

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Submitters Perspective

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Giving Thanks

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 (3:191).

Find a quiet spot in nature. Sit there silently for half an hour or so. How do you feel? Perhaps the same way I felt, for it helped me understand that not only do people have stories to tell, but so also do all of God's creations (6:38; 16:68-69; 27:18-19, 23-24; 59:21; 88:17; 99:4). Some of these tales are joyful; some are sad; some are long; some are short. All are beautiful; all are important; all are part of God's plan.

As I looked around, I realized that every tree whispers its story in the rings that encircle its heart, in the leaves and fruits that spring from its branches and in the wind that carries its seeds to new nurseries. But it's not just living things that have a story to tell. Just as every species has an experience to share, so does every mountain, river, and ocean. Each, in its time, tells us about our planet's journey through eternity (2:74; 27:88; 45:12-13; 59:21; 99:4). The winds travel faster and farther than people, and the sun, the moon, and the stars have witnessed more life and history than human eyes have ever seen. Every bird, every mammal, and every insect appreciates this web of life in its own unique way. Having seen this, I

ask myself why do we, humans, see ourselves as superior in all ways to the rest of God's creatures.

Why are we so proud of ourselves? Are we the fastest creatures on earth? No; Peregrine falcons can travel 200 miles per hour while we humans, on foot, can move only slightly faster than snakes (when you think about it, snakes are pretty fast without legs). Do we live longer than all other species? No; Galapagos tortoises have a lifespan of 130 plus years, and lichens live thousands of years. Do we have better eyesight than other species? No; owls can see mice from a mile away; what can we see from a mile away? A shopping mall perhaps! Even more amazing is the fact that snakes can see heat. Do we see more colors than all other living species? No; bees can see ultra-violet light, which is invisible to us. And look at birds, they can fly because of the God-given gift of wings. We, too, have a unique and special God-given gift. One that allows us to understand the world around us, to build planes that let us soar with the birds, cars that let us race the falcons and, most importantly, build and do things that improve the lives of all living creatures. It is the gift of a creative intellect.

This gift of intelligence is perhaps one of the greatest gifts God may bestow upon a creature. He has given humans alone the gift of an inquiring mind, and forward thinking (30:8). But such a great gift

comes with a very great responsibility to appreciate and use this gift properly (23:78; 36:35-36). The word of God in scriptures to submitters of all faiths reinforces the importance of this gift and how great is the responsibility that accompanies it. "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required." (Luke, 12:48)

We, of all God's creatures, have the ability to provide stewardship for the whole world and all who live in it. We alone have been blessed to discover cures for diseases. We can provide support and compassion for those whose lives have been devastated by tragedy. We have the capacity to show kindness to complete strangers, and we do it without expectation (76:9). We, of all species, have the heart and soul to help others and the brain to turn that desire into action. That, I believe, is among the gifts God has given us that differentiate us from all other animals. God gave us stewardship over the earth and will hold us to account for the way we use or abuse it (40:64; 21:47; 31:16; 36:12). How sad it is that humans abuse what God gave us (39:7).

God gave us only one habitable planet (15:20; 43:10) with great biodiversity (26:7; 41:10). Giving thanks is not a lip service (9:105; 25:63; 36:45-47). If we damage the planet and knowingly contribute to the ever-increasing loss of biodiver-

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sity, we are not only endangering our physical well-being and that of generations to come, but also our souls because we are violating God's commandment of not corrupting the earth (7:56; 10:23; 25:63; 30:41; 31:18). Today, plant and animal species are becoming extinct at a rate of one every 20 seconds mainly because of human actions. What price will we pay for usurping God's power to bestow life and death on a whole species of creatures? Do we need to be asking if creating genetically modified organisms by inserting genes from totally unrelated species, is dangerously tampering with God's creation?

In the past, we may have damaged the environment out of ignorance as with the production of carbon dioxide during the early industrial revolution, but we don't have that excuse today. Our actions are more often due to greed and personal interest than to ignorance (4:17-18; 68:13; 74:14-15). Rainforest lands are burned to open fields for agriculture. A number of plant and animal species have been driven to the brink of extinction due to improper or overfishing and killing animals merely for trophies (7:56; 10:23; 30:41).

