

Hope in Islam

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## **Hope in Psychology**

Snyder, Rand, and Sigmon (2017, 28) developed a theory of hope that consists of three components: Goals, pathways thinking, and agency. Goals may be difficult but they are attainable. Pathways thinking is the ability of people to develop routes that can lead to the identified goals. Agency thinking is the motivation that will drive people to follow the routes that lead to the realization of the goals.

An alternative theory was introduced by Ward and Wampler who defined hope as a “belief and feeling that a desired outcome is possible.” (2010, 223) Ward and Wampler’s theory identified four elements which can be used to determine the level of hope. These are options, action, evidence, and connection. Options are alternative actions which the person believes available to him or her. Action incorporates beliefs that the individual is able to act to achieve the desired goal. Evidence is available proof that indicate that the desired outcome is attainable. Connections with other people or with a higher power are a source of hope. This theory was developed to be used mainly in connection with couples’ therapy.

The objective of this paper is not to discuss theories of hope. This introduction serves to outline some of the similarities between the secular and the Islamic approaches to the construct of hope. It is interesting that Ward and Wampler’s theory refers to the importance of having a connection with a higher power as a source of hope. The agency thinking in Snyder’s theory has some resemblance to the concept of the “station” in Al-Ghazali’s theory. The element of pathways thinking in Snyder’s theory has been emphasized by al-Muhasibi, Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Ghazali.

## Hope in Islam

### *Words for hope in the Quran*

There are four Arabic words which can be translated as hope.

The first one is pronounced “*raja*’” (رَجَاء). Al-Asfahani indicates that the Arabic word “*raja*’” means anticipating something pleasing to happen (2009, 346). It is translated as “to expect, to look forward to, or to anticipate” (Wehr 1976, 330). Muqatil (2011, 215) points out that the word “*raja*’” could mean either covet or fear. In verses (al-Isra’: 57 and al-Baqarah: 218) it means coveted; while in verses (al-Karf: 110, al-Furqan: 21) it means feared<sup>1</sup>. Al-Jawhari (2009, 426) agreed with Muqatel and cited verse, (Nuh, 13) to support his argument. Zakariyya (1979, 494) indicated that it means hope, sometimes hope is used to indicate fear. Hope is the anticipation of something possible, when the individual fears that what he desires will not come true, then hope becomes mixed with fear (Lane 1863, Book I, Part 3, 1049). Al-Jawhary (2009, 426) indicates that this word could also mean deferring something (see al-A’raf, 111; al-Tawbah, 106; and al-Ahzab, 51).

The second word is pronounced “*tamma*na,” (تَمَنَّى). The word “*tamma*na” is usually used for wishful thinking (see al-Nisaa: 120.) According to al-Asfahani (2009, 780; and Al-‘Askari (1997, 123) it is equivalent to lying.

The third word is pronounced “*tam*’a” (طَمَع). According to al-Asfahani (2009, 524) it means coveted. It can also mean greed. In the Quran it was used to mean hoping with humility (Al-A’raf: 56) and hoping in vain (al-Baqarah: 75).

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<sup>1</sup> The concept that the same word would have different meanings when used in different verses of the Quran is one of the branches of the Sciences of Quran. It seems that Muqatel’s book was one of the first in this area.

The fourth word is “Amal” (أمل). It is the same as “*raja*” (Al-Jawhary 2009, 54). Zakariyya (1979, v. 1, 140) is in agreement with this definition. The word *amal* appeared twice in the Quran meaning hope, in Surat al-Hijr: 3 and in Surat al-Kahf: 46. Ibn ‘Ashour (v. 14, 12) indicated that *amal* means hoping for something desirable, though improbable. It is between hope and coveting. Ibn ‘Ashour commented on the statement translated as “better grounds for hope” (al-Kahf: 46) means that it is better [object of] hope than the hope in having wealth and progeny in this life. Hoping for wealth and progeny in this life is not certain and when it happens, it only lasts for a short period; while hoping for a reward in the Hereafter for the good deeds done during life, is certain because it is a promise of God. It could also bring a reward in this life in addition to the reward in the Hereafter.

### ***Theories***

Al-Muhasibi (1991, 52) classified those who are hopeful into three categories. The first, is a person who is sincere in doing good. He does good deeds for the sake of God and seeking only His rewards. He hopes that God will accept his deeds and will reward him, however he entertains fear because he/she is worried that his/her deeds would not be accepted. The second kind, is a person who committed a sin, then repented. He hopes that God would accept his repentance. He hopes in God’s forgiveness but he is also fearful that he may not get it. The third kind is a person who is immersed in sin; he does not repent. However, he still hopes that he would be forgiven. This is wishful thinking. Al-Muhasiby commented only on the third type of hope, that it will be in vain. One can then assume the first two categories are acceptable.

