

Gratitude in Islam

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Introduction

Gratitude is one of the most important moral values in Islam. Two of the beautiful names of God are related to gratitude. Many verses in the Quran associate gratitude with the remembrance of God (al-Baqarah: 152) and worshipping God (al-Zomour: 66). God promised to reward those who show gratitude (al-‘Imran: 144-145) and He promised to increase the blessings which He bestows on them (Ibrahim: 7). There are many *hadiths* which talk about the value of showing gratitude. In this paper I would like to discuss the virtues of gratitude in Islam, and to develop a model for inculcating a disposition for gratitude in Muslims. I started by looking at the different verses which mention the word gratitude "شكر" and its cognates. These verses were listed in another paper.

There are about sixty-nine verses in the Quran which mentions the word gratitude or one of its cognates. I chose only seven of these verses to discuss in this paper. The commentaries on these verses were obtained from nine of the well-known commentators. The commentaries are given in the Appendix. The verses were chosen as a sample to show the meaning of gratitude in Islam and how it is related to other Islamic values e.g. worship, *tawhid*, and other issues. The commentary on verse (al-Qamar: 35) discusses the relationship between gratitude and the belief in God, and highlights the reward for the grateful. God’s saved those who believed with Prophet Lut because they were grateful. The verse also promises a similar blessing to be bestowed on all grateful servants. God’s promise to increase the blessings for those who show gratitude is given in verse (Ibrahim: 7). Reminding the believers of the blessings which God bestowed on them is given in verses (al-Nahl: 78, and al-Muminu: 78). A reference to the benefits which the grateful will earn in this life as well as in the Hereafter is given in verses (Luqman: 12 and al-Naml: 40). The connection between worship and gratitude is shown in verse (al-Zomour: 66). Verse (al-

Dhariyyat: 56) is not directly related to gratitude but it will be used to show the connection between gratitude and the belief in the Oneness of God.

In the following sections I will discuss the linguistic meaning of the Arabic word for gratitude, its meaning as given by different scholars, the reward which God promised those who are grateful, and the benefits which a grateful person will gain from an Islamic point of view. I will also discuss the concept of gratitude in psychology, specifically the impact of gratitude on the subjective well-being of the individual. Finally, I will discuss a plan which helps people to acquire a grateful mindset. The plan is based on Quranic verses and prophetic *hadith*.

The Meaning of the Word شُكْر

Al-Asphahany defines *Shukr* (Gratitude) as acknowledging the blessing and displaying it¹. It is derived from a word which means to display. It is the opposite of *kufr*, which means forgetting the blessing and hiding it. Al-Asphahany indicates that there are three means for displaying gratitude: using the heart, using the tongue, and using the senses. The heart acknowledges the blessing, the tongue utters words of gratitude, and the senses use the blessing for its intended purpose. Zakariyya² and Al-Jawziyya³ define gratitude as being content with whatever little one gets. The Arabic word *shukr* may also mean a display of abundance. An animal which grows fatter when it eats little is called a grateful animal⁴.

Gratitude in Islam

According to al-Ghazali, gratitude is comprised of three components: knowledge, state, and action. Knowledge is to recognize the favor which has been bestowed and the benefactor

¹ Al-Asphahany, 461.

² Zakariyya, v. 3, 208.

³ Al-Jawziyya, 289.

⁴ Al-Qurtobi, v. 2, 104.

who bestowed the favor. Knowledge will create an inner state which is a combination of joy, humility, and submission. Finally, the state of joy, humility, and submission will produce action (emotional, verbal, and physical) which expresses the gratitude to God⁵. Al-Razi gave a nearly similar definition.

Al-Jawziyya indicates that *shukr* is half the faith with perseverance as the other half. He explains this, saying that faith is comprised of utterance, action, and intention. These three components encompass two things: action and avoidance. The action is to perform acts of obedience and avoidance is to avoid performing acts of disobedience. The essence of *shukr* is to perform acts of obedience, and Perseverance is to avoid acts of disobedience.⁶ He further explains that gratitude consists of three components: acknowledging the blessing of God, expressing gratitude to God for His blessings, and using the blessings to perform actions which please God⁷.

Al-Jawziyya reported a number of definitions given by different scholars. Some of these are: Gratitude is to acknowledge the blessings, avoid unlawful things, and serve God. This shows that one of the aspects of gratitude is to proclaim the blessings of God. A second aspect is that a believer should show gratitude to God by being obedient to Him. A third aspect is that showing gratitude is an act of worship. Al-Shibly said, “Gratitude is to recognize the One who bestowed the blessing not the blessing itself.”⁸ Scholars tried to warn against confusing the blessing with the One who bestows the blessing. Those who appreciate material and physical things think more of the blessing than thinking about the One who provided the blessing.

⁵ Al-Ghazali, v. 4, 81.

⁶ Al-Jawziyya, 205.

⁷ Ibid, 290.

⁸ Ibid, 291.

Al-Qurtobi gave some other definitions, e.g. Al-Junaid said, “The essence of gratitude is to realize that you are unable to show gratitude.” This statement has two aspects. The first is that it is a blessing in itself to be able to recognize the blessing. Thus, we need to show gratitude to God not only because He gave us the blessing but also because He gave us the ability to recognize it. The second aspect is that no matter how we show our gratitude, we will be short of showing enough gratitude for what we have received. He also said, “Gratitude is not to use the blessings of God in ways that displease Him.” Al-Shibly said, “Gratitude is to be humble, to do good, to control the desires, to obey God, and to observe the Powerful (God).” Dhu al-Nun Al-Masri said, “Showing gratitude is to obey your seniors, reward your equals, and be gracious to those who are your juniors.”⁹ One can consider each of these definitions to represent an aspect of gratitude, the aspect perceived by the scholar who formulated it. Gratitude would be the sum total of these definitions.

