Tafse: Journal of Qur'anic Studies
Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 1-18, January-June 2026
https://jurnal.ar-raniry.ac.id/index.php/tafse
DOI:10.22373/tafse.v11i1.34569

Tawazun as a Qur'anic Ethical Framework for the Limits of Kindness: A *Tahlili* Reading of QS. Al-Qashash [28]: 77 and People Pleasing

[*]Deni Setiawan[1], Halimatussa'diyah[2], Ahmad Syarif Hidayatullah[3]
[1,2,3]Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, Indonesia
[*]Email: *2130304080@radenfatah.ac.id*

Abstract: This study examines QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 to formulate *tawāzun* as a Qur'anic ethical framework for evaluating the limits of kindness in contemporary social relations. It addresses two questions: how does the verse construct an ethical framework of balance, and how can this framework be used to understand *people pleasing*? This qualitative library research employs a *tahlili* approach through linguistic analysis, examination of the narrative context of Qarun, and synthesis of classical and contemporary Qur'anic interpretations. The analysis shows that QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 integrates four ethical elements: orientation toward the hereafter, recognition of one's legitimate share in worldly life, the obligation of *iḥsān*, and the prohibition of *fasād*. Although the term *tawāzun* does not appear explicitly in the verse, it can be inferred as a principle of proportionate ethical ordering among spiritual purpose, personal needs, social responsibility, and moral restraint. The study argues that the verse does not directly address *people pleasing* or provide a psychological diagnosis. Its relevance lies in ethical contextualization. This framework distinguishes responsible kindness from conduct persistently driven by fear of rejection, dependence on external approval, or the neglect of legitimate personal responsibilities.

Keywords: *Tawāzun; People Pleasing; Qs. Al-qashash [28]: 77; Tahlili Interpretation; Qur'anic Ethics*

***

Introduction

The Qur'an regulates the relationship between human beings and God and provides ethical guidance for managing personal and social life in a balanced and proportionate way. Balance serves as a key principle that helps individuals avoid excess in fulfilling spiritual, worldly, and relational needs. Its relevance is increasingly evident in contemporary life, where social interactions, digital media, and pressures of self-presentation often encourage individuals to adjust their behavior in pursuit of social acceptance.[1]

One tendency that may arise in this context is *people pleasing*, used in this study as a descriptive term for a pattern of excessive accommodation in which individuals

[1]Jacqueline Nesi, Sophia Choukas-Bradley, and Mitchell J. Prinstein, "Transformation of Adolescent Peer Relations in the Social Media Context: Part 1—A Theoretical Framework and Application to Dyadic Peer Relationships," *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 21 (2018): 267–294.

repeatedly prioritise others' expectations over personal comfort, needs, or boundaries.[2] This tendency may involve difficulty refusing requests, avoidance of interpersonal conflict, and heightened concern about negative social evaluation. In psychological discussions, such patterns are associated with weak self-boundaries, meaning a reduced ability to distinguish personal needs from external expectations in a healthy way.[3] In certain situations, the desire to maintain acceptance may also relate to interpersonal dependency, where individuals continuously adjust themselves to others' expectations to avoid disapproval or rejection.[4]

Psychological discussions of excessive accommodation commonly draw attention to external validation, fear of negative evaluation, personal boundaries, and relational dependency. These perspectives help identify its behavioral and emotional dimensions. However, they do not always provide a clear normative framework for distinguishing between proportionate kindness, meaningful self-sacrifice, and actions driven mainly by fear of rejection. Helping others or prioritizing their interests is not inherently problematic. The ethical value of such actions depends on motivation, the ability to maintain appropriate boundaries, and their impact on personal well-being and social relationships.[5]

In Qur'anic scholarship, balance is often understood as the proper alignment between worldly life and the hereafter. One verse frequently cited in this discussion is QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77, which instructs believers to seek the hereafter through what God has granted them, to maintain their share of worldly life, to act with kindness, and to avoid corruption on earth.[6] Classical and contemporary interpretations generally view this verse as an ethical foundation for maintaining harmony between spiritual commitment and worldly engagement.[7]

---

[2] David Watson and Ronald Friend, "Measurement of Social-Evaluative Anxiety," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 33, no. 4 (1969): 448–457, https://doi.org/10.1037/h0027806.

