Ingratitude

Ungratefulness nurtures a number of other diseases too

Ingratitude is a disease of the heart that becomes a harbinger of many other diseases. When in the state of ungratefulness, one thinks that he or she is entitled to things. People, government, organization and even Allah swt owe him things. This is a delusion. If we honestly ask ourselves this question that ‘does Allah owe us anything?’, the clear answer would be ‘no’. It is the favors of Allah swt that we are surrounded which He keeps blessing us with despite our disobedience.

When an ungratefulness person, who thinks that he is entitled to things, doesn’t receive a blessing that he thinks he is deserving of, he severs his relationship with Allah swt and develops a hatred or envy against those who have that blessing. Such a condition may also result in anger which is another spiritual disease. These are the sufficient reasons for one to work on treating the diseases of ingratitude.

Explanation of gratitude in the light of Surah Ar-Rahman

Let us understand this concept further through an explanation of some of the highly profound ayahs from Surah Ar-Rahman.

All that exists on the earth will perish,
But the Face of your Rabb will remain full of Majesty and Glory.
Then, which of your Rabb’s favors will you deny?
All who dwell in the heavens and the earth, implore Him for their needs, [and] every day He manifests Himself in yet another [wondrous] way.

Then, which of your Rabb’s favors will you deny?

(Quran 55:26-30)

Then, which of your Rabb’s favors will you deny?

In Surah Ar-Rahman, there is one ayah that Allah swt has repeated a number of times. “Then, which of your Rabb’s favors will you deny”? If we don’t understand the meaning of this ayah, then we miss the whole point. Allah swt is asking us in a very emphatic way that which of the wonders that Rabb (Lord and Sustainer) has done for you, which of the blessings that He is given you, which of the His favors that you enjoying at this very moment too will you deny and be ungrateful for? Allah keeps asking about how much more we will be in the mode of denial? How many blessings of Allah will we keep ignoring? How much more you think Allah swt should do while you are busy thinking that it is not Him who created all this? How blind can you be? And He keeps asking the question.

Why has Allah swt repeated this question over and over again?

Scholars have pondered over why Allah swt has asked this question again and again. It is also baffling in the sense that first Allah swt explains His creation and asks this question; then He explains the hereafter including the hellfire and asks this question again. Then comes Jannah and the same question is asked. There are five different topics which are placed in between this repeated ayah. This makes one curious of what is the wisdom behind this?

Arabic of the Quran is a very clear and natural language. It is simple to understand. Same is the case with this repeated verse too. If we are upset and angry with someone, we keep repeating the things we have to say. Consider the example of a teacher who is angry over his class which has performed very bad in an exam. You would be able to listen to him or her repeating these questions such as ‘did we not cover this in class?’ ‘did I not teach you this content?’ ‘did I not make it really clear for you and gave a number of examples?’ ‘You are all going to be in the same grade next year too! Did you really not make any benefit of all the hours that I spent explaining this subject to you?’ ‘I told you that I am available to assist even after the normal class times and yet you guys have given such a performance and missed the obvious?. This shows how upset and angry the teacher is over his students.

Can you see a parallel between this and the repeated ayah that we discussed above? This expression from Allah swt is asking us that He has done His part; why are we not doing our part?

The use of Allah’s name Ar-Rahman in this ayah

The use of Allah swt’s this name in the ayah قبّلُيُّ آلهِهَا رَكَبُوا لَكُلِّ نَزْلٍ is highly profound. This name shows the intensity in the mercy. Had this not been the mercy of Allah swt, we would have doomed by now on account of our disobedience. But our merciful Lord has still not stopped the blessings around us
despite our ingratitude. Most of the people and humanity has invited Allah’s anger. But we are still protected on account of Him being Ar-Rahman.

**The first people that these ayahs addressed**

The first people that these ayahs address were the people of Quresh. Almost a decade has already come down before this surah was revealed and they were still in denial.

The Prophet ﷺ was sent to the whole mankind a blessing. But the special favor was done to the umiyeen (the unlettered people who were not given a book previously) that the last and most beloved messenger of Allah swt was sent to them. They were not great in the worldly sense. They were not the most civilized of the people. They were neither great in the spiritual sense. At other places in the world, such as India and China and so on, the place for shirk and temple were built. But they did something far more worst and converted the house built by Ibrahim A.S. into the place of shirk and filled it with idols. So these were the people who were behind everyone in the worldly as well as the spiritual sense. Even the great empires of the day did not want to conquer them not seeing any benefit in conquering a desert place and fighting the Bedouins. Yet Allah swt blessed them with the presence of His final messenger ﷺ. Not only that, but He also gave them the most exalted of the books. Not even that, He also decided to give to them in 23 years rather than one go. That too in their language and from the mouth of a person that they considered to be truthful and trustworthy.