Gratitude and *Tawheed*

Nursi¹⁰ indicated that the belief in the Oneness of God and gratitude are closely linked. To understand this, one should realize that gratitude should be offered to the One who bestows the blessing not for the blessing itself nor for the means through which the blessing has been bestowed. One should realize that the blessings cannot be obtained unless God wills. It is important to emphasize the relationship between gratitude and *tawhid*, however, we should also remember that obedience to God is an integral component of *tawhid*. God commanded us to “proclaim His blessings.” One way to fulfill this command is to be grateful to the means through which the blessing was delivered. I will discuss this further later on.

⁹ Al-Qurtobi, v. 2, 106.

¹⁰ Bouguenaya and Yazicioglu, 95-102.

In commenting on the verse, “No, worship God alone, and be of those who are grateful.” (al-Zomour: 66) most commentators indicate that it means that there is a connection between gratitude and the belief in the Oneness of God. They quote Ibn ‘Abbas who said, “Gratitude means the belief in the Oneness of God.” (see Appendix.)

The purpose of the creation of human beings and jinn is enunciated in the verse, “I have only created jinn and humankind to worship Me.” (al-Dhariyyat: 56) The verse clearly indicates that the purpose of the creation of jinn and humans is for them to worship God. Worship is a comprehensive term. It includes all lawful actions and utterings made with the intention to please God. Verses (al-Baqarah: 172 and al-Zomour: 66) clearly link gratitude to worship, “Believers, eat of the good things that We have provided for you, and be grateful to God, if it is Him you worship,” (al-Baqarah: 172) and “No, worship God alone, and be of those who are grateful.” (al-Zomour: 66) Since the purpose of the creation is to worship God, then gratitude is closely related to the purpose of creation. Thus, it is closely linked to the belief in the Oneness of God.

Verse (al-Dhariyyat: 56) is a reminder for the believers and a rebuke for the disbelievers. The believers are reminded that Allah created the jinn and humans to acknowledge Him. They should understand that He controls everything which is the essence of *tawhid*. The verse rebukes the disbelievers, because they forgot the purpose for which they were created. Worship is to acknowledge the power of the One being worshipped and to realize His ability to control everything and that He knows what benefits the worshipper and what harms him. So the purpose of creation is to believe in the Oneness of God¹¹.

¹¹ See Appendix for the commentary.

Gratitude in Psychology

There are several definitions for gratitude in psychology. Emmons and Crumpler suggest that gratitude is comprised of “an emotion, a virtue, a moral sentiment, a motive, a coping response, a skill, and an attitude.”¹² Watkins et al. defined gratitude as “the emotion people experience when they affirm that something good has happened to them, and they recognize that someone else is largely responsible for this benefit.”¹³ Many researchers investigated the relationships between gratitude, mental health, and physical health. Watkins et al. reported that there are over forty experimental studies which demonstrated that gratitude exercises enhance happiness.¹⁴ Kausar studied the relationship between gratitude and happiness in college students. She concluded that a significant relationship exists between gratitude and happiness in college students¹⁵. Ali et al. reviewed Quranic verses and prophetic *hadith* which encourage Muslims to express their gratitude. Their main objective was to develop a tool for the measurement of the level of employees satisfaction.¹⁶ I think using contentment instead of gratitude serves the objective of the authors better. Although the two values are related but they represent two distinct constructs. Rosmarin et al. listed a number of studies which indicated that gratitude is associated with general well-being, vitality, happiness, self-esteem, life satisfaction, lower depression, and prosocial and generous behavior¹⁷. Watkins and Scheib stated that gratitude is strongly associated with measures of subjective well-being.¹⁸ Subjective well-being is one of the most popular measures of the quality of life. It is an evaluation of how people subjectively

¹² Emmons and Crumpler, 56.

¹³ Watkins et al., 21.

¹⁴ Ibid, 23.

¹⁵ Kausar.

¹⁶ Ali, et al.

¹⁷ Rosmarin, et al., 389.

¹⁸ Watkins and Scheibe, 212.

perceive their well-being.¹⁹It may be defined as “the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one’s life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile.”²⁰

One of the questions that is still open is the relationship between gratitude to God and general gratitude. Rosmarin et al. studied a sample of 405 Christian and Jewish adults. They concluded that, after controlling for general attitude, religious gratitude was a strong predictor of all well-being measures among religiously committed people²¹.

Aghababaei et al. examined the relation between religious and general gratitude and mental health using a sample of 256 students at the University of Tehran. They concluded that the two types of gratitude have moderate- to- strong correlation with life satisfaction, anxiety, depression, and general health²².

Krause et al. investigated the effect of gratitude on physical health and also studied the question of the effect of gender on gratitude. They reached three conclusions. First, women are more inclined to feel grateful in general than men; they are more grateful to God than men. Second, higher levels of general gratitude are associated with lower HbA1c. However, this does not apply to being grateful to God. The relationship between general gratitude and the levels of HbA1c are not affected by gender²³.

Pasha-Zaidi et al. suggested ways to cultivate *shukr* using rituals and supplemental forms of worship e.g. prostration and prayer of gratitude²⁴.

A Framework for a Model to Inculcate Gratitude

I would like to build upon Al-Ghazali’s model for gratitude to formulate a model for training Muslims to adopt a mindset of gratitude and to act according to that mindset. Any model

¹⁹ Webb and Wills-Herrera, 3.

²⁰ Maddux, 3.

²¹ Rosmarin et al., 393.

²² Aghababaei et al., 763.

²³ Krause et al., 647.

²⁴ Pasha-Zaidi et al., 219.

should start with an objective or a goal. However, in the proposed model I start with acquiring the necessary knowledge which will help in identifying the objective. The model should also include means for motivating the believers to complete the actions which would lead to achieving the goal. Thus, I am suggesting a model that consists of five components. These are

1. Gaining the knowledge needed.
2. Identifying the goal.
3. Creating a state of mind conducive to the achievement of the goal.
4. Identifying the means for motivating the believer.
5. Acting to achieve the goal.

