that and described them as being those who benefit from His signs, and stated that they are people of understanding. He has told us of the loss of those who are distracted from Dhikr by other things. He has told us that the reward of those who remember Him is that He Himself remembers them and mentions them. He has told us that remembrance of Him is greater than everything, and He has described Dhikr as being the twin of righteous deeds. He has made Dhikr the beginning and end of righteous deeds in many verses, some of which we shall quote here, but we will not list all of them.

When Does Dhikr become obligatory or forbidden?

In some situations, remembrance of Allah is more highly recommended, as we shall see below.

- Dhikr may be obligatory; obligatory Adhkar include some of the Adhkar of the prayer, such as Takbirat Al-Ihram and recitation of Quran. Obligatory Adhkar also include the Adhan and Iqamah, according to the view that they are a communal obligation. Returning greetings of Salam, and saying Bismillah when slaughtering an animal for meat are also obligatory Adhkar. Details on the rulings on each of these may be found elsewhere.
- Dhikr may be prohibited if it involves elements of Shirk (associating others with Allah), such as the Talbiyah of the Jahiliyyah, or if it contains phrases that are inappropriate when speaking of Allah, such as what they used to say (in the prayer) at the beginning of Islam, “Peace be upon Allah from His slaves.” The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Do not say, `Peace (As-Salam) be upon Allah,’ for Allah is As-Salam. Rather say: `At-Tahiyyatu Lillahi was-Salawatu wat-Tayyibat (All compliments, prayers and pure words

are due to Allah).'" For Salam (peace) is only sought for the one who needs it, but Allah is As-Salam; so Salam is to be sought from Him, not for Him. Rather He is to be praised for being as-Salam, such as saying, "Allahumma anta As-Salam wa minka As-Salam (O Allah, You are As-Salam (the One Who is free from all defects and deficiencies) and from You is all peace)."

- Dhikr may be prohibited in certain circumstances, such as saying Dhikr during the Khutbah (sermon) on Fridays. End quote.

The believer who prays regularly, offering the obligatory prayers on time, is constantly remembering Allah, may He be Exalted, as he is reciting the Adhkar that are to be recited during the prayer, and after the prayer, and so on.

- Situations in which one should make sure not to forget to recite Dhikr include: eating and drinking, entering and exiting. So when a person eats or drinks something, he should mention the name of Allah (by saying Bismillah), and when he finishes it, he should praise Him (by saying Al-Hamdu Lillah). When he enters his house, he should mention the name of Allah, when he exits his house, he should mention the name of Allah. Similarly, he should consistently recite the Adhkar of morning and evening, and the Adhkar for going to sleep.

Hypocrisy in Dhikr: A Warning for Believers

As for the hypocrite who conceals disbelief while making an outward display of being Muslim, or he is uncertain and has doubts about the religion, he is not keen to remember Allah and does not feel at ease with Dhikr, apart from what he does by way of showing off and hypocrisy.

Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Verily, the hypocrites seek to deceive Allah, but it is He Who deceives them. And when they stand up for As-Salah (the prayer), they stand with laziness and to be seen of men, and they do not remember Allah but little} [An-Nisa' 4:142]

Ibn Kathir (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

With regard to the words "And when they stand up for As-Salah (the prayer), they stand with

laziness and to be seen of men, and they do not remember Allah but little": This is how the hypocrites are in the noblest and best of deeds, namely the prayer. When they stand up to pray, they stand with laziness, because they have no sincere intention concerning it; they do not believe in it, they do not fear Allah, and they do not understand its meaning. Ibn Mardawayh narrated, via `Ubaydullah ibn Dhahr, from Khalid ibn Abi `Imran, from `Ata' ibn Abi Rabah, from Ibn `Abbas who said: It is disliked for a man to stand up to pray with laziness; rather he should stand up to pray cheerfully, with eagerness and joy, for he is conversing with Allah, may He be Exalted, and Allah is before him, forgiving him, answering him when he calls upon Him. Then Ibn `Abbas recited this verse: "And when they stand up for As-Salah (the prayer), they stand with laziness."

Similar reports were narrated via more than one chain of narration, from Ibn `Abbas.