[3] Farras Raisa Zalika and Athia Tamyizatun Nisa, "The Relationship between Self Boundaries and People Pleaser Behavior in Islamic Guidance and Counseling Students at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta," *Jurnal Ilmu dan Teknik Dakwah* 12, no. 2 (2024): 15–25, https://jurnal.uin-antasari.ac.id/index.php/alhiwar/article/view/14355.

[4] Robert F. Bornstein and Mary A. Languirand, *Healthy Dependency: Learning on Others Without Losing Yourself* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2003).

[5] Bornstein and Languirand, *Healthy Dependency*; Zalika and Nisa, "The Relationship between Self Boundaries and People Pleaser Behavior."

[6] M. Quraish Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," in *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 10 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 402.

[7] Abdul Malik Abdulkarim Amrullah (Hamka), "Surah Al-Qashash," in *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, vol. 7 (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional PTE LTD, 2019), 5385; Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," 402.

This article does not treat QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 as a verse that directly addresses *people pleasing*. Instead, it explores the relationship between the verse and this contemporary phenomenon through ethical contextualization. The structure of commands and prohibition in the verse is used to examine the limits of appropriate kindness in modern social interactions. The study does not impose a modern psychological category onto the Qur'anic text. It approaches *people pleasing* as a contemporary context that allows for a renewed understanding of Qur'anic ethics related to balance, responsibility, and moral limits.

Discussions of balance, moderation, and proportionate conduct occupy an important place in Islamic ethics. Mohammad Hashim Kamali explains *wasatiyyah* as a Qur'anic orientation that rejects extremity and requires the appropriate ordering of moral commitments in human life.[8] Such discussions provide an important ethical basis for understanding balance in Islam. This study extends ethical discussions of balance in Islam by applying QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 to the contemporary question of how kindness may be distinguished from approval-driven conduct that persistently compromises legitimate personal responsibilities. This study therefore examines QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 as a textual and ethical basis for distinguishing proportionate kindness from conduct that persistently sacrifices legitimate personal responsibilities for social approval.

This study offers a reading of QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 as a Qur'anic ethical foundation for defining the limits of kindness. It does not claim that the verse explicitly formulates self-boundaries in a modern psychological sense. Instead, it presents *tawāzun* as a principle of ethical regulation that connects spiritual orientation, awareness of personal needs, social responsibility, and the avoidance of excess. Acts of kindness are evaluated based on their alignment with individual capacity, responsibility, and their broader impact on personal and relational well-being.

This study examines the construction of *tawāzun* in QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 and its relevance as an ethical framework for understanding *people pleasing*. It uses qualitative library research with a *tahlili* approach (a method of detailed textual analysis). QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 serves as the primary source, while secondary sources include classical and contemporary Qur'anic commentaries, particularly *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr*, *Tafsir*

[8] Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic Principle of Wasatiyyah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsir al-Miṣbāḥ*, *Tafsir al-Munīr*, and *Tafsir al-Azhar*. Arabic lexical sources, especially *Lisān al-'Arab* (a classical Arabic dictionary) and *al-Ma'ānī* (a lexical reference for meanings), are used to analyze key terms in the verse.

The analysis proceeds in four stages. First, it conducts a *lughawī* analysis (linguistic analysis) of the main words and structures in QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77. Second, it examines the verse's *munāsabah* (contextual relationship between verses) by situating it within the narrative about Qarun. Third, it synthesizes classical and contemporary interpretations to identify the ethical structure of *tawāzun* in the verse. Fourth, it develops an ethical contextualization of *people pleasing*. Psychological literature is used only to clarify the characteristics of the phenomenon, not for diagnosis or empirical generalization. Through these stages, the study formulates *tawāzun* as a Qur'anic ethical principle that places acts of kindness within the limits of capacity, responsibility, and *maṣlaḥah* (public benefit or welfare).