Gaining the Knowledge

Before one can identify the objective of this training model, one has to gain enough information about the blessings which have been bestowed and the One who bestowed them. This information can be obtained from the verses which describe the blessings which have been bestowed on human beings. One of the verses which serve this purpose is verse 78 in Surat al-Nahl. The Quran says, “It is God Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts, that you may be grateful.” (al-Nahl: 78) This verse establishes two facts. First, it is God who created people, and it is He who gave them the ears to hear with, eyes to see with and the intellect to understand with. Other verses in the Quran mention many other blessings, “God is He who created the heavens and the earth, and sent down water from the sky, thereby producing fruits as provision for you, and made the ships to be of service for you, that they may run upon the sea at His command, and has made the rivers of service to you; And He has made the sun and the moon, constant in their courses, to

be of service for you, and has made the night and the day of service for you.” (Ibrahim: 32: 33)
There is an endless list of the blessings which God bestowed on His creatures, “But if you count the blessings of God, never will you be able to enumerate them.” (Ibrahim: 34), see also (al-Nahl: 18)

Thus, the knowledge that God is the only Creator and that all blessings come from Him alone is provided. The second component of knowledge which shows the blessings which God bestowed on His creatures has also been established by these verses.

Identifying the Goal

Since, it has been established that God is the only source of all blessings, then the objective of this framework should be how to show one’s gratitude to God alone. Sometime we confuse the source of the blessings with the means which were used to deliver the blessings²⁵. One should not fall in this trap. Al-Tabari says, “It is God whom you should be grateful to, because He is the One who gave you all these blessings. You should not show gratitude for anyone except God.”²⁶ That does not mean that we should not show gratitude to people who deliver the blessings of God. Showing gratitude to people is a component of being grateful to God. The Prophet (ﷺ) confirmed this principle when he said²⁷, "Allah does not thank the person who does not thank people." In another version of the hadith, the Prophet (ﷺ) said²⁸, “Whoever is not grateful to people, he is not grateful to Allah." Both versions are considered authentic. The problem arises when people become appreciative of the blessing itself or the person who delivered the blessing and forget about the One who bestowed the blessing in the first place.

²⁵ Bouguenaya and Yazicioglu, 96.

²⁶ Al_Tabari, v. 7, 235.

²⁷ Narrated by Abi Hurairah and reported by al-Bukhari (al-Adab al-Mufrad218).

²⁸ Narrated by Abi Hurairah and reported by al-Tirmidhi.

Creating a State of Mind²⁹

Having gained the knowledge which shows that showing gratitude to God is an obligatory duty for the Muslim and established the objective of the training exercise, we need to create the mindset which would make the achievement of the goal easy. Creating an appropriate mindset is important to maintain the attitude of being grateful. This mindset will enable us to overcome the daily life circumstances which may distract the individual and disallow him/her to express their gratitude.

One way for creating such a mindset is to reflect on the beautiful names of God which is related to gratitude. The Beautiful Names of God provide a set of traits for the believer to work hard to acquire. The Prophet (ﷺ) said,³⁰ “Allah has ninety-nine names, i.e. one-hundred minus one, and whoever knows them by heart³¹ will go to Paradise.” The word which has been translated here as “knows them by heart,” actually means acts upon them.³² Thus, the attributes of God present a set of ethical behaviors that Muslims should aspire to acquire.

Two of His names depict Him as grateful: “*al-Shaker*” the Grateful, and “*al-Shakour*” the Oft-Grateful. These two attributes indicate that God recognizes, blesses and rewards abundantly His servants who do good. God bestows His blessings on His servant then goes on to shower praise upon the recipient³³. God gives us the highest example in good behavior.

It is not enough for the Muslims to show gratitude intermittently. Being grateful should be a disposition that the Muslim should display in all circumstances. Remembering the *hadith* mentioned above will help us create a mindset for gratitude. This mindset should encompass two

²⁹ This step is intentionally called mindset to differentiate it from al-Ghazali’s term “state,” because al-Ghazali uses the term state to refer to a transient and temporary condition. The mind set which we would like to create is a permanent condition.

³⁰ Narrated by Abi Hurairah and reported by al-Bukhari

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³² Al-‘Asqalani, v. 24, 270.

³³ Charles, 70.

types for gratitude: gratitude to God and gratitude to people. If the Creator shows His gratitude to His servant, then it is more appropriate for the servant to show his gratitude to his fellow human beings. This indicates that if the believers want to acquire the attribute of gratitude then they should express their gratitude not only to God but also to those who do them favors.

Having a disposition of gratitude does not only help the believer gain abundant blessings from God but also grants him a praise in the Higher Host.

Identifying the means for motivating the believer.

Motivations to maintain the acquired mindset and to use it as a prime mover for actions are needed. Three incentives are available for Muslims to acquire a mindset for gratitude and motivate them to act: God promised to reward the grateful (al-An'am: 144-145), God promised to increase the blessings which He bestowed on the grateful (Ibrahim: 7), and God told us that it is good for the Muslim to show gratitude (al-Naml: 40, Luqman: 12). These verses and others provide strong motives for the believers to show gratitude to God.

Acting to achieve the goal.

The Prophet (ﷺ) was reminded of the blessings which God bestowed on him and was commanded to recognize these blessings and to show gratitude to God for them, “And proclaim the blessing of your Lord.” (al-Duha: 11) A command to the Prophet (ﷺ) is also considered a command to the believers. So, believers are commanded to proclaim the blessings of their Lord.

