

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

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Appreciation is an Antidote

According to Dictionary.com, antidote is a medicine taken to counteract a particular poison. If you were to be bitten by a rattlesnake (not very common, I agree, but possible here in the desert), you would be given antivenom. It works by boosting the immune responses in your body to let your body fight the invader. Antidotes may prevent the absorption of the toxin; may neutralize the toxin; or may inhibit the toxin from converting to something even more poisonous.

If you asked what is the “universal antidote”, the response would be anything having activated charcoal as its principal ingredient. And that may well be true for attacks on our body. But our soul is also subject to attack by the poisonous forces of Satan. Humans have been created with many negative characteristics—impatience, jealousy, stinginess—and Satan knows how to exploit those traits to lead people astray. It’s important that we find the antidote to save our soul.

We know that turning to God is the only thing that can save us.
[7:200] *When the devil whispers to you any whisper, seek refuge in GOD; He is Hearer, Omniscient.*

[23:97] *Say, “My Lord, I seek refuge in You from the whispers of the devils.*

[23:98] *“And I seek refuge in You, my Lord, lest they come near me.”*

And just as God has provided us with antidotes to viruses and poisons that attack our bodies, He has also given us a powerful antidote to Satan and to all of the many human failings that cause us to turn away from God. That antidote is appreciation.

[3:145].... *We reward those who are appreciative.*

[39:66] *Therefore, you shall worship GOD alone, and be appreciative.*

And as Luqmān informed his son in 31:12: *“You shall be appreciative of GOD.” Whoever is appreciative is appreciative for his own good. As for those who turn unappreciative, GOD is in no need, Praiseworthy.*

Jealousy is a powerful emotion. It can cause all sorts of problems between people. [42:14] *Ironically, they broke up into sects only after the knowledge had come to them, due to jealousy and resentment among themselves. If it were not for a predetermined decision from your Lord to respite them for a*

definite interim, they would have been judged immediately. Indeed, the later generations who inherited the scripture are full of doubts.

There’s a strong desire among humans to have what someone else has, plus a little more. People resent the fortune of another. If we look instead at what we have, at how we are blessed, it’s easier to let go of a jealous reaction. Be appreciative of where you are and what God has given you. Maybe your neighbor’s car is newer, his house is nicer. But, to have a house, a car, good health, these are things to appreciate and rejoice in. Don’t compare, celebrate. Appreciation is the antidote to jealousy.

And when we can achieve that, God promises us: [7:43] *We will remove all jealousy from their hearts. Rivers will flow beneath them, and they will say, “GOD be praised for guiding us. We could not possibly be guided, if it were not that GOD has guided us. The messengers of our Lord did bring the truth.” They will be called: “This is your Paradise. You have inherited it, in return for your works.”*

We may be tested through our lives. It’s how we respond to the adversity

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that shows where we are on our submission journey. [41:49] *The human being never tires of imploring for good things. And when adversity befalls him, he turns despondent, desperate.*

If we can appreciate the fact that God is actually blessing us by showing us the areas we need to work on, then we can face these adversities with more calmness. Most people have no idea that they should be working on growing their souls to come closer to God. They stumble through their lives with no understanding that this life is a mere illusion and the Hereafter is the goal. They don't recognize the concept of accountability for their actions, either assuming that someone will intercede and save them or figuring there's nothing after this life anyway. We are so blessed to have this knowledge. [38:46] *We bestowed upon them a great blessing: awareness of the Hereafter.* We need to be appreciative of this fact. And that appreciation can be the antidote to adversity.

Humans are stingy by nature (17:100, 96:6, 70:21). It's something we have to work to overcome. [59:9] *Indeed, those who overcome their natural stinginess are the successful ones.* We have a tendency to hoard possessions, afraid that we'll run out (3:180, 9:34, sura 102). Instead of worrying about losing something, take inventory of all you have. Not just material things, though those are great to enjoy in this world, but also health, friends, peace of mind, the knowledge that God is the Provider. There's a song that says if you count your blessings instead of sheep, you'll fall asleep counting your blessings. When you realize how much you have, you can more easily share with others. [14:34] *And He gives you all kinds of things that you implore Him for. If you count GOD's blessings, you can never encompass them. Indeed, the human being is transgressing, unappreciative.* Appreciation is an antidote to stinginess.

Human beings are weak, anxious and lost. We seem to have so much to be

afraid of—violence all around us, global warming, economic crises. But we know that God is in full control of everything. He created the earth and everything on it. He knows what every creature is doing, saying, even thinking at any given moment. With that kind of awesome power, it's easy to appreciate that He can protect us from everything out there. [4:28] *GOD wishes to lighten your burden, for the human being is created weak.* He can take away the anxiety and fear, if we let Him, if we turn completely to Him as 22:15 says. Think how God has protected you throughout your life; appreciate how much worse each occasion might have been. Appreciation is an antidote to fear.