Discussion

A *Tahlili* Reading of QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 as an Ethical Foundation

A *tahlili* reading of QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 examines the verse through its linguistic structure, its position within the narrative of Qarun, and the interpretations offered by classical and contemporary exegetes. This approach does not treat the verse as a collection of separate moral instructions. Instead, it reads the commands and prohibition as an integrated ethical structure that guides the use of divine blessings, the recognition of personal needs, social responsibility, and the avoidance of excess.

Linguistic Analysis of QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77

وَابْتَغِ فِيمَا آتَاكَ اللَّهُ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ ۖ وَلَا تَنْسَ نَصِيبَكَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا ۖ وَأَحْسِنْ كَمَا أَحْسَنَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكَ ۖ وَلَا تَبْغِ الْفَسَادَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

"But seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter; and [yet], do not forget your share of the world. And do good as Allah has done good to you. And desire not corruption in the land. Indeed, Allah does not like corrupters."[9]

The verse begins with the command *wabtaghi fīmā ātāka Allāhu al-dār al-ākhirah*—"seek, through that which Allah has given you, the home of the Hereafter." The verb *wabtaghi* derives from the root *b-gh-y*, which denotes seeking, pursuing, or striving

[9] The Qur'an, QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77, Saheeh International translation

for something intentionally.[10] This command indicates an active orientation rather than a passive expectation. The expression *fīmā ātāka Allāh* further clarifies that the gifts granted by God are not ultimate ends in themselves; rather, they function as resources through which human beings are expected to pursue a higher moral and spiritual purpose.

Ibn Kathīr interprets this command as an instruction to use worldly blessings as means for attaining the hereafter, rather than treating them as the final goal of life.[11] A similar interpretation appears in *Tafsir al-Miṣbāḥ*, where Quraish Shihab explains that the verse does not call for the abandonment of worldly life. Instead, it directs human beings to place worldly possessions, capacities, and opportunities within a broader orientation toward the hereafter.[12] Thus, the first part of the verse establishes an ethical direction: worldly resources should be managed in light of an ultimate spiritual purpose.

This instruction is immediately followed by *wa lā tansa naṣībaka min al-dunyā*—"and do not forget your share of the world." The verb *tansa* derives from the root *n-s-y*, which may refer not only to forgetting in the sense of memory loss but also to neglecting or failing to give proper attention to something.[13] The prohibition *lā tansa* therefore indicates that worldly needs should not be ignored. The word *naṣīb* refers to a determined or allotted share.[14] In this context, the verse recognises that human beings possess legitimate worldly needs and responsibilities that must be maintained.

Al-Zuḥaylī explains that this phrase affirms the legitimacy of worldly life as long as it does not displace the orientation toward the hereafter.[15] The verse does not endorse withdrawal from ordinary life, nor does it present the neglect of one's basic needs as an ideal form of piety. Instead, its structure requires a proper ordering between spiritual purpose and worldly responsibility. In this sense, the phrase establishes that ethical life includes attention to one's legitimate share of worldly existence.

---

[10] Al-Maany, "ابتغى," *Al-Maany*, 2025, https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/ابتغى/; Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 1 (Beirut, 1985), https://archive.org/details/01_20210525_20210525_0314/01/page/n67/mode/1up.

[11] Ibn Kathīr, "QS. Al-Qashash," in *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir*, ed. Hartono, vol. 6.3 (Jakarta: Pustaka Imam asy-Syafi'i, 2004), 297.

[12] M. Quraish Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," in *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 10 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 402.

[13] Al-Maany, "تنسى," *Al-Maany*, 2025, https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/نسي/; Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 15 (Beirut, 1985),

[14] Al-Maany, "نصيب," *Al-Maany*, 2025, https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/نصيب/; Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 14 (Beirut, 1985), https://archive.org/details/01_20210525_20210525_0314/14/page/n49/mode/1up.

[15] Wahbah Az-Zuḥaylī, "QS. Al-Qashash: 77," in *Tafsir Al-Munir*, ed. Abdul Hayyie al-Kattani et al., vol. 10 (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2013), 429.

