

# The Concept of Gratitude in the Implementation of Development by the Prophet Sulayman (PBUH): An Analysis of Selected Quranic Verses

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## Abstract

This paper aims to study and analyze the verses of the Qur'an related to the application of the concept of gratitude in the implementation of development by Prophet Sulayman (PBUH). The Qur'an portrays Prophet Sulayman as a Prophet who carried out development with great excellence. In the Quranic narratives about him, the word gratitude (*shukr*) has been mentioned several times clearly through various verses. This indicates that he emphasized this concept in his governance. The question arises: what is the understanding of the concept of gratitude that aligns with Prophet Sulayman (PBUH)? How is this concept of gratitude implemented in Islamic-based Development? Based on these questions, this paper attempts to further examine the concept of gratitude and analyze it based on selected Quranic verses using the method of thematic interpretation (*tafsir al-mawdu'iy*). Finally, this paper concludes that gratitude is a concept closely related to faith (*aqidah*), serving as the core of every developmental activity. It is through this concept that outstanding productivity can be achieved in the implementation of IbD.

**Keywords:** Prophet Sulayman, Qur'an, *Shukr*, Gratitude, Islamic-based Development

## Introduction

From an Islamic perspective, gratitude or *shukr* is a form of interaction between a servant and their Creator, serving as evidence of recognition for all the blessings bestowed upon them. It not only involves a connection with the Creator but also extends to the relationship between humans and other creations. The recurring mention of the word gratitude in the Qur'an highlights the importance of understanding, deeply studying, and practicing this concept in life. Additionally, the Qur'an, as the primary source of knowledge for Islamic-based Development (IbD), records various stories of the Prophets. One of the missions of these Prophets is to develop the world through the purification of relationships with the Creator, interpersonal relationships, and connections with nature (Hasan, 1993). Among the

Prophets synonymous with the implementation of development is Prophet Sulayman (PBUH).

In the Quranic narratives related to the development of Prophet Sulayman, the concept of gratitude is clearly mentioned through various verses. This indirectly indicates the importance of integrating the concept of gratitude into any development initiative. The question arises: what is the true understanding of the concept of gratitude? How can this concept of gratitude be implemented in Ibd?

This paper is written to address these questions. It focuses on the discussion of the concept of gratitude mentioned in the story of Prophet Sulayman in the Qur'an. The discussion in this paper is divided into three main sections. First, identifying the verses related to the concept of gratitude in the story of Prophet Sulayman's development in the Qur'an. Second, analyzing the verses related to the concept of gratitude in the story of Prophet Sulayman's development through thematic interpretation. Third, formulating the concept of gratitude in the development of Prophet Sulayman based on the identified verses. To achieve the objectives of this study, this qualitative research, presented in an explanatory and descriptive manner, employs the method of thematic interpretation (*tafsir al-mawdu'iy*).

### Meaning of *Shukr*

The word *Shukr*, in its various forms, is mentioned 75 times in the Qur'an in several places (Al-Baqiy, 1988; Asad, n.d). This differs slightly from Shihab (1996), who stated that the word gratitude appears 64 times in various forms.

Shihab (2002) explains that the term *shukr* is derived from the word "*shakara*," which means praising the goodness and fullness of something. Linguists suggest that a plant growing with little water or an animal being fat with little grass both are called "*shakur*." This term is also defined by al-Biq'a'iy as engaging in activities that show respect to the giver of blessings, such as praising Him. Praise indicates that the recipient of the blessing is aware of its existence, acknowledges it, and then shows respect to the giver. It is narrated that Prophet Dawud (PBUH) once asked

*"O Lord, how can I be grateful to You, while gratitude itself is another of Your blessings, requiring my gratitude?" Allah revealed to him: "If you realize that what you enjoy comes from Me, then you have thanked Me."*

Furthermore, Shihab (2002) quotes four basic meanings of gratitude mentioned by Ahmad Ibn Faris: first, praise for the acquired goodness. Essentially, it is being content or satisfied with even little; hence the term is used for a healthy horse that needs only a little grass. Second, completeness and abundance. A thriving tree is described by the phrase "*shakar al-shajarat*." Third, something that grows on the stem of a plant (parasite); and fourth, marriage or the reproductive organ.