Scientists have shown temperatures are rising. Weather extremes are becoming more common. God is saying that nature is a great teacher (3:191). Why aren't we listening? We share this planet with so many special plants and animals that He has made (6:38; 55:10); so much beauty and life He has given us (26:7). We should give thanks to Him for His gifts by caring for them. Instead, we take what He has given, and often damage or destroy it (30:41; 7:56).

"That may be true," you might say, "for global leaders and large businesses, but I am not responsible. I can't change the world. I am only one small person."

But you may think differently when you hear the story of the boy and the starfish. Early one morning a boy was picking up starfish, stranded on the shore by low tide and destined to die in the hot summer sun. One by one he was throwing them back out to sea when a passerby commented, "There are thousands of starfish on this beach and it's getting hot very quickly. You can't save them all, so how can you possibly make a difference?" The boy picked up another starfish, smiled, and said, as he threw the creature into the sea, "I can make a difference to this one."

Each of us can find our own "starfish;" our own way of giving thanks to God by helping to save this world He gave us (31:16). We can conserve energy by turning off lights, appliances, TVs, and computers when we are not using them (6:141). We can conserve water by planting drought tolerant plants, taking shorter showers and not watering as frequently. We can reduce waste by preparing only the amount of food we know we will eat, eating moderately (7:31), and by consuming non-endangered species. We can also reduce the amount of fossil fuels we use and thereby the amount of carbon dioxide we put into the atmosphere by combining as many errands as possible into one trip, or even better by walking or biking shorter distances instead of driving. We can compost vegetable waste and shredded paper, which enriches the soil and reduces the amount of waste going to landfill sites. We can participate in coastal clean up days or Earth days. Even such minor actions as picking up trash from the ground and putting it in a trash bin can make a difference (31:16; 36:12). We can lead by example, by showing our children how to conserve or by listening to them when they tell us how to show thanks by showing concern for God's gift of this planet. If we want to be able to share with our children and future generations that peaceful spot in nature where we can listen to the sounds of nature and give thanks, we all must take care of it now (27:60; 55:6; 56:72).

God reminds: *He is the One who made the earth habitable for you, and created for you roads therein, that you may follow the right way* (43:10). The right way is the way to take care of the earth to keep it habitable as God meant it for not just human but all living creatures (55:10). A true worshiper of God will tread the earth gently (25:63; 31:18). Remember, everything we do, "even the equivalent of a mustard seed will be accounted for" (21:47; 36:12).

If one boy can make a small difference, imagine how much more we can do as a group. Imagine how many "starfish" we can save if we work alone and together to make a difference. We appreciate God and His creations, and in doing so grow our souls, protect our environment and our future.

Practicing conservation and avoiding wasteful practices go hand in hand with giving thanks to God.

Sister Laleh

GIVING THANKS SOME OF GOD'S PROVISIONS: 16:65-69

In Sura 16, God gives many beautiful examples of His provisions to us and verse 18 says: *If you count GOD's blessings, you cannot possibly encompass them. GOD is Forgiver, Most Merciful.*

I want to concentrate on one small section in Sura 16, just five verses, but they illustrate His blessings in a wonderful way. 16:65-69 tell us about some of His provisions, and when we look at just these specific ones, we can see how much God has blessed us with.

[16:65] *GOD sends down from the sky water to revive the land after it had died. This should be (sufficient) proof for people who hear.*

Water is essential for all life. We know that all living things are made from water (21:30, 24:45), and we can survive for only a short while without water. God created the system which provides us with water (25:53, 35:12). The water is there for us to drink and to clean ourselves (8:11); it allows the plants to grow (2:22, 14:32, 20:53, 35:27 and many more); and God is the One who provides it and keeps it pure (18:41, 23:18, 25:48, 67:30). Even in the desert where we never feel we get enough rain, I know that we get exactly what we need. And when it rains, after a long drought, it's so easy to be thankful and appreciative of this blessing.

[16:66] *And in the livestock there is a lesson for you: we provide you with a drink from their bellies. From the midst of digested food and blood, you get pure milk, delicious for the drinkers.*

All of the livestock, and the many ways we enjoy them, are blessings from God. We ride horses, raise chickens for eggs, shear sheep for their wool. God subdued them for us so that we can have meat, hides and transportation (6:142, 16:5, 20:54, 36:71-3). And then there's milk.