This could not have been in a better way than this. The teacher was the best teacher in the whole of mankind. All the teachers of true divine knowledge that would come after him would take him as a role model. There could not be any curriculum better than the book of Allah. The learning was also linked to the occasions and situations so that the learning could stick. It couldn’t be designed to meet your needs more because the curriculum was set by the one who designed them too.

But they demonstrated a really thankless behavior. They mocked the teacher and even tortured him and those who listened to him. They ignored the message and the book. Allah could punish them. This was big enough an offense. Even though the people asked for punishment themselves while mocking the punishment on previous generations, Allah did not punish them and destroy them. In response to all that, Allah still mentions that Allah swt is Ar-Rahman. When the previous generations displayed such behavior, they were destroyed. But for these people, Allah showed His intense mercy. This final word and final messenger ﷺ are mercy to mankind which it had never seen before.

So these are the people who this surah initially addressed to.

**Does this Surah address anyone else too?**

This surah not only addresses those people of Quresh but also those who come after them and display a thankless and ungrateful attitude. It can include me and you too. It can also include those people who get away from Allah and slip away. It also includes those people who think that ‘at least I come for Jumuah’. It may also include those people who believe that we will be good Muslims
otherwise but don’t ask us about the new year eve. This Surah contains profound and loving wake up calls for all of such people and all of us.

The wakeup call

The first ayah of the passage selected for discussion today is ﴿ثَلََّتُ مَنْ عَلَّمِيَ فَإِنَّكَ﴾. Everyone on this earth shall cease to exist. It is not just death. The word ‘faan’ means that people would even forget that you even existed one day. We don’t know the people that existed a 1000 years ago or a couple of thousand years ago.

So, Allah swt tells us that one reality that has to settle in our mind is that we are not here permanently. We get so caught up in the thick of thin that we forget this ultimate reality? We are so bothered about what to do on the weekend, what to watch on tv, where to spend the holidays and so on that this inevitable reality goes out of sight. We make our years and years-long calendars. Some really well-planned people think 25 or 30 years plan for our life. We became oblivious to what can come any moment. Even if we pretend it is not there, it would come and hit us. Whether we pray or not, whether we live our lives in the obedience of Allah or not, we are all going to perish. It accordingly has to be a conscious thing on our mind and we should make arrangements for that.

Only Allah’s glory will remain

All the worldly things would perish; however, the face (which Quran uses as an expression of glory, dignity, and majesty) of your Lord will remain. Even when no one would be left, Allah would still be there in all His glory. Allah does not need to be glorified. He already possesses it. When no-one would be there, He would still be there. Allah is not in the need of creation to praise Him.

Whoever obeys does it for his own benefit

This answers the question of those who have been deceived by Satan to think that why does Allah want us to praise and thank Him all the time? Why are we bound to do that? The answer is right here. Allah does not need it. Who needs it is YOU! Allah swt tells us:

إِنَّا أَخَذَنَا حُكْمَ الْعَيْنِ لِنَعْمَاهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا نَعْمَاهُمْ فِي لَبِسَةٍ

If you persevere in doing good, you will but be doing good to yourselves; and if you do evil, it will be [done] to yourselves (Quran 17:7)

Also, he tells us:

وَمَنْ جَاهَدَ فَإِنَّمَا يَجَاهِدُ لِنَفْسِهِ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغْفِرُ مَنْ عَمِّى الْآذَانِ

And whoever strives ‘in Allah’s cause’, only does so for their own good. Surely Allah is not in need of ‘any of’ His creation. (Quran 29:6)
Whatever we do, it is an investment in our own selves. We are not dragged into obedience and what we don’t want to do. Whoever wants to believe, they are welcome. Whoever wants to walk away, they are open to disobey. But whoever chooses to obey, they are benefitting their own selves and not adding anything to Allah’s treasures. And whoever disobeys is depriving his own soul and not decreasing anything from the treasures of Allah swt. Allah swt says that his dignity will remain around. If you come towards Allah, you will be the only beneficiary.

