

English edition · A reflective essay

When Blessings Remain but Their Grace Departs

On guarding what we are given through gratitude, and examining ourselves without turning suffering into an indictment

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Water, light and an olive branch · an AI-generated conceptual illustration

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A reflection on blessings as trusts, gratitude as something made visible in their use, and the effects of sin as a reason for self-examination rather than a licence to explain the suffering of others.

A blessing is not a permanent resident

Ibn al-Qayyim asks, “Has any blessing ever departed from anyone except through the ill consequence of disobedience?” [Abu Nu‘aym reports al-Fudayl ibn ‘Iyad](#) saying, “I disobey God and recognise its effect in the disposition of my donkey and my servant.” Neither statement lets us explain every change in another person’s life, or declare every hardship the penalty for a particular sin. Their force is inward: the believer watches what his conduct does to his own heart and life, without assuming that sin’s consequence must arrive as a visible punishment with a label attached.

A sin may leave a shadow that cannot be measured. The heart tightens. Divine enabling—the right opening at the right moment—seems harder to find. A relationship loses some gentleness. The blessing keeps its outward form while something of its baraka recedes. By baraka I mean the sustaining good through which a gift continues to benefit us, not a superstitious guarantee that obedience will secure the outcome we choose. This scrutiny belongs to the self: it opens a door to repentance, not a window onto the mysteries of other people’s fate.

One of our stranger illusions is that a blessing, once received, is a completed transaction. A salary enters the account and somehow becomes part of the local geography. Health settles in the body and appears to sign a non-aggression pact. Love takes up residence in the heart and is promptly issued permanent papers. A long period of divine concealment begins to feel less like a mercy renewed each day and more like an acquired right.

We are good at counting blessings when they arrive, and less good at considering what allows them to remain. We ask for increase at length, then treat what is already present as though it needs no care. This is why Ibn al-Qayyim’s question unsettles as much as it awakens. It joins what we do in private to what our inner lives become, and asks us to examine our relationship with a blessing before asking how much of it we possess.

A loss that does not appear on the statement

Disobedience does not always smash the blessing in front of us. Its effect may be subtler. The money remains, but less good comes from it. The house remains, but its share of tranquillity diminishes. The job remains, while the path to doing it well grows heavy. The body remains, but the well-being that made its days light is no longer the same. Knowledge remains too, while a truth committed to memory proves unavailable when it is needed.

Loss is not always the thing being taken from you. Sometimes the deeper loss is that it remains in your hands but no longer does its work in your soul. No bank sends a notification to say that a portion of the salary's baraka has been deducted after this week's moral failure. No health app reports that the tranquillity index has fallen because of a sin left without repentance. The largest things in life often work silently, and so does the weakness that enters them.

Quran 8:53 conveys this meaning: God does not change a blessing He has bestowed on a people until they change what is within themselves; and God is all-hearing, all-knowing. The verse makes the inward life impossible to ignore when blessings change. Which values shifted? Which act of obedience gave way to disobedience? Yet it does not cancel material causes, nor does it offer us a formula by which every individual loss can be traced to a known offence.

At the beginning of a sin, a person is rarely asking for ruin. He wants a passing pleasure, extra money, a small victory for the ego, a sentence that will discharge his anger, or a glance he imagines no one sees. Fire does not ask for the whole forest at first either. One match will do; if nobody intervenes, the ordinary laws of combustion take care of the rest.

The match and the marketing department

In Bada'i al-Fawa'id, Ibn al-Qayyim likens sins to poisons: something the appetite enjoys can be joined to what causes pain. If sin were repellent from the first instant, we would need far fewer sermons. Poison, however, can arrive inside an attractive promise. Usury promises increase; lying promises escape; backbiting promises entertainment; arrogance promises stature; envy gives the ego a convenient account of its disappointments; delaying repentance promises a long life for which no one has signed the contract.

Nearly every sin has an excellent marketing department; the side effects are hidden on page thirty-seven in small print. When circumstances deteriorate, we search everywhere except within. If provision narrows, we inspect the global economy. If the home grows unsettled, we read about personality types. If peace disappears, we download a meditation app. If plans stall, we rearrange the desk. These causes and tools may all deserve attention. The checklist is still incomplete until it admits the harder question: what have I changed in myself?

That question does not ask us to abandon medicine, economics or psychology, or to explain every mechanical fault as punishment for a sin committed on Tuesday night. It restores moral agency to its place among the network of causes. Have I wronged someone? Delayed a right that was due? Grown careless with doubtful money? Let my tongue feed on the reputations of others? Used a blessing in the very way that spoils it?

Self-accounting is not an explanation of providence

There is a distinction we must not lose: calling oneself to account is not the same as passing judgment on someone else. In revelation, affliction does not automatically signify God's anger. The Prophet, peace be upon him, taught that the prophets are tested most severely, then those nearest to them in faith and character. A trial may raise a person, erase sins, refine the heart, or carry a mercy still hidden. No one may look at another person's calamity and hunt for a sin to match it, as though employed by an investigative office in the department of providence.

