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**AN INVESTIGATION OF APPRECIATION AND FORGIVENESS IN POSITIVE
PSYCHOLOGY AND THE QURAN**

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ABSTRACT

Among the objectives of the Quran and the newly emerged school of positivism is the promotion of enjoyment of welfare and a happy life. Appreciating others and forgiving their wrongdoings are emphasized in both positive psychology and the Quran as means to ensuring one's wellbeing. But there seems to be fundamental differences between the two schools. The Quran takes a firm step towards joining the two acts of appreciation and forgiveness with monotheism and God's divinity. It also employs appropriate educational strategies such as modeling and making promises in order to internalize these values. Through the application of these instructions, a true Muslim can benefit from well-being and a happy life. However, from a positive psychology point of view, appreciation and forgiveness are both human-oriented rather than god-oriented, which compared with the Quran is less profitable.

Keywords: Appreciation, Forgiveness, The Quran, Positive Psychology

INTRODUCTION

Positive psychology is a newly emerged school claiming to have focused on the wellbeing of human beings. Designing strategies in three areas of positive emotions, human positive strength and positive organizations, Seligman as the founding father of this school tries to guide people towards a positive life. Appreciation

and forgiveness are among the positive emotions that highlight promising and desirable points in one's past life and provide them with feelings of happiness and satisfaction. Comparing the Quran's view and that of positive psychology, the present study aims to examine the concepts of appreciation and forgiveness and through

them define wellbeing from the viewpoint of both schools. Accordingly, this descriptive-analytic study, tries to answer the following questions:

- What is the concept of appreciation and forgiveness in positive psychology view?
- What is the concept of appreciation and forgiveness in the Quran's view?
- What are the similarities and differences of the two schools in explanation of these two concepts?

1. Appreciation

Thankfulness and appreciation are among the accentuated concepts discussed in both positive psychology as well as the Quran. In the following, both schools' viewpoints will be touched upon.

2-1. Appreciation in positive psychology

Susan Quiliam believes that positive thinking means having a positive attitude towards oneself as well as others; treating others well brings about desirable relationships with them. The better the relations one has with others, the stronger and more adaptable one will be emotionally [1]. The prerequisite of appreciation is having favorable relations with others, which brings with it beneficial effects for both the appreciator and the appreciated. This is because appreciation exists only when we are sure that we have received a positive social behavior from others [2]. Seligman points out the effects of

appreciation not only on the appreciator and the appreciated, but also on those who have witnessed the act of appreciation and are positively moved by it. He believes these effects allow others to touch the most profound roots of humanity [3].

From the positive psychology perspective, appreciation enhances enjoyment and lends itself to a better understanding of the past's pleasant understanding of pleasant occurrences from the past. In fact, appreciation is realizing the good and positive points in our past life, which leads to greater appreciate for our current life. Appreciation is expressed when one approves of a noble and positive act in a social relationship [4]. Increase in appreciation enhances past positive memories and brings about one's feeling of happiness and satisfaction from their past life; a life which is the result of remembering others' true sacrifices and amiable kindnesses. The more appreciation one shows, the more satisfied one feels.

Those who write down their memories regarding appreciation benefit from better physical and mental health than those who have recorded their memories of mental pressure and other unpleasant daily events [5]. For three reasons, appreciation is a moral emotion: first, it provides us with the chance to have positive social interactions with others; secondly, it encourages us to

demonstrate a positive social behavior and to refrain from partaking in anti-social acts; and thirdly, it will reinforce the moral behavior of the person who performed the acceptable behavior and was appreciated [6].

2-2. Appreciation in the Quran

God says: “Nay! But worship Allah (Alone and none else), and be among the grateful” [7]. According to this verse, worshipping necessitates being grateful. In this verse, God declares: should you want to be among the appreciators, worship God. Hence, in order to achieve the rank of a true servant of God, one must appreciate him [8]. But, what is gratefulness and what stages does it include?

Raghib Esfahani considers gratefulness to be, “visualizing God's endowments and declaring it” [9]. Also, Jowhari believes that gratefulness is to acknowledge goodness, to spread it and then to appreciate God [10]. Therefore, gratefulness and appreciation are shown in return for virtuousness and goodness, which one receives. The mind requires people to be grateful for what they are endowed. As such, all humans must appreciate God, since all that they possess in life, such as their senses, understanding, minds, and thoughts are gifts of God.

