

3 Gratitude and Giving Thanks

Summary 3.1 Gratitude and Praise. – 3.2 Addition, Increase and Multiplication. – 3.3 Gratitude and Faith. – 3.4 Praise Be to God. – 3.5 Gratitude Towards One's Neighbour.

If patience (*ṣabr*) is necessary in the face of suffering and adversity, good fortune conversely demands gratitude (*shukr*). “Let whoever is afflicted show patience, whoever receives gifts be grateful, whoever suffers an injustice forgive, and whoever does an injustice ask for forgiveness”, goes a saying of Muḥammad’s which pithily encapsulates the ethics of virtue according to Islam.¹

Gratitude, specifically, is essential for all those who wish to avoid divine disfavour; al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), one of the earliest Qur’ānic commentators and a famous preacher in his day, much quoted down the ages, declared that “God bestows his favour on whom He wishes, but towards those who are ungrateful He converts it to punishment”. Thus, as the Umayyad Caliph ‘Umar Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 101/720) put it, somewhat dramatically, God’s grace “must be chained and put in the stocks through the tool of gratitude”.²

Gratitude too should be practised in imitation of God: the Name ‘the Most Grateful’ or ‘the Most Thankful’, *al-shakūr* الشكور, in its emphatic form, included in the principal lists,³ appears in the Qur’ān (XXXV,34; XLII,23; LXIV,17) alongside ‘the Most Forgiving’ (in the expression *shakūr ghafūr* غفور) and ‘the Forbearing’ (in the expression *shakūr ḥalīm* حلیم), alternating with its simple form, *al-shākir* الشاكر ‘the Grateful’ or ‘the Thankful’ (II,158; IV,147). Of particular relevance is a verse in the sura *al-Nisā* ‘The Women’,

¹ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 65-6.

² Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 16-17.

³ No. 36 in al-Tirmidhī’s list.

where God's gratitude is linked to that of human beings: "Why would God punish you if you are grateful to Him and believe in Him. God is grateful and all-knowing [*shākir* 'alīm عَلِيم] (IV,147).

Again, in the Qur'ān, the same emphatic *shakūr* defines the good believer (XIV,5; XXXI,31; XXXIV,19; XLII,33). In man's case, gratitude goes hand in hand with patience in the expression *ṣabbār shakūr* صَبَّارٌ شَكُورٌ 'very patient and very grateful' – demonstrating the indispensable coexistence of both qualities in defining the good believer; an idea confirmed by a famous saying of the Prophet's according to which faith is in two halves, half is patience and half is gratitude.⁴

As for the lovability of the grateful in God's eyes, nothing is specified in the Qur'ān, but it can be derived by contrast from the stated dislike of the proud, the vain and the miserly:

Worship only God and associate none with Him [...]. Surely God loves not the proud and boastful and those who are miserly, and bid other men to be miserly, and themselves conceal the bounty that God has given them. (Qur'ān IV,36-7)

3.1 Gratitude and Praise

We have noted above the divine Name *al-shakūr* 'the Most Grateful'. In so far as gratitude implies a benefit received and the desire to respond in kind, it is natural to ask ourselves in what sense can God be grateful, and to whom, questions that can only be answered by taking into consideration the fact that, like patience or *ṣabr*, the Arabic word for 'gratitude' (*shukr*) has a semantic breadth well beyond that of its English equivalent.

