

## Gratitude as Ecological Ethics in Islam: An Ecotheological Reading of the Nyadran Tradition in Temanggung, Indonesia

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### Abstract:

Recent scholarship on religion and environmental sustainability has highlighted the importance of local religious traditions in fostering ecological responsibility. However, studies of the Javanese *Nyadran* tradition have primarily focused on its cultural and ritual dimensions, leaving its ecological and theological significance underexplored. This study examines how the *Nyadran* tradition in Temanggung, Indonesia, embodies ecological ethics through the Islamic concept of gratitude (*shukr*). Drawing on Al-Ghazali's theory of gratitude, which integrates *al-'ilm* (knowledge), *al-hal* (spiritual disposition), and *al-'amal* (ethical action), this research develops an ecotheological interpretation of *Nyadran* and its relationship to environmental stewardship. Using a qualitative approach and cultural hermeneutic analysis, the study interprets the symbolic meanings embedded in *Nyadran Kali* and *Nyadran Makam* through observations, interviews, and local cultural narratives. The findings reveal that *Nyadran* functions not only as a ritual expression of gratitude to God but also as a communal mechanism for cultivating environmental awareness and responsibility. Through practices that honor water sources, agricultural landscapes, and ancestral heritage, local communities express gratitude by preserving the natural environment that sustains their

livelihoods. The study argues that *Nyadran* operationalizes the Islamic principles of *khalifah* (stewardship) and *amanah* (trusteeship), transforming gratitude from an individual spiritual virtue into a collective ecological ethic. By demonstrating how local Islamic traditions contribute to environmental sustainability, this research advances contemporary discussions in Islamic ecotheology and offers a culturally grounded framework for faith-based ecological conservation.

**Keywords:** gratitude, nyadran, Islamic ecotheology, ecological ethics, Al-Ghazali

## A. Introduction

Gratitude (*syukur*) is a fundamental value in Islam that emphasizes the harmonious relationship between God, humans, and nature. The Qur'an explicitly states, "If you are grateful, I will surely increase My favor upon you" (Ibrahim: 7), which implies that gratitude is not confined to verbal expression but must be manifested through spiritual awareness and concrete actions that sustain God's blessings particularly in preserving the natural environment. In Islamic theology, humans are appointed as *khalifah fil-ardh*, vicegerents on earth who bear the divine mandate to nurture and maintain ecological balance. Hence, genuine gratitude requires both spiritual devotion and ecological responsibility, not merely ritualistic observance.

In the ideal condition, Muslim communities are expected to express gratitude for nature's abundance through two inseparable dimensions: the spiritual and the ecological. The spiritual dimension is realized through acknowledgment of Allah's sovereignty as the ultimate provider of sustenance, while the ecological dimension is embodied in responsible behavior toward the environment, using resources wisely and protecting nature as an act of worship. From this ideal standpoint, local traditions rooted in Islamic values can serve as an effective medium to reinforce ecological awareness and strengthen communal spirituality. Ideally, gratitude for natural bounty should inspire greater piety, social solidarity, and environmental stewardship among believers.

As Nor Hasan<sup>1</sup> noted in his study on *Nyadran* in Nganjuk, East Java, which examined the practice from the perspective of the jurisprudence of civilization he concluded that the values embodied in *Nyadran* serve as a vehicle for strengthening social bonds, facilitating the acculturation of Islamic religious

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<sup>1</sup> Hasan, Nor, et All, *Tradition, Social Values, and Fiqh of Civilization: Examining the Nyadran Ritual in Nganjuk, East Java, Indonesia*. (2023). Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam, 7(3), 1778-1802. <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i3.20578>

values, and expressing reverence for the ancestors who played a pivotal role in founding the village of Sono Ageng. In line with this, Fatimah's<sup>2</sup> research focuses more on the sociological aspect, presenting her findings on how *Nyadran* has transformed over time as a social institution that strengthens religious-cultural identity, fosters social cohesion, and ensures the transmission of religious and moral values across generations within a pluralistic society.

However, the real condition in Temanggung society reveals a gradual shift in both meaning and practice. Temanggung, a fertile highland region in Central Java, is well known for its rich agricultural yields such as tobacco, coffee, vegetables, and various cash crops. For generations, communities in various villages in Temanggung have had a tradition called *Nyadran* tradition a collective ritual of thanksgiving and remembrance held after the harvest season. It typically involves prayers, communal meals, *tahlil* recitations, and symbolic offerings of agricultural produce at ancestral graves or open fields. Historically, *Nyadran* functioned not only as a cultural expression of gratitude to God but also as a means of strengthening social cohesion among villagers.

