

# The Ruling of making *Dhikr* collectively in Unison according to the Imams of the Salaf

Researched by Ahmad bin Muhammad an-Najjar

*Imam Abu Hanifah -Rahimullaah- said:*

*'That raising the voice in making Takbeer (saying Allaahu Akbar) is principally a Bida', because it is Dhikr, and the Sunnah regarding Dhikr is with lowering the voice.'*



# The Ruling of making *Dhikr* collectively in Unison according to the Imams of the Salaf

Researched by Ahmad bin Muhammad an-Najjar

Translated by

Abbas Abu Yahya

**Published with permission**  
[www.miraathpublications.net](http://www.miraathpublications.net)

### [The scenario]

This is collectively coming together to make *Dhikr* (remembrance of Allaah) in unison (one voice) whether that *Dhikr* is reciting the Qur'aan, or making *Dua* or making *Tasbeeh* (saying: *SubhanAllaah*) etc. doing this without the aim of educating or learning.

### [Its ruling According to the Imams of the Salaf ]

Indeed the Imams of the Salaf from the (*Sahabah*) Companions and those that followed them in goodness are all agreed upon the rejection of every innovation in the *Deen*, and rejecting every worship or form of worship which the Prophet -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*- did not do, nor what his noble Companions did not practice. There are narrations from a group of the Companions and those who followed their way, concerning this form of making *Dhikr*, and here are their statements:

#### [Umar bin al-Khattab -Radi Allaahu anhu]

From Abu Uthmaan an-Nahdi who said: 'A worker for Umar bin al-Khattab wrote to Umar saying that there are a group of people who gather together to make *Dua* for the Muslims and the leader.'

So Umar -*Radi Allaahu anhu*- wrote to him: 'Bring them to me with yourself.'

The man came and Umar said to the doorman, prepare the whip. When they entered upon Umar -*Radi Allaahu anhu*- he descended upon their leader by hitting him with the whip.' [1]

The rightly guided Khalifah Umar bin al-Khattab -*Radi Allaahu anhu*- rejected that a group gathered to make *Dhikr* in a form that the Prophet -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*- did not do, nor did the best of his Companions. To the extent Umar -*Radi Allaahu anhu*- did not suffice by rejecting what they did by just speaking about it, rather he beat their leader with a whip, and this shows the great concern the Companions had in rejecting innovated *Bida* in the *Deen*.

#### [Abdullaah ibn Mas'ood]

From 'Amr bin Salamah: We were sitting by the door of Abdullaah ibn Mas'ood before lunch, so that if he came out, we could walk with him to the *Masjid*.

Abu Moosaa al-Ash'aree came and said: Has Abu Abdur-Rahmaan come out yet?

We said: No.

So, he sat down with us, waiting for him to come out, and when he came out, we all gathered towards him, and Abu Moosaa said:

'O Abu Abdur-Rahmaan! Previously I saw something in the *Masjid*, which I disliked. But, *Alhamdulillah*, what I saw, was nothing but good.'

He said: What was it?

Abu Moosaa said, 'If you live, you will see it.'

Then Abu Moosaa said, 'I saw a group of people, sitting in circles waiting for the prayer. In every circle there was a man and in their hands were small stones and he would say: 'Say *Allaahu Akbar* 100 times' and they would say '*Allaahu Akbar*' 100 times. Then, he would say, 'Say *laa ilaha ilAllaah* 100 times' and they would say '*laa ilaha ilAllaah*' 100 times and he would say, 'Say *SubhaanAllaah*' 100 times and they would say '*SubhaanAllaah*' 100 times.'

Abdullaah ibn Mas'ood said, 'So what did you say to them?'

He said: 'I did not say anything to them, rather I waited for your opinion [or 'I waited for your command'].'

He said: 'Why did you not command them to count their bad deeds [i.e. seek forgiveness from your deeds] and guarantee them that their good deeds would not be lost?!'

Then he walked and we walked with him until he reached one of those circles and he stood there and said, 'What is this that I see you doing?'

They said: 'O Abu Abdur-Rahmaan! These are nothing but small stones with which we are counting, saying '*Allaahu Akbar*, *laa ilaaha illAllaah* and *SubhaanAllaah*.'

He said, 'Count your sins; I guarantee that you will not lose anything of your good deeds! Beware, O *Ummah* of Muhammad! How quick you are to your destruction!