The entry that the medieval scholar Ibn Manẓūr dedicates to the lemma in question in *The Language of the Arabs*, arguably the most authoritative dictionary of the classical language, proves to be very useful as an introduction to the topic, both for the clarity of the author's explanations and because he directs us to its most notable appearances in the canonical literature of Islam.⁵ The author attributes to gratitude both a declarative and a disclosing meaning – "it is the acknowledgement and the open admission of the benefit received" – but it is also and above all physical, tangible, practical, because, he explains, it necessarily comes 'from the hand', is openly given, unlike praise (*ḥamd* حَمْدٌ) which may come 'from the hand', and also may not. The Prophet had said that "praise stands above gratitude" and that "the servant who does not praise God is not grateful to Him", writes Ibn Manẓūr, illustrating the superiority of the act of praising, "praise, in fact, contains the manifest admission and also the celebration of a grace received".⁶ Praising (*ḥamd*) is broader and more inclusive than thanksgiving (*shukr*), he goes on to say, because it has to do with both the good qualities and at the same time the good actions of the benefactor, while gratitude concerns only his actions. He then gives us the Qur'ānic example of

⁴ This saying is reported on the authority of the Companion Ibn Mas'ūd in different wordings; cf. also, for example, Al-Ṭabarī 1412/1992, glossing Qur'ān XXI,31.

⁵ Ibn Manẓūr 2010, root sh-k-r.

⁶ Ibn Manẓūr 2010, root sh-k-r.

Noah, a “very grateful servant”, ‘*abd shakūr*’ (Qur’ān XVII,3; cf. XXVI,109) who had been unsuccessful in his prophetic mission but was nonetheless saved from the flood as a reward. He also gives an example from the Sunna:

The Prophet prayed until his feet were sore and swollen. They asked him: – Do you do this, even if God has already forgiven you for past and future faults? He replied: – Should I not then be a very grateful servant?⁷

It is a much-repeated saying, transmitted in variants of differing length and detail that turn on Muḥammad’s bodily mortification during prayer, all attesting to the value of an act, even – especially, perhaps – when physically performed, inherent in human gratitude to the Lord.

As for the intrinsic meaning of gratitude, the author of *The Language of the Arabs* explains that *shukr* refers to the camels fattening at pasture, of whom it is said that they ‘give thanks’; dairy animals are also said to be ‘grateful’ when, having been given their feed, they produce milk more abundantly than before; and precisely *shakūr* – the divine Name and epithet of the good believer – is used of the quadruped which needs little food and fattens even on that, “as if it were giving thanks even though the benefit it has received is small, its gratitude consisting exactly in its visible growth, as evidence of its assimilated feed”.⁸ It is said too of the sky that it ‘gives thanks’ when it rains copiously and the effect on nature is exuberant, and also of the wind when it brings rain.

3.2 Addition, Increase and Multiplication

These lively, physically grounded examples, which deal with gratitude largely in a context of food, also speak of scarcity repaid with abundance, and seem thus to affirm that the true essence of gratitude according to Islam lies precisely in addition, increase or multiplication. And this is the usual way with God’s gratitude, which ‘increases’ (*yazīdu*) and ‘redoubles’ (*yuḍā’ifu*), which God “redoubles for whomever He wants”, in this world and in the hereafter (Qur’ān II,261): “If there is a good deed, He will double it, and out of His grace He will reward it abundantly” (IV,40; cf. II,245; XXX,39; XXXV,30; LVII,11). When God says that “He will pay them what is due to them and multiply His grace [*ni’ma*] for them” (XXXV,30) – Ibn Manẓūr further explains – this means that every work of the servant, however small, will grow and prosper with the Creator, who repays it beyond measure.

Gratitude, then, as understood in Islam, beginning with the Arabic term which expresses it, is a concrete action, a blessing deriving from a blessing; and it is also an augmentative response, a magnifying chain-reaction. On this point one cannot but insist: if everything benefits, one thing after the other must be followed by greater benefits. Thus, the gratitude of Islam presents a very happy aspect, because it implies a continuous expansion of good. This begins with God’s own gratitude – as *shukr* is one of His attributes, a ‘description’ (*ṣifa* صفة) – which is not reciprocation, but immeasurable reward.

⁷ Ibn Manẓūr 2010, root sh-k-r. Cf. for example, Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *kitāb ṣifāt al-qiyāma*, nos. 5051-2; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, *kitāb iqāmat al-ṣalāt*, no. 1409.

⁸ Ibn Manẓūr 2010, 2305-6.