Ibn al-Qayyim (v. 2, 26) follows al-Muhasiby's classification and classifies hope into three categories. Two of them are laudable and the third is illaudable. The laudable ones are the hope of a believer who does something good and hopes to be rewarded by God, and the hope of a repentant sinner to be forgiven by God. The illaudable hope is the hope of an unrepentant sinner who hopes to be forgiven without doing anything to make him/her deserving of this forgiveness. This is false hope. Ibn al-Qayyim is of the opinion that a believer is the one whose acts of worship are shaped by three emotions: the love of God, the hope in God, and the fear of God. He bases his view on the verse, "Those whom they call upon seek a way of approach to their Lord, which of them shall be the nearest; they hope for His mercy and they fear His torment. The torment of your Lord is to be cautious of." (al-Israa: 57) Ibn al-Qayyim differentiates between hope and wishful thinking. A hopeful person works hard to achieve the goal then puts his/her trust in God. Wishful thinking is the way of lazy people who do not want to exert themselves but they hope something will happen. Ibn al-Qayyim's definition of hope does not differ much from Snyder's theory. According to Ibn al-Qayyim, there is a goal, which is to please God; to reach that goal one should identify the proper routes, which is expressed in the statement that the believer "should work hard to attain the goal."

According to al-Ghazaly (v. 4, 144) hope is a station on the path of the traveler. A traveler is a person who is seeking the nearness of God. A station refers to a permanent and well established condition. Hope has three components: knowledge, state, and action. Knowledge should lead to the state and state should lead to action. If one thinks of something that occurred in the past, this is called remembering. If one thinks of something that presently exists, this is called yearning. If one thinks of something that is

expected in the future, this is called anticipation. If one is anticipating something harmful, then, the heart will ache and this is called fear. If one is anticipating something that she likes, then the heart will be comforted and this comfort is called hope. Hope is the comfortable feeling that fills the heart when it is waiting for something desirable to happen.

For a desired thing to happen, its prerequisites should occur first. When most of the prerequisites have occurred then anticipating the desired thing is called hope. However, if none of the prerequisites have occurred then anticipating the thing to occur is a delusion. In this case, anticipating the occurrence of the desired thing is foolishness not hope. However, if it is not known whether the prerequisites have occurred or not, then anticipating the thing to occur is more like wishful thinking. In all circumstances, hope and fear are only used in relation to situations which may or may not occur. Hope and fear are not used in relation to situations which will certainly occur. One cannot say, “I hope for the rising of the sun” at the time of sunrise, or, “I fear the setting of the sun” at sunset, because these two events are certain to occur. But one can say, “I hope that rain falls and I fear it may not fall.”

Thus, hope is only used to describe waiting for a desired outcome to happen, provided that all the prerequisites (which are within human control) which are needed for the desired outcome to occur have been completed. Things which are not under human control are left for the grace of God. “And there followed them successors who inherited the Scripture while taking the commodities of this lower life and saying, ‘We will be forgiven.’” (al-A’raf:169)

Al-Ghazali's definition is in agreement with Snyder's theory of hope as well. Al-Ghazali insists that the goal to be achieved should be realizable. He states that for hope to be realized, its prerequisites should be completed. What is missing in Ibn al-Qayyim's and al-Ghazali's theories is a well-defined component for motivating the Muslim to act. This should be included in any framework for hope in Islam.

Before I discuss the suggested framework for hope in Islam, we need to introduce a component which should be considered and included in the suggested framework. There is evidence in the Quran which shows that hope was ingrained in the human psyche from the beginning. This can be gleaned from the story of Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve realized that they disobeyed God they said, "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will certainly be lost." (al-A'raf: 23) They identified a goal: they wanted God to forgive them. They identified the route for the achievement of the goal: repentance. Their motivation is that they do not want to be of the losers. They acted by asking God for forgiveness. One can see the interaction of fear and hope in this story. They were afraid that they would become losers. Thus, fear became their incentive to act. An Islamic theory of hope should help nurtures this initial natural disposition of the human being. This factor can be used in providing a suitable motivating factor for hope.

### **A Framework for Hope in Islam**

In the Quran, there are thirteen verses which mention the hope in meeting God, and availing of His mercy. There are fourteen verses which mention cognates of the word "*raja'*." Eight



verses refer to those who do not hope in the meeting of God. In the remaining verses the word means deferral of an action or areas in the universe. Most commentaries agree that the Arabic word (رجاء) means hope. Hope is anticipating something possible and pleasant to happen. Some of the commentators indicate that hope is always mixed with fear, because while anticipating something to happen, there is always the possibility that it will not happen. Some commentators are of the opinion that it means fear (al-Qurtubi). Some said that it means both (al-Maraghi) because hope is always mixed with fear; when one hopes for something, he/she is afraid that they may not get it. I will only deal with the first category: verses which uses the word “*raja*” as hoping to meet God and availing oneself of His mercy.