In recent decades, however, modernization, urban migration, and shifting religious perceptions have altered the spiritual meaning of *Nyadran*. In many villages, the ritual has become increasingly ceremonial and festive, focusing more on social and entertainment aspects rather than on its theological essence. Younger generations often regard it merely as an annual cultural event, detached from its deeper religious and ecological significance. Conversely, some *puritan* religious groups reject the practice altogether, labeling it as *bid'ah* or syncretic. This dual tendency between cultural formalism and religious exclusivism has created a tension that threatens the continuity of *Nyadran* as a spiritually meaningful tradition.

At the same time, ecological awareness among local farmers remains relatively low. Nature is often perceived primarily as an economic resource rather than a sacred trust from God. Over-cultivation of land, excessive use of chemical fertilizers, and environmental degradation reflect that gratitude toward nature's bounty has not been fully internalized as ecological responsibility. These conditions reveal a crucial need to reinterpret the meaning of *syukur* beyond ritual expression toward a theology that integrates faith, ethics, and environmental consciousness.

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<sup>2</sup> Fatimah, et all, *Acculturation of Islamic Teachings and Local Customs: A Sociological Study on the Nyadran Tradition in Java*. (2025). SMART: Journal of Sharia, Traditon, and Modernity, 5(1), 13-24. <https://doi.org/10.24042/f16gp058>

In this context, reinterpreting the value of gratitude within the *Nyadran* tradition becomes essential. *Nyadran* should not merely be viewed as a customary ritual but as a religious-ecological medium that embodies the Islamic principle of *tawhid* recognizing the unity of all creation under divine order. Through the perspective of Islamic ecotheology, gratitude can be understood as an awareness of human interdependence with nature as part of God's signs (*ayatullah*). Proper reinterpretation of *Nyadran* therefore has the potential to serve as a form of ecological *da'wah*, teaching that caring for nature is a genuine expression of gratitude and worship.

This study seeks to explore how the people of Temanggung express their gratitude through the *Nyadran* tradition and how these expressions can be reinterpreted within the framework of Islamic ecotheology. Such an exploration is significant not only for preserving religiously inspired local wisdom but also for developing a new paradigm in which Islam and local culture collaborate to form a sustainable ecological ethic. In this way, the *Nyadran* tradition can be recognized as a tangible manifestation of *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin* Islam as a mercy to all creation integrating spirituality, culture, and environmental preservation in harmonious balance.

## **B. Research Methods**

This study employs a qualitative research approach using cultural hermeneutic analysis. The choice of this method is based on the understanding that the *Nyadran* tradition of the Temanggung community is not merely a social practice, but also a system of meaning that embodies deep religious and cultural values. Therefore, this research aims not only to describe the *Nyadran* ritual as a social phenomenon but also to interpret the spiritual and ecological meanings embedded within it. In qualitative inquiry, the researcher functions as the primary instrument in exploring the phenomenon within its natural setting, because social meanings cannot be separated from the cultural context in which they emerge.<sup>3</sup>

Methodologically, this study is interpretative qualitative research, in which the researcher seeks to uncover symbolic and theological meanings through the lens of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, in this context, is understood as the art of understanding and interpreting meaning beyond the surface of texts and human actions<sup>4</sup>. The cultural hermeneutic approach allows the researcher to engage in a dialogue between *cultural texts* such as rituals, prayers, symbols of agricultural

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<sup>3</sup> Moleong, L. J. (2018). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. PT Remaja Rosdakarya, hlm. 11

<sup>4</sup> Ricoeur, P. (1976). *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Texas Christian University Press, hlm. 79

products, and social practices and *Islamic theological texts* concerning *syukur* (gratitude), *tawhid* (unity of God), and human responsibility as *khalifah fil-ardh* (steward of the earth).

The study was conducted in several villages in Temanggung Regency, such as Kedu, Lempuyang, and Pringsurat, where the *Nyadran* tradition continues to be practiced across generations. The local community, which is predominantly Muslim and agrarian, still maintains strong cultural bonds and collective rituals. The research subjects include religious leaders, community elders, *Nyadran* organizers, and local participants involved in the event. Data collection techniques consisted of participant observation, where the researcher directly observed the ritual performances, symbols, and social interactions during *Nyadran*;<sup>5</sup> in-depth interviews with community and religious figures to explore their perceptions of gratitude and religious meaning; and documentation, including photographs, videos, and written prayers used in the ritual.

