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Lesson 12: Thankfulness and Gratitude

{وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ}

And when your Lord proclaimed, "If you are thankful, surely I will increase you, but if you are thankless My chastisement is surely terrible." (Ibrahim 14:7).

Imam Sadiq (pbuh) states that gratefulness towards blessings is far from sin. He also stated gratitude is where one knows their blessings are from Allahﷻ (and not know their blessings as being a result of their cleverness, knowledge, mind and efforts or of others) and is content with what has been given to them from Allahﷻ, and those very blessings should not be used as a means to sin, true gratitude is when one uses the blessings of Allahﷻ in the way of Allahﷻ.

Gratitude for divine blessings are many, and cannot be listed.

We read in the narrations that Allahﷻ inspired to Prophet Moses (pbuh), to deliver my (Allah'sﷻ) right of gratitude, Prophet Moses (pbuh) replied that he could not possibly do so, as each word to thank itself requires another thanks. The inspiration came down that that very confession you make and that you know everything is from Me, is the best way to thank me.^{[1](#)}

Gratitude towards others is gratitude towards Allahﷻ, it has been brought to us through narrations that: Anyone who is not thankful of the created, is not thankful of Allahﷻ.

مَنْ لَمْ يَشْكُرِ الْمُنْعَمَ مِنَ الْمَخْلُوقِينَ لَمْ يَشْكُرِ اللَّهَ عَزَّوَجَلَّ^{[2](#)}

If the blessings of Allahﷻ are spent in a way contrary to the rights in which it must be spent in, that shows ingratitude and is the foundation of blasphemy. “If you are thankless”, or as in another Ayah “those who exchanged the bounty of God with unthankfulness”^{[3](#)}, are those who exchanged the blessings from Allahﷻ in to blasphemy.

Thanking Allah

Allah has no need for our worship and gratitude and the Holy Qur'an has repeatedly indicated and stated this: Allahﷻ is all sufficient and not in need of you.⁴ But our attention towards him is our capital for our own honor and growth, just as the sun is not in need of us, we benefit from its sunlight.

One of the praises that Allahﷻ has of Prophets is their spirit of gratitude. For example, Prophet Noah, because of all his patience and perseverance in the face of an unfaithful wife, children and people, Allahﷻ in the Holy Qur'an recognizes his gratitude and knows him as being thankful:

{إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَبْدًا شَكُورًا}

He was a thankful servant (Al-Isra 17:3).

Many times, Allahﷻ complains from many people from their (lack of) gratitude.

Of course, the grace of gratitude is one that one must be sought from Allahﷻ, just like Prophet Sulaimaan (pbuh) requested the same:

{رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ}

My Lord, dispose me that I may be thankful for Thy blessing wherewith Thou hast blessed me. (An Naml 27: 19).

“Dispose me” means to ask Allahﷻ to inspire, make me attached to, and to love, being thankful towards Your blessings. We are mostly aware of and thankful for the blessings that we deal with on a daily basis, and are negligent of many blessings, such as the blessings that have come to us through inheritance and good people, or the thousands of calamities that have been prevented from befalling us, and the spiritual blessings such as faith in Allahﷻ and His Guides, or the dislike of blasphemy and debauchery and sin, such as how Allahﷻ reminds us in the Qur'an:

{اللَّهُ حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَزَيَّنَهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَكَرَّهَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْكُفْرَ وَالْفُسُوقَ وَالْعِصْيَانَ}

God has endeared to you belief, decking it fair in your hearts, and He has made detestable to you unbelief and ungodliness and disobedience. (Al Hujarat 49:7).

As well as that which has been mentioned, some of the supplications of the Divinely Guided concentrate on the blessings of Allahﷻ and show gratitude and gives thanks for them, so that the spirit of gratitude is brought to life and strengthened.

Thanking Allahﷻ is sometimes with the tongue and through speech, and sometimes through action and deed. In the narrations, we read that every time we are thoughtful of a blessing from the Divine blessings, in gratitude to it one should prostrate upon the earth, and even if we are riding on a horse, we come down and do this and if we can't, we put our forehead (in prostration) on the higher part of the saddle, and if we can't do that either, we place our forehead (in prostration) on our hand and be thankful of Allahﷻ⁵.