One can think of hope as an expression of *tawhid*. Having the expectation of meeting God and seeking His mercy are expressions of the certitude in the belief in God as the Creator. He controls everything, He can grant mercy or He can exact punishment as He wills. Some of the verses which mention *raja* refer to “the hope of meeting God” (al-Kahf: 110); while others refer to “hoping to avail oneself of God’s mercy” (al-Baqarah: 218). The verses in the first group obviously deal with the Hereafter, while the verses in the second group deal with both this life and the Hereafter. The mercy of God is bestowed both in this life as well as in the Hereafter. Thus, hope is a feeling that can be experienced regarding worldly affairs as well as forgiveness in the Hereafter.

A framework for hope which applies to the two cases is suggested. The framework is based on Al-Ghazali’s approach as well as the example of Adam and Eve. In formulating this model one is guided also by the thirteen verses mentioned above.

The suggested framework consists of five stages (see Figure 1). These are

1. Knowledge.
2. Goal.
3. Means.
4. Motivation.
5. Action.

### ***Knowledge***

God gave the believers the privilege of hoping for His mercy (al-Baqarah: 218), His unlimited support (al-Nisaa: 104), and unlimited reward (Fater: 29). One of the signs of the strength of faith is looking forward to meeting God (al-Kahf: 110). An individual who is looking forward to meeting God is an individual who believes in the Day of Judgment and accountability (al-Ankabut: 5). This individual hopes in the mercy and forgiveness of God, God reassures these individuals that they will gain God's reward. However, hope is always mixed with fear, the fear that their good deeds may fall short of the acceptable standard (al-Israa: 57).

Hope is a feeling that can be entertained regarding God's forgiveness in the Hereafter, as well seeking His support in this life (al-Nisa': 104). The Prophet (ﷺ) advised Muslims to make supplications requesting the blessings of health, good provision, knowledge, and righteous progeny. These supplications are an expression of hope in the mercy and grace of God. Knowledge is about gaining the certitude that God is the only source of hope.

## ***Goal***

The goal then is to have hope in the forgiveness, the mercy and the support of God which the believers were promised; and to know with certitude that hoping in the support of God covers all areas of activities of human life: hope for recovery from sickness, hope for advancement in work, hope for having a righteous family and so on.

## ***Means***

One has to prepare the tools and means to achieve the goal which the person is hoping to achieve. The Quran describes a comprehensive tool that will help the believers to attain the set goals, whether they deal with the Hereafter or this worldly life. This tool is to follow the example of the Prophet (ﷺ), “You have indeed an excellent example in the Messenger of God for any who hopes for (the meeting of) God and the Last Day, and remembers God much.” (al-Ahzab: 21) Adopting the excellent example of the Prophet (ﷺ) means practicing Islam as it was meant to be practiced.

The Quran lists the prerequisites of hope in a good life in the Hereafter: having sincere faith, and doing good deeds (al-Kahf: 110); struggling in the path of God (al-Baqarah: 218); avoiding indulgence in the worldly pleasures and living a heedless life (Yonus: 7); and reciting the Book of God, establishing regular prayer, and spending (in Charity) out of what God has provided for them, secretly and openly (Fater: 29).

For goals which are set for this worldly life, one has to use the practical means provided by God which are appropriate for dealing with the specific situation at hand, then one should put one's trust in God (Hud: 88, 133). To a certain extent, there are similar aspects in both hope and *twakkul* (putting one's trust in God.) They both start with a goal that needs to be achieved. They both require making an appropriate plan for achieving the goal. They both require that the individual would do her best to achieve the desired outcome. In the process of hope, one seeks God's help and support and hopes that they will be given. In the process of *twakkul*, the person accepts the end result of his/her efforts believing that this is the most beneficial result.

### ***Motivation***

The individual may have the knowledge, could have identified the goal, determined the means and tools to be used to achieve the desired outcome, but she may be still reluctant to exert the effort needed to perform the necessary action. This is where a motivation is needed to move the person to do the work needed. If the goal is to have hope in a good reward on the Day of Judgment, but the person is afraid that her shortcomings will not enable her to reach that goal, then reciting the verse, "Say, 'My servants who have were given to excesses against themselves; do not despair of the mercy of God. Indeed, God forgives all sins. Indeed, He is All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.'" (al-Zomour: 53) will kindle the hope in the heart of the believer and motivates her to perform the deeds which lead to a good reward on the Day of Judgment.

If we are dealing with hopes regarding a worldly matter, then one should remember verse (al-Nisa': 104) which urges the believers to struggle against their enemy, giving them the

glad tidings of God's support. God has promised to support the believers in their struggle in this life.

Another tool that has been suggested by Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), is supplication. There are many supplications which can be recited by the believers and which remind them of the support of God when they are pursuing goals which helps them to lead a good worldly life.

### ***Action***

The next stage is to use the means which have been identified to form a plan of action to achieve the goals. The plan should start by identifying certain objectives which serve the identified goal. These objectives should be SMART objectives. This means that they should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Specific means that the tasks to be done should be well defined with no ambiguity. Measurable means that the number and frequency of the tasks should be well defined. There should be a standard to indicate how much of the objective has been achieved. Achievable means that they should be realistic, one should not over burden her/himself beyond their abilities. Relevant means that the objectives should be focused on the task at hand. Time-bound means that the tasks should follow a well defined schedule.