In elucidating these four meanings, Shihab states that the third and fourth meanings can be traced back to the first and second meanings. In clearer terms, the third meaning aligns with the first meaning, which describes contentment with something minimal, and the fourth meaning aligns with the second meaning because through marriage (reproductive organs), many

children can be born. In other words, these basic meanings can be interpreted as causes and their effects, so the word gratitude implies that anyone who is content with something minimal will receive abundant, abundant, and thriving rewards (Shihab, 1996).

Al-Asfahani (n.d.) states that the term gratitude involves the mental representation of blessings and manifests them on the surface. According to some scholars, this word originates from the word "*shakara*," which means to open, and it is the opposite of the word "*kafara*," which means to close (one of its meanings is to forget the blessing and conceal it). This understanding is reinforced by several Quranic verses that compare the words gratitude and disbelief, as in Surah Ibrahim (14:7), which means: "*If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]; but if you deny, indeed, My punishment is severe.*" and also the statement of Prophet Sulayman (PBUH) as recorded in Surah al-Naml (27:40): "*This is from the favor of my Lord to test me whether I will be grateful or ungrateful. And whoever is grateful - his gratitude is only for [the benefit of] himself. And whoever is ungrateful - then indeed, my Lord is Free of need and Generous.*"

In summary, gratitude is about acknowledging the blessings and concealing them, while disbelief is about hiding them. Revealing blessings means using them in a manner appropriate to the giver's intentions and mentioning the blessings and the giver with one's tongue.

Gratitude is also defined as returning all of Allah's blessings to their original purpose of creation (Hijab, 1997). This means that a person should be able to use everything bestowed by Allah in this world in line with its purpose. Azmie (2001) adds that gratitude means using a blessing to perfect its purpose, on the path of obedience and devotion to Allah, and not being ungrateful for goodness. In other words, gratitude occurs when a blessing is used correctly. However, if a blessing is used for the wrong purpose, ingratitude, which is the opposite of gratitude, occurs.

Furthermore, Azmie (2001) characterizes gratitude in five aspects: awareness, recognition, fairness, loyalty, and generosity. In more detail, awareness is the characteristic of gratitude at the level of the heart and is achieved by realizing God's role, involving an assessment of history, current conditions, and future possibilities. Recognition typically occurs at the oral level and is done by respecting and remembering the service and kindness of those who have served. Fairness means using blessings correctly, justly, and in balance. Loyalty is about always being loyal to God, oneself, and the organizations and communities one belongs to. Thus, this loyalty means appreciating the service received with obedience and loyalty to those who have contributed (Azmie, 2001).

In explaining the essence of gratitude, al-Ghazali mentioned that gratitude is composed of three things: knowledge, state, and action. Knowledge here means recognizing the blessing from the giver of the blessing. State means the joy that results from the given blessing, while action is doing whatever the giver of the blessing desires. According to him, these actions are closely related to the heart, body, and tongue (al-Zabidiy, 1989).

In addition, within a conventional framework, the concept of gratitude can be defined as the emotional response that arises when an individual (the receiver) perceives that another

individual (the provider) or source, has intentionally undertaken measures to improve the well-being of the receiver (Fredrickson, 2004). Thus, the Islamic perspective on gratitude differs from the conventional perspective in that it encompasses not only the verbal articulation of gratitude, but also tangible demonstrations of appreciation (Ali et al., 2020). Muslims firmly believe that gratitude entails acknowledging the blessings bestowed upon them by God in any given circumstance, regardless of its desirability. Furthermore, scholars assert that the performance of *Shukr* (gratitude) is obligatory for every Muslim as a means of atoning for their sins and acts of transgression, and as an act of submission to God in response to both their own actions and the consequences they receive. This differs from the conventional perspective, which may place more emphasis on expressing gratitude for the sake of conforming to societal norms or promoting personal well-being.