The next command, *wa aḥsin kamā aḥsana Allāhu ilayk*—"and do good as Allah has done good to you"—introduces the social dimension of the verse. The verb *aḥsin* derives from the root *ḥ-s-n*, which refers to goodness, excellence, beauty, and the proper fulfilment of an action.[16] The command does not merely instruct believers to perform isolated acts of generosity. It calls for *iḥsān*, namely conduct marked by moral excellence and responsiveness to the blessings received from God.

Quraish Shihab interprets this phrase as a call to extend goodness to others in response to the goodness that God has bestowed upon human beings.[17] The phrase therefore establishes a relationship between divine beneficence and social responsibility. However, the verse itself does not define *iḥsān* as unlimited self-sacrifice. The command must be read together with the preceding recognition of one's worldly share and the subsequent prohibition of *fasād*. Its ethical meaning emerges from this complete structure rather than from one command in isolation.

The final instruction, *wa lā tabghi al-fasāda fī al-arḍ*—"and desire not corruption in the land"—functions as a moral prohibition. The verb *tabghi*, derived from the same root as *wabtaghi*, indicates seeking or pursuing; however, in this context it refers to pursuing a harmful or wrongful end.[18] The word *fasād* refers broadly to corruption, disorder, damage, or the loss of proper order.[19] Classical exegetes generally associate *fasād* in this verse with wrongdoing, injustice, arrogance, and the misuse of divine blessings in ways that harm others and disrupt social order.[20]

The prohibition against *fasād* should therefore be understood within the immediate Qur'anic context of Qarun's abuse of wealth and social position. It does not imply that every form of personal difficulty or emotional exhaustion automatically constitutes *fasād* in the technical Qur'anic sense. Nevertheless, the prohibition establishes an ethical limit against conduct that destroys proper order, causes harm, or turns divine

[16] Al-Maany, "أحسن," *Al-Maany*, 2025, https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/حسن/; Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 13 (Beirut, 1985), https://archive.org/details/01_20210525_20210525_0314/13/page/n3/mode/1up.

[17] Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," 402.

[18] Al-Maany, "تبغ," *Al-Maany*, 2025, https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/بغي/.

[19] Al-Maany, "الفساد," *Al-Maany*, 2025, https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/الفساد/; Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 1 (Beirut, 1985), https://archive.org/details/01_20210525_20210525_0314/01/page/n67/mode/1up.

[20] Ibn Kathīr, "QS. Al-Qashash," 297; Al-Qurṭubī, "QS. Al-Qashash: 77," in *Tafsir Al-Qurṭubī*, vol. 13, n.d.

blessings into instruments of wrongdoing. This broader moral limit becomes important when the verse is later contextualised in relation to contemporary social conduct.

Taken together, the linguistic structure of QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 reveals four interconnected ethical elements. First, *wabtaghi fīmā ātāka Allāhu al-dār al-ākhirah* establishes the hereafter as the ultimate orientation of human action. Second, *wa lā tansa naṣībaka min al-dunyā* recognises the legitimacy of worldly and personal needs. Third, *wa aḥsin kamā aḥsana Allāhu ilayk* establishes social responsibility through morally excellent action. Fourth, *wa lā tabghi al-fasāda fī al-arḍ* sets a prohibition against excess, injustice, and harmful conduct. The principle of *tawāzun* is not stated explicitly in the verse; rather, it is inferred from the relationship among these commands and prohibition.

The Absence of a Specific Asbāb al-Nuzūl Report

An examination of al-Wāḥidī's *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* does not identify a specific report concerning the occasion of revelation of QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77.[21] The verse appears within the narrative concerning Qarun and functions as part of the moral counsel directed to him by his community. Its interpretation must therefore be grounded primarily in its narrative setting, its relationship with the surrounding verses, and the broader structure of the Qur'anic account.

The absence of a specific *asbāb al-nuzūl* report does not diminish the importance of historical or textual context. Rather, it directs attention to the internal context of the passage. QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 forms part of a sequence that exposes Qarun's distorted understanding of wealth, success, and responsibility. The verse provides moral guidance concerning how blessings should be used before the narrative presents Qarun's rejection of that guidance and the consequences of his arrogance.

Munāsabah and the Narrative Context of Qarun

The *munāsabah* of QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 becomes clear when the verse is read within the narrative sequence beginning with verse 76. Qarun is described as a member of Moses' people who acted arrogantly and oppressed others because of the wealth he possessed.[22] His wealth became a source of pride, superiority, and social domination rather than a means of fulfilling moral responsibility.