When discussing the topic of gratefulness, verbal appreciation in the form of some special expressions comes to mind; while,

taking a quick look at verses in the Quran, a different, more expanded concept is construed. True gratefulness originates from knowledge. In the first place, a servant must know that all the endowments are granted by God almighty. This knowledge brings with it a special happiness which results from God's reward and this special happiness makes them appreciate their God's reward practically. Accordingly, gratefulness is a process involving mind, knowledge and heart as well as human organs [11].

In fact no matter how hard one tries, it is impossible to appreciate God's endowments in any true way; for the unique creator is far from any need and has no requirements to be met through which one can appreciate him. On the other hand, whatever one possesses is granted by God, even what we have acquired through our own will and effort. Despite there being no real way to appreciate God for his endowments, by employing our body parts, organs and whatever else he has provided us to live and move, we show our appreciation for him. In other words, to appreciate one of God's endowments, we have to use his other endowments. Therefore, how can we truly appreciate his endowments? [12].

Imam Sadegh (peace be upon him, hereafter referred to as PBUH) says: In his revelation to Moses (PBUH), God says, “Be grateful to

me as I deserve!" To this Moses replies, "God! How can I truly appreciate your endowments while the very same appreciation is an endowment you have granted me?" God tells him, "Oh Moses! The very moment you realized that even the same appreciation is an endowment of mine to you, you have appreciated me the way I deserve it." [13].

In this regard, Imam Sajjad (PBUH) says: Pure is the God who deems the confession to his endowments as worshipping him and regards admitting the inability to appreciate his gifts as the appreciation of his endowments [14]. Although sincere appreciation for God's blessings by those who are poor in nature would not be possible, wisdom dictates that one is required to appreciate God's blessings endowments as much as possible. In the Quran, gratefulness means following God's orders and having faith in him. Appreciation of God's endowments is not shown just in word; it must be well expressed in practice too. Since God is totally free from any need, the practical appreciation is to refrain from sins, abide by God's rules and use God's endowments properly, as he orders.

"Work, O family of David, in gratitude" and few of my servants are grateful [15]. The use of the word "A'malū", which means work, God demands, beyond verbal appreciation, an appreciation by body and

soul, which can be shown in practice [16]. According to Imam Sadegh (PBUH), "True appreciation of God's endowments is refraining from sins" [17]. Appreciation is not limited to God, rather according to the verses, one must be grateful to those who have acted as intermediaries between God's endowments and people.

Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) says: In the resurrection, one of God's servants is brought to the divine court before God, God orders to put him in the fire. The man appeals the decision and says, "Do you intend to put me in the fire? But I have read the Quran!" To this, God says, "Yes, you read the Quran, but you did not appreciate my endowments." The man says, "God, you blessed me with gifts and I showed appreciation. ..." He goes on to enumerate God's blessings and the way he appreciated them. Again God replied, "You are absolutely right but you have not been grateful to those who had acted as intermediaries for receiving my endowments to you and I have made a vow not to accept any man's appreciation unless they thank those who have made it possible for them to receive my blessing" [18]. Imam Reza (PBUH) says, "Those who are not grateful to the generous people in fact are not grateful to God" [19]. Imam Sajjad (PBUC) also expresses in a hadith [20] that

“The most appreciative of God’s blessings is the most grateful one to people” [21].

In the Quran, following appreciation for God’s blessings, comes being grateful to parents [22] which reveals the paramount importance of the issue. Since one is never deprived of God’s endowments, they are bound to be grateful to him in sorrow and happiness. Appreciation for God’s endowments when one is happy demonstrates that one realizes that what brought them happiness is a product of God and they appreciate him for the endowment. Appreciation in times of trouble brings with it some advantages such as:

- A) When in trouble, appreciation opens a new window to man. When filled with disappointment, one remembers God’s endowments and reminds themselves that in times of trouble, not every hope is lost and God, who blesses them, will still help them surmount difficulties. According to the Prophet Mohammad, a pious person will enjoy great benefits and if something terrible happens to him, if he exercises patience, the experience will be of benefit to him as well [23].
- B) Appreciation in a disaster reminds people of even worse conditions or experiences. They are grateful to God for the calamity, because there could be much worse and more disastrous

situations. While people could think of the disaster as the worst possible situation and accordingly feel despair, by remembering worse conditions, they think of the positive side of the disaster and this in turn diminishes their grief. According to the Quran, appreciating God’s blessing increases the blessing and it is an undeniable divine vow [24].

In this regard, God states: “If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor] [25]; Since a true appreciation is being grateful to the endower in mind and practice and employing the God’s blessing in the way he has ordered, God blesses those who use the endowments in a proper way, with more graciousness and kindness. Ala’ibn Kamel says: I asked imam Kazem (PBU), “God has endowed me what I hadn’t expected and I do not know why I have received them.” He replied, “Do you not know that these are the outcome of appreciation?” [26].