Humans are very impatient. We want everything to happen right now, in our time. [21:37] *The human being is impatient by nature. I will inevitably show you My signs; do not be in such a hurry.* But we have to understand that only God has the master plan. Each thing that happens to us meshes with things happening to people around us. If we can just relax and know that God is running the show, and He's doing it flawlessly, life can be so much simpler. I am impatient waiting in line or waiting at a stop light. So I use the time to think of God's attributes or recite verses from Quran. Or I do something mindless, like a crossword puzzle to help those few minutes pass. I'm much calmer and I can be appreciative of the alternative things God has provided for me. I remember that God is doing everything; everything happens for a reason. I'm exactly where I'm meant to be at that moment. Appreciation is an antidote to impatience.

Humans like to argue, in fact God says we're the most argumentative creature (18:54). We have strong opinions and we don't like to budge from those understandings. We tend not to listen to another side of an argument, just formulating our staunch response. Sometimes it seems the less we know of a subject, the stronger is our opinion on it. And we'll fight to prove we're right, even if we really

don't know. When it comes to our knowledge of God, we need to be steadfast and strong in our stand against disbelievers. But God tells us [16:125] *You shall invite to the path of your Lord with wisdom and kind enlightenment, and debate with them in the best possible manner. Your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path, and He knows best who are the guided ones.*

We have to appreciate the fact that only God knows what's truly in someone's heart. We shouldn't be name-calling or arguing harshly with anyone. We need to deliver God's message in the best way possible and then leave it God. [25:63] *The worshipers of the Most Gracious are those who tread the earth gently, and when the ignorant speak to them, they only utter peace.*

What a blessing to say peace to someone, and diffuse the argument completely. When we truly appreciate that God controls all the hearts and minds, it's easier to let go of an argument and walk away. Appreciation is the antidote to argumentative behavior.

The ego is a primary culprit for those who stray away from God. We were evicted from Paradise in the first place because of the ego. And it's the ego we have to work all our lives to kill. It's ego that caused people to kill messengers, just as Cain killed his brother Abel because of ego. Today millions get killed every year from arrogance, jealousy, hatred, and fear—all driven by the ego. If we can realize how little control we have over anything, if we can recognize how God runs everything; basically, if we can just get out of our own way, we can truly be appreciative of all we have and how wonderful life is. We can use appreciation as an antidote to ego.

God tells us that as human beings we are unappreciative by nature. We tend to believe only what we see in front of us; we see all that others have attained and we want a piece of that; we fight and argue and steal and cheat in

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order to get ahead in this world, never appreciating all we have.

[100:6] The human being is unappreciative of his Lord.

[80:17] Woe to the human being; he is so unappreciative!

So let's really turn that around. Let's really be appreciative. Let's thank God for each blessing. Let's appreciate all we have, all we've done, and all we need to do. Appreciation can be the antidote for unappreciation. It can be the antidote for everything. It will keep us healthy and neutralize the toxins Satan keeps throwing at us.

Lydia

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The Quranic Concept of Worship

For many people, worship means performing *Salat*, *Zakat*, fasting and *Hajj* pilgrimage. Though these are practices of worship that the Quran prescribes, worship can have a broader understanding.

Worship can be seen as an all-inclusive term, which covers all that a believer says and does exclusively for the pleasure of God. Some of the attributes of GOD include the Creator of all things, the One, the Supreme; He is Omniscient, Omnipresent; God is Compassionate, the Cognizant; God is Forgiver, Clement; God is Hearer, Seer; He is always near, responsive; To Him belongs all sovereignty, and to Him you will be returned; God is watchful over all things. Through His Supreme knowledge, God is nearer to us than our jugular vein (50:16). He knows more about us than we do of ourselves even before the creation of the heavens and the earth (53:32).

Since these are attributes of God, there are certain formalities required to offer

worship, which also means submission unto God alone. Worship consists of certain prescribed modes of prayer as well as belief, behaviour and personal contribution of an individual for the common good of society. If you uphold the Quran alone, that too is a form of worship. A broader term used by the Quran for worship is "Zikr" which needs no specific posture, tone or direction. The Quran reveals this fact in various places:

[3:191] They remember GOD while standing, sitting, and on their sides, and they reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth: "Our Lord, You did not create all this in vain. Be You glorified. Save us from the retribution of Hell."

[76:25] And commemorate the name of your Lord day and night. [76:26] During the night, fall prostrate before Him, and glorify Him many a long night.

[7:205] You shall remember your Lord within yourself, publicly, privately, and quietly, day and night; do not be unaware.

[2:115] To GOD belongs the east and the west; wherever you go there will be the presence of GOD. GOD is Omnipresent, Omniscient.

[55:26] Everyone on earth perishes.

[55:27] Only the presence of your Lord lasts. Possessor of Majesty and Honor.

