

Merits of the Soul: Thankfulness – Shukr

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Article

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And certainly, We gave Luqman wisdom, saying: Give thanks unto Allah; and whosoever is thankful, he gives thanks for (the good of) his own soul... (Qur'an, 31: 12)

Imam al-Baqir (a) said: "One night the Messenger of Allah (s) was with 'A'ishah, she said to him, 'O Messenger of Allah, why do you exhaust yourself when God has forgiven you your former and latter sins?' The Prophet (s) replied: 'O 'A'ishah, shouldn't I be a grateful servant?' "The Imam (a) added: "The Messenger of Allah (s) used to stand on the toes of his feet (in prayer in the night) and so God, the Glorious and the Exalted, sent down the verse:

'Taha. We have not sent down the Qur'an upon thee to cause thee hardship.' " (20: 1).

[Al-Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, vol. 2, kitab al-'iman wa al-kufr, bab *al-shukr*, hadith # 2]

God sent revelation to Prophet Musa (a): 'O Musa! Thank Me in the manner that fulfils the right of giving thanks.' Musa (a) asked: 'O Lord! How can I fulfil the right of giving thanks to you as whenever I thank you for a blessing, You always bless me another blessing.' God replied: 'O Musa! When you know that every blessing you have is from Me, then you have thanked Me in the manner which is the right of giving thanks.'

[Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 3, p. 351]

The reality of Thankfulness to God

- Thankfulness (*shukr*) is the contemplation of the *ni'mah* (blessing) and its expression. [Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, *al-Mufradat fi gharib al-Qur'an*, p. 265]
- The confirmed gnostic Khwajah 'Abd Allah Ansari [ra] says, "*Shukr* is a name for the knowledge (*marifah*) of *ni'mah*, for it is the means of knowing the *Mun'im* (the one bestows blessing)."
- Imam Khomeini (r) says that it is a state of human soul (*halat-e nafsaniyyah*) which itself

results from the knowledge of the *Mun'im*. The acts of the heart and the body are the fruits of this state.

- The actions that result from the state of soul produce an impulse aimed to achieve nearness to God. These are related to the heart, tongue and other members or parts.

1. As to the heart, its action consists of the veneration, praise, and glorification of the Provider, the contemplation of His creation, His acts, the effects of His grace, and His beneficence towards all His creatures.

2. As to the tongue, its action consists of the expression of that beneficence through praising, glorifying and extolling God and declaring Divine unity, as well as through, discharging the duty of *al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy an al-munkar* (enjoining goodness and forbidding evil) and other duties.

3. As to the bodily members, their thanksgiving action lies in using the outward and inward bounties in obedience, worship and in preventing sin against God and violation of His commands. Thus, the eye should be used for studying His creation, reading His scripture, and teaching the traditional sciences of the prophets and the *awsiya'* (vicegerents) (a). Similarly, for the other bodily members.

The ultimate limit of Thankfulness to God

- Thankfulness to God for the inward and outward bounties of God Almighty is one of the obligatory duties of servanthood and creaturehood, which everyone must attempt to fulfil to the extent of his capacity, although no creature can adequately fulfil its obligation of thanking God Almighty.
- The ultimate limit of thankfulness is the knowledge of the incapacity to satisfy it fully, in the same way as the ultimate limit of servanthood is the realization of the incapacity of fulfilling its demands – and hence the Noble Messenger (s) confessed to his incapacity, although none of the existents have attempted to discharge the duties of servanthood and gratitude to the extent of that holy master –because the perfection or inadequacy of gratitude is subject to the gnosis of the *Mum'in* and the knowledge of His bounties.

The servant becomes fully thankful (*shakur*) when he knows the relation of creation to the Creator, and has gnosis of the entire spread of Divine beneficence, from its beginning to end, of the interrelations of

the bounties with each other as well as of the beginning and end of the stream of existence in its true reality. And this gnosis is not attainable for anyone except elect of all the *awliya'*, the noblest and best of whom is the Seal of Prophethood, Prophet Muhammad (s).

- The ultimate degree of *shukr* lies when the servant does not see anything except the beauty of the *Mun'im*, being immersed in His beauty. That consists of three stations. First, he observes Him like a humble slave contemplates about his master. Second, he observes a lover observing his beloved. Third, he observes Him without the limitations of the Names, having an intuitive grasp of reality of the Essence itself. In this state, he forgets himself and everything else and sees only the Divine Essence, and is conscious neither of any bounty nor adversity.