Data were analyzed through cultural hermeneutic interpretation, which involves three main stages. (1). *The first stage* is phenomenological description (pre-understanding), where the researcher objectively describes the observed phenomena of *Nyadran* without judgment or theological imposition, aiming to grasp the *initial horizon of meaning* embedded in the community's consciousness<sup>6</sup>. (2). *The second stage* is interpretation of meaning (the hermeneutic circle), a dialogical process between the parts and the whole, between cultural expressions and Islamic teachings. In this stage, the researcher interprets *syukur* in the context of *Nyadran* as a form of lived spirituality rooted in Islamic values but expressed through local cultural forms<sup>7</sup>. (3). *The third stage* is reconstruction of meaning (cultural reinterpretation), where the researcher formulates *syukur* as both an ecological and spiritual awareness that reinforces the harmonious relationship between human beings, nature, and God<sup>8</sup> (Clifford Geertz, 1973).

Thus, the cultural hermeneutic method in this study serves as a bridge between Islamic religious texts and local cultural practices. Through this approach, the value of *syukur* can be reinterpreted not merely as verbal expression toward God

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<sup>5</sup> Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant Observation*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, hlm. 130

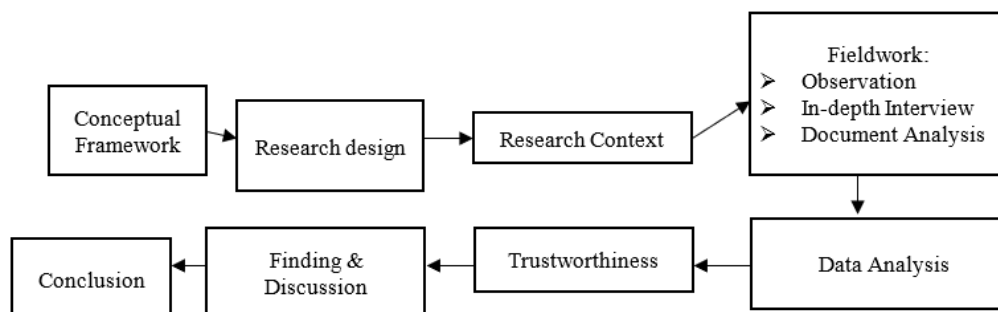
<sup>6</sup> Gadamer, H.-G. (2004). *Truth and Method* (2nd rev. ed., J. Weinsheimer & D. G. Marshall, Trans.). Continuum, hlm. 278

<sup>7</sup> *Opcit*, Ricoeur hlm. 145

<sup>8</sup> Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. Basic Books, hlm. 5

but as an ecological consciousness that affirms human responsibility to preserve nature as a concrete manifestation of gratitude to the Creator.

Figure: 1 Research flowchart



## C. Findings

### 1. *Nyadran*: An Environmental Awareness Practice by Temanggung Residents

The *Nyadran* ceremony in Temanggung is generally held on Friday *Pahing* in the month of *Ruwah* (*Sha'ban*), a few weeks before *Ramadan*. This timing is understood as a spiritual moment for *resik batin lan resik panggonan* (cleansing the soul and living space), as well as preparing oneself physically and spiritually before entering the holy month. *Nyadran* is not seen as a mere ceremonial ritual, but as tangible evidence of the religious and social cycle of village life that has been passed down from generation to generation.

The initial stage of *Nyadran* in Temanggung is marked by mass community service activities that begin on Friday *Kliwon* several weeks before the peak of the event, involving all elements of the village community. According to sources<sup>9</sup>, residents work together to clean the graves of their ancestors, the roads leading to the graves, and the surrounding environment, such as yards, waterways, and nearby rice fields. This activity is understood as a tangible expression of concern for environmental cleanliness as well as a sign of respect for the ancestors who have gone before us to preserve the earth's heritage that they have cared for. Religious leaders emphasize that the cleaning of graves is not meant to be mystical, but rather a symbol of moral responsibility for our shared living space. In general, *Nyadran* here can be