[21] Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, trans. Mokrane Guezzou (Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008).

[22] Ibn Kathīr, "QS. Al-Qashash," 297.

Within this narrative, verse 77 represents the ethical counsel offered to Qarun. This counsel does not condemn wealth itself. Rather, it instructs him to direct the blessings he possesses toward the hereafter, to retain his legitimate worldly share, to do good to others, and to avoid corruption. Al-Ṭabarī's interpretation indicates that the verse concerns the responsible use of divine favour and the rejection of conduct that causes harm or injustice.[23] Accordingly, the central problem in the story is not Qarun's ownership of wealth, but his failure to understand wealth as a trust accompanied by moral obligations.

The following verse strengthens this interpretation. In QS. al-Qashash [28]: 78, Qarun rejects the advice given to him and claims that his wealth has been acquired solely through his own knowledge. His response reflects an ethic of self-sufficiency that disconnects material success from gratitude, social responsibility, and divine accountability.[24] The narrative then contrasts the reactions of those who desire Qarun's worldly splendour with those who possess knowledge and recognise the superiority of divine reward.[25]

The conclusion of the narrative, in verses 81–82, demonstrates the consequences of Qarun's arrogance and misuse of wealth. His destruction confirms that material possessions cannot protect a person from the consequences of injustice, pride, and moral disorder.[26] In this sense, QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 functions as the ethical centre of the Qarun narrative. It explains how blessings should be ordered and used, while the surrounding verses illustrate the consequences of rejecting that ethical order.

The *munāsabah* of the passage supports the interpretation that the verse establishes a framework of proportionate moral conduct. The command to seek the hereafter prevents worldly resources from becoming ultimate ends. The recognition of one's worldly share prevents an ethic of self-denial detached from human needs and responsibilities. The command to do good establishes social obligation, while the prohibition of *fasād* limits the misuse of resources and power. These elements form the

[23] Al-Ṭabarī, "QS. Al-Qashash: 77," in *Tafsir Ath-Thabari*, n.d.
[24] Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," 402.
[25] Abdul Malik Abdulkarim Amrullah (Hamka), "Surah Al-Qashash," in *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, vol. 7 (Singapore: Pustaka Nasional PTE LTD, 2019), 5385.
[26] Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," 402.

textual basis for the subsequent formulation of *tawāzun* as an ethical principle of proportion, responsibility, and moral restraint.

Tawāzun as a Qur'anic Principle of Ethical Regulation

The *tahlili* reading of QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 shows that the term *tawāzun* does not appear explicitly in the verse. Its ethical significance is derived from the relationship among the commands and prohibition contained in the passage. The verse does not prescribe a mechanical division between worldly and otherworldly concerns, nor does it offer an abstract appeal for moderation. Rather, it presents an ordered ethical framework in which spiritual orientation, worldly responsibility, social goodness, and moral restraint are mutually connected.

The first element of this framework is spiritual orientation. The command *wabtaghi fīmā ātāka Allāhu al-dār al-ākhirah* directs human beings to use the blessings granted by Allah in pursuit of the hereafter. This instruction does not negate worldly activity, wealth, ability, or social position. Instead, it places them within a moral horizon that exceeds immediate gain, personal recognition, and material interest. In the narrative of Qarun, this orientation is particularly important because his failure did not arise merely from possessing wealth, but from treating wealth as a basis for self-glorification and autonomy from moral responsibility.[27]

The second element is the recognition of legitimate worldly needs. The phrase *wa lā tansa naṣībaka min al-dunyā* affirms that human beings have a rightful share in worldly life. This share includes the fulfilment of legitimate needs, the preservation of well-being, and the performance of ordinary responsibilities. The verse therefore rejects two opposite tendencies: treating worldly life as an ultimate end and neglecting worldly responsibilities in the name of spiritual devotion. In this respect, *tawāzun* should not be understood as an equal distribution between the world and the hereafter. It refers instead to the proper ordering of each dimension according to its ethical function.[28]

The third element is social responsibility through *iḥsān*. The command *wa aḥsin kamā aḥsana Allāhu ilayk* requires human beings to translate their awareness of divine blessings into morally excellent conduct toward others. *Iḥsān* involves more than

[27] Ibn Kathīr, "QS. Al-Qashash," 297; M. Quraish Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," in *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 10 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 402.