There are many blessings which we take for granted. The Prophet (ﷺ) reminds us of these blessings and commands us to be grateful to the One who bestowed these blessings. The Prophet (ﷺ) said³⁴, “A person must perform a charitable act every day (to show gratitude to God) for each joint in his/her body.” Body joints are blessings that we take for granted but without them we cannot perform the simplest body movement. We should show our appreciation

³⁴ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

for having them. The *hadith* is making it imperative that we show gratitude *every day* for each joint. This will help build a trait, an attitude, and a disposition of gratitude. The *hadith* continues to give examples of charitable acts that can be done to show our gratitude to God. These include: being just in settling disputes between two adversaries, helping someone to carry a heavy load, saying a good word, going to the mosque to attend prayers (each step will count as a charitable act), and removing an obstacle from the road.

The *hadith* mentioned above shows that there are many ways to show our gratitude to God. One way of showing gratitude is by using these blessings, whether mental ability, physical power, or creative skills in serving people. Helping people and alleviating their suffering is one way to show gratitude to God. The commentators indicated that the blessings bestowed by God should only be used in a way to please God.

A plan of action to practice gratitude should be tailored to suit the conditions, circumstance, and abilities of each individual. Everyone has been created with different talents and characteristics. Proclaiming the blessings of God means that we use these talents and characteristics to help others and to do good deeds which reflect our gratitude to God.

Gratitude is a Gift for the Grateful

Quranic verses and commentaries indicate that God will reward the grateful. In Surat Ibrahim: 7, God promised to increase the blessings for the grateful. The two verses (al-Naml: 40) and (Luqman: 12) state that “if any is grateful, truly his gratitude is for his own soul.”

The commentaries on these two verses state that gratitude benefits the grateful not God. Gratitude is a protection for the blessings which have been already bestowed and a reason for its

increase. However, results of psychological research allow us to understand the depth of the meaning of the statement, “if any is grateful, truly his gratitude is for his own soul.” Research showed that gratitude has a positive impact on mental and physical health. A grateful person not only leads a happy life but will also enjoy good physical health.

Discussion

This paper reviewed the definition of gratitude in Islam and in psychological research. The results of psychological research were used to explain the Quranic statements made about the benefits which the believer will gain for his gratitude in this life.

The dichotomy between gratitude to God and gratitude to people which was dealt with in psychological research does not exist in Islam. In Islam the source of all blessings is God. However, being grateful to people is a component of being grateful to God.

Using the Quran and the *Sunnah* I suggested a plan for training Muslims to create and maintain a state of gratitude. The cornerstone of the plan is the recognition of God as the only source of blessings. The plan has many implications on human life on earth. The plan should be personalized to suit the individual’s abilities and skills.

One can consider gratitude as a covenant with God. God promised those who show their gratitude great reward in this life as well as in the Hereafter. Such a covenant provides the believer with great reassurance that he is not alone in this world. It gives the believer a sense of belonging to the “Party of God.” Such a feeling will support human life on earth both in times of

comfort and times of adversity. The feeling of having the support of God will reduce stress and will improve mental and physical health.

It is important to reflect on Al-Ghazali's definition of gratitude, which indicates that gratitude has three components: knowledge, state, and action. This means that gratitude is not a passive emotion but it is an active trait. It motivates the believer to endeavor to do good. At times of adversity, it provides the believer with a coping mechanism. The coping mechanism is provided by being reminded by the blessings of God which we usually take for granted. Responding favorably to the *hadith* of the Prophet requiring the believers to do a charitable act for each joint in the body on a daily basis as a way to show gratitude to God, serves as a tool for coping with stress and adverse life conditions.

A component of being grateful to God is to show gratitude to people. Showing gratitude to people provides a great support for the social life in the society. People who feel that their efforts are appreciated will strive to do more. Gratitude will spread love and empathy in the society and will create strong bonds among people.

There is a similarity between gratitude and contentment, sometimes people confuse one for the other. However, they are two different constructs, but they are closely related. The link between the two has not been investigated. This may be a good topic for another research paper.

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Appendix

Commentaries on Different Verses

1. “As a Blessing from Us; thus, We reward him who shows gratitude.” (Al-Qmar: 35)

a. Al-Tabari³⁵

Allah promised those who are grateful, who obey God and follow His path, the same blessing which He bestowed on the family of Lut who believed in him.

b. Al-Qushayri³⁶

Allah saved the family of Lut who believed. Similarly, He will save everyone who expresses his gratitude to God. Expressing gratitude for being saved from a calamity is more deserving than the gratitude expressed for receiving a blessing. No one knows except he who is wise and successful.

c. Al-Kashaf³⁷

Whoever believed in Allah and obeyed Him, will be rewarded for his expression of gratitude.

d. Al-Razi³⁸

The saving of the family of Lut was a blessing from Allah. Destroying the disbelievers was an act of justice. Most of the commentators are of the opinion that this is a promise from God to the believers to save them in this life. Al-Razi is of the opinion that this is a promise of the reward of the Hereafter, since destruction in this life is not guaranteed.

e. Al-Qurtobi³⁹

³⁵ Al-Tabari, v.10, 519.

³⁶ Al-Qushayri, v.3, 259.

³⁷ Al-Zamakhshari, 1067.

³⁸ Al-Razi, v. 29, 60.

³⁹ Al-Qurtobi, v.20, 100.

Allah blessed Lut and his two daughter and saved them from the destruction which his people suffered. Similarly, Allah will save those who believe and obey Him.

f. Ibn Katheer⁴⁰

Allah blessed Lut and his two daughter and saved them from the destruction which his people suffered. Similarly, Allah will save those who believe and obey Him.

g. Al-Maqdisi⁴¹

Allah blessed Lut and his two daughter and saved them from the destruction which his people suffered. Similarly, Allah will save those who believe and obey Him.

h. Al-Maraghi⁴²

Allah blessed Lut and his two daughter and saved them from the destruction which his people suffered. Similarly, Allah will save those who believe and obey Him.

i. Ibn ‘Ashour⁴³

This is a glad tiding for the believers and a warning for the disbelievers. Allah will save those who express their gratitude to Allah. The reason for the destruction of the others is that they disbelieved.