The word Zikr has wider connotations. In its verbal significance it implies to remember, to praise by frequently mentioning, to magnify, to glorify, to rehearse, to celebrate, to commemorate, to please. When we attain this exalted state of Zikr, we become eligible for God's Favour, if He so wills, and He continues His Blessings culminating in our eventual salvation. The Almighty proclaims *[2:152] You shall remember Me, that I may remember you, and be thankful to Me; do not be unappreciative.*

So, if we remember God, He will remember us; if we advance a step closer to Him, He will advance many steps closer

to us. The Quran speaks of this rapport between God and humans in *[2:186] When My servants ask you about Me, I am always near. I answer their prayers when they pray to Me. The people shall respond to Me and believe in Me, in order to be guided.* God listens to the call of every supplicant who calls. It behooves us to hearken (to listen, hear with intent to respond) to God and believe in Him so that He may guide us in the right path. God will never steer the sincere worshiper in the wrong direction.

Islam looks at human life as a whole. Hence, we are required to submit ourselves completely to God. There is no part time submission allowed (*2:208, 4:65, 35:32 – others upheld it only part of the time*). Take for example the words of Prophet Mohammad enshrined in the Quran *[6:162] Say, "My Contact Prayers (Salat), my worship practices, my life and my death, are all devoted absolutely to GOD alone, the Lord of the universe".*

As a natural corollary to this unreserved submission, our activities should conform to the injunctions of the Supreme Being to whom we are submitting. Islam as a complete code of life requires that its adherents should mold their lives according to its precepts in every aspect – religious, spiritual, worldly, or mundane. Nothing then falls out of the scope of worship. We should not pay much regard to rituals performed mechanically without any communion with the Almighty. *[2:171] The example of such disbelievers is that of parrots who repeat what they hear of sounds and calls, without understanding. Deaf, dumb, and blind; they cannot understand.*

[107:4] And woe to those who observe the contact prayers (Salat)—[107:5] who are totally heedless of their prayers.

It follows therefore, that acts of worship performed with full devotion have a positive influence on one's inner life, otherwise they are meaningless.

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[29:45] *You shall recite what is revealed to you of the scripture, and observe the Contact Prayers (Salat), for the Contact Prayers prohibit evil and vice. But the remembrance of GOD (through Salat) is the most important objective. GOD knows everything you do.* So the Quran contends that Salat restrains from shameful and unjust deeds. As such if the prayer is offered with devotion, solemnity and humility, it would generate the fear of God and that would preclude the worshipper from harbouring obscene and unjust deeds and ideas. The same holds true of all other rituals and acts of worship.

When we know that there is only one God – *La Elaha Ella Allah* – all deeds that benefit humanity no matter how small become a form of worship. A smile, helping someone in need even if you have to go out of your way, tending to the sick, reading to the blind – everything is being recorded. Even the treatment of animals.

If duties are performed honestly and sincerely, they become a part of worship. Even some acts which we do for our personal enjoyment, may become acts of worship. You bite into a succulent steak and thank God for providing and subduing livestock for us. This is an act of worship. The only condition is that these acts

should be performed for the ultimate aim of seeking the Pleasure of God.

Worship in Islam, whether ritual or non-ritual, trains us in such a way that we love our Creator the most—[2:165]

....*Those who believe love GOD the most.* We thereby gain an unyielding will and spirit to, God willing, wipe out evil and oppression from society and make the Quran, the Word of God, dominant in the world.

Our worship and prayers must change our thinking and behaviour. If no change and improvement takes place, it may mean that our acts of worship have lost their effectiveness for us and we are no longer receptive to them. It does not mean that worship has lost its inherent effectiveness. It is just like the fire which does not burn wet wood. The fire has not lost its capability but the wood has lost its receptivity.

Our worship of God does not add to God's glory and honour in the least, for He is high above all needs. God does not depend upon His creatures to be praised. [29:6] *Those who strive, strive for their own good. GOD is in no need for anyone.*

Jihad (striving) can also be seen as a form of submission or worship. It is to struggle against the daily temptations one faces in life—lying, cheating, stealing, gossiping, giving false witness and

creating deliberate misunderstanding between people. It is to conquer the vices of anger, revenge, greed, vanity, ego, lust and misuse of power. It is to strive for patience, tolerance, courage, and fortitude. It is to fight for justice, to protect the defenceless. It is to strive for the goodness in thoughts, in words and in deeds. It is to strive to reach that goal of closeness to God. It is to please Him in every way in serving humanity. It is to strive for the spiritual companionship of our Lord.

If we adopt an attitude and behaviour of thankfulness and gratitude, it is for our own benefit. In fact, it benefits our soul for a higher rank in the Hereafter.

So, worship God in all thoughts and deeds. Pray for His Everlasting Grace. This is depictive of Islam as an all-embracing religion for humanity.

Alim

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