<sup>9</sup> Wawancara tokoh pemuda (Indra Pradista) Dusun Larangan Desa Laranganluwok Kecamatan Bejen Kab. Temanggung

grouped into two different activities. The first is *Nyadran Kali* (water), which is a *Nyadran* activity carried out to maintain (clean, smoothen, tidy up) several water sources in or crossing the village area, such as water for drinking, water for cleaning clothes, and water for irrigation or agriculture. The second is *Nyadran Makam*, which is a *Nyadran* activity to clean the cemetery environment, from the road to the village cemetery. After the preparations for the cleaning activities were completed, during the *Nyadran Kali* procession, the community carried a parade of *gunungan* made from the earth's harvest to a water source to perform *Slametan*, which is the highlight of the event with a communal prayer to God for safety, security, and blessings so that the earth would provide an abundant harvest, and it was concluded with a communal meal with all the villagers. Meanwhile, the *Nyadran Makam* activity begins with a joint pilgrimage to the graves of the village ancestors. This procession is led by religious leaders or village elders. The series of activities includes reciting *tahlil*, praying for the souls of the deceased, and asking for forgiveness from Allah SWT for the ancestors. The source emphasized that the prayers recited are entirely Islamic in nature, with the main intention of asking for Allah's mercy and reminding the community of the transience of life. In this context, *Nyadran* serves as a means of strengthening spiritual awareness and ethical reflection on the relationship between humans, God, and nature. The next stage is a *slametan* or *kenduri* communal feast held in the tomb area or village hall. The food brought by residents, such as *tumpeng*, blessed rice, and local produce, is interpreted as a symbol of gratitude for the sustenance provided by Allah through the fertile land and nature of Temanggung. According to religious leaders, eating together is not just a social tradition, but a means of strengthening *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and symbolically redistributing sustenance so that it can be enjoyed fairly by all residents.

Figure: 2 The *Nyadran Kali* procession to the nearest water source in Larangan Village<sup>10</sup>



Figure: 3 The *Nyadran Makam* procession from the gravesite to the public cemetery in the Magelang area<sup>11</sup>



After the main *Nyadran* procession, which is a *slametan* ceremony at the village water source and cemetery, the mosque or community gathering is completed. With the passage of time, the people of Temanggung have developed activities from sacred ritual spaces to more open socio-cultural spaces. This transition is marked by the emergence of traditional entertainment activities, especially kuda lumping or jaranan art, as part of the *Nyadran* celebration. The community understands this addition not as a reduction in the sacredness of the ritual, but as an expansion of the meaning

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<sup>10</sup> Dikumentasi acara *Nyadran Kali* di wilayah Larangan Temanggung

<sup>11</sup> <https://news.detik.com/foto-news/d-5529128/sambut-ramadhan-warga-megelang-nyadran>, akses 5 Januari 2026

of collective gratitude in the form of cultural expression. According to the younger generation and village elders<sup>12</sup>, the involvement of *kuda lumping/jaranan* in the *Nyadran* series is a response to the dynamics of modernization and social change in rural communities. Amidst the penetration of modern entertainment and the declining interest of the younger generation in traditional rituals and culture, *jaranan* art is positioned as a cultural medium to maintain the continuity of *Nyadran*. Thus, *kuda lumping* serves as a means of tradition regeneration, attracting the participation of the younger generation to remain involved in traditional celebrations and the values that accompany them.

The *kuda lumping* activity also has great potential to expand the function of *Nyadran* as a space for social cohesion. Residents from various backgrounds, including children, youth, and the elderly, gather to watch the performance. This interaction strengthens social bonds, renews relationships between residents, and creates a space for intergenerational dialogue. In this context, *Nyadran* is not only a spiritual ritual, but also a communal recreational arena that strengthens the social solidarity of the village. Although horse dancing in some Javanese contexts is often associated with elements of trance, the results of the interviews<sup>13</sup> show that in Temanggung there are cultural and religious adjustments and controls. Religious leaders play an active role in ensuring that the performances focus on art and entertainment, and avoid practices that are considered contrary to Islamic values. This shows that there is an ongoing process of negotiation between Islamic religiosity and local cultural expression in order to maintain a balance between tradition and belief.

The addition of *kuda lumping* to the *Nyadran* ceremony can be understood as an adaptive strategy of local traditions towards modernization. Instead of being abandoned, *Nyadran* has expanded its meaning to remain relevant to the social needs of contemporary society. From this perspective, *jaranan* art serves as a means of preserving cultural identity and tradition in order to perpetuate the values of gratitude, togetherness, and respect for nature, albeit in a more popular and communicative form of expression.