Al-Ghazālī's comment on the Name *al-shakūr*, in his work on the Beautiful Names, turns precisely on the increase that is inherent in gratitude – in God's case unlimited, in man's limited: God is 'the Most Grateful', he writes, "because he compensates to a much higher degree men's small acts of obedience, and repays the work of finite days with the infinite bliss of the afterlife". What is more:

we say that someone has shown gratitude for a good deed when he responds to it with a doubly good deed [...] and if we reflect on the increase inherent in that remuneration, then the only one absolutely grateful is God; in fact, what He adds is without restriction or limit, because nothing is greater than the beatitude of heaven.⁹

Since *shukr*, as we have seen, also has a declarative sense where it signifies 'praise' (*thanā'* ثناء), the Name *al-shakūr* must imply God's praise of the deserving. And on this point al-Ghazālī's commentary clearly expresses the intersection between the divine and the human encapsulated in some of the Beautiful Names, as well as their circularity of meaning. The great theologian notes here that God's praise, although addressed to the actions of the faithful, is even so in a sense directed at Himself, because human actions are created by Him, whereas human praise for a benefit received can only be directed outwards. In the same way, the gratitude of man towards God can be said to originate with God himself, who alone can sanction it, and this is a further grace added on top of His grace towards the man who expresses gratitude. Man's praise of God is always insufficient, al-Ghazālī goes on to say, because the vastness of the praise due is beyond the capacity of humankind, and is certainly poorer than obedient deeds. The author maintains for this reason that the highest expression of gratitude to the Lord is to exert oneself in obedience to his commands.¹⁰

The thinking of the learned Ḥanbalī Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya in his *The Resources of the Patient, The Reserves of the Grateful* runs along similar lines.¹¹ This author, who also dwells, as the title of his work suggests, on the substance and expression of human gratitude,¹² does not neglect to align the latter with God's gratitude; and in his turn notes the underlying interconnectedness of both. Taking his cue from the sura 'The Women', where it is written "if you give thanks and believe in Him [...] God is All-thankful and All-forgiving" (Qur'ān IV,147) – and again in the sura *al-Isrā'* 'The Night Journey': "The efforts of those who faithfully strive hard for the happiness of the life to come will be thanked [*mashkūr* مشكور] by God" (XVII,19) – Ibn Qayyim draws the reader's attention to the pairing God establishes between Himself and the good believer through the use of an analogous vocabulary, and he teaches that God, too, is grateful to the obedient servant, as the servant is grateful to Him, although His gratitude is of a different order. Entirely in agreement with al-Ghazālī, Ibn Qayyim also observes that God deserves to be called 'grateful' above any other – "in all truth God is

⁹ Al-Ghazālī 1971, 114.

¹⁰ Al-Ghazālī 1971, 115.

¹¹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1409/1989, 111-47 and 280-3.

¹² Characteristic in this context is Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1409/1989, 111-47, devoted to the debated superiority of either gratitude or patience over the other.

the most Grateful” – because He not only reciprocates what is offered to Him by way of gratitude, but also repays good deeds with ten times better ones. Thus, the being that He loves the most is the one most distinguished by gratitude: “God is Beautiful and loves beauty, He is the Wise One and loves the wise, and He is the Grateful One who loves whoever is grateful”.¹³

3.3 Gratitude and Faith

In the course of his reflections on the divine Name *al-shakūr*, al-Ghazālī cites a Prophetic saying that was frequently revisited in the subsequent literature: “God is not grateful to those who are not grateful to others”.¹⁴ A notable feature of this axiom is that the subtlety of the Arabic language allows us, according to whether the Name *Allāh* is read in the nominative, as the phrase’s subject, or in the accusative as its object, also to read it as “whoever is not grateful to others is not grateful to God”.