[28] Wahbah Az-Zuḥaylī, "QS. Al-Qashash: 77," in *Tafsir Al-Munir*, ed. Abdul Hayyie al-Kattani et al., vol. 10 (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2013), 429; Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," 402.

occasional generosity because it reflects a broader disposition of gratitude, responsibility, and moral attentiveness. Yet the ethical demand of *iḥsān* must be read within the complete structure of the verse. It is neither detached from the recognition of one's worldly share nor separated from the prohibition against conduct that produces harm or disorder. Thus, the verse does not establish kindness as an unrestricted obligation to meet every expectation of others.[29]

The fourth element is moral restraint through the prohibition of *fasād*. The phrase *wa lā tabghi al-fasāda fī al-arḍ* functions as a corrective limit for the preceding commands. In the context of Qarun, *fasād* concerns the misuse of wealth, power, and social standing in ways that generate injustice and damage the moral order.[30] It marks the point at which blessings and capacities cease to function as means of goodness and become instruments of wrongdoing. The prohibition confirms that ethical action requires not only positive intention but also restraint from conduct that produces harm, imbalance, or injustice.

These four elements form an integrated ethical structure. Spiritual orientation prevents worldly capacities from becoming ultimate ends. Recognition of one's worldly share prevents the neglect of legitimate personal needs and responsibilities. *Iḥsān* directs individuals toward responsible social action, while the prohibition of *fasād* establishes a limit against moral excess and harmful consequences. The relationship among these elements indicates that ethical life requires a continuous process of proportionate ordering rather than the pursuit of a single value in isolation.

Within this framework, *tawāzun* may be defined as a Qur'anic principle of proportionate ethical ordering. It refers to the capacity to place spiritual orientation, worldly needs, and social responsibility in their appropriate relationship without allowing one dimension to erase or distort the others. This definition differs from an understanding of balance as numerical equality or compromise between competing interests. The ethical question is not whether all dimensions receive an identical portion, but whether each is placed in a manner consistent with its moral purpose, human capacity, and broader *maṣlaḥah*.

[29] Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," 402.

[30] Ibn Kathīr, "QS. Al-Qashash," 297; Al-Qurṭubī, "QS. Al-Qashash: 77," in *Tafsir Al-Qurṭubī*, vol. 13, n.d.

This formulation is consistent with broader discussions of balance and moderation in Islamic ethics. Al-Ghazālī emphasises the importance of regulating human faculties so that reason, desire, and emotion do not lead to destructive excess.[31] Likewise, Yusuf al-Qaraḍāwī presents *wasatiyyah* as a foundational Islamic orientation that rejects extremity and requires proportionality in human conduct.[32] Although neither scholar employs the contemporary language of personal boundaries, their ethical frameworks support the view that morally valuable action requires restraint, self-awareness, and attention to the consequences of excess.

The ethical relevance of this formulation becomes clearer when actions are assessed beyond their visible form. A person may appear generous, helpful, or self-sacrificing, yet the ethical value of such conduct cannot be determined solely by its outward appearance. Its orientation, the individual's capacity, the responsibilities involved, and the consequences of the action must also be considered. QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 provides a framework for this assessment by linking human action to accountability before Allah, legitimate worldly needs, social goodness, and moral restraint.

The command to seek the hereafter gives ethical conduct its primary orientation. Human beings are not instructed to reject worldly resources, abilities, or social relationships. Instead, these are placed within a broader moral horizon in which actions remain accountable to Allah and directed toward purposes that transcend social recognition, material gain, or personal status.[33] Accordingly, the ethical value of an action cannot be determined only by whether it satisfies others or produces approval. It must also be assessed according to whether it remains connected to a morally responsible orientation.

