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Gratitude (Shukr) as a Factor of Social Stability: A Socio-Philosophical Analysis

Kendjayeva Zumrat Astanovna¹

1. Researcher, Bukhara State Technical University, Bukhara, Uzbekistan

Correspondence: zumratbuxdu@gmail.com

Citation: Astanovna, K. Z. Gratitude (Shukr) as a Factor of Social Stability: A Socio-Philosophical Analysis. Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy, and Culture 2026, 7(2), 530-535.

Received: 4th Feb 2026

Revised: 25th Feb 2026

Accepted: 10th Mar 2026

Published: 31st Mar 2026



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Abstract: The article offers a socio-philosophical analysis of gratitude (shukr) as elaborated in the Sufi tradition of Central Asia and examines its function as a factor of social stability. Shukr is shown to be not a mere feeling of thankfulness but a structured worldview position uniting contentment (qanoat), patience (sabr), satisfaction with one's destiny (rizo), generosity (ehson) and trust in the Creator (tavakkul). On the basis of the classical works of al-Hakim at-Tirmidhi and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, its three-level structure - of the tongue, of the heart and of the limbs - is interpreted as a mechanism translating individual moral experience into social behaviour. A community in which the culture of gratitude is widespread displays higher interpersonal trust and resistance to destructive ideologies, whereas ingratitude (kufron an-ni'ma) breeds discontent and disintegration. The model "gratitude - unity - connection - advancement" is proposed as an instrument of spiritual and educational policy.

Keywords: Gratitude (Shukr), Sufism, Social Stability, Contentment, Patience, Spiritual Immunity, Social Trust, Philosophy of Values, Moral Consciousness

1. Introduction

The question of what holds a society together has never been answered by institutions alone. Laws and administrative mechanisms regulate behaviour, but they do not produce the inner disposition that makes cooperation desirable rather than merely obligatory. Between the legal order and the individual conscience lies a broad field of moral attitudes - trust, contentment, mutual recognition, the readiness to endure difficulty without resentment - which classical Eastern philosophy described with precision and which contemporary social theory is only beginning to formalise under such headings as social capital. Gratitude occupies a special place among them, because it orients the person at once towards the source of the good received and towards the community through which it is mediated.[1]

In the heritage of the Islamic East, and particularly in Sufi teaching, this attitude is conceptualised through the category of shukr. The Arabic term denotes thankfulness and contentment; its plural shukur expresses the multiplicity of acts through which thankfulness is realised, while shukrona denotes the concrete expression of thanks. Already at the level of language the concept contains a movement from an inner state to an outward act, and it is this movement that gives shukr its social dimension: a feeling enclosed in the heart has no social consequence, whereas one that expresses itself in speech and conduct becomes a factor of social life.[2]

The relevance of such a study is determined by an environment in which consumerism, individualism and spiritual emptiness visibly influence young people, so that the inner stability of the person and the spiritual harmony of society become strategic resources. The reforms of New Uzbekistan proceed from this understanding: “bringing up a spiritually mature and harmoniously developed generation, developing education and upbringing, and raising a new person capable of implementing the development strategy in the course of building an enlightened society, is one of the most important tasks of our reforms, whose ultimate goal is to ensure the interests of the human being” [3]. Cultivating gratitude is a condition of such reforms, since a person who does not value what has been achieved will neither defend it nor build upon it.

The aim of the article is to analyse philosophically the content of shukr in Sufi teaching and to substantiate its role in the stabilisation of society: to clarify its essence in the classical sources, to reconstruct its internal structure, to show how an individual moral state is converted into collective social capital, and to formulate practical recommendations.

