

The State of Hamd September 12, 2025

al-ḥamdu lillahi alladhī khalaqa l-samāwāti wal-arḍa waja'ala l-ẓulumāti wal-nūr (Surah Al Anam 6:1)

All praise is due to Allah, who has created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the light.

We begin our prayers with Surah Al-Fatiha, a pillar of the prayer's validity. As the opening of the Qur'an, it begins with the verse, 'Alhamdulillah Rabbil 'Alamin: all praise is due to Allah. Praising Allah is the key to prayer, to the heart, and to a life lived in the light of faith. Allah is absolutely self-sufficient; He needs nothing from His creation and certainly He does not need our praise. The reason that praising Him in every prayer is obligatory, then, is that our praise and worship are for our own benefit. In this way, worship truly benefits the worshiper. The Prophet Muhammad (saws) said that, "La ilaha illallah" (There is no deity but Allah) is the best form of remembrance, and "Alhamdulillah" (All praise is due to Allah) is the best supplication. This highlights the profound significance of praising the Lord in every circumstance. How does praising Allah benefit us, in particular, here in this world?

Praising Allah not only with words but with our hearts connects us with our purpose, and changes the way we perceive the world around us. So Hamd is not merely a verbal expression or gesture. It is a state of the heart that recognizes, praises, and glorifies Allah for His perfect attributes and benevolent actions. Our inner state directly influences how we perceive and talk about the world around us. The way we speak shapes the way we see, and the way we see shapes the way we speak. One cannot praise while having constant negative thoughts about life and creation, and one cannot see and talk about beauty when the heart abandons the state of hamd.

The Prophet Muhammad (saws) never once criticized or belittled any blessing, whether it was a morsel of food, an overcooked piece of bread, or a garment he received as a gift. He was simply grateful and never pointed out a flaw; this was the constant state of his heart. He extended this same wisdom to relationships, advising men, "Let not a believing man despise a believing woman," and urging them to focus on their wives' virtues rather than their imperfections. Likewise, he warned women against ingratitude, cautioning them not to dismiss a husband's lifetime of good deeds with a single mistake by saying, "I never saw anything good from you." This is a spiritual disease that afflicts both genders: a failure to appreciate the blessings of Allah.

It causes us to belittle the good qualities and actions in another person, focusing instead on their faults and shortcomings.

There is a key difference between shukr (thankfulness) and hamd (praise). We express shukr when we receive a specific, exclusive blessing. It is a feeling of gratitude directed at the giver, particularly for an unexpected gift. However, we do not always feel thankful for blessings that are not exclusively for us. In this sense, our thankfulness is often conditional, dependent on a tangible gift we have received and liked. It is the gift itself, rather than a state of the heart, that triggers the gratitude. This is what we call shukr. Shukr is a response to good deeds or blessings from a benefactor. We express our thankfulness through our actions, feeling contentment and using the gift the way that pleases the giver. Recognizing the blessings and being thankful for them is what Allah expects from believers. In Surah Ibrahim (14:7), Allah says: "If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in favor]; but if you deny, indeed, My punishment is severe." Rasulallah (saws) said: "A small amount of wealth for which you can give thanks is better than a large amount of wealth for which you cannot."

In comparison to thankfulness or shukr, hamd is a more comprehensive, universal form of praise and adoration that goes beyond simple gratitude for a favor. The praise that is emphasised in hamd is due to Allah alone. Shukr is about thanking Allah for the beauties given to us, while hamd involves remembering Allah indiscriminately in times of pain, hardship, misfortune, or beauty. Hamd means praise and admiration without the praise being conditional upon the gift. It is broader, encompassing worship and glorification, and acknowledging Allah as the only entity worthy of such praise. In this sense, every hamd is also shukr, thankfulness, but every shukr is not hamd, or praise to Allah.

We instinctively say "Alhamdulillah" when we're blessed with things like good health, kind friends, or a new opportunity. But for a believer, the real test of faith is saying "Alhamdulillah" during hardship, loss, and trauma. In these moments of trial, expressing gratitude is not only difficult but also deeply rewarding. By following the example of the Prophet (saws) and praising Allah in both good and bad times, we acknowledge His divine wisdom and mercy, trusting in a plan that we may not fully comprehend.

Allah-u Ta'ala clearly wants us to be in the state of hamd and look at the world with that state. He wants us to keep the state of hamd when we talk, when we look, when we act. There is a powerful connection between the state of our hearts, or inner condition, and how we think and speak about our circumstances, or external reality. If we speak negatively, our hearts will inevitably follow, making it impossible to remain in a state of hamd. This creates a cycle of negativity that shapes our perception of life and our circumstances.

Conversely, a heart in a state of hamd changes our words and action, and by extension, the world around us. Our joy and misery are not always determined by our circumstances, but by our perspective. This is evident when you see two people with the exact same life circumstances; one will praise the good in their life, while the other will speak as if they have the worst life imaginable. Two people, same circumstances, completely different perspectives.

In a hadith, the Prophet Muhammad (saws) said, “As for the blessing of Allah, speak of it, express it.” This means we should internalize praise in every moment, even with every sip of water we drink, and express it by saying, “Alhamdulillah.” He also advised those who have difficulty seeing the blessings around them to “Look to those who have less than you, not to those who have more than you.”

The final part of the hadith is a powerful warning: “Do not belittle the blessings that Allah has bestowed upon you.” This guidance applies to both our perspective and our speech. It reminds us not to use words that diminish a blessing, be it something large or small. Its wisdom extends to our own internal dialogue, our interactions with family and community, and the choice between optimism and pessimism in all aspects of our lives.

Yurdaer Al Latif Al Jerrahi