Few hadiths on Thankfulness to God

- The Prophet of God (s) said: **“One who takes food with gratitude has a reward like one who fasts exercising vigilance over himself. Healthy person grateful for his health has a reward like one who bears his (bodily) afflictions patiently. And one who gives gratefully has a reward similar to the one who bears his deprivation with continence.”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 71, p. 22]
- Imam al-Baqir (a) said: **“Until the thankfulness from the servant of God doesn't stop, the continuation of blessings from God also doesn't stop.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 9595]
- Imam Ali (a) said: **“A believer's thankfulness becomes apparent in his actions while a hypocrite's thankfulness is limited to his tongue.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 9605]
- Imam Ali (a) said: **“A scholar's thankfulness is acting upon his knowledge and imparting it to the one who deserves it.”** [*Mizan al-Hikmah*, hadith # 9606]
- Imam al-Baqir (a) said: **“Offer sincere thanks to God to multiply your meagre sustenance to plentiful one.”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 78, p. 163]

Thanking Creatures amounts to Thanking God

- Imam Zain al-Abedin (a) said: **“The most thankful person among you to God is the one most thankful to people.”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 71, p. 38]
- Imam Ar-Ridha (a) said: **“The one who doesn’t thank creatures for their good deeds (towards him), has not thanked God.”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 71, p. 44]
- Imam Zain al-Abedin (a) said: **“On the day of judgement, God will ask one of his servants: ‘Did you thank so and so person?’ He will reply: ‘O Lord! No, I thanked You.’ God will reply: ‘If you didn’t thank him, you have also not thanked Me.’”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 71, p. 28]
- Imam Ar-Ridha (a) said: **“Almighty and All Magnificent God has ordered to thank Him and to thank parents. Thus, the person who doesn’t thank his parents has not thanked God.”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 74, p. 68]
- The Prophet of God (s) said: **“In front of God, the most honourable person and the most connected to be nearest to God is the person who is not thanked for his virtuous deeds.”** [*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 67, p. 259]

Practical Advices To Be Thankful To God And Creatures

Thankfulness is inherent in human nature. A person to whom you do good, you expect him to at least thank you. It’s a natural law written in the book of human heart. In addition, the sense of respect and gratitude for the benefactors increases with the amount of good they have done, particularly if the benefactors’ generosity has no selfish motive. Let us consider following points...

- If a doctor rescues you from darkness of blindness, even though he is paid for it, you still naturally owe to him a lot of respect, but if someone saves you from clutches of death and without asking any return or thanks, you certainly owe him a lot more and will remember him always with good words. This is human nature.

- If a friend gives you a small gift, you will thank him once or twice and then forget but if two persons (your parents) give you gift of life, especially the one by carrying you in her body, developing you with her own blood and by giving you birth with pain, both of them by nurturing and caring for you day and night and providing you with home, food, education and other necessities and caring for you in sickness, you will always respect and thank them – more than anyone else.
- Think of teachers who have imparted you with knowledge and skills throughout your life at different stages. If they didn't teach you with love and care, with keen observation, with criticism and appreciation, you would have remained ignorant and illiterate. Thus, even if you have achieved highest and most respectable of position in world, you will always be thankful to your teachers.
- Now reflect upon and estimate the seen and unseen favours bestowed on us by the God Almighty, even a small fraction of which all the latest technology invented by most intelligent human beings cannot even provide us. Take for instance the air we breathe day and night, upon which our existence as well as that of other living beings is dependent, nothing can remain alive if it is taken off merely for a quarter of an hour. What a marvellous gift it is!
- In the same way, think of other invaluable gifts of God such as external bodily senses viz. sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, etc., and inner faculties such as faculties of speech, thinking, memory, imagination and reason, etc., each one of which carries unlimited benefits for us and which are granted to us by Our Lord.
- Among His other valuable blessings are the messengers and prophets He sent for our practical guidance as best role models for whole humanity and His Divine Books to show us which path is right and which one is wrong, which path leads us to Heaven or Hell. Thus, we should always thank God for His blessings.

Conclusion

Imam Ar-Ridha (a) said: “**Let it be known to you that after your faith in God and His Prophet and after acknowledging the rights of *awliya* of God in the progeny of Muhammad, peace be upon them, you cannot thank God until you love helping your brothers-in-faith in their worldly affairs.**”

[*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 78, p. 355]

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