Here we are, the Companions of your Prophet – abundant, everywhere and here is his clothing which has not been [wasted away] and his utensils have not been broken. I swear by Him in Whose Hand is my soul, **either you are an *Ummah* more rightly-guided than the *Ummah* of Muhammad or you are opening the door of misguidance.**'

They said; 'We swear by Allaah, O Abu Abdur-Rahmaan, we did not intend anything but good.'

He said: 'How many people intend good but never achieve it. Verily the Messenger of Allaah – narrated to us, 'Indeed there will be a people who read the Qur'aan but it does not pass beyond their throats.' I swear by Allaah, I do not know. Perhaps most of them are from amongst you.'

Then he went away.

'Amr bin Salamah said, 'We saw some of those sitting in those circles fighting on the Day of *Nahrawaan*, along with the *Khawaarij*.' [2]

Indeed Ibn Mas'ood -*Radi Allaahu anhu*- reprimanded a group who were gathered together in the form of circles, remembering Allaah, and Ibn Mas'ood used as an evidence against their misguidance in that they opposed that what the Companions of the Messenger of Allaah -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*- were upon, those who had witnessed the Messenger -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*, and they knew his statements, his actions, and his situations, which the Companions used to use to show their guidance.

#### **[Abu Hanifah an-Nu'man]**

Imam Abu Hanifah -*Rahimullaah*- said:

'That raising the voice in making *Takbeer* (saying *Allaahu Akbar*) is principally a *Bida'*, because it is *Dhikr*, and the Sunnah regarding *Dhikr* is with lowering the voice.'**[3]**

#### **[Malik bin Anas]**

From Ibn Wahab who said:

'I said to Malik -*Rahimullaah*-: 'What would you say if you saw a group of people gathering together and all of them together reading one *Soorah* till the end of the *Soorah*?

Imam Malik rejected that and found fault with that and said:

'This is not how the people used to do this, rather one man used to recite to another person for learning purposes.'**[4]**

Ibn Wahab also said in 'Taj wal-Ikleel li Mukhtasir Khaleel':

'Malik disliked that reciters gather together reciting one *Soorah*, and he said: 'this was not from the practice of the people,' and he regarded it as a *Bida'*'.**[5]**

#### **[Yahya bin Ma'een & Ahmad bin Hanbal]**

al-Fadl bin Mihraan said: 'I asked Yahya bin Ma'een and Ahmad bin Hanbal: 'Indeed we have a group of people who get together and make *Dua'*, recite Qur'aan (collectively) and remember Allaah *Ta'ala* together, how do you view these people?'

As for Yahya bin Ma'een he said: 'They should read from the *Mus'haf* (Qur'aan), and make *Dua'* after the prayer and remember Allaah individually to themselves.'

al-Fadl bin Muhammad said: 'I said: 'I have a brother who takes part with them.'

Yahya said: 'Forbid him from that.'

I said: 'He does not accept.'

Yahya said: 'Admonish him.'

I said: 'He does not accept. Should I boycott him?'

He said: 'Yes.'

Then I came to Ahmad and told him similar to what I had said to Yahya and Ahmad also said to me:

'They should read from the *Mus'haf*, and remember Allaah Ta'ala individually and seek the hadeeth of the Messenger of Allaah -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*.'

I said: 'Should I forbid my brother?'

Ahmad said: 'Yes.'

I said: 'And if he does not accept.'

Ahmad said: 'Of course he will *InshAllaah*, since indeed this is an innovation, this type of gathering which you describe.'

I said: 'and if he does not accept should I boycott him?'

Ahmad smiled and remained silent.' [6]

If an opponent contests what has preceded and says, there are *Sharia*' texts which indicate to the excellence of gathering for *Dhikr*, and this is what is established in Saheeh Muslim from Abu Hurairah -*Radi Allaahu anhu*- from the Prophet -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*- who said: 'Indeed Allaah -*Tabaraka wa Ta'ala* - has noble Angels who travel around, they search for gatherings of *Dhikr*, and if they find gatherings where there is *Dhikr* they sit with those people and they encompass each other with their wings, until they fill that which is between them and the heavens of the *Dunyaa*, then when they leave they ascend and climb to the heavens.