Discussion

The verse states that God saved the family of Lut because they were grateful. Only those who believed were saved. There is a reference to a link between belief and gratitude.

⁴⁰ Ibn Katheer, v. 7, 91.

⁴¹ Al-Maqdisi, v.6, 468.

⁴² Al-Maraghi, v.27, 93.

⁴³ Ibn ‘Ashour, v.27, 205.

2. “And when your Lord proclaimed, ‘If you show your gratitude, I will give you more; but if you are ungrateful, My torment is dire.’” (Ibrahim: 7)

a. Al-Tabari⁴⁴

Remember when your Lord said, “If you show gratitude, I will give you more.” Thus, if you express your gratitude by obeying His commands and abstaining from doing the things which you have been forbidden, then God will bestow more of His blessings on you. But if you reject His blessing by not expressing your gratitude, then His torment is great.

b. Al-Qushayri⁴⁵

If you show gratitude, then I will give you more blessings but if you reject my blessings, I will torment you today with my trials and tomorrow with abandoning you.

If you recognized how to come closer to Me, I will increase the means for coming closer, then I will give you the tools to witness my Beauty and Majesty.

c. Al-Kashaf⁴⁶

Remember when Moses to his people, “Remember the blessings which God bestowed on you. God certainly indicated that if you show gratitude, He will increase these blessings. But, if you show ingratitude, then His torment is great.”

d. Al-Razi⁴⁷

Moses said to his people, “Remember the blessings which God bestowed on you. God certainly indicated that if you show gratitude, He will increase these blessings. But, if you show ingratitude, then His torment is great.”

⁴⁴ Al-Tabari, v.6, 873.

⁴⁵ Al-Qushayri, v.2, 117.

⁴⁶ Al-Zamakhshari, 545.

⁴⁷ Al-Razi, v. 19, 87.

Thus, God will increase His blessings on those who busy themselves with showing gratitude to God. Gratitude is to acknowledge the blessings and the One who bestowed the blessings.

e. Al-Qurtobi⁴⁸

If you believe in the Oneness of God and obeyed Him, He will increase His blessings. Blessings increase when an individual shows gratitude. The essence of gratitude is to acknowledge the blessings and not to use them in acts of disobedience.

f. Ibn Katheer⁴⁹

Remember when your Lord told you, that He will increase His blessings, if you show gratitude and he will torment you painfully if you deny the blessings. God will remove His blessings from them. Thawban narrated that the messenger of God said⁵⁰, “Nothing increases one’s life span except righteousness and nothing repels the Divine decree except supplication, and a man may be deprived of provision for a sin that he commits.”

g. Al-Maqdisi⁵¹

God told the Israelites that if they show gratitude and believe in the Oneness of God, He will bestow more blessings on them. If they deny the blessings He will punish them.

h. Al-Maraghi⁵²

Like a human limb, if a blessing is used for the purpose it was created for, it will grow but if it was ignored then it will disappear. Anas narrated a tradition which indicates that whoever was inspired to show gratitude will not miss its increase.

The sum of it is that whoever express his gratitude for the provision which God blessed him with, he will get more provision. Similarly, for health and other blessings.

⁴⁸ Al-Qurtobi, v.12, 108.

⁴⁹ Ibn Katheer, v. 4, 597.

⁵⁰ Narrated by Thawban and reported by Ibn Majah. Weak hadith.

⁵¹ Al-Maqdisi, v.3, 507.

⁵² Al-Maraghi, v.13, 130.

i. Ibn ‘Ashour⁵³

Remember the blessings of God. God’s reward for the grateful is to increase the blessings, even though being grateful to the One who bestowed the blessings in the first place is an obligation on the one who received the blessings.

Discussion

If you believe in the Oneness of God and obeyed Him, He will increase His blessings. Blessings increase when an individual shows gratitude. The essence of gratitude is to acknowledge the blessings and not to use them in acts of disobedience.

⁵³ Ibn ‘Ashour, v.1, 669.

3. “It is He Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts, that you may be grateful (to God)”. (al-Nahl: 78)

a. Al-Tabari⁵⁴

When you were born, you had no knowledge and no understanding. God gave you brains so that you can think and be able to discriminate between right and wrong. He gave you the sense of hearing, so you listen to one another and understand what is being said. He gave you eyes to see and be able to recognize what you see. He gave you intellect to learn and understand. It is God whom you should be grateful to, because He is the One who gave you all these blessings. You should not show gratitude for anyone except God.

b. Al-Qushayri⁵⁵

God created them without consulting them; He gave them the form and shape that He wished without giving them a choice. They were neither able to know how to improve themselves, nor were they able to understand the attributes of their Lord. However, God inspired them, so the newly born baby would find the way to his mother’s chest so that he can eat. God gave you ears to listen to His speech, eyes to see His deeds, and intellects to understand His right. You should be grateful to Him for the blessings He bestowed on you.

c. Al-Kashaf⁵⁶

He formed you and shaped you in your mothers’ bellies, then He brought you out from the dark small place into the space of this world. You had no knowledge of how to show gratitude to the One who bestowed all these blessings on you. So, He gave you the means to acquire knowledge and to use it to show your gratitude to the One who bestowed these blessings on you.

⁵⁴ Al-Tabari, v.7, 235.

⁵⁵ Al-Qushayri, v. 2, 165.