From this overall discussion, it can be concluded that gratitude involves recognizing the giver of the blessing, Allah, and using all these blessings according to their original purpose of being bestowed. Gratitude can also be practiced through the heart, tongue, and bodily actions.

### **Thematic Tafsir**

Thematic interpretation, also known as *tafsir al-mawdu'iy* in Arabic terminology, is a form of interpreting the Qur'an based on specific themes. Through this method, verses of the Qur'an that discuss a particular theme are collected, organized according to their chronological order of revelation, and then analyzed. As a result, the Quranic perspective on the discussed theme becomes clear after these verses are interconnected (Thaib & Zamakhsyari, 2007).

In general, this method has two forms (Azra, 1999). First, the interpretation that comprehensively discusses an entire chapter of the Qur'an. The objectives found within that chapter are explained by connecting one verse to another or one issue to another.

Second, the interpretation that gathers Quranic verses with similar themes or topics. These verses are then clearly explained and conclusions are drawn under specific thematic discussions. Through studies like this, the relationship between one verse and another can provide comprehensive conclusions about specific issues based on the Quranic perspective. For this study, the meaning of thematic interpretation will be applied.

In implementing this method of thematic interpretation, several important elements need attention. According to Khairuldin and Embong (2017), the method of thematic interpretation has four main elements. First, the interpretation focuses on specific words or terms, themes, topics, objectives, or goals. Second, this interpretation compiles separate Quranic verses based on the objective to be achieved. Third, the compiled interpretation is analyzed in simple and concise language. Fourth, the references used are based on primary Islamic sources, including the Qur'an, the Sunnah (traditions and practices of the Prophet), the views of the companions, the *tabi'in* (followers of the companions), and Islamic scholars.

### **Quranic Verses Related to The Concept of *Shukr* Through The Story of The Prophet Sulayman (Pbuh)**

The story of Prophet Sulayman (PBUH) is narrated in different Surahs within the Qur'an. In this paper, the focus will be solely on the verses related to the concept of gratitude found in the story of Prophet Sulayman (PBUH) in the Qur'an. However, these verses do not explicitly state

that they outline the concept necessary for the implementation of Prophet Sulayman's development. Therefore, these verses are analyzed by connecting the concept of gratitude with the implementation of his development.

Table 1

*Quranic Verses Related To The Concept of Shukr Through The Story of The Prophet Sulayman (Pbuh)*

Verse	Translation of Verses
<i>al-Naml (27:15)</i>	<i>"And We had certainly given to Dawud and Sulayman knowledge, and they said, "Praise [is due] to Allah, who has favored us over many of His believing servants."</i>
<i>Al-Naml (27:19)</i>	<i>"So [Sulayman] smiled, amused at her speech, and said, "My Lord, enable me to be <b>grateful</b> for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to do righteousness of which You approve. And admit me by Your mercy into [the ranks of] Your righteous servants."</i>
<i>al-Naml (27:40)</i>	<i>"Said one who had knowledge from the Scripture, "I will bring it to you before your glance returns to you." And when [Sulayman] saw it placed before him, he said, "This is from the favor of my Lord to test me whether I will be <b>grateful</b> or ungrateful. And whoever is <b>grateful</b> - his gratitude is only for [the benefit of] himself. And whoever is ungrateful - then indeed, my Lord is Free of need and Generous."</i>
<i>Saba' (34:13)</i>	<i>"They made for him what he willed of elevated chambers, statues, bowls like reservoirs, and stationary kettles. [We said], "Work, O family of Dawud, in <b>gratitude</b>." And few of My servants are <b>grateful</b>."</i>

Table 1 shows the Quranic verses related to the concept of gratitude in the story of Prophet Sulayman (PBUH) along with their translations. Based on the author's research, there are four Quranic verses that directly and explicitly mention the concept of gratitude in the story of Prophet Sulayman, namely *al-Naml* (27:15, 19, & 40) and *Saba'* (34:13).