Nor should we ignore the effect of our own actions. Quran 42:30 conveys that whatever affliction befalls you is because of what your own hands have earned, while God pardons much. The verse wakes self-accounting, and its ending restrains despair and conceit together: He pardons much. We live inside an expanse of pardon, beneath a covering whose reach we cannot know, and receive provision that does not come because our deeds have paid its price in full.

The honest use of this teaching begins when a person is alone with his own heart. He performs ablution, sits before God and asks what needs repair. If he leaves that solitude carrying a list that explains why other people became ill, fell into poverty or lost those they loved, he has missed the purpose of self-accounting and converted it into cruelty.

Gratitude is an act before it is a word

Obedience is not only a ledger of good deeds for the future; it also guards the present. Prayer guards. Charity guards. Lowering the gaze guards. Honouring one's parents guards. Refusing doubtful money guards. Seeking forgiveness guards. Returning a right whose owner does not know you took it, withholding the sentence that could wound someone's reputation, closing a screen because God sees you: each is part of the fence we raise around what we have been given.

Perhaps this is why gratitude is wider than saying alhamdulillah—praise be to God—while using the blessing in the opposite direction. Human beings can praise God for money and then disobey Him with it; praise Him for health and make the body a vehicle for wrongdoing; praise Him for intelligence and apply it to deceit; praise Him for a tongue and spend an evening tearing apart the honour of others. It resembles thanking someone for the gift of a car, then driving it into his house.

Quran 34:13 conveys a command to the family of David to work in gratitude, while noting that few of God's servants are truly grateful. Gratitude appears as work because gifts speak a language words alone cannot complete. The language of a blessing is its use. A grateful eye

knows where to look. Grateful wealth finds lawful earnings and charity. Grateful knowledge produces humility rather than self-inflation. Grateful authority keeps the vulnerable safe; grateful strength gives the weak protection rather than threat.

Sin then becomes graver than an abstract breach of a rule. It can be the use of God's own gift in disobedience to Him. He gives you a tongue and you disobey with the tongue; wealth and you disobey with wealth; sight and you disobey with sight. He grants you a private place, sheltered from human eyes, and you begin by forgetting His sight. Then we wonder why beautiful things in our lives lose some of their light.

Fearing for what we love

The question beside a blessing should be more than, How did I obtain this? We should also ask: How do I give it its due, and what must I avoid so that I do not ruin it? A person may spend twenty years building what twenty minutes can burn: a reputation felled by one message; a family broken by betrayal; a lifetime's wealth consumed by greed; knowledge corrupted by pride; love killed by a small contempt, repeated until the heart has no room for repair.

Great losses do not always require one great cause. A small cause, repeated often enough, can become a destiny. The righteous therefore feared sin as people fear for what they love. Their repentance was not only an escape from punishment. They feared losing the sweetness of intimate prayer, an ease in doing right that had long accompanied them, or the protection that keeps a person from being abandoned to his own resources.

To be left to one's intelligence, plans, connections, strength and careful calculations is a trial no camera will capture. A person may possess every visible means while lacking divine enabling. Without it, brilliance can become an advanced instrument for choosing the wrong thing.

This is why hidden repentance is among the most beautiful means by which we may hope to preserve blessings: leaving an old sin, disposing of doubtful money, mending a quarrel, returning a right, seeking forgiveness from someone you have wronged, or closing a door once used for wrongdoing. Others may see no connection between these acts and what worries us. Our knowledge of causes is limited; God knows them all. We use the visible means and repair what lies between us and Him, without claiming to comprehend His wisdom or to have secured a particular result.

When a blessing remains a blessing

Perhaps wealth needs another definition. Wealth is not simply having many blessings. It is having blessings that remain blessings. What is money worth if it steals your sleep? Fame if it steals your heart? Success if it makes you the worst person you know? A grand house if God is

remembered there only on a framed inscription by the entrance? Losing things is not the only danger. The harsher loss is for the blessing itself to become evidence against us.

One of the wisest responses to a beautiful life is to fear for it through obedience to God—a fear born of love, not panic. It is like carrying a rare glass in both hands and walking gently because you know its value. Blessings ask something of that lighter step: less noise about what we deserve, less certainty that competence alone won God's gifts. How many people are more intelligent than we are and were not given what we received? How many worked hard and found closed the door that opened for us?

A blessing needs more than delight; it needs good manners: knowing the Giver, using His gift in a way that pleases Him, and returning when we slip. Ibn al-Qayyim writes that nothing preserves God's blessing like obedience to Him, and nothing brings increase like gratitude. This is an invitation to love life without becoming its servant: enjoy what we have, thank the One who gave it, seek forgiveness when we fail, and do not delay our return, because we do not know which blessing in our homes is living beneath the shelter of pardon.

We do not always need a new blessing. Sometimes we need only to stop setting fire to the old ones. Perhaps one of the deepest forms of poverty is to raise our hands at night and say, 'My Lord, give me more,' while the way we use everything already given says, 'Leave.'