⁵⁶ Al-Zamakhshari, 580.

d. Al-Razi⁵⁷

Initially, human beings had no knowledge. God gave the human beings the tools to gain knowledge. He gave them ears to hear, eyes to see, and brains to think and understand.

e. Al-Qurtobi⁵⁸

The verse indicates that you were brought out of your mothers' bellies with no knowledge. This knowledge can be

- Knowing the covenant that you gave when you were in the lions of your fathers.
- Knowing whether you are going to be among those who will be happy or those who will suffer.
- Knowing what benefits you.

Then God gave you the tools with which you can gain this knowledge. He gave you ears to hear, eyes to see, and brains to think and understand.

Showing gratitude could be showing gratitude for the blessings which have been bestowed on you or observing the signs of God all around you. Observing leads to showing gratitude.

f. Ibn Katheer⁵⁹

The verse highlights the blessings which God bestowed on His servants. When He brought them out of the bellies of their mothers, they had no knowledge of anything. Then God gave them the ears to hear with, eyes to see with, and brains to understand, think, and discriminate between right and wrong. These senses were given to the human being so that he/she can worship God. One should use all his/her senses in performing acts of obedience to God.

It was narrated that Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Allah the Exalted has said, 'I will declare war against him who shows hostility to a pious worshipper of Mine. And the most beloved thing

⁵⁷ Al-Razi, v. 20, 90.

⁵⁸ Al-Qurtobi, v. 12, 389.

⁵⁹ Ibn Katheer, v. 4, 699.

with which My slave comes nearer to Me is that which I have enjoined upon him; and My slave keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *Nawafil* (acts of worship which are not obligatory) till I love him. When I love him I become his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his leg with which he walks; and if he asks Me, I will give him, and if he asks My Protection (refuge), I will give him protection”⁶⁰.

This *hadith* indicates that the actions of a believer who worships God sincerely will be action for the sake of God. He/she will only hear, see, walk for the sake of God. He will ask God for help in everything he/she does.

g. Al-Maqdisi⁶¹

God brought you out of the bellies of your mothers, not knowing anything. He gave you the knowledge and the understanding; so that you express your gratitude for the blessing of God.

h. Al-Maraghi⁶²

God brought you out of the bellies of your mothers and taught you that which you did not know. He gave you brains to understand with and to be able to discriminate between right and wrong; and gave you ears to be able to hear what the others are saying so you can communicate with them; and eyes to be able to see people, roads and other things which would make life easy for you. So, express your gratitude to God for the blessings which He bestowed on you.

i. Ibn ‘Ashour⁶³

The verse enumerates the blessings which God bestowed on His creatures. You did not exist, then God created you. Similarly, on the Day of Judgement, He will resurrect you after you have

⁶⁰ Narrated by Abu Hurriarah and reported by al-Bukhary.

⁶¹ Al-Maqdisi, v. 4, 44.

⁶² Al-Maraghi, v.14, 118.

⁶³ Ibn ‘Ashour, v.14, 231.

been dead. This is reason enough for you to express your gratitude to God. He gave you the senses of hearing, seeing, and understanding.

Discussion

The commentaries are all very much similar. They do stress two points: believers should show their gratitude to God for His blessings, and the first creation is a proof that God can resurrect humans after they have died. The way to Show gratitude to God is to use the senses which bestowed on us in doing things that please Him. An interesting point was made that hearing is mentioned in the singular form, while seeing and understanding are mentioned in the plural form. People sitting in one room, will hear the same sound but they will have different images and different understandings of what they see and hear.

This is a reminder that God is the Creator therefore one should be grateful to God for all His blessings which started with the creation of the human being. The verse links the belief in the Oneness of God and gratitude.

4. “It is He who has created for you the faculties of hearing, sight, and understanding (hearts); little gratitude it is you show.” (al-Muminun: 78)

a. Al-Tabari⁶⁴

You deny God’s ability to resurrect you, while He was the One who gave you ears to hear with, eyes to see with, and intellect to understand with. In spite of this, you do not show gratitude for the blessings of hearing, seeing, and understanding.

b. Al-Qushayri⁶⁵

God mentions His great blessings which He bestowed on His creatures. They should show gratitude to God by using these senses in doing things that pleases God. Showing gratitude for hearing is to hear only things about God and things which is dedicated to God. Showing gratitude for seeing is to see only things about God and things which is dedicated to God. Showing gratitude for being given a heart is to use it only to witness God and to love only God.

c. Al-Kashaf⁶⁶

Of the essence of showing gratitude is to bear witness that only God is the One who bestowed the blessings.

d. Al-Razi⁶⁷

He who does not use these blessings the way God intended, it is as if he does not have them.

e. Al-Qurtobi⁶⁸

f. God reminded them with the blessings which He bestowed on them, but they still deny them.

⁶⁴ Al-Tabari, v.9, 313.

⁶⁵ Al-Qushayri, v.2, 347.

⁶⁶ Al-Zamakhshari, 713.

⁶⁷ Al-Razi, v. 23, 115.

⁶⁸ Al-Qurtobi, v.15, 77.

g. Ibn Katheer⁶⁹

God reminded them with the blessings which He bestowed on them, but they still deny them.

h. Al-Maqdisi⁷⁰

He gave you hearing, seeing, and hearts but you are ungrateful.

i. Al-Maraghi⁷¹

He gave you hearing, seeing, and hearts but you are ungrateful.

j. Ibn ‘Ashour⁷²

These are signs of the Oneness of God. He blessed people with these gifts so that they worship Him alone. The hearing is mentioned in the singular form while the seeing and understanding are mentioned in the plural form. The same sound is heard by everyone but different people see different things and understand things differently.

If this is addressed to the disbelievers, then gratitude means believing in the Oneness of God. If the verse is addressed to all people, then gratitude means thanking God for His blessings.

Discussion

All the commentaries except for the Qushayeri are similar and straightforward. Al-Qushayeri is offering a gnostic interpretation. The comment made by Ibn ‘Ashour about the way the senses are mentioned is interesting. When you have a group of people listening to speech, they will all hear the same voice, hence the singular form for the hearing. The same people will see different things and will understand the speech in a different way, hence the plural form.