Figure: 3 *Kuda Lumping* art in the *Nyadran* procession in Temanggung<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Wawancara bersama tokoh pemuda (Wiwid Suprayogi) Desa Larangan

<sup>13</sup> Wawancara bersama mbah Gendon tokoh budaya *kuda lumping* Desa Larangan

<sup>14</sup> Dokumentasi acara *Nyadran* di Wilayah Bejen Temanggung



The interview results<sup>15</sup> show that the people of Temanggung interpret *Nyadran* as a moment to maintain harmony among fellow human beings and with nature. Prohibitions against damaging the environment, protecting springs, and littering are often conveyed verbally by religious leaders during *Nyadran*. Thus, this ritual becomes a means of transmitting environmental ethics culturally and religiously, without having to go through a formal or instructional approach. Religious leaders emphasize that *Nyadran* does not conflict with Islamic teachings as long as it is intended as a prayer, charity, and gratitude to Allah SWT. *Nyadran* is understood as an effective form of cultural da'wah, because the values of *tawhid*, *amanah*, and social concern are conveyed through traditions that are alive in the community. In this context, *Nyadran* serves as a bridge between normative Islamic teachings and the local wisdom of the Temanggung community.

## D. Discussion

### 1. Gratitude as the Foundation of an Alternative Ecological Ethics to Anthropocentrism

Gratitude is explained by Al Ghazali<sup>16</sup>:

أن الشكر من جملة مقامات السالكين، وهو أيضاً ينتظم من علم وحال وعمل، فالعلم هو الأصل فيورث الحال والحال يورث العمل. فأما العلم فهو معرفة النعمة من المنعم، والحال هو الفرح الحاصل بإنعامه، والعمل هو القيام بما هو مقصود المنعم ومحبو به. ويتعلق ذلك العمل بالقلب وبالحواس وباللسان

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<sup>15</sup> Tokoh Masyarakat Dusun Larangan Desa Laranganluwok Kecamatan Bejen Kab. Temanggung

<sup>16</sup>Al Ghazali, (2018), *Ihya Ulum Ad-Din*, (Jeddah: Al Haromain), hlm. 85

Meaning: Know that gratitude is one of the stations (*maqamat*) of those who seek God (*salikin*). Gratitude also consists of three elements: knowledge (*ilmu*), state of heart (*hal*), and deeds (*amal*). *Al ilmu* is the foundation, which then gives rise to the state of heart, and the state of heart then gives rise to deeds. What is meant by knowledge is awareness and recognition of the blessings that come from the Giver of Blessings (*Al-Mun'im*). Meanwhile, *hal* is the feeling of joy that arises because of the giving of these blessings. And *Amal* is doing what is the goal and what is loved by the Giver of Blessings. These actions are related to the heart, limbs, and tongue.

Table: 1 *The Concept of Gratitude from Al Ghazali's Perspective*

<i>Al Ilmu</i>	<i>Al Hal</i>	<i>Al Amal</i>
that is, awareness and recognition of the blessings that come from the Giver of Blessings	that is, the joy that arises from receiving such blessings	that is, doing what is the purpose of the blessings that encompass the heart, limbs, and tongue

Gratitude here is defined not merely as a verbal expression, but as an entity composed of three main pillars that are interrelated and mutually supportive, namely *ilmu* (knowledge), *hal* (state of mind), and *amal* (deeds). The dimension of knowledge acts as the foundation (*al-ashl*), where an individual is required to have cognitive awareness in recognizing blessings and their source, namely the Giver (*Al-Mun'im*) Allah SWT. This knowledge then triggers the heart, which is an affective response in the form of deep joy for these blessings. The final stage of this cycle is deeds, which are practical manifestations in line with the purpose and love of the Giver of Blessings, encompassing activities of the heart, speech, and all limbs.