The words "And when they stand up for As-Salah (the prayer), they stand with laziness" describe their outward appearance, as Allah says elsewhere (interpretation of the meaning): "and that they came not to As-Salah (the prayer) except in a lazy state" [At-Tawbah 9:54]. Then He, may He be Exalted, mentions the real motive in their hearts: "and to be seen of men". That is, there is no sincerity towards Allah in what they do; rather they only attend the prayer by way of dissimilation and going along with people. Hence they often stay away from prayers in which they are not usually seen, such as `Isha' prayer, when it is dark, and Fajr prayer when it is still dark. It is proven in a Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "The most burdensome prayers for the hypocrites are `Isha' prayer and Fajr prayer. If they knew what (reward) is in them, they would come to them even if they had to crawl. I was thinking of ordering that the call to prayer be given, then I would tell a man to lead the people in prayer, and I would go out with men carrying bundles of wood to people who do not come to the prayers, and I would burn their houses with fire around them."

The phrase "and they do not remember Allah but little" refers to their prayers. They do not focus when praying, and they do not understand what they are saying; rather they are distracted from their prayer, and they have no interest in what they could attain of goodness therein.

Imam Malik narrated from Al-`Ala' ibn `Abd Ar-Rahman, that Anas ibn Malik said: The Messenger of

Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “That is the prayer of the hypocrite, that is the prayer of the hypocrite, that is the prayer of the hypocrite. He sits watching the sun until, when it is between the horns (that is, the two sides of the head) of the Shaytan, he pecks out four Rak`ahs, in which he does not remember Allah but little.

This is how it was narrated by Muslim, At-Tirmidhi and An-Nasa’i, from the Hadith of Isma`il ibn Ja`far Al-Madani, from Al-`Ala ibn `Abd Ar-Rahman. At-Tirmidhi said: It is authentic." (End quote from Tafsir Ibn Kathir 2/438)

Abu Hayyan (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Al-Hasan said: It is little, because they do not do it for the sake of Allah. Qatadah said: Rather what is meant is that it is little because it is not going to be accepted, and whatever Allah rejects, a lot of it is little, and what He accepts, a little of it is a lot. Others said: It is little in relation to how much they indulge in falsehood, lies and disbelief. Az-Zamakhshari said: It is “but little” because they do not pray at all when they are away from people; they only pray in front of people, and what they pray openly is little, because whenever they have the opportunity to refrain from doing what they have no interest in, they use that opportunity. Or they do not mention Allah in the sense of reciting Tasbih (saying Subhan-Allah (glory be to Allah) and Tahlil (saying La ilaha ill-Allah (There is none worthy of worship but Allah)) except a little. It may be that little means nothing at all. End quote.

But it is not possible that it means nothing at all, because it says “but” or “except”, and there cannot be an exception when there is nothing in the first place. It was also suggested that it is little because their intention (when remembering or mentioning Allah) is worldly gain, because the enjoyment of this world is little. And it was also said that there is something implied and not explicitly mentioned, which is that they do not remember the punishment and reward of Allah except a little, because they are too preoccupied with worldly concerns and they pay no attention at all to matters of the hereafter.

What appears to be the case is that Dhikr here refers to remembering and mentioning Allah

verbally, and that they rarely mention Allah, unlike the sincere believer, who remembers Allah, may He be Exalted, most of the time."(End quote from Al-Bahr Al-Muhit, 4/110)

This is the situation of the hypocrite. As for the believer who loves Allah and His Messenger, and is certain of the truth of His religion, he inevitably remembers Allah all the time. Even if he only recites a little Dhikr, he cannot be a hypocrite in the sense mentioned above, but he is missing out on a great deal of reward and goodness by only remembering Allah a little.

The Spiritual and Worldly Benefits of Dhikr

- Remembering Allah (Dhikr) brings great benefits, such as spiritual well-being, tranquility and softening of the heart. Allah, may He be Exalted, Says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Those who believe (in the Oneness of Allah - Islamic Monotheism), and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allah, Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest} [Ar-Ra`d 13:28]

{Is he whose heart Allah has opened to Islam, so that he is in light from His Lord (as he who is non-Muslim)? So, woe to those whose hearts are hardened against remembrance of Allah! They are in plain error!} [Az-Zumar 39:22]

- Another of these benefits is attaining great reward by doing a small deed, which is simply moving one’s lips and reciting a few words.