Among other glosses is that of Ibn Manẓūr in his dictionary,¹⁵ where he explains that the first reading means that God does not accept or reciprocate the gratitude that men show towards Him if they are not grateful to others for the benefits that come from them, and refuse to acknowledge them; in the second case, denying the good received from others and failing to be grateful for them also entails a denial and want of thanksgiving for the good received from God. The difference between the readings is not trivial, and in both cases it lends itself to discussion: where God is not grateful to the man who is not grateful to his brother, divine gratitude would appear to be subordinate to that among His creatures – an anthropocentrism which is at the very least anomalous in the Islamic context; in the other case, where those ungrateful to their brothers are also ungrateful to God, gratitude assumes an entirely human context, and omits the gratitude that the Creator offers the pious man, which is regularly insisted on by the Qur’ān. However that may be, between the nuances of the language and theological complexities, gratitude in action is clearly revealed to be a moment of connection between God’s praxis and the behaviour that human beings owe – to Him and for Him: gratitude is, then, a connective process, plausibly a continuous one, and a highpoint of mutual contiguity.

Let us stay with Ibn Manẓūr for a moment. The religious status of gratitude, together with its auspicious content, is reflected last but not least in the definition *a contrario* the author furnishes: he writes, in fact, that gratitude is the opposite of ‘denial’ or ‘impiety’ (*kufrān* كفران),¹⁶ thus making *shukr* synonymous with Islam itself. His note is a commonplace, and reflects the opposition between gratitude and impiety that appears several times in the Qur’ān; for instance, in the sura *al-Naml* ‘The Ant’ “Whoever thanks God does so for his own good. Whoever is ungrateful to God [or ‘unbelieving’, the verb *kafara* كفر] should know that the Lord is Self-Sufficient and Benevolent” (Qur’ān XXVII,40).

¹³ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 1409/1989, 282-3.

¹⁴ Al-Ghazālī 1971, 115; in Arabic: *lā yashkuru llāh man lā yashkuru l-nās*.

¹⁵ Ibn Manẓūr 2010, root sh-k-r.

¹⁶ Ibn Manẓūr 2010, root k-f-r.

3.4 Praise Be to God

The Baghdad scholar Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, who had much to say on the subject of moral conduct, was the author, among other works, of a pamphlet entitled *Al-shukr li-llāh*, or ‘The gratitude to God’,¹⁷ where human thankfulness to God is exemplified through Prophetic sayings sporadically supported by Qur’ānic quotations, anecdotes or poetic verses featuring pre-Islamic prophets, the learned and pious of early Islam, and a scattering of others whose example had been preserved in memory. The material is jumbled together without commentary, so that the small booklet is essentially a selection made by the author, an anthology, which does not appear to be governed by any firm criteria. It is useful nonetheless as a collection of some of the oldest writings on gratitude.

One thing we notice immediately in Ibn Abī l-Dunyā’s work is that the overlapping of human and divine gratitude, so dear to such theologians as al-Ghazālī or Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, is missing entirely, and instead the one-sided nature of acts of gratitude is taken as given. The early master’s purpose is to teach the substance and modality of good works: what exactly is gratitude to God, in real life? What are its expressions and due seasons? And how can we be sure of giving the Creator His due?

What gratitude means is soon told: to repeat ‘praise be to God’ (*al-ḥamdu li-llāh*), continuously, and particularly for the coming of the Prophet and of Islam because no speech of gratitude is sweeter than “praise be to God for having helped us and guided us on the path of religion”. The answer to the question ‘For what should we be grateful?’ is vast, even limitless, since every thing is a gift, food and drink, new clothes, the bodies men have been given, their eyes and tongues; as the Qur’ān says: “When God brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers, you knew nothing, and He gave you hearing and sight and hearts that you may give thanks” (XVI,78).