### **Discussion**

The framework presented can be used as a foundation for a plan of action. A plan of action should be personalized to address the circumstances and conditions of each individual. While all plans should be developed on the basis of the common foundation, they should

should be tailored to suit the personal requirements of each individual. The plan should include a standard to measure its progress.

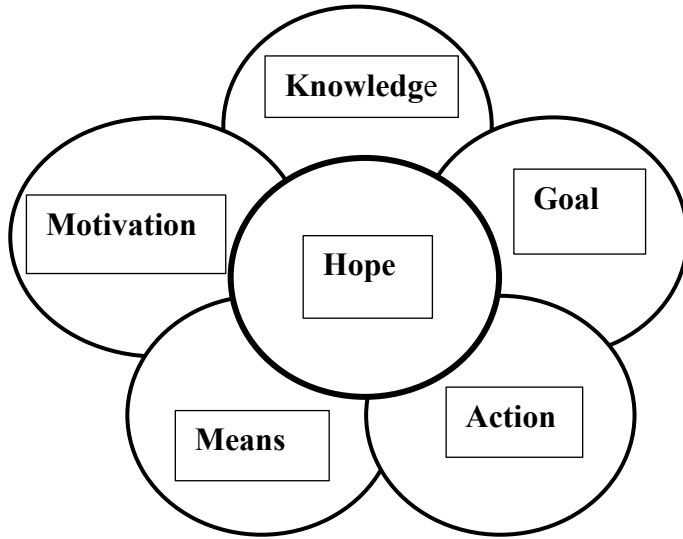


Figure 1

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## Appendix: Commentaries

1. “Those who believed and those who fled their homes and strove hard in the path of God, they hope for the Mercy of God. And God is All-Forgiving, Giver of Mercy.” (al-Baqarah: 218)
  - a. Al-Tabari (v. 2, 393)

Those who believed and left the place which was controlled by those who associate partners with God so that they can maintain their faith and fought for the sake of God, those should hope in the mercy of God. He will admit them to Paradise. God is all forgiving, Giver of mercy.
  - b. Al-Qushayri (v. 1, 103)

Those who were sincere in their intention, fulfilled their covenant, and did not turn back on their heels, these are the ones who lived the spirit of hope to reach a state of perfect existence in the abode of the meeting (of God).
  - c. Al-Zamakhshari (127)

These people were chosen by God to be the best, they became people of hope. He who hopes strives and he who fears flees.
  - d. Al-Razi (v. 6, 42)

Hope is to anticipate a pleasant thing to happen. In this verse it refers to those who hope for a reward from God. They were not certain that they would get the reward but they were expecting it and hopeful that they will get it. One should not be certain that he will get a reward for believing and doing good deeds. However, it will happen because of the it was promised. This does not mean that a believer should be in doubt of God’s forgiveness, but he/she should always think that what they have done is not enough. There is another opinion which indicates that the reward is certain but its amount and time are not certain.
  - e. Al-Qurtobi (v. 3, 431)

The verse was revealed on the occasion of the killing of one of the pagans during the Sacred Months. This happened when a group of Muslims under the leadership of ‘Abd Allah ibn Jahsh were sent to monitor Quraish’s caravans, but they ended up killing one of the pagans. The Prophet (ﷺ) rebuked them for fighting during the Sacred Month. The verse was revealed to absolve Ibn Jahsh and his company of any wrong doing and to praise them for their sincere faith, migrating and fighting in the path of God. Hope means anticipating and coveting something uncertain. Hope is always mixed with fear. It could also mean fear (Nuh: 13).
  - f. Ibn Katheer (v. 2, 142)

Ibn Katheer’s commentary is mainly on the story of ‘Abd Allah ibn Jahsh, he did not discuss the meaning of hope.
  - g. Al-Maqdisi (v. 1, 306)

Those who believed, left their homes and families, and fought for the sake of God, should hope for the mercy of God.
  - h. Al-Maraghi (v. 2, 137)

Those who believed, left their homes and families, and fought for the sake of God, should hope for the mercy of God.

i. Ibn 'Ashour (v. 2, 337)

Raja' is anticipating something pleasant to happen. In this case the promise of God is certain but the end is unknown.

### **Discussion**

The commentaries all agree that the Arabic word (رجاء) means hope. Hope is anticipating something possible and pleasant to happen. Some of the commentators indicate that hope is always mixed with fear, because while anticipating something to happen, there is always the possibility that it will not happen.