The description in verse 66 is so apt. Trying to learn how cows turn the grass and

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grain they eat into pure white milk is a confusing study. But essentially, there's a process of fermentation which takes place in the rumen, or first chamber, of a cow's stomach. All kinds of nutrients are absorbed into the rumen from blood vessels. So it is truly *from the midst of digested food and blood*.

Milk is considered by many as one of nature's most nearly perfect foods, and it comes in so many wonderful forms—cheese, butter, cottage cheese, ice cream and more. Milk is the best source of calcium for our body, and calcium is essential for healthy bones and teeth. Having enough calcium helps prevent bone loss, arthritis, and migraine headaches. Plus milk contains other vitamins, minerals and amino acids to help keep us healthy, fit, and strong. Milk is also good for the skin, both inside and out. Cleopatra used to take a milk bath daily! And, as God says, it's delicious for the drinkers.

[16:67] And from the fruits of date palms and grapes you produce intoxicants, as well as good provisions. This should be (sufficient) proof for people who understand.

Why dates and grapes? We know that this world is full of healthy and delicious foods. God doesn't mention oranges or spinach. And we know that humans have misused grapes to make wine. Satan has even tricked scientists into saying a glass of wine every day is good for your health. But in truth it's the grape that's so good for our health.

There are huge health benefits from grapes. They treat constipation, indigestion, fatigue, kidney disorders, macular degeneration and cataracts. Grapes contain many vitamins and minerals, plus a high concentration of antioxidants. This has been shown to inhibit the growth of some cancers, reverse coronary heart disease and high blood pressure, and slow the aging process.

And what about dates? This fruit contains a concentration of natural fibers; it's rich in many vitamins and minerals, like calcium, iron, potassium and magnesium. Like

grapes, dates help fight many intestinal problems, including both constipation and diarrhea, and abdominal cancer. They are among the best nourishment for muscle development. It's said that taking one date a day will help you maintain your healthy eyes for your lifetime.

Many use dates to break their fast during Ramadan. It helps avoid overeating. And they're delicious. So many benefits from both grapes and dates, and they taste so much better than a multi-vitamin! God's gift. (23:19, 16:11, 78:32, 36:34)

[16:68] And your Lord inspired the bee: build homes in mountains and trees, and in (the hives) they build for you.

[16:69] Then eat from all the fruits, following the design of your Lord, precisely. From their bellies comes a drink of different colors, wherein there is healing for the people. This should be (sufficient) proof for people who reflect.

And then we come to the bee, the title of Sura 16. First of all, as God instructed, wild bees build their hives in rocks or trees. Any cave or rock cavity or hollow in a tree provides a perfect nesting site. Around the entrance, the bees will smooth the bark or coat the rock with a plant resin. Then the bees spend their short lives coming and going to find flowers. (See Submitters Perspective Mar. 1993, Nov. 1993, Sep. 2004)

And from the nectar in those flowers, bees produce honey. Only bees produce honey; man's attempts to duplicate the flavor and texture of honey have fallen way short. God designed the bee, gave her special enzymes for converting the nectar, and "inspired" her on how it is done. The result is a food that is sweet and delicious and has amazing health benefits. It's a natural energy booster, no need for a Red Bull! And its healing properties are well known. It can be used to treat cuts and burns as an external ointment because it absorbs moisture from the air and speeds healing. It can also help reduce arthritis pain and inflammation. It soothes a sore throat and is gentle on the stomach for intestinal ailments. Milk and honey is a natural sleep aid to calm and relax you. Like all of the foods mentioned in this section, honey is chocked full of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

God put these verses together in Sura 16. Science has caught up and agrees with the Quran. Water, milk, dates, grapes, and honey—these are beautiful provisions from God, with huge health benefits and great taste. We need to be among the people who "hear," "understand," and "reflect" on these proofs from God.