### **Analysis of The Concept of Gratitude in The Implementation of Development By Prophet Sulayman (Pbuh) Based on Surah Al-Naml (27:15, 19 & 40) And Surah Saba' (34:13)**

Based on the Quranic verses in Surah *al-Naml* (27:15, 19, & 40) and Surah *Saba'* (34:13), which mention the concept of gratitude in the story of Prophet Sulayman (PBUH), it is found that the concept of gratitude can be divided into two main contexts: the context of the relationship with Allah SWT and the context of the relationship with other creatures.

#### **1. Context of the Relationship with Allah SWT**

The concept of gratitude undoubtedly has a direct connection with Allah SWT. In this context, the concept of gratitude can be observed through three states: the heart, the tongue, and the actions of Prophet Sulayman (PBUH). These three states have a very close relationship with one another.

### i. The Concept of Gratitude Through Heart and Tongue

In explaining Surah al-Naml (27:15); al-Raziyy (1981) stated that expressing gratitude with the tongue begins with the practice of the heart and the body. The practice of the heart refers to the determination to obey and abstain from disobedience, while the bodily practice is the actual implementation of obedience. This can be understood through the conjunction used in the verse, which is not "fa" (which means 'thus') but rather "wa" (which means 'and'), as mentioned by Allah SWT: "*And We had certainly given to Dawud and Sulayman knowledge, and they said, 'Praise [is due] to Allah, who has favored us over many of His believing servants.'*" (al-Naml, 27:15). Thus, the expression of gratitude by Prophet Dawud and Sulayman signifies that their gratitude spoken through their tongues truly originated from their hearts and was manifested through their actions.

In this case, the gratitude expressed is due to the greatest blessing, which is the knowledge bestowed by Allah upon them both (al-Sya'rawiy, n.d ; Qutb, n.d). In more detail, Shihab (2002) explained that Surah al-Naml (27:15) urges every scholar to first acknowledge Allah's blessing on their knowledge and then express gratitude not only verbally but also by practicing and adapting to the knowledge they possess.

The relationship between knowledge and gratitude can also be further observed through Surah al-Naml (27:40). Surah al-Naml (27:40) emphasizes the role of knowledge. If the Qur'an or the Sunnah praises someone possessing knowledge, it means they have applied their knowledge. This verse also indicates that by knowing and practicing knowledge sourced from Allah, a person will gain extraordinary strength and abilities. Humans have at least four main powers: first, physical power that, when trained, can produce skills. Second, intellectual power that generates knowledge and technology. Third, spiritual power that yields faith and its remarkable effects. Fourth, vital power that enables the owner to face various challenges in life. If these powers are trained properly, they can produce astonishing results (Shihab, 2002).

Surah al-Naml (27:40) clearly states that Allah SWT is Most Rich, signifying that Allah SWT does not need the gratitude of those who are grateful. In essence, the benefits of gratitude return to the individual. Moreover, the attribute of Allah SWT being Most Generous means that Allah grants with great generosity without waiting for gratitude in return (Qutb, n.d). This point is also highlighted by al-Zuhailiy (2009), mentioning that the benefits of gratitude and the harms of ingratitude all revert to the individual.

The word "*kathir*" (many) mentioned does not mean the majority; instead, it carries the meaning of numerous. The utterances of both Prophets indicate a sense of vigilance and humility. This is because the word "many" only describes a quantity that exceeds two individuals, compared to the word "majority," which, at the very least, should surpass half of the total number of believers. While it is true that Prophet Dawud and Prophet Sulayman were endowed with excellence compared to the believers, they still did not utter the phrase "*most of the believers*," showcasing their precise knowledge of all believers. Furthermore, if they had spoken in such a manner, it would have conveyed inappropriate pride for a Prophet without coupling it with a statement reflecting humility (Shihab, 2002).