2. “And be not weak hearted in pursuit of the enemy; if you suffer pain, they too suffer pain as you suffer pain, and you hope from God that which they do not hope; and God is Omniscient, Wise.” (al-Nisa’: 104)

a. Al-Tabari (v. 4, 139)

Do not stop pursuing the enemies of God because you feel weak and you do not want to exert yourselves. If you feel pain, they also feel pain like you. But you hope for a much better reward from God. You are certain of the reward of God while they do not expect any reward because they do not believe in God.

b. Al-Qushayri (v. 1, 222)

Put your trust in God, because if you feel pain, they also feel pain. But your hearts see what they do not see. Your hearts will get what they do not get. So, exert yourselves.

c. Al-Zamakhshari (258)

Don’t slacken in pursuing the enemies of God. If you feel pain, they also feel pain. You should persevere, because you expect your religion to lead you to victory and great reward in the Hereafter.

d. Al-Razi (v. 11, 31)

The verse urges the believers to fight for the sake of God. They are subjected to pain as you are. Pain did not prevent them from fighting you, why it should stop you from fighting them. The believers are more deserving to persevere because of the reward they expect from God, while the disbelievers have no similar hope.

e. Al-Qurtobi (v. 7, 112)

It was mentioned that this verse was revealed when the Prophet (ﷺ) returned from the battle of Uhud. He wanted to pursue the disbelievers the following day and he wanted only those who participated in the battle of Uhud the previous day to follow him. The believers were tired and wounded after the battle so the verse came to urge them to continue the struggle.

Some said, the word “raja” here means fear, because whoever is hoping for something fears that he would not be able to get it. However, al-Farra’ wa al-Zajaj said that the use of the word “raja” to mean fear, happens only when the action is negated. Like “What is the matter with you, that you do not appreciate God’s Majesty?” (Nuh: 13) and “Tell those who believe, to forgive those who do not look forward to the Days of God. It is for Him to recompense (for good or ill) each people according to what they have earned.” (al-Jathiyah: 14). Al-Qushayri did not agree with al-Farra’ wa al-Zajaj.

f. Ibn Katheer (v. 3, 209)

Don’t slacken in pursuing the enemies of God. If you feel pain, they also feel pain. You should persevere, because you expect great reward from your Lord, while they expect nothing. The promise of God is the truth and He will fulfill His promise.

g. Al-Maqdisi (v. 2, 190)

When Abu Sufian and his army left the battle ground in the battle of Uhud, The Prophet (ﷺ) wanted to send a company of the Muslims to pursue them. Muslims were hurting from the wounds of the battle. This verse came to respond to their complaints. The disbelievers are also hurting, but you expect a reward from God that while they do not expect anything because they do not believe in resurrection.

h. Al-Maraghi (v. 5, 145)

The verse urges the believers to fight for the sake of God. They are subjected to pain as you are. Pain did not prevent them from fighting you, why it should stop you from fighting them.

The believers are more deserving to persevere because of the reward they expect from God, while the disbelievers have no similar hope.

i. Ibn ‘Ashour (v. 5, 189)

The verse is trying to motivate the Muslims to fight against the disbelievers. The verse is urging them to be on the offensive and attack the disbelievers because the offense will spread fear in the hearts of the disbelievers. Both sides are hurting, but the Muslims expect from God what the others do not expect. The verse brings glad tidings to the believers, God will reward them and will support them to gain victory.

**Discussion**

All the commentators agree that this verse was revealed to motivate the believers to fight against the disbelievers even though they were injured and feel pain. However, there is a difference in opinion regarding whether the word “Tarjun” here means hope or fear. It does not make sense that the word is used in the context of fear because the verse is meant to motivate the believers to fight. The incentive that they should expect a reward from God constitute this motivation.

3. “Certainly, those who do not expect to meet with Us, but are pleased and satisfied with the life of this world, and those who are heedless of Our signs.” (Yunus: 7)

a. Al-Tabari (v. 6, 201)

Those who do not expect to meet us on the Day of Judgment because they deny the concepts of resurrection and accountability, indulge themselves in the pleasures of this world. Those are the ones who are heedless of the signs of God. Hellfire will be their abode as a recompense for the sins which they committed in their worldly life. The Arabs use the word “raja” to mean feared.

b. Al-Qushayri (v. 2, 6)

They did not hope in “seeing” because they denied that it was possible. The believers believed in “the seeing” so they hoped it will happen. It was said that “do not expect to meet with Us” means that they did not yearn to meet with God, they did not yearn because they did not love God. They did not love God because they did not know Him. They did not know Him because they did not seek Him. They did not seek Him because He did not want them to seek Him. It is also said that if He wanted them to seek Him, they would have sought Him. If they sought Him, they would have known Him. Had they known Him, they would have loved Him. When they love Him they will yearn to Him. When they yearn to Him they will have hope to meet Him.