Gratitude in modern psychology is defined as cognitive recognition of the good received and appreciation for the source of that good, which is often outside oneself. This concept is in line with what Al Ghazali said about the elements of knowledge and things, namely gratitude as a short-term emotion felt after receiving help and gratitude as a personality tendency to recognize and respond emotionally to the role of other people's kindness in the positive experiences obtained.<sup>17</sup> A neuroscience study conducted by Kini et al. using

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<sup>17</sup> Jans-Beken, L., Jacobs, N., Janssens, M., Peeters, S., Reijnders, J., Lechner, L., & Lataster, J. (2021). Gratitude and health: An updated review. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 16(6), 743-762

fMRI scanning shows that expressions of gratitude activate the medial prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain associated with learning, moral decision-making, and the reward system. This explains why gratitude has a positive addictive effect on mental health.<sup>18</sup> In interpersonal relationships, Algoe emphasizes that gratitude serves to find good people, remind us of the importance of these relationships, and strengthen social bonds through positive reciprocal behavior.<sup>19</sup> This is in line with the concept of charity involving interaction with others, as previously conveyed by Al Ghazali.

Imam al Ghazali, in his other work, *Mukasyafatul Qulub*<sup>20</sup>, places gratitude as a spiritual maqam that is inseparable from dhikr and awareness of tawhid, as mentioned in surat al Baqarah 152:

فَادْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ ﴿١٥٢﴾

Meaning: so remember Me, and I will remember you. Be grateful to Me and do not deny Me.

Gratitude is understood as a human existential response to God's unlimited blessings, so that in the Qur'an it is always associated with the command to remember God. Al Ghazali emphasizes that *zikir* is the foundation of inner awareness, while gratitude is the ethical manifestation of that awareness. Therefore, gratitude is not merely a verbal expression, but a way of life that reflects a total acknowledgment that all blessings come from Allah and must be used according to His will. In this framework, gratitude becomes an authentic indicator of faith and a barrier to punishment, as Allah affirms that there is no reason for Him to punish servants who are faithful and grateful, as mentioned in Surah An-Nisa verse 137:

مَا يَفْعَلُ اللَّهُ بِعَدَابِكُمْ إِنْ شَكَرْتُمْ وَأَمِنْتُمْ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ شَاكِرًا عَلِيمًا ﴿١٤٧﴾

This means: Allah will not punish you if you are grateful and faithful. Allah is Most Grateful and All-Knowing.

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<sup>18</sup> Kini, P., Wong, J., McInnis, S., Gabana, N., & Brown, J. W. (2021). The effects of gratitude expression on neural activity. *NeuroImage*, 223, 117-128

<sup>19</sup> Algoe, S. B. (2021). The find-remind-and-bind theory of gratitude: An update. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 43, 112-117

<sup>20</sup> Al Ghazali, (2005), *Mukasyafatul Qulub Al Muqorob ila hadhroti 'Alamil Ghuyub fi Ilmi At Tashowwuf*, (Jeddah: Al Haromain), hlm. 153

Al Ghazali<sup>21</sup> also emphasizes that gratitude is a difficult spiritual path that only a few people take. Referring to the Qur'an's statement about Satan's oath to lead humans astray from the path of gratitude, al Ghazali explains that the essence of Satan's temptation is not to take away blessings, but to cloud human awareness of the source of those blessings. As a result, humans enjoy Allah's gifts without humility and responsibility, so that blessings become a cause of arrogance and negligence. In this context, gratitude requires spiritual maturity because it requires humans to subdue their ego, accept their limitations, and acknowledge their absolute dependence on Allah. Therefore, the Qur'an emphasizes that only a few of Allah's servants are truly grateful

Al Ghazali then discusses Surah Ibrahim verse 7 as follows:

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكُمْ لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ وَلَئِن كَفَرْتُمْ إِنَّ عَذَابِي لَشَدِيدٌ ﴿٧﴾

Meaning: (Remember) When your Lord proclaimed, "Indeed, if you are grateful, I will surely increase (My blessings) for you, but if you deny (My blessings), indeed My punishment is severe.

In this verse, gratitude has a direct implication on the increase of blessings, as promised by Allah that gratitude will bring additional blessings. However, the increase in blessings is not merely understood in material and quantitative terms, but also in qualitative and spiritual terms. Blessings accompanied by gratitude give birth to blessings, inner peace, and closeness to Allah, while blessings without gratitude have the potential to become a source of moral destruction. Thus, gratitude functions as a mechanism for transforming worldly blessings into a means of approaching Allah and purifying the soul.

Al Ghazali deepens the meaning of gratitude by presenting the example of the Prophet Muhammad through the account of *Ummul Mukminin* 'Aisyah ra.