Examples Of Practical Gratitude

1. Prayer, is the best form of gratitude to Allahﷻ. Allahﷻ says to His Prophet:

{إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ}

Surely We have given thee abundance;

{فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَأَنْحِرْ}

So pray unto thy Lord and sacrifice.

2. Fasting, just as gratitude was shown by the Prophets of Allahﷻ towards Him for their blessings through fasting.⁶

3. Serving the people. The Holy Qur'an states that if an illiterate person asks a literate person to write a letter, the literate person should not turn the request down in gratitude to the blessing of literacy and write the letter.

{وَلَا يَأْبَ كَاتِبٌ أَنْ يَكْتُبَ كَمَا عَلَّمَهُ اللَّهُ}

And let a writer write it down between you justly, and let not any writer refuse to write it down, as God has taught him. (Al Baqarah 2:282).

Here, writing a letter in the service of people is a form of gratitude to the blessing of literacy.

4. Contentment. The Prophet (pbuh) states that

{وَكُنْ قَنِينًا تَكُنْ أَشْكَرَ النَّاسِ}

Be content and you will be the most gratuitous of the people.⁷

5. Take care of orphans. Allahﷻ says to the Prophet (pbuh), in gratitude to you being sheltered as an orphan, do not oppress an orphan:

{فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ}

As for the orphan, do not oppress him. (Ad Dhuha 93:9)

6. Assisting the deprived and the needy. Allahﷻ says to the Prophet (pbuh), in gratitude to you having been in need and I made you needless, do not scold the needy that requests your assistance:

{وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ}

And as for the beggar, scold him not. (Ad Dhuha 93:9).

7. Gratitude towards others. Allahﷻ says to the Prophet, In gratitude and incentive to those who pay Islamic Tax (Zakat), send your praise towards them, for your praise brings tranquility to them:

{وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلَاتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَهُمْ}

***And pray for them; thy prayers are a comfort for them.
(Al Tawba 9: 103).***

Gratitude In The Face Of Hardship

The Holy Qur'an states

{وَعَسَى أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ}

Yet it may happen that you will hate a thing which is better for you; and it may happen that you will love a thing which is worse for you. (Al Baqarah 2:216).

If we knew, others have more problems.

If we knew, problems increase our attention towards Allahﷻ.

If we knew, problems break our vanity and gets rid of hard heartedness.

If we knew, problems remind us of those afflicted with ill fate.

If we knew, problems bring our thoughts to defense and initiative.

If we knew, problems remind us of our previous blessings.

If we knew, problems are the atonement of our sins.

If we knew, problems are the reason for reward in the hereafter.

If we knew, problems are a warning to us and the alarm that awakens us to resurrection.

If we knew, problems are the reason we become acquainted with patience or know who our real friends are.

And if we knew, it could be that greater problems or harder ones may befall us, whereby we would recognize although our problems are externally bitter, they can be sweet in the right place.

Yes, for children, dates are sweet but onions and hot pepper are avoided, while for mature, grown parents who have foresight, the benefits of both sour and sweetness are known.

Imam Ali (as) during the War of Uhud, states that fighting in the battlefield is a blessing that we must be thankful for.⁸ And his daughter, Zeinab(as) in response to the felonious Bani Ummia stated with regards to Karbala⁹ – I saw nothing but beauty.¹⁰

^{1.} (Tafseer-e-Namoona)

^{2.} (Bihar Al Anwar بحار الأنوار) V71 P44

^{3.} Holy Qur'an Ibrahim 14:28

^{4.} See Surahs AnNaml 24:40 and Luqman 31:12

^{5.} (Al Kafi) – Chapter of Gratitude V25

^{6.} (Wasa'il Al Shia وسائل الشيعة) V10 P446

^{7.} (Mustadrak al-Wasail المستدرک الوسائل) V11 Hadith 12,676

^{8.} (Nahjul Balagha) Speech 156.

^{9.} Karbala is the site in which Imam Hussein, the brother of Syeda Zeinab (pbuh), son of Imam Ali (pbuh) and Seyda Fatima (pbuh) and grandson (pbuh) of the Prophet (pbuh) was massacred along with 72 companions.

^{10.} (Bihar Al Anwar بحار الأنوار) V45 P116

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