

# Quranic Solutions for Relief from Greed and Miserliness<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The Quran offers an explanation on how to free oneself from moral vices; it does not only give instructions and rulings but also explains them scientifically and cognitively as well. When the issue of miserliness is mentioned in the Quran as a moral issue, its cognitive and actual effects are also addressed. In the Quran, the term “*bukhl*” (lit. miserliness) does not mean only to avoid using one’s property appropriately but suggests a broader sense, which is to avoid using the blessings God has bestowed on human beings. In this article, the vice of miserliness, its factors and outcomes, and also the ways to be freed from it will be discussed.

**Keywords:** *Moral vices, miserliness, greed, outcomes of miserliness, treatment of miserliness.*

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## Miserliness: a Natural and Social Characteristic

In the Quran, miserliness is not an acquired characteristic; rather, it is a natural and instinctive characteristic of man. Therefore, it can be considered the same as anger or other human characteristics, which are called “inspiration” in the Quran.

Through analyzing a human nature and characteristics, the Quran mentions that a human being is embedded with good and bad attributes. These attributes are scientifically known as natural and instinctive attributes. There are two groups—good and evil—which serve as natural forces in humans. However, to distinguish between them, good attributes in humans are called natural, and bad attributes are called instinctive. But this label is not very common, and therefore all good and bad attributes can be called natural or instinctive interchangeably.<sup>1</sup>

At any rate, in the Quran, *bukhl* is a natural, instinctive attribute and society can only strengthen or weaken its manifestations. This does not mean that these attributes cannot be controlled or subdued by man,

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, man is characterized by various good and bad attributes in the Quran, including stinginess (“and man is very niggardly” [Quran 17:100]). The structure of the verse tells us that this attribute, like some others, is embedded in human nature. By studying these two sets of opposite attributes, we may ask whether the man depicted by the Quran [as having desirable or undesirable traits] is morally good or bad. Why is he highly praised in some verses and blamed so much in other verses? The answer is that due to their dual nature and being composed of the soul and body, human beings naturally possess two groups of characteristics: good characteristics related to the soul and bad ones related to the body. What is important is that having natural imperfections does not in itself earn human beings the wrath of God. They are natural attributes necessary for human beings in this world.

but it means that such modifications in a natural and instinctive aspect are difficult. Therefore, according to the Quran, even with great

opposition, a human being can guide his forces toward good or evil. Human faculties, called in the beginning of surah al-Shams as inspirations to virtues and vices, can be modified and controlled by a human being.

### **Bukhl in the Quran**

Statements and teachings of the Quran for humans give the true knowledge about their position in the world of nature and in creation, and also pave the way to control evil forces and strengthen good forces, ultimately guiding all of them towards perfection.

To explain the attribute of bukhl, the Quran says that this attribute is innate in human soul and he is inclined to behave with miserliness. In verse 128 of chapter Nisa', we read, "The souls are prone to greed" (4:128).

In verse 100 of the chapter Isra', the word "*kana*," which indicates the existence of things, is used to suggest that bukhl is a natural characteristic that exists in human beings: "And man is very niggardly" (17:100). According to this verse, the reason for some bad attributes of human beings should be found in his being niggardly and miserly.

Verse 9 of the chapter Hashr states that human beings are naturally greedy and miserly creatures and that only few try to fight with this natural instinct and control it and protect themselves from its negative effects. Therefore, the Quran says, "Those who are saved from their own greed—it is they who are the felicitous" (64:16).

## Roots of Bukhl

It is said that bukhl is a natural and instinctive human attribute that is rooted in greed, which is another natural and instinctive human attribute. It is greed that causes a human to turn into an insatiable being and inclined to go toward bukhl.

As a driving force for humans, greed has the potential to act positively as well. It can work for the eternal prosperity and perfection; it can take him to the place “within two bows’ length or even nearer” (53:9) and, in the ascent of perfection, take him to meet God. However, it can also be a factor to drag him down to the depths of no return. Thus, this natural instinct can show up in two ways: sometimes as perseverance, taking a human toward perfection, and sometimes showing up as bukhl (greed) and niggardliness.

Greed means a desire towards more. It is a neutral characteristic that can show up in a positive or a negative form. Therefore, when we speak of the roots of bukhl, we refer to the process of its development in humans. The Quran mentions some reasons for its development, the most important of them being one’s ignorance of God’s absolute dominance and richness.