Forgiveness

Forgiveness and mercies are demanded both in positive psychology and the Quran. In the following section, the perspectives of both schools of thought will be briefly explained.

1-3- Forgiveness in positive psychology

Everyone’s life is replete with bitter events in which people’s role cannot be ignored. Disloyalties, hostilities, mistrusts, etc. bring about intrapersonal problems. When

remembered, such unfavorable memories cause reactions such as vengeance and retaliation, which in turn deteriorate the situation and increase the mental pressure. Forgiving, forgetting and repressing undesirable memories are some ways to change the aforementioned negative thoughts [27]. It is worth noting that not only is there no specific way to improve the power of forgetting sad memories, every effort to forget a memory also causes the memory to become more of an obsession, which in turn will make forgetting it an impossible task. In this situation, the value of forgiveness stands out, because forgiveness ameliorates the bitter memories and does not make the memories vanish so that they do not haunt you anymore.

Forgiveness is in fact disregarding, excusing and ignoring the wrongdoings and its seriousness. Reviewing the past unfavorable memories diminishes the feeling of dissatisfaction and brings happiness with it. Although there is no vengeance in forgiving someone, it helps to free us from the things that haunt our body and minds. Rage, hatred and resentment cause mental pressure in people while forgiving not only removes this feeling but also it fosters the relationships. Forgiveness is a prerequisite for not being arrogant; the act of a person who tries to understand the wrongdoer and looks at the event from a different angle.

Morally mature people (people with high level of moral understanding) can more readily forgive others. This characteristic shows itself more clearly as one gets older [28]. Forgiveness positively influences the improvement of physical health, especially of the heart and veins, enhances mental health and reduces the rate of crime [29].

Here is a look at Seligman's forgiveness strategies:

The first step in forgiveness is for the forgiver to look at the transgressor not as a villain and not to let the pity surge through him.

The second step is empathizing and sympathizing with the wrongdoer i.e. looking at the incident and the reasons of the action from his point of view [30].

The third step is donating an altruistic gift; i.e. the person himself has done something wrong and has violated others' right and now he had better make others happy by this gift.

The last step is holding onto one's vow. The person must not forget that he has forgiven the wrongdoer and should not look vengefully at the past bitter memories [31].

2-3- forgiveness in the Quran

Looking quickly at the Quran, one can see that the word "Afuw" [32] is repeatedly cited, which indicates the paramount importance of the issue for both God and the humans. The word «Afuw» literally means

elimination and erasure and figuratively means «not punishing or not imposing penalty and erasing the sin» [33]. God declares: «For these there is hope that Allah will forgive them, and Allah is Ever Oft Pardoning, Oft-Forgiving» [34]. In this verse, God calls himself «Afuw». It's in Exaggeration form, in syllabic rhythm with fa'oul, which means forgiver or a person who ignores many of people's sins [35]. Prophet Mohammad (PBU) says, «God is forgiver (does Afuw) and loves forgiving» [36]. After calling himself a forgiver, God invites his prophet to ignore peoples' sins: «Show forgiveness, enjoin what is good, and turn away from the foolish» [37] (akhdh) to something means accompanying something and not leaving it; therefore «Khudh al-'Afw», means "always forget people's misdeeds and ignore your right to take vengeance and never stop doing that" [38]. Declaring that he overlooks many of his servants' misdeeds and his prophet also must do the same, God in fact urges people to forgive other sins. While an evil act can be retaliated by another misdeed, God considers forgiving peoples' wrongdoing to be a more becoming reaction and asks his servants to turn a blind eye to the others' sins and then receive God's blessings:

«The recompense for an evil is an evil like thereof, but whoever forgives and reconciles, is rewarded by Allah. Verily, He

likes not the *Zalimun* oppressors, polytheists, and wrong-doers» [39]. God promises the best rewards to those who forgive and states that just as you need to be forgiven when you commit a sin, close your eyes to others' misdeeds, so that I overlook your sins, which would have had much more severe punishments than you would imagine. And this is an unavoidable divine vow.

And somewhere else he states: «O you who have believed, indeed, among your wives and your children are enemies to you, so beware of them. But if you pardon and overlook and forgive - then indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful» [40]. Besides "Afuw" God in this verse uses the word "safh" to state that we should not even blame others for their wrongdoings [41] because sometimes we forgive others but we also blame them for what they have done.