Everything done by humans is a modification of the raw material that Allah SWT has spread throughout the universe. Human creations are mere adaptations of the raw materials created by Him. If so, all praise in this regard should be directed to Allah SWT. Clearly, Allah SWT is the

Owner, Ruler, Protector, and Administrator of all. If this reality is truly understood, humans as the servants and vicegerents of Allah SWT will be able to prepare holistic development plans in their activities (Hanapi, 2014).

According to Qutb (n.d); Surah al-Naml (27:40) explains that the event of transferring the throne of the Queen of Saba' from the Southern Arabian Peninsula to al-Quds, Palestine, deeply moved the heart of Prophet Sulayman (PBUH). He was astounded because Allah SWT fulfilled his desires in a miraculous way. He realized that such a blessing was a test that required him to be vigilant in facing it and to seek help to gain strength and shelter from Allah.

The verse instructing the family of Prophet Dawud and the followers of Prophet Sulayman to be grateful does not use the word "ya" (O). The absence of this calling word indicates the closeness of their relationship with Allah SWT. This is because the use of the calling word "ya" (O) suggests a distance. It is also found that all supplications of Allah's servants recorded in the Qur'an do not begin with the word "ya" (O). The word "shakur" (grateful) implies those who are abundant and steadfast in their gratitude, while the word "qalil" (few) means "little" and is presented in the "nakirah" (general) form, implying extremely little. This verse indicates that those who are grateful, although not perfect, are not very few but can be quite numerous. Clearly, gratitude has its own levels and covers the aspects of the heart, speech, and actions. Therefore, Allah's statement, "*But very few of My servants are grateful,*" can be understood in the sense of explaining the scarcity of Allah's servants who are firmly grateful. Two among those few are Prophet Dawud and Prophet Sulayman. It is also understood that due to the scarcity of Allah's servants who are firmly grateful, both of you – O Dawud and Sulayman – should increase your gratitude (Shihab, 2002b).

## ii. The Concept of Gratitude Through Actions

According to Ibn Kathir (1999), Allah SWT commanded the family of Prophet Dawud to act in gratitude for all the blessings bestowed upon them in this world and the hereafter. This indicates that gratitude manifests through deeds, just as it occurs through words and intentions. This statement is further reinforced by a Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) which means

*"Indeed, the prayer most loved by Allah SWT is the prayer of Prophet Dawud. He slept for half the night, prayed for a third of it, and then slept for a sixth of it. The fast most loved by Allah SWT is the fast of Prophet Dawud. He fasted one day and broke his fast the next."* (Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim)

The same matter is elaborated by Qutb (n.d), stating that this verse commands the family of Prophet Dawud to act in gratitude to express gratitude to Allah SWT, not to boast about the blessings granted to them. This is because righteous deeds are a significant expression of gratitude to Allah SWT.

Similarly, al-Sya'rawiy (n.d) explained that the command in the verse is to express gratitude to Allah SWT for His blessings. In short, the verse advises him to be earnest in his actions and assist anyone in need. This is because gratitude is not merely to acknowledge a blessing but to preserve it and increase it. This is further clarified by Allah SWT's statement which means:

*"And [remember] when your Lord proclaimed: 'If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]; but if you deny, indeed, My punishment is severe.'" (Ibrahim, 14:7)*

Furthermore, the expression of Allah SWT's statement which means *"But very few of My servants are grateful"* is a statement that explains the reality and provides guidance as is often found in the Qur'an. This statement aims to reveal the greatness of Allah SWT's blessings, which humans cannot fully appreciate, and to expose human negligence in appreciating Allah SWT's blessings and grace (Qutb, n.d).