⁶⁹ Ibn Katheer, v. 5, 471.

⁷⁰ Al-Maqdisi, v.1, 175.

⁷¹ Al-Maraghi, v.18, 45.

⁷² Ibn ‘Ashour, v.18, 103.

God mentions His great blessings which He bestowed on His creatures. They should show gratitude to God by using these senses in doing things that pleases God. Of the essence of showing gratitude is to bear witness that only God is the One who bestowed the blessings.

5. “The one who had knowledge of the Book said, ‘I will bring it to you within the twinkling of an eye.’ Then when (Solomon) saw it placed firmly before him, he said, ‘This is by the Grace of my Lord to test me whether I am grateful or ungrateful - and if any is grateful, truly his gratitude is for his own soul; but if any is ungrateful, truly my God is Rich, Generous.’” (al-Naml: 40)

a. Al-Tabari⁷³

When Suleiman saw the throne, he told those who were around him, that the power he has which enabled him to see the throne being carried to him in a blink of an eye is a blessing from God. He believed that this was a test for him. God wanted to see whether he would express his gratitude for the blessings which God bestowed on him, or he reject the blessing by not expressing his gratitude.

Whoever expresses his gratitude for the blessings which God bestowed on him, actually benefits himself. Expressing gratitude does not benefit any one except the one who does. God is independent, and does not need anything from His creatures.

b. Al-Qushayri⁷⁴

Gratitude is to praise the for the one who bestowed the blessings by proclaiming the blessings. The gratitude of God is to bestow His blessings while the gratitude of the believer is to obey God. The Sufi say, “Gratitude is to use the blessings in the service of God.” It has been also said that gratitude is not to use the blessings in performing acts of disobedience, and to realize the inability to express gratitude. It was said that the best way to show gratitude is to be grateful the God enabled you to express your gratitude.

⁷³ Al-Tabari, v. 8, 690.

⁷⁴ Al-Qushayri, v.2, 420.

c. Al-Kashaf⁷⁵

The person who expresses gratitude to God is in fact benefiting himself, because expressing gratitude is an obligatory duty for the recipient of the blessings. Gratitude is a protection for the blessings and a reason for its increase.

d. Al-Razi⁷⁶

Gratitude benefits the grateful not God. Gratitude is a protection for the blessings and a reason for its increase.

e. Al-Qurtobi⁷⁷

Gratitude benefits the grateful not God. Gratitude is a protection for the blessings and a reason for its increase.

f. Ibn Katheer⁷⁸

This is a test.

g. Al-Maqdisi⁷⁹

Gratitude benefits the grateful not God. Gratitude is a protection for the blessings and a reason for its increase.

h. Al-Maraghi⁸⁰

Gratitude benefits the grateful not God. Gratitude is a protection for the blessings and a reason for its increase.

i. Ibn 'Ashour⁸¹

⁷⁵ Al-Zamakhshari, 784.

⁷⁶ Al-Razi, v. 24, 197.

⁷⁷ Al-Qurtobi, v.16, 171.

⁷⁸ Ibn Katheer, v. 5, 674.

⁷⁹ Al-Maqdisi, v.5, 140.

⁸⁰ Al-Maraghi, v.19, 139.

⁸¹ Ibn 'Ashour, v.19, 272.

Everyone who wants to get closer to God, should have the sincere intention that every good deed he performs is for the sake of God. He should also have the hope that God will continue to bless him in this life. This way he wins in this life and in the Hereafter.

Discussion

The person who expresses gratitude to God is in fact benefiting himself, because expressing gratitude is an obligatory duty for the recipient of the blessings. Gratitude is a protection for the blessings and a reason for its increase.

6. “And verily We gave Luqman wisdom, saying, ‘Be grateful to God; whosoever shows gratitude, his gratitude is for (the good of) his own soul. And whosoever is ungrateful, then surely God is Independent, Praised.’” (Luqman: 12)

a. Al-Tabari⁸²

We have given Luqman the understanding of religion, sharp intellect, and the ability to say the right thing. Wisdom is the ability to say and do the right thing without being a prophet. The verse commands Luqman to express his gratitude to God. Wisdom enables the person to realize that one should be grateful to God. Showing gratitude to God only benefits the person who does it. The benefit will be received in terms of the extra reward that God will bestow on him. Whoever, becomes ungrateful, is only hurting himself because God will punish him.

b. Al-Qushayri⁸³

We have given Luqman the ability to follow the path by the will of God not as a result of his effort. It was also mentioned that wisdom means being free of the control of the whims and desires. It was also said that wisdom means knowing oneself.

The essence of gratitude is being able to see the blessings of God with the eyes of the heart. It was also said, that gratitude is realizing your inability to express enough gratitude for the blessings of God.

c. Al-Kashaf⁸⁴

The commentary was about who was Luqman and whether he was a prophet or a wise man.

d. Al-Razi⁸⁵

⁸² Al-Tabari, v.9, 117.

⁸³ Al-Qushayri, v.3, 18.

⁸⁴ Al-Zamakhshari, 836.

⁸⁵ Al-Razi, v. 25, 145.

Allah gave Luqman wisdom by making him grateful. Gratitude came in the future tense and disbelief came in the past tense. This indicates that showing gratitude should be perpetual process; but who ever disbelieved should stop.

e. Al-Qurtobi⁸⁶

Whoever obeys Allah is benefiting himself.

f. Ibn Katheer⁸⁷

Whoever obeys Allah is benefiting himself.

g. Al-Maqdisi⁸⁸

Whoever obeys Allah is benefiting himself.

h. Al-Maraghi⁸⁹

Whoever obeys Allah is benefiting himself.

i. Ibn ‘Ashour⁹⁰

The first in the wisdom that Luqman received was to express gratitude to Allah. The person who expresses gratitude to Allah will receive the benefit for his actions.

