

Did Imaam As-Suyootee Support Using The Dhikr Beads?

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[The following is an objection regarding Subhah using Imaam As-Suyootee as a proof, which is answered by brother Abu Khaliyl]

[Q]: "... My concern is focused on an article in which a Muslim asked a question regarding Dhikr beads, or subhah while reciting Tasbiyyah. The reply was that it was a Bid'ah and that the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) taught us to make tasbeeh with our right hand.

Jalaal ud Deen As-Suyootee a famous Shaafi'ee Mujtahid Imaam, spoke on the subject in his book Al Haawi lil Fataawee. Shaykh As-Suyootee states, "Counting the times one says Subhaan Allaah on ones fingers is superior to doing so on Dhikr beads because of the Hadeeth of Ibn Amr, though it has been said that if the person saying it is safe from mistakes, his fingers are better, however, if not, then saying it on Dhikr beads is more suitable." Shaykh As-Suyootee further states, "Some of the most renowned Muslims have used rosaries, those from whom the Religion is taken, and whom are relied upon, such as Abu Hurayrah who had a string with two thousand knots in it, and he did not used to sleep except after saying Subhaan Allaah on it twelve thousand times."

To say this practice is a Bid'ah is at the same time defaming the scholars who have practiced it over the centuries..."

[A]: May Allaah reward you, in response to your inquiry and statements, this servant of Allaah, who is in sure need of Him, and dependant upon Him, and who prays for those who preceded us in Faith would reply:

The claim that the one who makes the statements that Subhah is an innovation, has by that statement defamed the scholars who endorsed it, is not a fair statement, since most of the scholars who support it are aware that they have to try very hard to prove it is not an innovation. That is the reason that discussions about it normally take up so much space. This is due to the nature of innovation, that is a new thing. So, in order for those who support it as good, in order to prove that it is good, must argue that it is not in reality new. And when they present their argument, we do not consider their arguments as defamation against their opponents from amongst the scholars.

Even the noun, Subhah - from the linguistic point of view - was a fabrication of those who used it; Ibn Mandthoor said in Lisaan Al Arab, "The Subhah: Beads upon which one making tasbeeh, counts his tasbeeh. It is a new-fangled [muwalladah] word." In Taaj Al Aroos, az-Zubaydee said, "And it is a new-fangled [muwalladah] word, as was said by Al-Azhaaree..." That is, Muwalladah is a word formed by people who were using something, that there was no word before they made up their word for it as explained by Al-Baghdaadee in Khazaanaat Al Arab. This is according to the linguistic sense.

As for the Sharee'ah sense, Allaah said (that which means):

"This day I have perfected your way of life for you, and have chosen Islaam as your Religion." [Al-Maa'idah 4]

So in general, any religious act that comes after the death of the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) as the Subhah clearly did, is an innovation. And the scholars of Ijtihaad are rewarded for their Ijtihaad nevertheless.

The hadeeth of Ibn Amr, which was referenced in the question should be noted for the benefit of the reader; Abdullaah Ibn Amr said, "I saw Allaah's messenger (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) counting the tasbeeh on the right [hand]."¹

Yet, this is not the only Hadeeth from which the scholars determine what is better in this case. There is for example, whose grade is Hasan, and those who seek reward from their Lord may act on it, if space permits us to note it. The Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) said to Yusayrah (Radiya 'Llahu 'anhu) that:

"You must say the Tahleel, Tasbeeh, and the Taqdees. Do not forget it, or you will have forgotten the Mercy. And count them on the fingers for they will be questioned and interrogated."

And in one narration:

That the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) commanded them to count on their fingers, for they will be questioned and interrogated [about it]"²

The great scholar, Suyootee May Allaah have mercy on him, noted that due to the hadeeth of Ibn Amr noted above, it is better to count the tasbeeh on ones fingers. Yet it should be obvious from the second Hadeeth that it is obligatory to do so. Like wise, the honourable scholar, as-Suyootee noted that "it has been said" (Qeela), that this is better if the person is safe from losing count, whereas if he is not safe from that, then the beads are more suitable. Then he gave the example of Abu Hurayrah. We ask Allaah to reward Imaam As-Suyootee for mentioning what has been said, and we do this out of sincerity.

As a note however, it should be noted that the report alluded to is not one that has been graded as Saheeh or Hasan, rather its grade is weak. It is transmitted by way of Abdul Waahid Ibn Moosaa from Mu'aym Ibn Muharrar Ibn Abee Hurayrah from his grandfather [Abu Hurayrah], "That he had a string with one thousand knots on it and he would not sleep until he had done his Tasbeeh on it."

There is another narration whose meaning he has combined into this statement about Abu Hurayrah, that is reported via Ikrimah from Abu Hurayrah that he said, "Astaghfrullaah" twelve thousand times, but this report is disconnected after Ikrimah, for he is not known by the Hadeeth Scholars to have actually heard from Abu Hurayrah. (See Al Inaabah by Ibn Hajar). Nevertheless, it does not mention Dhikr beads at all. So it has nothing to do with this discussion either way.

As for the narration about the string with Abu Hurayrah, it is weak because its chain contains Nu'aym Ibn Muharrar, whose condition among hadeeth narrators is that of an unknown. It is for this reason that what Suyootee labelled as "better" - is indeed better - May Allaah reward him - rather there is no authentic evidence to prove that it was commanded, and otherwise it would contradict the command, since it has not been authentically reported that the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) nor any of his companions used Dhikr beads. Furthermore, some of the companions and their followers were reported to have rejected alternatives to the fingers in this regard.

¹ Recorded by Abu Daawood, Tirmidthee and others, it is a well known Saheeh Hadeeth

² This is a Hasan Hadeeth recorded by Ahmad, Abu Daawood, Ibn Abbee Shaybah, and a number of others

As for the Hadeeth reported on the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) on the authority of Alee (Radiya 'Llahu 'anhu) mentioning the Subhah (mentioned here in case one finds it being used as "evidence") it is a famous weak report. There is a very useful and helpful discussion of its unknown and fabricating narrators which may be viewed in Silsilah-Al-Ahaadeeth Ad Da'eefah no. 83 by Al Albaanee.

In summary, to anyone who allows the new-fangled Subhah which contradicts the command of the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) in this matter, we do not claim that these scholars have 'opposed' the Messenger (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam)! Nor should anyone claim that those who enforce his (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) command are defaming scholars by doing so.

As this discussion shows, there are many matters about which the scholars made differing statements about. If we were to quote all of their arguments and statements, we would just lead the people into confusion, regarding the way which is the way of the Sunnah. This is not the objective of our publication. On the other hand, it is also not our objective to be unfair and one sided. However, when the issue is centred around a great deal of "So and So" said, and debate, then only the most proven, and safest position can be endorsed, and the safe way is that of the command of the Messenger (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam).

It is he (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) who we have been commanded to follow and obey in these matters, and in this case, he (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam) commanded counting the Tasbeeh on the fingers as was noted before.

We ask Allaah to guide us to his way.