



Movement During Dhikr ¹

al-Sayyid Shaykh ‘Abdal Qādir ‘Īsā al-Ḥalabī

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Movement during Dhikr (remembrance) is a good thing because it brings energy to the body for that act of worship. It is permissible in Sacred Law, as proven by the narration of Aḥmad in his Musnad, and al-Maqdisī with sound narrators from the Ḥadīth of Anas ؓ, saying in their language: ‘Muhammad is a righteous servant.’ He ؓ said: “What are they saying?” It was said: “[They are saying] Muhammad is a righteous servant.” When he saw them in that state, he did not censure them. Rather, he approved of their act. It is known that the rulings in Sacred Law are taken from his ؓ statements, actions, and tacit approvals. Since he approved of their action and did not censure them, it is clear that it is permissible.

This Ḥadīth contains evidence that it is permissible to gather between permissible movement and extolling the Messenger of Allāh ؓ. It also proves that movement during Dhikr is not described as forbidden dance, rather, it is permissible because it energizes the body for Dhikr and assists one in having presence of heart with Allāh the Exalted—if [one’s] intention is sound—for actions are according to their ends and actions are only based on their intentions and every person shall have what he intends.

Let us listen to Imām ‘Alī ؓ and how he describes the companions of the Prophet ﷺ. Abū Arākah said:

Once, I prayed the Fajr prayer with ‘Alī. When he moved from his position, he remained sitting as if he was sad. When the rays of the sun were upon the Maṣjid wall covering the span of a spear, he [stood and] prayed two units of prayer. Afterwards, he wrung his hands and said: “I have seen the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh ؓ. I see no-one that resembles them. By Allāh! They used to rise in the morning disheveled, dust-covered, pale, with something between their eyes resembling goat’s knees, as they had spent the night chanting Allāh’s Book, turning from their feet to their foreheads. If Allāh was mentioned they swayed the way trees sway on a windy day, then their eyes would pour out tears until - by Allāh! - they soaked their clothes.” ²

¹ [Publisher’s Note] Translated from *Ḥaqā’iq ‘an al-Taṣawwuf*, al-Sayyid ‘Abdal Qādir ‘Īsā al-Ḥalabī (Dār al-‘Irfān, Aleppo) p.157-163. Preview of the forthcoming English translation by Sunni Publications (www.sunnipubs.com).

² *al-Bidāya wal-Nihāya fīl Tārīkh* by the Imām, the Ḥāfiẓ, Qur’ānic exegete, and historian; Ismā‘īl ibn Kathīr al-Qurashī al-Hāshimī (d. 744 Hijrī), vol 8 pg 6. This narration was also narrated by Abū Nu‘aym in *al-Ḥilya* vol 1 pg 76.

The expression of Imām ‘Alī that concerns us here is his statement: “they swayed the way trees sway on a windy day.” This statement is explicit in stating that it was movement, and it repudiates the view of those that said it is a forbidden innovation, as well as establishing the unrestricted permissibility of movement during Dhikr.

This Ḥadīth was used as evidence by Shaykh ‘Abdul Ghanī al-Nablūsī (may Allāh have mercy upon him) in one of his essays that he wrote in support of movement during Dhikr. He said:

This is explicitly clear in stating that the companions used strong movements during Dhikr, and this is based upon the fact/reality that one is not taken to account when he moves, stands up, sits down in anyway because he has not committed an act of disobedience or intended one as was mentioned.

Having said this however, there are a group of foreign reprobates that have entered upon the Ṣūfīs and ascribed themselves to them while they (the Ṣūfīs) are free from them. They have tarnished the beauty of the gatherings of Dhikr due to the things they have added to it of misguided innovations and evil actions that are forbidden in the pure Sacred Law, such as playing musical instruments that are forbidden, intentionally gathering with prepubescent boys, and vile singing. Due to this, it has not remained as an act that serves as a means to purify the hearts from their grime and establish connection with Allāh. Nay, it has become a trap for heedless souls and a way of actualizing lowly desires.

What is so unfortunate is that some of the claimants to knowledge have attacked the gatherings of Dhikr. They have not made a distinction between these deviated foreign elements, and the people of Dhikr, the spiritual travelers (unto Allāh) and sincere ones who, through Dhikr of Allāh, are increased in the firmness of their *imān*, uprightness in their dealings, loftiness in their character, and contentment in their hearts.