Al-Zamakhshari (457)

They do not hope for meeting Us because they are heedless, they never thought it could happen. Their indulgence in the pleasures of this life obscured their vision so they do not see the facts. It could mean they did not fear the consequences of their deeds. They were happy to enjoy this life.

c. Al-Razi (v.17, 40)

The verse describes the characteristics of the disbelievers. These are

- They do not hope/expect meeting God. This has two interpretations: Ibn ‘Abbas and Muqatel said they were not afraid of the resurrection because they did not believe in the resurrection. The second interpretation is that they did not hope in the mercy and reward of God. Al-Razi is of the opinion that the word “yarjun” here means hope. “Meeting Us” is a metaphorical expression for seeing God.
- The second characteristic is that they are pleased with the worldly pleasures.
- The third characteristic is that they are satisfied and content with the worldly pleasures.
- The fourth characteristic is that they are heedless.

d. Al-Qurtobi (v. 10, 456)

The verse means that those who do not fear meeting with Us. It was said that it could mean that they do not hope in meeting Us. Thus, the word “raja” could mean fear and covet. Thus, the verse means they do not fear punishment nor they hope for a reward. The word “meeting with God” means seeing God. They indulged themselves in the pleasures of this world and were happy with them. They also were heedless of the signs of God, they did not reflect or contemplate.

e. Ibn Katheer (v. 4, 384)

God is telling us about the condition of those who did not believe in meeting God on the Day of Judgment. They did not hope to gain anything from that meeting. They were satisfied with the worldly life and were content enjoying its pleasures. They were heedless of the

signs of God in the universe, as well as the legal signs of God. Hellfire will be their abode.

f. Al-Maqdisi (v. 3, 267)

Those who do not expect to meet Us because they do not believe in the resurrection, and chose the pleasures of this world over the Hereafter, they were content with it, and they were heedless of the signs of God will end up in Hellfire.

g. Al-Maraghi (v. 11, 70)

The Arabic word “raja” is used to mean either hope or fear. The two are closely connected because when one hopes for something he/she fears losing it. Those who reject the idea that they will be meeting God on the Day of Judgment because they do not believe in resurrection, and who became content with the pleasures of this life and are heedless of the signs of God, will end up in Hellfire.

h. Ibn ‘Ashour (v. 11, 98)

This is a warning to the disbelievers who rejected the concept of the resurrection and did not think about the Hereafter. They did not reflect on the signs of God. The word “raja” is expecting something to happen. This thing may be good or bad, but most of the time it means something good. Thus, the verse means they do not expect to meet God. They did not think of the Hereafter. The pleasures of this life were enough for them. The verse hints to the fact that the more people get interested in the pleasures of this life, the farthest they are from thinking about the Hereafter. They are content with the pleasures of this life and heedless of the signs of God.

#### Discussion

The different commentaries are similar. However, they differ in the meaning of the word “raja’.” Some say it means hope (al-Tabari and al-Zamakhshari), others say it means fear (al-Qurtobi). Some said that it means both (al-Maraghi) because hope is always mixed with fear; when one hopes for something, he/she is afraid that they would not get it.

4. “Those whom they call upon seek a way of approach to their Lord, which of them shall be the nearest; they hope for His mercy and they fear His torment. The torment of your Lord is to be cautious of.” (al-Israa: 57)
- a. Al-Tabari (v. 7, 414)  
Those whom the disbelievers call gods, they call upon their Lord themselves because they believe in God. They hope for the mercy of God and fear His punishment. It said that the occasion of the revelation of this verse was because some Arabs used to worship jinn, these jinn became believers. The Arabs who were worshipping the jinn did not realize that the jinn became believers.
- b. Al-Qushayri (v. 2, 193)  
Those whom they worship besides God, e.g. Jesus, ‘Uzair and the angels, do not have the power to benefit or harm themselves. They themselves believe in God and they try to find ways to come closer to Him. They perform acts of obedience hoping that this would bring them closer to God and they fear God’s punishment. It is being said that a blind man leading another blind man will end up falling in a well.
- c. Al-Zamakhshari (600)  
The reference in the verse is to the angels whom the Arabs worshipped. Some said the reference is to Jesus or ‘Uzair. These have no power. They themselves believe in God and they seek a way to come closer to God. They fear the punishment of God.
- d. Al-Razi (v. 20, 232)  
The objective of the verse is to counter the argument of the disbelievers that they only worship the angels to intercede on their behalf to God. If this is true, then we say that the occasion of revelation is that a group of the Arabs worshipped the angels. However, angels cannot benefit or harm those who worship them.
- e. Al-Qurtobi (v. 13, 106)  
The occasion of the revelation of this verse was because some Arabs used to worship jinn, these jinn became believers. The Arabs who were worshipping the jinn did not realize that the jinn became believers. It was also said that the verse refers to the angels whom the Arabs used to worship. Sahl ibn ‘Abd Allah said, “Hope and fear are the two conditions that should balance each other.”
- f. Ibn Katheer (v. 5, 87)  
This refers to a group of Arabs who worshipped jinn, the jinn became Muslims. Ibn Masoud said that they were worshipping a kind of the angels called jinn. Ibn ‘Abbas was quoted to have said that the reference is to Jesus, his mother and ‘Uzair. Worship is not complete unless it is combined by hope and fear. Fear forbids people from committing sins, and hope drives people to perform acts of obedience.
- g. Al-Maqdisi (v. 4, 110)  
The verse refers to the prophets mentioned in verse 55. They call upon their Lord to bring them closer to Him. They hope in His mercy and fear His punishments. These include Jesus, his mother, ‘Uzair, the angels, the sun, the moon, the stars, and anything that was worshipped besides Allah but they were themselves believers.