A handsome face is a gift too: “When the Prophet looked at himself in a mirror he would say: – God be praised that he has made me regularly proportioned, and rendered my face noble and handsome”;¹⁸ And breathing likewise:

Lord, what is the smallest gift you have given me? – the prophet David asked. He replied – Breathe! David drew a breath and He said: – There is the smallest gift I have given you.¹⁹

Also worthy of gratitude is our capacity for gratefulness; as the poet Maḥmūd al-Warrāq (d. c. 225/840) put it:

If my gratitude for God’s grace is His gift | for such a gift I must be grateful. | In the succession of days, in our existence that endures, | gratitude is obtained only through His favour.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994.

¹⁸ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 59-60; cf. 69.

¹⁹ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 50-1.

²⁰ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 36; cf. 49.

When Moses asked God what was the best gratitude, God answered: “Be grateful in every case” (*‘alā kull ḥāl*);²¹ and in fact, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā teaches in one quotation after another, one should always be formulating one’s gratitude to God because the whole length of our lives is a gift, every moment of it, happy or unhappy. They are wise who do not know whether grace lies in the good that happens to them or in the evil that does not befall them; therefore, “look at who is worse off than you and do not look at who is better off than you”, the Prophet advised.²²

The Gratitude to God by the early Bagdadi master also contains the occasional allusion to patience *ṣabr* – inevitably, since patience and gratitude are together required of all the faithful, Muslim or otherwise, by the vicissitudes of life. What stands out is, as always, the unparalleled extent of divine Grace; as for example in this new reference to David, a great Qur’ānic exemplar of gratitude (cf. Qur’ān VII,144):

He exclaimed: – My God, if every hair on my head had two tongues, and every tongue, night and day, sang Your praises, I would not have repaid a single one of Your benefits.²³

But the overflowing abundance of divine benefits should not dishearten the believer who knows he cannot reciprocate them; an ancient sage has said that “God has benefited the servants according to His measure and has asked them for gratitude according to their ability”.²⁴ Such reassurances are continuous and God’s habit of extraordinarily rewarding even the smallest of the faithful’s deeds is repeatedly illustrated. The Caliph ‘Alī Ibn Abī Tālib (d. 40/661) said that “God’s grace is linked to gratitude, and gratitude has to do with accretion [*mazīd* مزيد], and the two things proceed together”;²⁵ no less eloquent is this conversation between two of the Prophet’s Companions, in which human gratitude is summarised as a formula of grateful thanking:

One said: – Every time that one of His servants says ‘God be praised’ [*al-ḥamdu li-llāh*], he has earned a blessing from God.

The other asked: – And how does he repay that blessing?

By again saying ‘God be praised’ – he replied – after which another blessing will arrive. The gifts of God are without end.²⁶

The same succession of human praise and divine gifts appears in the dense prayer, especially pregnant in the finale, which al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī formulated before dedicating himself to his exegetical activity:

Praise be to the Lord our God, may You be praised, God, who created us, blessed us and guided us on the Path, who taught us, saved us and lifted us out of adversity, praise be to You for Islam, for the Qur’ān, praise be to

²¹ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 60.

²² Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 38-9; cf. 77. For the Prophet’s saying, cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, *kitāb musnad al-anṣār*, no. 20908.

²³ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 18.

²⁴ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 12.

²⁵ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 16.

²⁶ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 12; cf. 41.

You for our families, our wealth and our restored health, to You who have given us – truthfully! – everything we have asked of You [...]. May You be praised for every gift of Yours old and new, secret and known, particular and general, in life and death, presence and absence, praise be to You so that You may be satisfied, praise be unto You even when You are satisfied.²⁷

Of major didactic interest in Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's work are his stories about the prophets. One example is the following dialogue between God and Moses, another emblematic figure of gratitude in the Qur'ān (cf. XXXIV,13):

Lord – said Moses – what can Adam do to repay in gratitude what You have done for him? You created him with Your hand, You breathed Your spirit into him, sheltered him in the Garden, and made the angels bow down before him.