There are fair minded scholars that have distinguished between the true Ṣūfīs that traverse upon the path of the Greatest Messenger ﷺ, and those deviated foreign elements. These (scholars) clarified the ruling of Allāh concerning Dhikr—at the head of them, the ‘Allāmah, Ibn ‘Ābidīn in his essay; *Shifā’ al-‘Alīl*. He attacked the foreign elements among the Ṣūfīs, exposed their innovation and evil acts during Dhikr and warned against them and against gathering with them. He said: “We have nothing [negative] to say against the truthful ones of our masters of the Ṣūfīs that are innocent from every low trait. The Imām of the two groups ³, our master al-Junayd was told: “Certain people indulge in ecstatic behavior, and sway with their bodies.” He replied:

Leave them to their happiness with Allāh. They are the ones whose affections have been smashed by the path and whose breasts have been torn apart by effort, and they are unable to bear it. There is no blame on them if they breathe awhile as a remedy for their intense state. If you tasted what they taste, you would excuse their exuberance.

³ Meaning the people of the *Sharī‘ah* and the *Ḥaqīqa*.

Then he said: “The adept ‘Allāmah Ibn Kamāl Bāshā responded just as al-Junayd before him responded when he was asked for a formal legal verdict concerning this. He said (in some poetry):

*If you investigate, you will not find any harm
in outwardly manifesting ecstatic behavior*

Or swaying, if you were sincere from that which is bad

So you may stand and hasten on your feet, and it is fully appropriate

For the one whose Master has called him to hasten on (his) head

So, the dispensation that is mentioned in these situations, during Dhikr and audition, is exclusively for the Gnostics that devote all their time to the best of actions, those who are traveling the mystic path and in control of their lower selves, keeping them away from ugly states. These individuals do not listen to any save the Deity. They long for no one but Him. When they remember Him they sway. When they are thankful to him they disclose it. If they fall into an ecstatic state, they loudly express that. When they witness Him, they relax and fall at ease. When they roam freely in the Divine Presence they spend their nights awake. When ecstasy overcomes them, and they drink from the fountains of His Divine Will; from them are those that are overtaken by the [Divine] magnificence, thus they fall into submission and melt away. From them are those that are struck by the luminance of Divine kindness, thus they move in delight. From them are those who have love rise over them whilst in the direction of [Divine] closeness, so they fall into stupor and are absent. This is the answer that is apparent to me.

He also said:

We have nothing to say regarding those that follow them, drink from their fountain, and find within themselves longing and aspiration to the All Knowing King (Allāh). Rather, our words (of censure) are towards those of the corrupt and blameworthy laymen.⁴

From this, we see that Ibn ‘Ābidīn (may Allāh have mercy upon him) allows the outward display of ecstasy and movement during Dhikr, and that his legal verdict concerning it is one of permissibility. [We also see] that the texts that he cited in forbiddance (of movement during Dhikr) within his well know gloss in volume three are understood in the event that there are evil practices committed in the gatherings of Dhikr, such as musical instruments, striking with iron, gathering with handsome young boys, intending the meanings of the words (of poetry) to them and courting them and other such evils.

⁴ *Majmū‘a Rasā’il Ibn ‘Ābidīn*, essay six titled: *Shifā’ al-‘Alīl wa Wabl al-Ghalīl fi Ḥukm al-Wasiyya bil Khatamāt wal-Tahālīl*, pg 172-173

Those that forbid (movement during Dhikr) and hold fast to the words of Ibn ‘Ābidīn only did so because they did not peruse his words in Majmū‘ al-Rasā’il, where he made a distinction (as has proceeded) between the foreign miscreants and those that are of the truthful. He allowed outward expression of ecstasy for the Gnostics and those arriving at the path and those among the beginners of the path that follow them. Therefore, if you go back and review to two works (of Ibn ‘Ābidīn), the truth will become clear to you.