2. Materials and Methods

The analysis applied the principles of historicity and logicity, which made it possible to trace the concept of shukr from the early Islamic sources to the Naqshbandi tradition and to contemporary interpretations; the systemic approach, which treats gratitude as an element of an interconnected complex of moral categories rather than an isolated virtue; comparative analysis of the interpretations offered by different thinkers; analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction; and the dialectical and synergetic approaches. Primary sources were used in their original and translated editions.[4]

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 The Philosophical Content of Shukr and Its Conceptual Field

In the Sufi sources gratitude is never an isolated emotional reaction. It appears as the organising centre of a whole family of concepts: thankfulness (*minnatdorchilik*), patience and contentment (*sabr-qanoat*), satisfaction with the divine decree (*rizo*), kindness and magnanimity (*mehr-muruvvat*), charity and generosity (*xayr-saxovat*, *ehson*), trust in God (*tavakkul*) and high aspiration (*himmat*). Together they describe a person who recognises that the goods of life are received rather than merely produced, who therefore neither claims them arrogantly nor loses them in despair, and who is free to share them.[5]

Gratitude presupposes a relation of three terms - the recipient, the good received and the giver - and thereby breaks the self-enclosure of the individual subject. Where the consumerist consciousness perceives only the object of enjoyment, the grateful consciousness perceives a relationship: whoever sees a gift where another sees a possession has already acquired the basic cognitive structure of solidarity. Shukr is accordingly not resignation but the removal of the resentment that paralyses effort.

The opposite of gratitude clarifies its nature further. The Qur'anic text states: “Remember when your Lord proclaimed: If you are grateful, I shall surely increase you; but if you are ungrateful, then indeed My punishment is severe” [6]. Read philosophically, this verse formulates a law of the moral economy of the human being. Acknowledged goods are preserved and multiplied because acknowledgement attaches the person to their source; unacknowledged goods are dissipated, since one who takes them for granted neither protects nor renews them. Ingratitude is thus a mechanism of depletion, and when it becomes general it depletes a society's shared possessions - peace, trust, inherited culture.

3.2 The Structure of Gratitude: Tongue, Heart and Limbs

The Table 1. classical tradition gives gratitude a precise internal architecture. Shukr is realised, in the formulation transmitted in the commentary literature, by the heart, the tongue and the bodily members: gratitude of the heart consists in intending good and holding good thoughts towards all living beings; gratitude of the tongue, in expressing

praise and thanks in speech; gratitude of the limbs, in employing the goods received in acts of worship, obedience and benevolence. It thus distributes a single attitude across the three domains of human existence - intention, communication and action - and these are not alternatives: social stability is produced only by the complete circuit, in which inner recognition becomes public acknowledgement and then concrete act.[7]

Table 1. The social consequences of each level are distinct and cumulative.[8]

Level of gratitude	Sphere of realisation	Social effect
Gratitude of the heart	Intention, thought, inner attitude	Removal of envy and resentment; benevolent presumption towards others; psychological stability
Gratitude of the tongue	Speech, praise, acknowledgement	Culture of recognition; positive communicative climate; reduction of complaint-driven discourse
Gratitude of the limbs	Conduct, labour, use of resources	Charity and mutual aid; responsible use of common goods; preservation of heritage

3.3 Al-Hakim at-Tirmidhi: Gratitude as Attachment and Its Opposite as Concealment

One of the earliest and philosophically most rigorous definitions of shukr in the Central Asian tradition belongs to Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ali al-Hakim at-Tirmidhi, who writes in his *Ma'rifat al-asrar*: "The essence of gratitude is the attachment of the heart to the Giver of blessings. Gratitude arises from contentment. Its work is that God Most High has granted you the love of being grateful to Him. The opposite of gratitude is denial and discontent" [9].

Three theses are compressed into this definition. First, gratitude is defined not through emotion but through attachment - a stable relation of the heart to the source of the good rather than a transient response to it; this shifts gratitude from psychology to ontology, since the grateful person has correctly identified the structure of reality in which he stands. Second, gratitude arises from contentment: one cannot be grateful for what one has while refusing the conditions under which one has it. Third, its opposite is designated by a term whose primary meaning is concealment - the concealment of the truth that all blessings come from their true Giver.

This thesis has considerable social force. If ingratitude is a concealment of the real source of what one enjoys, the ungrateful consciousness misdescribes its own situation: it attributes to its own merit what was received, and to injustice what was not received. The first operation produces arrogance and contempt for those who have less, the second envy and resentment of those who have more, and a society in which both become habitual exhibits precisely the phenomena that erode stability - status competition, mutual suspicion, indifference towards the collective effort by which peace was secured.[10]

3.4 Al-Ghazali: Gratitude as the Condition of the Continuity of Blessings

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali develops the theme in an explicitly consequential direction. Classifying the blessings granted to the human being, he distinguishes the blessings of this world - the granting of what is beneficial and the protection from what is harmful - from the blessings of religion, and draws the conclusion that gives his analysis its practical edge: "since the continuation and increase of blessings depend on praise and gratitude, it is necessary not to fall into heedlessness even for a moment in performing this work, which is the cause of the granting of so many blessings and of the attainment of the capital of happiness, and not to be negligent in fulfilling this duty" [11].