Imam An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his great book, Riyadh As-Salihin:

Chapter on the virtue of Dhikr and encouragement to remember Allah:

Allah, may He be Exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And the remembrance of Allah is greater} [Al-`Ankabut 29:45]

{Therefore remember Me (by praying, glorifying, etc.). I will remember you} [Al-Baqarah 2:152]

{And remember your Lord by your tongue and within yourself, humbly and with fear without loudness in words in the mornings, and in the afternoons and be not of those who are neglectful} [Al-A`raf 7:205]

{And remember Allah much, that you may be successful} [Al-Jumu`ah 62:10]

{And the men and the women who remember Allah much with their hearts and tongues Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward (i.e. Paradise)} [Al-Ahzab 33:35]

{O you who believe! Remember Allah with much remembrance. And glorify His Praises morning and afternoon (the early morning (Fajr) and Asr prayers)} [Al-Ahzab 33:41-42]

And there are many similar, well-known verses.

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Two words that are light on the tongue and heavy in the balance and beloved to the Most Merciful: Subhan Allahi wa bi hamdihi Subhan Allah il-`Adhim (Glory and praise be to Allah, glory be to Allah the Almighty).”

And it was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “When I say `Subhan Allah, wal-hamdu Lillah, wa la ilah ill-Allah, wa Allahu akbar (Glory be to Allah, praise be to Allah, there is no god except Allah, and Allah is Most Great)’, this is more beloved to me than all that the sun rises upon.” (Narrated by Muslim)

It was also narrated from him that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever says `La ilaha ill-Allah wahdahu la sharika lah, lahul-mulk wa lahul-hamd wa huwa `ala kulli shay’in qadir (There is no god except Allah alone with no partner; to Him be dominion and praise, and He is Able to do all things)’ one hundred times in a day, will have reward equivalent to that of manumitting ten slaves, one hundred good deeds will be written for him, one hundred bad deeds will be erased from his record, and he will have protection from the Shaytan all that day until evening comes; no one will do anything better than what he has done, except a man

who does more than that.”

And he said: “Whoever says `Subhan Allahi wa bi hamdihi (Glory and praise be to Allah)’ one hundred times in a day, his sins will be erased, even if they are like the foam of the sea.” (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

It was narrated from Abu Ayyub Al-Ansari (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever says `La ilaha ill-Allah wahdahu la sharika lah, lahul-mulk wa lahul-hamd wa huwa `ala kulli shay’in qadir (There is no god except Allah alone with no partner; to Him be dominion and praise, and He is Able to do all things)’ ten times will be like one who manumitted four of the children of Isma`il.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

It was narrated that Abu Dharr (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Shall I not tell you of the dearest of words to Allah? The dearest of words to Allah are: Subhan Allah wa bi Hamdihi (Glory and praise be to Allah).” (Narrated by Muslim)

It was narrated that Abu Malik Al-Ash`ari (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Purification is half of faith, `Al-hamdu Lillah’ fills the Balance and `Subhan-Allah’ and `Al-hamdu Lillah’ fill the space between heaven and earth.” (Narrated by Muslim)

It was narrated that Sa`d ibn Abi Waqqas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: A Bedouin came to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and said: Teach me some words that I may say: He said: “Say: `La ilaha ill-Allah wahdahu la sharika lah, Allahu akbaru kabiran, wal hamdu Lillahi kathiran, wa subhan Allahi Rabb il-`Alamin, wa la hawla wa la quwwata illa Billah il-`Aziz il-Hakim (There is no god but Allah alone, with no partner or associate, Allah is most great, much praise be to Allah, glory be to Allah the Lord of the Worlds, and there is no power and no strength except with Allah, the Almighty, the Most Wise).” He said: These are for my Lord; what is there for me? He said: “Say: `Allahumm aghfir li warhamni wahdini warzuqni (O

Allah, forgive me, have mercy on me, guide me and grant me provision).” (Narrated by Muslim)

Then he narrated many other hadiths. This is a big topic.

For more information, please see the book Al-Wabil As-Sayyib min Al-Kalim At-Tayyib by Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him).

Whoever reflects upon the immense reward for these few words will understand the virtue of Dhikr (remembrance of Allah). It is appropriate for every Muslim, man or woman, to be keen to remember Allah and to keep his tongue moist with Dhikr and fill the record of his deeds therewith.

We ask Allah to enable us and you to do that.

And Allah knows best.