**Allah’s doesn’t owe us anything**

He then asks the question. Which of the favours of your Lord will you deny. He doesn’t even need you but still keep you around. He doesn’t even need you but feeds you, provide for you and look after you. and yet provides you with His blessings. He feeds you and shelters you, give you beauty in your life. He didn’t just give you a prison cell to live in; he gave you houses. He didn’t just gave you skin on your body, he also provided you with clothes to cover it. He gave you all these things that you have even though he doesn’t need anything from you. How much in denial will you remain? How much more oblivious will you remain? We can never do so much Allah swt. He can never thank him enough. It is such ignorance that we still find people around us who make statements such as ‘I made so much dua but Allah didn’t accept it’ as if Allah swt owe them something on account of what they do. How can one even make such a statement when our lives are filled with the disobedience of Allah swt and his messenger ﷺ? When other things in our life get priority over what pleases Allah swt and His messenger ﷺ? How can we even utter such statements? Dua towards Allah swt is not like placing an order on Amazon, eBay or olx.com; there is no point of you being arguing that a certain number of days are passed and your dua is not accepted. Who are you and I to place demands on Allah swt? Our attitude towards Allah swt has become that of a customer as if He owes us something! Even our dua has become arrogant. Do we realize that? Allah reminds us that how much more deluded could we be?

**The word ‘Aala’ in Arabic**

It is also pertinent to note that the word ‘Aala’ used in the ayah is not just used for favors. It has a lot of deeper meanings. It also means something that takes our attention. Allah has done us so many favors, He has put in our way so many signs, He has bestowed us with so many blessings – yet we remain ignorant and unthankful, yet we don’t open our eyes and see. We remain oblivious.

**Everyone in the skies and the earth is asking Him?**

There are two types of meaning for the word ‘Su’aal’ (this is from what the first word in the above ayah is derived) in Arabic. One is consciously asking for something. The other meaning is needing something. All of what is in the heavens and earth are doing su’aal from Allah swt – either by consciously asking Him for His favors or by needing him. Even a disbeliever cannot live without
enjoying Allah’s favor, without being on earth that Allah created, without breathing the air that Allah spread around, without using the resources that Allah provided. Everything is dependant on Him. The one who prays five times a day and is in the mosque all the time, as well as those who don’t see masajid very often are all benefited by Allah through His favors and they all need Him. Allah keeps filling their lungs with air. Allah keeps their hearts beating even when their hearts are filled with the disobedience of Allah swt. Allah doesn’t strike us with lighting on such disobedience. He doesn’t drag us to the masajid. He could do this if He wanted to. He did set straight the nations before us but he doesn’t do it to you and me. Allah gave us the ability to choose our way. When the hand steals, Allah does paralyzes that. When someone does Zina, he or she doesn’t immediately get a heart attack. When we fill our stomachs with haram, we don’t straight away get a stomach cancer. Allah allows us to keep living. We have to ponder upon this and do good to ourselves.

Every day he is doing something amazing:

In order to understand this ayah, let us discuss a couple of examples. A teacher cannot cope up with the requests of students if they all want something from him. If they all just need five extra minutes with the teacher after every class, a teacher cannot do that for 30 minutes. Even if does that sacrificing his own life, that would let the students dejected that five minutes were not enough and for their five minutes, they had to wait for so long. A human being cannot cope with the demands of such small groups. Also, consider the example of a store manager. After Christmas sales in the Western world and after Eid sales in the Muslim countries, a store manager doesn’t want to talk to anyone. They are so tired that they need to cut off and have time off. A human being can’t cope with such attention to so many people. Similarly, the head of the household can also give up on demand after demand that come our way.

Now consider what Allah swt is doing. Every single creation is asking him and is in need of him. Even those people who say the most vile things from their tongues are in need of Allah swt and ask him. Despite the open disobedience that they do, angels still guard them as they walk to the pub or the club on the weekend night and he keeps doing that till their appointed time comes. Their heart still seeks permission from Allah swt to beat and He allows it. And He will keep doing that till the appointed time comes. Allah is fulfilling the needs of all the creation and it is only Him who can do it for you and everything.

If you understand this reality, you would never ask that silly question that where was Allah when I needed him. Allah says that he is always there, whether you realize it or not. Allah is even taking care of our tongue when it says such a statement. He even gives us the air and allows our voicebox to use it for uttering such a neglectful statement.

Allah then asks us again, “Which of the favors of your Lord will you deny?”
A war inside ourselves and outside

When we disobey Allah swt, we are tempted by the Satans from the Jinns as well as the humans. Allah knows those who we see as well as those that we don’t see. In this beautiful repeated verse in Surah Ar-Rahman, Allah swt uses a dual pronoun كما which address mankind as well as the jinnkind. If they cause deviation for human beings, which Iblis, the satan, took as his mission, then they are harming their own selves.

There is a war happening between the forces of good and the evil – inside us as well as outside. He has to consciously side with the good and be a thankful servant of Allah swt. May Allah make us truly grateful servants of Allah swt. There would be temptations in life. This is where you will need to choose which force you are siding with.

CONTEMPLATION TASK FOR LESSON 12:

Find a quiet spot and ask yourself a question: How many favors of Lord will you keep denying? When would be the time that you would become a truly grateful slave of your most Merciful Lord?