When a human does not comprehend his position and status in creation, it would be possible for him to have an incorrect understanding of himself, of God, and of creation; and the consequence of this misunderstanding can be seen in his thoughts and tendencies.

On the other hand, when a human believes that God is an absolutely rich being, to whom belongs all the creation, he would not show any bukhl and would not fall prey to its ill effects. But if a person has an

imperfect understanding of God, then attributes such as bukhl would show up in his attitude and behavior. Therefore, in Quran 3:180 and 47:37-38, God has mentioned the ignorance about God's absolute dominance and richness as providing the grounds for the development of bukhl in a person, and commands humans to make changes in their understanding so that their tendencies toward this characteristic would be controlled.

### **The Danger of Having an Incorrect Understanding of God's Absolute Richness**

Having an incorrect understanding of God will sometimes lead the person towards arrogance and sometimes towards fear from poverty. A person who does not have the proper understanding of God and His Absolute dominance might think that if he helps others through giving and being charitable, he will become poor. So he increases his bukhl in order not to become poor. In the biographies of some Western artists, it is mentioned that since they were poor in childhood, they became niggardly when they got wealthy, because they always had the fear of poverty. This is why disbelievers always fear poverty and do not want to give out, donate, or help others (Quran 17:98, 100).

The Quran mentions that the reason why some Jews at the time of the Prophet (s) had excessive greed in collecting money and wealth was that they had an incorrect understanding about themselves and God and believed that God's hand was "tied up" and that He could not give. Therefore, they asked other Jews not to help the poor and just hoard money for themselves. God curses those Jews and rejects their belief:

"His hands are wide open: He bestows as He wishes"  
(5:64).

Another root of *bukhl* is the pursuit of richness. Whenever a person sees himself independent of God and thinks that he does not need even God, he will be tangled in *bukhl*.<sup>1</sup> The Quran refers to the essential dependency of humans: “You are the ones who stand in need of Allah” (35:15), and tries to redefine human understanding and show him that he is in need of God. That is why the Quran identifies the ignorant as those suffering from *bukhl* and says that those who find themselves independent of God will be tangled in *bukhl* (92:8).

Arrogance and pride are also among the factors which provide the grounds for the development of *bukhl*. A person who thinks of himself better than others may find himself full of arrogance and self-conceit. Such a person does not feel the need to help others or return the help of others; he will show his arrogance and reject people by showing miserliness (Quran 4:36-37, 57:23-24).

*Qārūn*, a wealthy and stingy person among the people of Moses (a), is a clear example of a person who had an incorrect understanding about himself and God and thought that the wealth he had collected was a product of his own knowledge and abilities. Verses 76 and 78 of surah Qasas (Quran 28) criticize this thought and consider it the main cause of Qarun’s destruction.

### Effects of *Bukhl*

One who is absorbed in *bukhl* almost inadvertently rejects the hereafter as well. He does not believe that in the future all his actions and intentions will be scrutinized (Quran 92:8-9). To warn the miserly, God

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<sup>1</sup> Generosity as opposed to *bukhl* means giving what one has for the sake of God to be rewarded by Him, but if one sees himself independent of God, he becomes stingy and doesn’t give anything for the sake of God.

sometimes inflicts hardship on them so that they give up their bad manners (92:8-10).

In the Quran, *bukhl* is introduced as a cause of conflict in families (4:128). It is also a cause of ingratitude (4:37), hatred (47:37-38), hypocrisy (9:76-77), and deprivation of God's love (4:36-37).

### **Eradicating BUKHL**

To be free of *bukhl*, the Quran calls mankind to correct their knowledge and understanding, and firmly believe that God is the sole owner of the heavens and the earth (3:180). Thinking of the absolute richness of God (47:38) and one's natural dependence on Him makes human beings rethink their behavior and become generous.

A person who knows that everything belongs to God (Quran 4:37, 39) and that the divine will is what controls the increase or decrease of one's sustenance (17:29, 30) upholds a good understanding of good and evil (3:180; 47:38) and would easily be free of *bukhl*. Therefore, to be rescued from *bukhl* and other such vices, man needs to first acquire a proper understanding of his position and status in creation and learn who he is and in what position he is standing. Only then he will understand that God is the absolute owner of creation, that it is only Him who is absolutely rich and knowledgeable (4:37-40), and that it is only Him who can make a person poor or rich. In this way, a human can make changes in his behavior by altering his attitude and understanding, and therefore controlling the natural attribute of greed and turning *bukhl* to generosity.