وروي عن عطاء أنه قال دخلت على عائشة رضي الله عنها فقلت أخبرينا بأعجب ما رأيت من رسول الله ﷺ فبكت وقالت وأي شأنه لم يكن عجبا أتاني ليلة فدخل معي في فراشي أو قالت في لحافي حتى

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<sup>21</sup> *Opcit* Ihya Ulum Ad Din, hlm. 86

مس جلدي جلده ثم قال يا ابنة أبي بكر ذريني أتعبد لربي قالت قلت أني أحب قربك لكني أوثر هواك فأذنت له فقام إلى قرية ماء فتوضأ فلم يكثر صب الماء ثم قام فيصلي فبكي حتى سالت دموعه على صدره ثم ركع فبكي ثم سجد فبكي ثم رفع رأسه فبكي فلم يزل كذلك يبكي حتى جاء بلال فأذنه بالصلاة فقلت يا رسول الله ما يبكيك وقد غفر الله ما تقدم من ذنبك وما تأخر قال أفلا أكون عبدا شكورا ولم لا أفعل ذلك وقد أنزل الله تعالى علي ﴿إن في خلق السموات والأرض﴾ الآية [البقرة: ١٦٤] وهذا يدل على أن البكاء ينبغي أن لا ينقطع أبدا

The story describes how the Prophet wept bitterly during night prayers, soaking his beard, chest, and the ground where he prostrated, even though he had been guaranteed forgiveness for his sins. When asked about the reason for his tears, the Prophet replied that he wanted to be a grateful servant. Al-Ghazali<sup>22</sup> uses this story to emphasize that true gratitude does not only come from receiving blessings, but also from a deep awareness of Allah's greatness. The Prophet's tears were not merely tears of fear, but an expression of gratitude, love, and appreciation for Allah's verses, especially his contemplation of the creation of the heavens and the earth. This shows that gratitude at the highest level involves deep spiritual sensitivity and does not stop at physical satisfaction. The human heart will not be free from violence except through tears born of fear and gratitude to Allah. Thus, gratitude is not always expressed in joy, but can also take the form of deep spiritual sadness, which actually shows the life of the heart and the sensitivity of faith. Gratitude is not only related to the heart and tongue, but also to all parts of the body. Gratitude of the eyes is using sight to cover faults and see goodness, gratitude of the ears is guarding hearing from futile and sinful things, while gratitude of the tongue is manifested through praise to Allah and acknowledgment of His blessings. Gratitude for the whole body is manifested by utilizing all physical potential in obedience and benefit. Thus, gratitude becomes a concrete ethical practice with social impact, not merely an individual inner experience.

## 2. The Implications of Gratitude for Social Behavior in the Community

In Al-Ghazali's thought, the concept of gratitude is understood not merely as a verbal expression of praise to God, but as a spiritual framework that

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<sup>22</sup> *Opcit, Mukasyafatul Qulub*, hlm. 155

encompasses the dimensions of knowledge (*al'ilm*), inner experience (*al'hal*), and concrete action (*al'amal*). Al-Ghazali<sup>23</sup> explains that gratitude begins with the intellectual awareness that all blessings originate from Allah and that every element of life is a manifestation of His mercy toward humanity. This awareness gives rise to the perspective that nature is not merely a material object to be freely exploited, but rather a divine trust whose balance must be preserved. In an ecological context, the *al'ilm* dimension fosters a societal awareness that water, soil, forests, plants, and animals possess spiritual value because they are part of the signs of God's greatness. The implications of this awareness are evident in societal behavior, as people begin to view environmental destruction as a form of ingratitude toward Allah's blessings (*kufir al ni'mah*). Therefore, communities possessing a sense of gratitude at the *al'ilm* stage tend to develop ecological behaviors such as protecting springs, avoiding river pollution, refraining from indiscriminate logging, and utilizing natural resources proportionally.<sup>24</sup> In Javanese society, this awareness is often expressed through respect for certain ecological spaces considered sacred, such as customary forests, springs, and agricultural areas, which are treated as part of the cosmic harmony between humans and nature.