h. Al-Maraghi (v. 15, 62)

Those who are being worshipped but they are themselves believers strive to become closer to God. The Prophet said, "Ask Allah to give me the means." The companions asked him, "what is the means?" He said, "To become closer to God." Then he recited this verse. Those who are being worshipped, have hope in the mercy of God, and they fear His punishment.

i. Ibn 'Ashour (v. 15, 140)

Those whose supplication is accepted by God. They are not like those whom you associate with God, who have not power to benefit you nor to harm you. Those whose supplications are accepted they have hope in God's mercy and they fear His punishment.

### **Discussion**

The commentators agree on the same commentary. The occasion of the revelation of this verse was because some Arabs used to worship jinn, these jinn became believers. The Arabs who were worshipping the jinn did not realize that the jinn became believers. It was also said that the verse refers to the angels whom the Arabs used to worship. Sahl ibn 'Abd Allah said, "Hope and fear are the two conditions that should balance each other." The idea that hope and fear go hand in hand is an interesting one. Ibn Katheer commented that worship is not complete unless it is combined by hope and fear. Fear forbids people from committing sins, and hope drives people to perform acts of obedience.

### Verses using the word “*tama*” (طمع)

1. “Can you (believers) entertain the hope that they will be true to you? Seeing that a party of them heard the word of God and they distorted it knowingly after they understood it.” (al-Baqarah: 75)

a. Al-Tabari (v. 1, 552)

Do you hope that the Jews will believe in what your Prophet came with?

b. Al-Qushayri (v. 1, 53)

The verse is describing the way the Children of Israel dealt with the message that they received from Prophet Moses. The verse tells the believers that if the Children of Israel did not believe in the Message which Prophet Moses brought in spite of the miracles which they saw by their own eyes, how can you expect them to believe in a message that was brought by another message.

c. Al-Zamakhshari (83)

Do you hope that the Jews will believe in what your Prophet came with? They did change the commands they received, knowingly.

d. Al-Razi (v. 3, 143)

There two opinions regarding who was addressed by this verse: is it a special address to the Prophet (ﷺ) or it is an address to both the Prophet (ﷺ) and the believers. Al-Razi believes that the address was to the Prophet (ﷺ). The verse tells the believers that if the Children of Israel did not believe in the Message which Prophet Moses brought in spite of the miracles which they saw by their eyes, how can you expect them to believe in a message that was brought by another messenger.

e. Al-Qurtobi (v. 2, 210)

The question implicitly means that it is impossible for this to happen.

f. Ibn Katheer (v. 1, 459)

Similar to the above.

g. Al-Maqdisi (v. 1, 134)

Indicates that the question is “do you hope?” He offers a similar commentary to the above.

h. Al-Maraghi (v. 1, 141)

The verse indicates that it was hopeless to guide the Jews to the religion of Islam.

i. Ibn ‘Ashour (v. 1, 566)

The verse indicates the amazement that the believers expect the Jews to believe in Islam.

### Discussion

There is no major variation between the different commentaries. The only point that has been disputed is whether the verses addresses the Prophet (ﷺ) alone or it is an address to both the Prophet (ﷺ) and the believers. The main point which concerns me in this verse is how the commentators understood the meaning of the word “أفتطمعون.” The word means do you hope or do you expect but also indicates that it is impossible.

2. Do no mischief on the earth, after it has been set in order, but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts). Certainly the Mercy of God is (always) near to those who do good. (al-A'raf: 56)
  - a. Al-Tabari (v. 5, 376)  
Do not spread mischief on earth means do not associate partners with God, and do not disobey Him. Call upon Him in all sincerity. Do not associate partners with Him in your actions. You should fear His punishment and hope for His reward. Those who do not call upon God in fear and hope are the ones who rejected the Last Day.
  - b. Al-Razi (v. 4, 141)  
Call upon God with the fear that you have shortcomings which may render your call invalid. One should call upon God with both the feelings of hope and fear.
  - c. Ibn Katheer (v. 4, 46)  
Call upon God with a combination of fear and hope.
  - d. Al-Maraghi (v. 8, 179)  
Fear is expected something bad to happen and hope is to expect something good to happen. Call upon God fearing His punishment and hoping for His mercy.

**Discussion**

Here too the word “*tama*” is used to mean hope.