Lydia

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A CLOUD

As I was taking my morning walk just before sunrise, I enjoyed a most wondrous experience. The sun wasn't yet up over the Rincon Mountains, but its rays were shooting into the air. And just above the mountains, they illuminated a single tiny cloud. I looked all around the sky and it was absolutely the only cloud anywhere in the sky. I watched the little puff for a minute, then turned away for no more than 15 seconds, perhaps less. When I looked again at "my" cloud, it was at least ten times its size. It was huge—still small compared to the whole sky, but immense compared to what it had been only a few seconds before. As I watched it, it broke apart and began to look like a medieval dragon symbol or a lace pattern. It was beautiful. I kept my eyes on it as it now began to disintegrate, and right before my eyes it got smaller and smaller until it was gone. Completely gone.

I am sure scientists can tell me why one tiny cloud forms in an otherwise cloudless sky, and why that cloud suddenly grows, breaks apart and disappears. But I'm not sure I even want to know. For me, it was a chance to appreciate the creations of God, the miracles He makes happen all the time. So I cherish the image of "my" cloud from the first tiny puff, to the lacy design, to it vanishing right before my eyes, and I thank God for the lovely experience.

[2:164] In the creation of the heavens and the earth... and the clouds that are placed between the sky and the earth, there are sufficient proofs for people who understand.

Lydia

MASJID TUCSON United Submitters International

PO Box 43476 Tucson AZ 85733-3476 USA

Tel: (520) 323 7636

internet web site www.masjiduntucson.org

e-mail: info@masjiduntucson.org masjiduntucson@gmail.com

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THANKSGIVING

A GREAT TIME FOR GIVING THANKS TO GOD

[14:7] *Your Lord has decreed: "The more you thank Me, the more I give you." But if you turn unappreciative, then My retribution is severe.*

[2:152] *You shall remember Me, that I may remember you, and be thankful to Me; do not be unappreciative.*

[56:68-70] *Have you noted the water you drink? Did you send it down from the clouds, or did we? If we will, we can make it salty. You should be thankful.*

[31:12] *We have endowed Luqmān with wisdom: "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.*

[16:114] *Therefore, you shall eat from GOD's provisions everything that is lawful and good, and be appreciative of GOD's blessings, if you do worship Him alone.*

[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.*

[30:50] *You shall appreciate GOD's continuous mercy, and how He revives the land that has been dead. He will*

just as certainly resurrect the dead. He is Omnipotent.

[16:78] *GOD brought you out of your mothers' bellies knowing nothing, and He gave you the hearing, the eyesight, and the brains, that you may be appreciative.*

[35:12] *The two seas are not the same; one is fresh and delicious, while the other is salty and undrinkable. From each of them you eat tender meat, and extract jewelry to wear. And you see the ships sailing through them, seeking His provisions, that you may be appreciative.*

[29:17] *...The idols you worship beside GOD do not possess any provisions for you. Therefore, you shall seek provisions only from GOD. You shall worship Him alone, and be appreciative of Him; to Him is your ultimate return.*

[31:14] *We enjoined the human being to honor his parents. His mother bore him, and the load got heavier and heavier. It takes two years (of intensive care) until weaning. You shall be appreciative of Me, and of your parents. To Me is the ultimate destiny.*

[3:145] *No one dies except by GOD's leave, at a predetermined time. Whoever seeks the vanities of this world, we give him therefrom, and whoever seeks the rewards of the Hereafter, we bless him therein. We reward those who are appreciative.*

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

Be included in our email list for weekly reminders

God has blessed us with the opportunity to send weekly reminders to submitters in our email list. The weekly reminder email is not very long. It usually consists of the topic of the week, and the corresponding link or links to get the information from. The reminder is sent every Thursday, God willing.

[51:55] *And remind, for the reminder benefits the believers.*

We would like every submitter, whether receiving our newsletters or not, to be included in the list. God willing you can join the list by sending an email to info@masjiduntucson.org and saying that you want to be in the weekly reminder list. If you want to make it a really short email, write "weekly reminder" in the subject line and send it. Or join via: <http://masjiduntucson.org/current/weekly.html>

If you also include in the email the city and state that you live in, God willing we can compile this information and use it for the submitters without a community who are asking to communicate with other submitters in their area.

Please help us to help you and other submitters by joining the list and by being proactive, God willing.

[3:200] *O you who believe, you shall be steadfast, you shall persevere, you shall be united, you shall observe GOD, that you may succeed.*

[87:9] *Therefore, you shall remind; perhaps the reminder will benefit.*

Note: Your comments are also welcome and appreciated.