– Moses – the Lord replied – he knew [*'alima*] that all this came from Me, and for this reason he praised Me, and that is enough to repay Me for what I did for him.²⁸

The above exchange revisits what will now be a familiar theme, the two-way traffic of gifts that God and man present to one another, the reciprocal and in some way always compensatory offering that forms the substance of gratitude: if God fills man with His grace, well then, man can offer in exchange his own physical presence in the world, a source of satisfaction for the Creator as long as it is accompanied by an awareness (*'ilm* علم) of the paucity of one's offerings against the abundance of the gifts received. Very clear in this regard is a story, once again with David as the protagonist, based on the mutual exchange of gifts and on such an awareness as a sufficient form of gratitude:

Lord – said David – how can I show my gratitude to You when I am enabled to be grateful only through Your grace?

God breathed into his ear: – Do you perhaps not know that the gifts you have come to you from Me?

– Of course – David answered.

– And I accept that as the gratitude which comes from you towards Me – God replied.²⁹

3.5 Gratitude Towards One's Neighbour

Islamic teaching of all ages sees the gratitude that men owe each other as an integral part of their religious obligations, so that praising and eulogising a brother for the benefits coming from him is comparable to thanking the Lord for His countless gifts. Whether God or one's brother is the benefactor, the Tradition nonetheless underlines the psychological element, and teaches that gratitude entails a full acknowledgement of the gratification obtained. According to religious thought, then, the virtuous believer is one

²⁷ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 13.

²⁸ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 14.

²⁹ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 1413/1994, 11-12.

who, knowing well his debts to God, also acknowledges as much before God by honouring his debts with human society.

The work of a well-enough known traditionist, the Palestinian al-Kharā'iṭī (d. 327/939), with the title *Faḍīlat al-shukr li-llāh* or 'The Excellence of Gratitude to God',³⁰ an anthology of sayings and stories partly dedicated to gratitude as social duty, also focuses on these themes. The gist of the author's argument is as follows: gratitude, precisely because it is a quality of God, should also be a quality of the virtuous man, not only in relation to God but also and simultaneously towards his brother. Al-Kharā'iṭī in his turn quotes the ambiguous Prophetic saying discussed by Ibn Manẓūr, and taken up by many others ("God is not grateful to those who are not grateful to others"), and turns towards an entirely human context, immediately citing, again from the Prophet, the maxim "The men most grateful to God are those most grateful to other men",³¹ thus inaugurating a line of thought on gratitude as at once a social and a religious duty.

The material collected by al-Kharā'iṭī contains the statements: "A hallmark of human gratitude is making one's gratitude known";³² and conversely: "The worst speech is that which denies a benefit received".³³ Letting others know of some good received from another is already an adequate return on that good: whoever receives a benefit should reciprocate it, and if he cannot do so, should mention it to others because – as the Prophet taught – "remembering a benefit means being grateful for it".³⁴ According to a similar saying, "Whoever receives a benefit and can find nothing to give in return but prayers and praise, has reciprocated". Not very different, but more centred on awareness is: "When you receive a benefit, give something back to the benefactor, and if you cannot, call on God on his behalf until you know that you have recompensed him",³⁵ that is to say, when God has signalled to you that He has accepted your prayers and repaid your brother in your stead. There is a witty aphorism along the same lines:

There are two things. The first I would not sell for anything in the world, and it is that others would say to me 'You have done well', because if you give someone a thousand gold coins and he says to you 'You have done a good thing, may God repay you well', then he has already given back more than he has taken. And the second I would not buy for anything in the world, and it is that others say to me 'You have done ill'.³⁶

In these episodes, it is as if man's gratitude and that of God intermingle in a single gesture, in so far as man's thanks to his benefactor prompt the beneficial action of God which is by its nature, as we know, always augmented. Among the numerous relevant anecdotes al-Kharā'iṭī passes on, we find the advice given by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), the sixth *imām* of the Twelver branch of Shī'ī Islam, to a friend:

³⁰ Al-Kharā'iṭī 1402/1982.

³¹ In Arabic: *ashkaru al-nās li-llāh ashkaru-hum li-l-nās*; al-Kharā'iṭī 1402/1982, 61.