Discussion

Gratitude came in the future tense and disbelief came in the past tense. This indicates that showing gratitude should be perpetual process; but who ever disbelieved should stop.

7. “No, worship God alone, and be of those who are grateful.” (al-Zomour: 66)

⁸⁶ Al-Qurtobi, v. 16, 467.

⁸⁷ Ibn Katheer, v. 6, 113.

⁸⁸ Al-Maqdisi, v. 5, 304.

⁸⁹ Al-Maraghi, v.21, 79.

⁹⁰ Ibn ‘Ashour, v.21, 152.

a. Al-Tabari⁹¹

God says to His prophet worship Allah and do not worship those which the disbelievers are asking you to worship. Be grateful to Allah who blessed you with the guidance to worship Him alone.

b. Al-Qushayri⁹²

Worship God alone, and be one of those who are grateful.

c. Al-Kashaf⁹³

God says to His prophet worship Allah and do not worship those which the disbelievers are asking you to worship. Be grateful to Allah that He made you the master of the Children of Adam.

d. Al-Razi⁹⁴

God says to His prophet worship Allah and do not worship those which the disbelievers are asking you to worship. Be grateful to Allah who blessed you with the guidance to worship Him alone.

e. Al-Qurtobi⁹⁵

Ibn ‘Abbas said that worship here means believe in the Oneness of God.

f. Ibn Katheer⁹⁶

Ibn ‘Abbas mentioned that the verse was revealed on the occasion that the pagans of mecca asked the Prophet to worship their idols. Allah commanded him to worship God Alone.

g. Al-Maqdisi⁹⁷

⁹¹ Al-Tabari, v.9, 705.

⁹² Al-Qushayri, v.3, 126.

⁹³ Al-Zamakhshari, 947.

⁹⁴ Al-Razi, v. 27, 14.

⁹⁵ Al-Qurtobi, v.18, 307.

⁹⁶ Ibn Katheer, v. 6, 466.

⁹⁷ Al-Maqdisi, v.6, 87.

Worship God only be grateful to Him for the blessings which He bestowed on you.

h. Al-Maraghi⁹⁸

Ibn ‘Abbas mentioned that the verse was revealed on the occasion that the pagans of Mecca asked the Prophet to worship their idols. Allah commanded him to worship God Alone. Be grateful to Allah for the guiding you to the belief in the Oneness of God and choosing you to be His messenger.

i. Ibn ‘Ashour⁹⁹

Gratitude is the righteous deed that pleases Allah. It is connected to worshipping God alone.

Discussion

God says to His prophet worship Allah and do not worship those which the disbelievers are asking you to worship. Be grateful to Allah who blessed you with the guidance to worship Him alone. Gratitude is the righteous deed that pleases Allah. It is connected to worshipping God alone.

⁹⁸ Al-Maraghi, v.24, 31.

⁹⁹ Ibn ‘Ashour, v.24, 60.

8. “I have only created jinn and humankind to worship Me.” (al-Dhariyyat: 56)

a. Al-Tabari¹⁰⁰

Jinn and humans were created to acknowledge their servitude to God and to worship Him alone.

b. Al-Qushayri¹⁰¹

I created, those whom I have chosen in eternity, singled them out to enjoy My nearness, and promised them My best reward, only to worship Me. Those whom incurred My wrath since eternity were created to suffer My torment in Hellfire.

c. Al-Kashaf¹⁰²

God created jinn and humans to voluntarily worship Him alone. Some chose to worship God voluntarily and some did not. God has the power to force people and jinn to worship Him, however, He gave them the choice.

d. Al-Razi¹⁰³

Worship is to acknowledge the majesty of God and to be treat the creation of God with mercy.

e. Al-Qurtobi¹⁰⁴

This applies to those who were assigned to worship Allah. Thus, the meaning of the verse is that God created the jinn and humans who were destined to be happy to worship Him alone. Those who were destined to unhappiness are not addressed by this verse. Worship here means the belief in the Oneness of God.

Zayed Ibn Aslam said, “According to the destiny which was allocated to them. The happy ones were created to worship God, while the miserable ones were created for disobedience.” Al-Kalby indicated that worship means the belief in the Oneness of God.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Tabari, v.10, 400.

¹⁰¹ Al-Qushayri, v.3, 240.

¹⁰² Al-Zamakhshari, 1054.

¹⁰³ Al-Razi, v. 28, 232.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Qurtobi, v. 19, 506.

f. Ibn Katheer¹⁰⁵

According to Ibn ‘Abbas, the Jinn and humans were created to acknowledge the right of God to be worshipped. Ibn Jareej said, this means they are created to know God. According to al-Sadday worship will only be accepted if it is done free of associating partners with God.

g. Al-Maqdisi¹⁰⁶

According to Ibn ‘Abbas and ‘Ali Ibn abi Taleb, Allah created jinn and humans only to worship Him and to acknowledge their servitude to Him. The meaning of worship is to acknowledge the right of Allah to be their master. He controls everything.

h. Al-Maraghi¹⁰⁷

This a reminder that Allah created the jinn and humans to acknowledge Him. They should understand that He controls everything.

i. Ibn ‘Ashour¹⁰⁸

This verse rebukes the disbelievers, because they forgot the purpose for which they were created. Worship is to acknowledge the power of the one being worshipped and to realize his ability to control everything and that he knows what benefits the worshipper and what harms him.

Discussion

So the purpose of creation to believe in the Oneness of God. The meaning of worship is to acknowledge the right of Allah to be their master. He controls e

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Katheer, v. 7, 38.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Maqdisi, v. 6, 412.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Maraghi, v.27, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibn ‘Ashour, v. 27, 24.