There is no doubt that outwardly expressing ecstasy is working to bring it about and manifesting it, although it is not really present in reality. There is no harm in that if the intention is correct—as stated by the ‘Allāmah Ibn ‘Ābidīn in his gloss:

If you investigate, you will not find any harm in ecstatic behavior

Or swaying if you were sincere from that which is bad

So, if manifesting ecstasy outwardly is legally permissible and of no harm as stated by the jurists, then displays of actual ecstasy is permissible *a fortiori*. The ecstasy and outward manifestation of ecstasy among the Ṣūfīs is nothing more than a portion of what the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ were upon.

The Mufti of the esteemed Shāfi‘ī jurists in Mecca al-Mukarrama, the great ‘Allāmah Aḥmad Zaynī Daḥlān (may Allāh have mercy upon him) cited a scene from one of their (the companion’s) states in his famous book on the Prophetic biography. In his commentary, he stated:

After the conquest of Khaybar, Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib ﷺ returned from Abyssinia along with some of the Muslims, some sixteen men. Ja‘far then met with the Prophet ﷺ, kissed his forehead and embraced him. He ﷺ, stood for him, just as he had stood for Ṣafwan ibn Umayyah and ‘Adī ibn Ḥātim when they came to him (from travel), then he said: “I do not know of which of the two things I am the most delighted about; the conquest of Khaybar, or the return of Ja‘far.” Then he said ﷺ to Ja‘far: “You resemble me in both my manners and physical characteristics.” Upon hearing this, Ja‘far ﷺ danced from the sweetness of what was said, and the Prophet ﷺ did not censure him for his dancing. This has been made a basis for the dancing of the Ṣūfīs when they experience ecstasy in the gatherings of Dhikr and audition.⁵

The ‘Allāmah, al-Alūsī said in his Tafsīr, while commenting on the words of the exalted:

“Those that remember Allāh standing, sitting, and while on their sides...”
(*Āl ‘Imrān; 191*)

In light of this, the narration of Ibn ‘Umar ﷺ ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr and a group of companions is understood, where it is narrated that they went out to the prayer place on the day of ‘Eid, and started to remember Allāh the Exalted. Some of them said: “Did not

⁵ *al-Sīrat al-Nabawīyya wal-Āthar al-Muhammadiyya* of Zaynī Daḥlān, found in the margins of the *Sīrat al-Ḥalabiyya*, vol 2 pg 252. The Ḥadīth is found in al-Bukhārī in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* in the book of *Ṣulḥ*.

Allāh say: “Those that remember Allāh standing and sitting...”? They then stood up and remembered Allāh while on their feet. This narration is understood to show that they intended by this act, to seek blessings through a way of conforming to the verse by (performing) one aspect that it indicates.⁶

Sīdī Abū Madyan ﷺ said:

Say to the one that censures the people (of Taṣawwuf) from ecstasy

*Leave us alone if you have not tasted the meaning of drinking
from the fountain of longing*

Yes, oh you who is ignorant of its meaning

*when the souls move out of longing for the meeting
the outward physical bodies dance*

Oh young man, do you not look at the caged bird

when its home is mentioned, it begins to sing

By singing, it releases that which is in its heart

And the bodily limbs become shaky both physically and in meaning

Such is also the state of the souls of the lovers oh young man

Longing for the higher realms constantly shake it

Do we force it to be patient while it is in a state of longing

And is the one who witnesses the meaning able to be patient

So, oh leader of the lovers stand upright

And murmur for us in the name of the beloved and put us at ease

Summary:

From what has proceeded, it is understood that movement during Dhikr is legally permissible. This is especially the case when added to the fact that the command to perform Dhikr is unrestricted and encompasses every state. So, whoever remembers Allāh the Exalted while sitting or standing, resting or walking, or moving or staying still,

⁶ *Rūh al-Ma'ānī* of al-'Allāmah al-Alūsī, vol 4 pg 140

he is carrying out that which is sought from him and complying with the Divine command.

So, the one that claims that movement during Dhikr is either forbidden or detested, he is the one that is requested to bring his evidence, because he is restricting some unrestricted states as opposed to others with a unique ruling.

No matter the case, the goal of the Muslim when entering into the gatherings of Dhikr is to carry out worship by the act of Dhikr. Movement during it is not a condition (for its validity), however, it is a means for gaining energy during that act of worship and a way of imitating the people of ecstasy if the intention is correct.

*Imitate if you are not like them
Imitation of the generous one is success*