Two features merit comment. The first is al-Ghazali's insistence on the protective blessings - the harms that did not occur, the illnesses not contracted, the conflicts that did not break out. Such goods are by nature invisible, and it is characteristic of the ungrateful

consciousness to notice only what is absent and never what has been averted. Peace is the paradigmatic protective good: it is noticed only when it is lost. A philosophy of gratitude is therefore a discipline of attention that makes the invisible conditions of ordinary life visible, and so makes them defensible.

The second feature is the language of capital and of continuous duty. Gratitude is described as an uninterrupted labour rather than an occasional act, and happiness as a capital that this labour accumulates - close to the way contemporary social theory speaks of trust: a resource that exists only in being continuously reproduced and collapses when its reproduction is interrupted.[12]

3.5 The Criterion of Sufficiency and the Psychology of Social Contentment

The tradition also furnishes an unusually concrete criterion of sufficiency. In the hadith transmitted in the Sunan of at-Tirmidhi it is said: "Whoever among you wakes in the morning secure in his family, healthy in his body, and having his food for the day, it is as if the whole world with all that is in it had been gathered for him" [13].

The philosophical content of this saying lies in its redefinition of wealth, measured not by accumulation but by the satisfaction of three elementary conditions - domestic peace, bodily health and the provision of the day - each of which the majority of people in a stable society possess and none of which they can produce alone. The criterion relocates the standard of a successful life from comparison with others to the adequacy of one's own situation. Comparative standards have no upper limit, so that a society evaluating itself comparatively grows discontented even under rising welfare, whereas an internal criterion of sufficiency converts the same prosperity into satisfaction.

Patience is the necessary complement of this disposition, since a gratitude sustainable only in favourable circumstances would be worthless precisely when stability is most needed. When people bear sorrow and separation with patience, retaining the conviction that difficult days are followed by better ones, they arrive at gratitude even in adversity. The social function of this combination is the containment of crisis: communities in which hardship is endured together do not translate it into blame, and it is that translation that converts difficulty into conflict.

3.6 Gratitude, Honest Labour and Tranquillity

The ethics of labour forms a further link in the argument. The grateful person is content with what is lawfully earned; and lawfulness in earning, as G. Navro'zova has demonstrated in her analysis of the heritage of the Seven Saints of Bukhara, is itself the foundation of peace and tranquillity [14]. Gratitude produces contentment; contentment removes the motive for illicit gain; the absence of illicit gain sustains mutual trust; and mutual trust is the practical form in which social peace exists. Where sufficiency is not felt, the sequence runs in reverse, until no legal regulation can restore social peace, since regulation itself depends on the trust it protects.

Baha al-Din Naqshband expressed the gratitude of his own modest life in the well-known quatrain: "Hechi mo neyu hechi mo kam ne, / Az payi hech - hechi mo g'am ne. / Janda bar pusht, pushti go'riston, / Gar bimirem hech motam ne" - "We have nothing, yet we lack nothing; we grieve after nothing. A patched cloak on our back and the graveyard behind us; if we die, there is no mourning" [15]. These lines demonstrate that sufficiency is a state of consciousness rather than a quantity of possessions. In the Naqshbandi tradition of Bukhara, mindfulness of the breath and awareness of the present moment are disciplines of attention that make such gratitude continuous rather than occasional.

3.7 From Individual Virtue to Social Stability

Gratitude functions as a factor of social stability through four distinguishable mechanisms.

First, through its effect on the individual. Daily acknowledgement of the goods one possesses awakens energy and the will to act, protects against despondency and supports psychological resilience. It is thus that the saying transmitted from Abu Hurayra is to be understood: "Be content with what God has given you, and you will be the wealthiest of people" - wealth is redefined as a relation to what one has rather than as its magnitude,

which makes a person independent of the comparative judgements of others and capable of cooperating with them without envy.