He also (states): «Whether you (mankind) disclose (by good words of thanks) a good deed (done to you in the form of a favor by someone), or conceal it, or pardon an evil, ... verily, Allah is Ever Oft-Pardoning, All-Powerful» [42]. The word "Afū" In the sentence "'Aw ta'fū 'an sū'in" means to conceal something. Thus "'fū 'an sū'in" means concealing a wrongdoing and it is performed in two ways: verbally i.e. not disclosing the name of the offender and not disgracing them; and in practice, namely not

avenging an evil act even though it's ethically acceptable [43]. In this verse, God points out the true forgiveness which is forgiving someone while we have the power to take vengeance. In other words, mentioning the word "Qadīran" God indicates that although he has the power to punish, he forgives in order to teach the pious people to overlook other's misdeeds while they have the power to take vengeance [44]. Imam Ali (PBUH) says: «There is nothing better than a man in power forgiving others» [45]. It must be noted that in the case of social crime i.e. either the society, religion or when an Islamic country is under invasion, there is no room for forgiveness or overlooking and all peoples' interest must be taken into account [46]. It is worth saying that when a misdeed is responded to with another misdeed, the hostility and hatred between the two sides may even flare while through ignoring other's offences hostility turns into friendship and hearts get filled with happiness. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) says: «Forgive each other to erase the grudges» [47].

Due to forgiving others while having the power to punish them; merciful people enjoy respect and admiration expressed by others. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) also says: «may you forgive; since showing mercy increases your dignity; so forgive so

that God honors you» [48]. In this verse, forgiveness has been considered as the conditions of one's honor and it suggests that through forgiveness, God honors people and this is an unavoidable divine vow. 4. A comparison of appreciation and forgiveness from positive psychology and the Quran perspectives. Thus far we have been exploring positive psychology and the Quran viewpoints concerning appreciation and forgiveness. Now to accurately assess the issue in question, it is required to outline the similarities and differences of what was obtained from these two schools.

4.1. Similarities

There seems to be some similarities between positive psychology and the Quran which will be noted in the following.

- A. According to both positive psychology and the Quran, forgiving causes positive emotions, which in turn change bad feelings into satisfaction.
- B. Both schools demand the remembrance of God's gifts and endowments by people to sharpen the sense of forgiveness. Positive psychology, like the Quran, asks people to bear in mind what causes the sense of appreciation.
- C. Forgiveness is among the strategies outlined by these two schools to find fulfillment. Forgiving alleviates bad memories of the past and makes it easier for one to stop feeling angry with

someone who has done something to harm, annoy or upset you.

4.2. Differences

In what follows there are some of the contrasts viewed in positive psychology and the Quran to appreciation and forgiveness.

A. In positive psychology, the reason behind the acts of appreciation and forgiveness is what these actions yield for the doer not for the sake of others. In other words, this leads to a form of selfishness. In contrast, directing people towards God, the Quran demands people to undertake actions of appreciation and forgiveness for the sake of God. This not only precludes people from negative repercussions of selfishness, but also makes people perfect their actions, because they consider God omnipresent and the observer of their innermost and outermost wishes and actions. Consequently, they both improve the external appearance of their actions, and choose the best intentions for their actions.

B. Employing models and promises in internalizing such suitable behaviors as appreciation and forgiveness, the Quran tries to provide people with enduring happiness and positive life. But positive psychology, through offering some advantages which often conceal the reality, attempts to make do with

superficial levels and encourages people to live a good life. It is clear that this strategy would not be as effective as the Quran's.

C. Offering some steps through which one can ignore other wrongdoings, positive psychology makes an effort to pave the way for forgiving easily. In the Quran's instructions there is no word of forgiving steps or procedures. The Quran asks us to forgive others, for when it comes time for judgment day, we can benefit from his instantaneous forgiveness, which is remarkably effective compared with secular forgiveness.

CONCLUSION

The Quran and positive psychology value appreciation and forgiving others' wrongdoings. In these schools all humans are required to help themselves with these values to have a happy life. Having been investigated, the positive psychology and the Quran's perspectives concerning appreciation and forgiveness, it was clearly characterized that in order to internalize these two subjects the Quran has always pursued strategies such as promises and indicating its profound and positive consequences. Furthermore, through integrating these two subjects with monotheism and servitude, the Quran asks people to do their deeds for God, which

would result in unifying their acts in a way that people adopt these acts appropriately without external forces, which it in turn would lead to a development of self-control and the final destination of sense of wellbeing. On the contrary, positive psychology suggest that appreciation and forgiveness are human –oriented undertakings rather than God –oriented, which compared with the Quran is less profitable.

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