In the next stage, gratitude evolves into *al'hal*, a spiritual state that gives rise to a sense of love, awe, and emotional closeness to God through reflection on His creation. According to Al-Ghazali, knowledge of divine blessings is incomplete without an inner transformation that fosters a sense of submission and dependence on Allah.<sup>25</sup> From an environmental humanities perspective, this stage gives rise to what is termed "spiritual ecology" the awareness that humanity's relationship with nature possesses sacred and ethical dimensions. This spiritual awareness fosters ecological behavior rooted in empathy and respect for all living beings. Nature is no longer understood merely as an economic commodity, but as a spiritual space connecting humans with God. The social implications of the *al'hal* stage are evident in the emergence of a collective culture that values environmental balance, such as the traditions of village clean-ups, earth almsgiving, and *Nyadran* practices carried out by Javanese communities as expressions of

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<sup>23</sup> Al Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulum al Din*, Juz IV (2005), Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al 'Ilmiyyah, pg. 86–87

<sup>24</sup> Richard C. Foltz, (2003), *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pg 95–98.

<sup>25</sup> *Opcit*, Al Ghazali, pg 89-90

gratitude for the earth's bounty and respect for the balance of nature.<sup>26</sup> This tradition serves not only as a cultural ritual but also fosters ecological solidarity within the community through collective efforts to clean the environment, maintain ancestral burial grounds, care for water sources, and preserve farmland. Thus, gratitude at the *al ḥal* stage leads to more environmentally friendly social behavior, as the community views nature as an integral part of their spiritual life and cultural identity.

According to Al-Ghazali, the highest stage of gratitude is *al 'amal*, which is the utilization of all of Allah's blessings in the form of concrete actions that are pleasing to Him.<sup>27</sup> At this stage, gratitude does not stop at intellectual awareness and spiritual experience, but is manifested in concrete ecological practices. In an environmental context, gratitude manifests through actions to preserve nature as a form of humanity's stewardship on Earth. The implications of societal behavior toward the environment at this stage are evident in community-based conservation practices, such as reforestation, water source preservation, waste management, sustainable agriculture, and the reduction of excessive exploitation of natural resources. Furthermore, communities that internalize gratitude as *al-'amal* tend to adopt a simple lifestyle, avoid a consumerist culture, and utilize nature wisely for the sustainability of future generations.<sup>28</sup> In Javanese agrarian societies, these actions often take the form of community cooperation in cleaning irrigation channels, customary prohibitions against forest destruction, tree planting around springs, and collective rituals that convey moral messages about the importance of maintaining ecological balance. Thus, Al-Ghazali's concept of gratitude holds strong relevance for the development of a contemporary Islamic eco-theological paradigm, as it fosters a harmonious relationship between humans, God, and the environment through the integration of consciousness, spirituality, and concrete ecological actions.

## E. Conclusion

The *Nyadran* tradition in Temanggung society, as explained above, is a concrete representation of the dialectic between Islamic theology and local wisdom in maintaining ecosystem harmony. Theologically, this practice is in line with the structure of gratitude formulated by Imam Al Ghazali, in which gratitude is seen as a unity between *Al ilmu*, *Al Hal*, and *Al 'Amal*. The dimension of *Al Ilmu* in

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<sup>26</sup> David Abram, (1997), *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, New York: Vintage Books, pg. 267–270

<sup>27</sup> *Opcit*, Al Ghazali, pg. 91

<sup>28</sup> *Opcit*, Foltz, C, pg. 101–103.

*Nyadran* is manifested through the collective awareness that the universe and lineage are blessings that originate absolutely from Allah as *Al-Mun'im*, while the elements of the earth are only instruments or “pens” moved by His will. This *Al Ilmu* then gives rise to *Al Hal*, namely an emotional response in the form of joy and deep respect, which ultimately culminates in *Al 'Amal* or concrete deeds in the form of cleaning graves and protecting the surrounding environment. In this context, *Nyadran* is not merely an eschatological ritual, but an ecological action that positions humans as *khalifah* who have a moral responsibility to protect Allah's trust (*'amanah*) in the form of nature conservation.

Psychologically, the manifestation of gratitude through *Nyadran* is in line with contemporary findings on eco-gratitude. Recent studies show that individuals with a strong orientation towards gratitude tend to have more positive affective relationships with the environment, which then triggers consistent pro-environmental behavior. Collective activities in *Nyadran*, such as caring for burial grounds and sharing agricultural produce, strengthen the social bonds essential for sustainable natural resource management. Through Al Ghazali's lens, preserving nature in the *Nyadran* tradition is seen as a form of servant ethics towards the “intermediary” of blessings; because if someone neglects the preservation of nature, they have indirectly neglected the instrument used by Allah to give them life. Thus, *Nyadran* transforms the concept of gratitude from a mere inner reflection into a progressive public ethic in facing the challenges of the modern environmental crisis.

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