³² Al-Kharā'iṭī 1402/1982, 63.

³³ Al-Kharā'iṭī 1402/1982, 70-1.

³⁴ Al-Kharā'iṭī 1402/1982, 62-3.

³⁵ Al-Kharā'iṭī 1402/1982, 63-4.

³⁶ Al-Kharā'iṭī 1402/1982, 68.

Be grateful to those who do well by you, and do well by those who are grateful to you; good deeds one is thankful for never perish, while those unappreciated will not last. Gratitude increases the good and protects us against the vicissitudes of fate.³⁷

Once again, we find, translated into the realm of human relations, the circularity of gratitude, that concatenation of gifts that already characterizes gratitude between man and God. As we have already seen, praising God for His grace by simply enunciating 'Praise be to God' (*al-ḥamdu li-llāh*) is a supreme form of human gratitude; and what the believer owes to God he also owes, again for God's sake, to his brother benefactors. A couplet composed by al-Kharā'iṭī himself goes:

No illustrious person can avoid gratitude for the grandeur of possessions or the excellence of his condition; / were this not so, God would not have commanded His servants to be grateful to Him by saying: 'Be grateful to Me, you two weighty persons'.³⁸

This last expression³⁹ usually refers to men and jinn (cf. Qur'ān LV,31). The same overlap of gratitude and Islam – and, conversely, ingratitude and impiety (*kufṛ*, *kufrān*) – reappears in al-Kharā'iṭī's account of man's gratitude to his brother:

Whoever receives a benefit from another and can return nothing but praise, then praise him, and he will have been grateful; ungrateful instead [or 'impious', the verb *kafara*] is he who has kept silent about that benefit.⁴⁰

Another example, in the words of the Prophet:

There are certain servants to whom, on the Day of Resurrection, God will not speak.

– Who are those? – they asked.

He replied: – Whoever disowns his parents [...], whoever disowns his own child, and whoever receives a benefit from others and then fails to acknowledge [*kafara*] their benefit and disowns them.⁴¹

A last but no less relevant form of human gratitude is that between men and women, rendered thus in a story by the famous 'woman-for-women preacher', Asmā' Bint Yazīd Ibn al-Sakan (d. 30/650):

The Messenger of God passed by us, and there were some women with me [...]; I was married, and they were concubines. When they saw him, they sat down and huddled together.

He said to me: – Take care, daughter of Sakan, and take care all of you, not to deny your benefactors.

³⁷ Al-Kharā'iṭī 1402/1982, 66-7.

³⁸ Al-Kharā'iṭī 1402/1982, 65.

³⁹ In Arabic: *ayyuhā al-thaqalān*.

⁴⁰ Al-Kharā'iṭī 1402/1982, 65.

⁴¹ Al-Kharā'iṭī 1402/1982, 70.

I asked: – For my father and mother’s sake, what does it mean to ‘deny a benefactor’?

He replied: – Suppose a man comes to you and, with his money, frees one of you from her condition, and she, thanks to him, finds a husband, and let us suppose that after this she becomes angry with that man and says: ‘I appeal to God, I have never had anything from you’. So likewise take care you do not deny a benefactor.⁴²

Al-Kharā’iṭī’s work was highly valued by those that came after him; it would, for example, be followed very closely four centuries later by the well-known Ḥanbalī jurist of Damascus Ibn Muflīḥ (d. 763/1361), with some additions of his own.⁴³ Another saying, for example, by Ja‘far al-Šādiq: “Nothing is sweeter to me than one helping hand followed by another”;⁴⁴ or again: “One who preens himself on a benefit he has not received is like one who wears two counterfeit garments”.⁴⁵

⁴² Al-Kharā’iṭī 1402/1982, 71.

⁴³ Ibn Muflīḥ 1419/1999.

⁴⁴ Ibn Muflīḥ 1419/1999, 335.

⁴⁵ Ibn Muflīḥ 1419/1999, 332.