Then Allaah -*Azza wa Jal*- asks them - while He knows more about them than they do -: 'From where did you come?'

They will reply:

'We came from worshippers of Yours on the earth, and they were saying: *SubhaanAllaah* (Far is Allaah from imperfection), *Allaahu Akbar* (Allaah is the Greatest), *laa ilaaha illAllaah* (there is none worthy of worship in truth except Allaah) and *Alhamdulillah* (Praise be to Allaah) and they were asking of You. . . .' [7]

And there are other similar evidences.

## **The reply to this objection is from different points:**

1- The wording ‘*Dhikr*’ and ‘*Tasbeeh*’ is mentioned in the texts (Book & Sunnah) unrestrictedly. For an unrestricted wording in the *Sharia*’ it is not allowed to limit it to a particular number or amount, or to a particular form, except if there is a text from the *Sharia*’ present regarding it.

As for *Dhikr* in a collective form with voices in unison, then this has not been mentioned in the Book of Allaah nor in the Sunnah of His Messenger -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*.

Therefore, what is mentioned in the texts, with the encouragement to perform *Dhikr* in a plural form does not indicate in itself to making *Dhikr* collectively, because it is an unrestricted wording, and an unrestricted wording cannot be limited except with a *Sharia*’ evidence, and there is no proof to restrict making *Dhikr* in unison in this issue.

2- That the Companions did not understand this form of *Dhikr* from these texts of the *Sharia*’, rather they rejected this form, and they dispraised the one who did this form of *Dhikr*. They regarded this from the innovated matters in the *Deen*, as has preceded in the story of Umar and Ibn Mas’ood, and the understanding of the Companions of the texts of the two revealed sources (the Book & the Sunnah) precedes the understanding of other than them. Rather it is an obligation to follow their understanding, and it is not allowed to abstain from it.

3- That the Imams also rejected what the Companions rejected as has been mentioned from Abu Hanifah, Malik, Ahmad bin Hanbal and others.

This indicates that they are united upon rejecting and criticizing this form of *Dhikr*, and along with that I will add two more statements of two Imams from the Maliki *Madhab*, and they are Qurtubi and Tartooshi.

Abul-Abbas Ahmad al-Qurtubi said:

‘As for the saying of the Messenger -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*:

‘No people gather together in one of the houses of Allah, reciting the Book of Allah and studying it among themselves, without tranquility descending upon them, mercy enveloping them, the angels surrounding them, and Allah making mention of them amongst those who are with Him.’[8]

The houses of Allaah are the *Masajid*, as Allaah *Ta’ala* said:

<< In houses (*Masajid*), which Allah has ordered to be raised, in them His Name is glorified in the mornings and in the afternoons or the evenings>>[9]

Those who hold it permissible to read the Qur’aan in congregation in unison (one voice) adhere to this hadeeth, as is done here in Morocco. Some of our scholars have disliked that, and held the opinion that it is a Bida’, since it was not the way of the Salaf in reciting like this. But rather the hadeeth is understood to be that every individual studies the Book of Allaah by them self, or with someone who will correct them.’[10]

Tartooshi said:

‘These *Aathaar* (narrations) necessitate the permissibility of congregating to recite the noble Qur’aan with the intent of studying it, learning it, and revising it. That takes place by a student reading it to a teacher, or a teacher reading it to a student. And if two people have an equal level of knowledge then one of them reads to the other for revision and studying purposes, this is how teaching and learning occur, without having to recite in congregation.’[11]

Concluding, I bring attention to an issue: which is that being continuous upon gathering for the *Dhikr* of Allaah – even if it does not include doing so in unison – has not been legislated, because there is no text from the Qur’aan nor from the Sunnah being continuous in gathering in this way. Likewise, being continuous upon this type of congregation resembles the congregations which are permissible, like the five daily prayers, the *Juma’* prayer, the two *Eid*, and the *Hajj*.

Therefore, there is a distinction between what is taken as Sunnah and custom, and these gatherings, which resemble legislated ones, and between that which is done sometimes, since this is permitted, and this is the guidance of the Companions of the Prophet - *sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*, as they would sometimes gather together.

al-Imam Ibn Taymeeyah said:

‘Gathering for optional prayers, or to listen to Qur’aan, or for the *Dhikr* of Allaah, etc. if that is done sometimes then it is better since it has been authentically reported from the Prophet -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*- that he prayed an optional prayer in congregation sometimes. Likewise, he went out to his Companions and there would be amongst them one who would recite and the others would listen, and the Prophet -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*- would sit with them to listen. And the Companions of the Messenger of Allaah -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*- would, if they gathered order one of them to recite while they would listen. . . . .