Second, through its effect on interpersonal relations. Gratitude presupposes recognition of the other as a source of good, and recognition is the elementary act from which trust is built. Communities with a high density of expressed acknowledgement display greater tolerance, readiness for mutual aid and resistance to the rumours by which conflicts are ignited.

Third, through its effect on the relation between generations. Gratitude is the attitude in which inherited goods - language, cultural heritage, independence, the peace secured by previous generations - are experienced as gifts that carry an obligation. Without it, historical memory becomes a matter of indifference and inherited values cease to be transmitted.

Fourth, through its effect on ideological security. The spiritual emptiness produced by consumerism and the fragmentation of attention is the environment in which destructive ideologies find recruits. Gratitude fills this emptiness with a content that is neither aggressive nor exclusive, and its cultivation therefore strengthens the spiritual immunity of society.

These mechanisms may be condensed into an applied formula: gratitude - unity - connection - advancement. Gratitude forms the inner disposition of the person; a shared gratitude unites people, since those who acknowledge the same goods recognise one another as co-recipients; unity generates connection, the network of practical cooperation; and connection makes advancement possible. In educational practice the formula gives concrete direction to work with young people: not the abstract summons to be grateful, but the cultivation of attention to what has been received.

3.8 A Possible Objection: Gratitude, Critique and the Limits of Contentment

An argument of this kind must confront a serious objection, raised both in European social philosophy and within the Islamic tradition itself. If gratitude disposes people to be satisfied with what they have, does it not disarm legitimate criticism and lend moral support to whatever arrangements happen to exist? On this reading contentment is ideology.

The classical sources themselves supply the means of answering it. Gratitude is defined by al-Hakim at-Tirmidhi as the attachment of the heart to the Giver of blessings, not as approval of every human arrangement through which blessings are distributed. Its object is the good actually received; it says nothing about the good unjustly withheld and contains no principle by which injustice might be reinterpreted as a gift. The tradition's linkage of gratitude to lawful earning cuts in the opposite direction: a person content with what is lawfully his is, by the same disposition, unwilling to accept what is not.

The distinction that resolves the objection is that between contentment and complacency. Contentment concerns the evaluation of what one has, complacency the evaluation of what one does; both appear as the absence of agitation, yet contentment releases energy for action by removing resentment, whereas complacency withdraws it by removing the sense of responsibility. Criticism grounded in resentment tends towards destruction, since its satisfaction lies in the humiliation of its object; criticism grounded in gratitude tends towards reform, since it seeks to protect goods whose value it already acknowledges.

4. Conclusion

Gratitude in Sufi teaching is not an emotional episode but a structured worldview position uniting thankfulness, patience, contentment, satisfaction with destiny, generosity, trust and high aspiration. It possesses a determinate architecture - gratitude of the heart, of the tongue and of the limbs - through which inner recognition becomes public acknowledgement and then beneficial action, and it is this conversion that gives an ostensibly private virtue its social weight. In the definition of al-Hakim at-Tirmidhi gratitude is the attachment of the heart to the Giver of blessings and its opposite the concealment of the true source of the good; in the analysis of al-Ghazali it is the

continuous labour on which the preservation of blessings depends.

Considered socially, gratitude strengthens peace, concord and prosperity because it removes envy at the level of intention, establishes a culture of recognition at the level of communication, produces charity and responsible stewardship at the level of action, and secures the transmission of inherited values between generations. The formula “gratitude - unity - connection – advancement” summarises this movement and may serve as a working model for spiritual and educational policy.

On this basis the following recommendations may be offered. First, the philosophical content of shukr - and not only its devotional aspect - should be incorporated into the curricula of general and higher education as an instrument of psychological resilience and civic responsibility. Secondly, spiritual-enlightenment programmes for young people should be built around the practical cultivation of the three levels of gratitude, with particular attention to the level of action. Thirdly, the media and cultural institutions should develop formats that make visible the protective goods identified by al-Ghazali. Fourthly, further research is desirable on the correlation between the culture of gratitude and such indicators of stability as interpersonal trust and mutual aid.

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