Al-Zuhailiy (2009) explained that only a few of Allah SWT's servants are truly grateful to Him and use all their body parts according to their purpose of creation, which is to perform beneficial and permissible (mubah) activities. He argued that true gratitude is being grateful in all circumstances, whether good or bad, as described by another verse of Allah SWT in Surah Sad (38:24) which means:

*"[Dawud] said, 'He has certainly wronged you in demanding your ewe [in addition] to his ewes. And indeed, many associates oppress one another, except for those who believe and do righteous deeds - and few are they.'" And Dawud became certain that We had tried him, and he asked forgiveness of his Lord and fell down bowing [in prostration] and turned in repentance [to Allah]."*

### **Context of Relationships with Other Creatures**

The concept of gratitude not only involves the relationship with Allah SWT but also extends to relationships with other humans and the natural resources. In this second context, it is found that the concept of gratitude is observed through various actions of Prophet Sulayman.

Among these, it is evident that all natural resources under his control were utilized to their maximum potential and managed efficiently. Natural resources mentioned in the verses of the development of Prophet Sulayman include water, wind, plants, copper, metals, and pearls at the bottom of the sea. Furthermore, al-Zuhailiy (2003), when explaining Surah al-Naml (27:24-26), stated that the natural resources mentioned in these verses by Allah SWT include water from the sky, plants on the earth's surface, metals from the earth's core, and so on. Here, Prophet Sulayman optimized the use of natural resources in his time, leading to the development of technologies like glass (al-Naml, 27:44), wind (al-Anbiya', 21:81; Saba', 34:12 & Sad, 38:36), and copper (Saba', 34:12).

This aligns with the definition of gratitude discussed earlier, which is utilizing all of Allah SWT's blessings in accordance with their intended purpose. This is because the natural resources created by Allah SWT are not in vain; they have specific functions and secrets, as stated in Surah al-Anbiya' (21:16); Surah Sad (38:27); Surah al-Ahqaf (46:3) these natural resources are created for at least three main purposes: to develop the spirituality of humans, enhance human intellect, and benefit humans and all living beings in this world (Hanapi, 2014).

From these statements, it can be understood that if these natural resources, which are tools for development, are truly appreciated, significant and divinely approved progress can be achieved. This is because these natural resources are also gifts from Allah SWT, serving as a



test to see how far humans can function as custodians who manage them with trustworthiness and responsibility.

Moreover, Prophet Sulayman's action of recognizing Allah SWT's blessings by showing respect to other humans also demonstrated the concept of gratitude in his kingdom. This can be observed in Surah al-Naml (27:40) when he expressed gratitude after the throne of the Queen of Saba' was brought to him in the blink of an eye by a servant of Allah. He acknowledged the servant of Allah SWT who was granted knowledge of the scripture, and he recognized that the blessing ultimately came from Allah SWT. This indirectly demonstrates one of the characteristics of gratitude mentioned earlier: acknowledging and respecting others.

### Conclusion

Based on the overall discussion in this paper, it can be concluded that the concept of gratitude in the development of Prophet Sulayman (PBUH) as stated in the Qur'an is divided into two main contexts. First, the context of the relationship with Allah SWT. Second, the context of the relationship with humans and natural resources. This concept of gratitude actually establishes a clear belief, namely Allah SWT as the Creator, as the main foundation and has been applied in the implementation of the activities of Prophet Sulayman, whether in the form of heart, speech, or action. This proves that in implementing development, humans as servants of Allah SWT cannot sever their connection with Allah (*habl min Allah*). At the same time, they are stewards who always maintain relationships with other humans and natural resources (*habl minal-nas*). If this concept of gratitude is deeply understood, then humans as actors in sustainable development (IbD) will be able to enhance their sincerity in all their good deeds in the world and optimize the use of natural resources to the best of their abilities with the goal of attaining the pleasure of Allah SWT.

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