As for taking gatherings successively repeating them, repeatedly and regularly over weeks, months and years, other than gatherings which have been legislated. Then these type gatherings which resemble gatherings for the five daily prayers, the *Juma’* prayer, the two *Eid*, and the *Hajj*, that is because those other gatherings are innovated and newly invented. Therefore, there is a difference between what is taken as a Sunnah and what is taken as a habit and that which resembles what is legislated, and this difference has been mentioned by Imam Ahmad and others from the Imams.

Abu Bakr al-Khalaal narrated in ‘the book of manners’ from Ishaq bin Mansoor al-Kosaj that he said to Abu Abdullaah:

‘It is disliked that a people gather to make *Dua’* to Allaah and to raise their hands to Allaah.

Imam Ahmad said: ‘I do not reject for brothers, if they should unintentionally gather except that they should not do it a lot.’

Ishaq bin Rahawayeeyah said the same as what Imam Ahmad said.

As for the wording: ‘not do it a lot’ means not to take it as a habit so much that it is done a lot, and this is the speech of Ishaq.’[12]

Ibn Taymeeyah also said:

‘Gathering upon reading, *Dhikr* and *Dua*’ is good and recommended as long as it is not taken as a regular habit – just like those gatherings which are legislated – and that there is no evil *Bida*’ connected to it.’[13]

Shaatabi al-Maliki said:

‘Constantly making *Dua*’ in a form of a congregation was not from the actions of the Messenger of Allaah -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*, as it was not from the statements of the Messenger, nor was it from that which he allowed.’[14]

---

[1] Collected by Ibn Abi Shaybah (8/558) from Muwayeeyah bin Hisham who said Sufyaan narrated to us from Sa’eed al-Jareere from Abi Uthmaan, & its chain is Hasan.

[2] Narrated by ad-Darmi in his Musnad. The chapter about the dislike of taking opinions (1/286-287) by ‘Amr bin Yahya bin ‘Amr bin Salmah from his father, from his grandfather.

[3] Badai’ as-Sanai’ by al-Kasani al-Hanafi (2/99)

[4] al-Madkhal by Ibn al-Hajj (1/91)

[5] (2/85) & al-Khaleel said: in his ‘Mukhtasir’ (p.38), and this is the main issue in the *Madhab* of Malik amongst the later comers: ‘This dislike of doing *Sujood* of gratefulness in unison, & reciting Soorah Zilzal together by raising voices in the Masjid and reciting Qur’aan and *Dhikr* in a musical way.’

The Malikeeyah clearly disliked this.

And in ‘at-Taj wal-Ikleel li Mukhtasir Khaleel’ (2/85): ‘Muhiddeen an-Nawawi commented regarding the saying of the Prophet -*sallAllaahu alayhi wa sallam*-: ‘No group of people gather together to recite the Book of Allaah except....’

This hadeeth shows the permissibility of reciting the Qur’aan in unison, this is our *Madhab*, and the *Madhab* of the majority, however Malik rejected it and some of our companions interpolated it.

Ibn Rushd said: ‘Indeed Malik disliked this because it is a matter which is innovated, and because these people desired to recite it in a musical tone, in the same way singers do, so the reason for it being disliked is clear.’

[6] 'al-Adab ash-Shareeya' by Ibn Muflih (2/75)

[7] Collected by Muslim in the Book of *Dhikr & Dua*, Chapter The Excellence of gatherings of *Dhikr*.

[8] Collected by Muslim in the Book of *Dhikr & Dua*, Chapter The Excellence of gatherings of reading Qur'aan & upon *Dhikr*.

[9] [Noor: 36]

[10] 'al-Mufhim 'ala Saheeh Muslim' (9/424)

[11] Kitab al-Hawadith wal-Bida' p.166

[12] Iqtida Siraat-ul-Mustaqeem (1/305)

[13] Majmoo' al-Fatawa (22/523)

[14] al-'Itissam (1/248)