### Verses with word “amal”

1. Let them eat and enjoy life, and let the hope (for worldly delights) beguile them. They will soon know. (al-Hijr: 3)

Let them lead a material life that is void of contemplation, thought, or curiosity. Leave them in their indulgence of material pleasures unaware of the passing of life, thinking that it will last forever. But one day, when it will be too late, they will come to know the truth.

- a. Al-Tabari (v. 7, 52)

Muhammad, let those who associate partners with God eat and indulge in material pleasures. Let the hope of a long life distract them from being obedient to God. They will know their mistake when they see the punishment waiting for them.

- b. Al-Qushayri

The value of each person is decided by the interests that preoccupy her. A person who is only preoccupied by the physical pleasures of this life, then she should not be held accountable nor is she required to employ her intellect. Accountability brings honor to the human being.

- c. Al-Zamakhshary (558)

Do not entertain the hope that they will believe. Let them enjoy the pleasures of the worldly life. Let their hope for a long and good life distract them from thinking about the Hereafter.

- d. Al-Razi (v. 19, 159)

Let the disbelievers enjoy the pleasures of the worldly life. This is their character, and they have no share of the rewards of the Hereafter. Do not advise them and let the hope they entertain distract them away from guidance.

- e. Al-Qurtobi (v. 12, 177)

The essence of “amal” is covetousness of the pleasures of life and turning away from entertaining any thoughts about the Hereafter. The Prophet (ﷺ) said<sup>2</sup>, “Four things bring unhappiness: a solid eye, a hard heart, long hope (hoping for a long life) and covetousness of the pleasures of life.”

- f. Al-Maqdisi (v. 3, 540)

Let the hope that they would have long lives to distract them from thinking about the Hereafter.

- g. Al-Maraghi (v. 14, 6)

The Prophet (ﷺ) said<sup>3</sup> “The first generations of this nation were guided because they were ascetic and entertained certitude, the later generations will be destroyed by niggardliness and the hope (in long life.” Ali said, “The two things I worry about are for you to have hope in long lives and to follow your whims. Having hope in long life makes you forget the Hereafter. Following the whims turns you away from the truth.”

- h. Ibn ‘Ashour (v. 14, 12)

They were satisfied to lead a life of physical pleasures and they turned away from the idealistic life which Islam wants for them. Amal is entertaining the thought that something desirable will happen even though it is improbable. It is between hope and coveting.

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<sup>2</sup> Narrated by Anas and reported by al-Bazzar.

<sup>3</sup> Narrated by ‘Amr ibn Shu’aib and reported by Ahmed, al-Tabarani, and al-Baihaqi (marfou’)

**Discussion**

These interpretations indicate that the word “amal” is used to mean hope in a long life.

Ibn ‘Ashour (v. 14, 12) indicated that *amal* means hoping for something desirable, though improbable, to happen. It is between hope and coveting.

2. Wealth and children are the ornament of the life of this world. But good deeds which endure are better in your Lord's sight for reward, and better grounds for hope. (Al-Kahf: 46)
- a. Al-Tabari (v. 7, 605)  
The whole commentary is on the meaning of “good deeds which endure.” No comment was made on the word for hope.
- b. Al-Qushayri (v. 2, 222)  
The good deeds which endure are the deeds which are done for the sake of God only. It was said that they are the secret characteristics of the believer. It was also said that it is the light of the suns which resides deep in the heart and nothing can eclipse it.
- c. Al-Zamakhshary (621)  
According to Qatadah, the good deeds that endure are all good deeds which have been dedicated sincerely to God. They will be rewarded and they are a source of hope. The believer will hope in his/her life to get the reward but the reward will be given only in the Hereafter.
- d. Al-Razi (v. 21, 132)  
The good things in this life are temporary, they will eventually vanish. But the good things in the Hereafter are everlasting. The everlasting is better than the temporary, especially when the quality is better as well.  
The reward and the hope related to any deed which has been sincerely dedicated to God is better. The believer will hope in his/her life to get the reward but the reward will be given only in the Hereafter.
- e. Al-Qurtobi (v. 13, 293)  
The commentary is on the different meanings of the “good deeds which endure.” The word “*amalan*” is interpreted as hope.
- f. Ibn Katheer (v. 5, 163)  
The whole commentary is on the meaning of “good deeds which endure.” No comment was made on the word for hope.
- g. Al-Maqdisi (v. 4, 182)  
The word “*amalan*” is interpreted as hope.
- h. Al-Maraghi (v. 15, 155)  
The reward and the hope related to any deed which has been sincerely dedicated to God is better. The believer will hope in his/her life to get the reward but the reward will be given only in the Hereafter.
- i. Ibn ‘Ashour (v. 15, 332)  
The statement translated as “better grounds for hope” means that it is better hope that the hope in having wealth and progeny in this life. Hoping for wealth and progeny in this life is not certain and when it happens, it lasts for a short period; while hoping for a reward in the Hereafter for the good deeds done during life, is certain because it is a promise of God. It could also bring a reward in this life in addition to the reward in the Hereafter.

### **Discussion**

The word “amal” means hope.