The recognition of one's worldly share introduces an equally important consideration. The phrase *wa lā tansa naṣībaka min al-dunyā* confirms that ethical responsibility does not require the erasure of legitimate personal needs. Worldly existence includes physical, emotional, relational, and material responsibilities that cannot be ignored without disrupting the integrity of human life.[34] This recognition prevents

[31] Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.); see also Al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-'Amal* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.).

[32] Yusuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-Wasaṭiyyah al-Islāmiyyah* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2009).

[33] Ibn Kathīr, "QS. Al-Qashash," 297; Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," 402.

[34] Az-Zuḥaylī, "QS. Al-Qashash: 77," 429; Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," 402.

tawāzun from being interpreted as a call to excessive self-denial. A person's capacity, well-being, and existing obligations remain ethically relevant when determining the appropriate scope of any action.

The command to perform *iḥsān* adds the social dimension of ethical responsibility. In the Qur'anic framework, goodness is not confined to private intention or personal spiritual discipline. It also requires conduct that benefits others and reflects gratitude for divine blessings.[35] However, *iḥsān* should not be understood as an obligation to satisfy every request, expectation, or emotional demand made by others. It operates within a structure that already recognises worldly responsibilities and prohibits conduct that produces harm or moral disorder.

This framework does not imply that ethical life is free from sacrifice. Islamic ethics recognises sacrifice as morally valuable in particular circumstances. The relationship between *iḥsān*, *īthār*, and ethical excess clarifies this point. *Iḥsān* refers to morally excellent conduct grounded in awareness of Allah and responsibility toward others. *Īthār* refers to the deliberate choice to give priority to another person's need over one's own in a particular situation, as illustrated in QS. al-Ḥashr [59]: 9. Both may involve generosity and sacrifice. However, neither concept requires the permanent disregard of personal capacity, obligations, or welfare. Their ethical value depends on intention, context, and consequences.

By contrast, ethical excess occurs when one dimension of responsibility overwhelms the others. Excessive pursuit of worldly gain may undermine spiritual accountability, as illustrated by Qarun. Excessive withdrawal from worldly responsibility may disregard legitimate human needs. Similarly, a form of social conduct that appears kind but systematically erodes personal capacity or prevents the fulfilment of legitimate responsibilities cannot be regarded as morally superior merely because it benefits another person in the immediate moment. The principle of *tawāzun* requires a more comprehensive ethical assessment.

For this reason, the present study uses "ethical regulation" rather than "self-boundaries" as the primary conceptual language of the Qur'anic analysis. *Self-boundaries* remains a useful contemporary term for describing a person's capacity to distinguish personal needs from external expectations. However, it is not a direct Qur'anic term and

[35] Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," 402.

should not be treated as the literal meaning of QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77. The Qur'anic contribution lies in its ethical orientation: human actions should be evaluated through their relationship to responsibility, proportion, harm, and *maṣlaḥah*.

Accordingly, *tawāzun* may be understood as a Qur'anic principle that regulates the relationship between spiritual purpose, personal well-being, and social responsibility. It provides a normative basis for distinguishing morally responsible kindness from conduct that exceeds an individual's legitimate capacity or disrupts the proper order of ethical obligations. This formulation establishes the conceptual basis for examining *people pleasing* not as a direct subject of the verse, but as a contemporary phenomenon that may be assessed through the ethical relationship between spiritual orientation, personal responsibility, social goodness, and moral restraint.

The Ethical Relevance of QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 to *People Pleasing*

The ethical structure derived from QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 provides a normative framework for interpreting *people pleasing* without treating the phenomenon as a direct subject of the Qur'anic text. The verse does not offer a psychological diagnosis, nor does it classify particular interpersonal behaviours through contemporary clinical categories. Its relevance lies instead in the ethical criteria it provides for evaluating how individuals use their capacities, respond to social expectations, fulfil responsibilities, and maintain proportion in their actions.

In contemporary social life, the need for acceptance often shapes how individuals present themselves and respond to others. Social relationships, digital communication, and public self-presentation may intensify the pressure to appear helpful, agreeable, and emotionally available.[36] In such contexts, *people pleasing* may develop as a pattern in which individuals repeatedly prioritise the expectations of others because they fear rejection, conflict, or negative evaluation. This pattern does not necessarily indicate a psychological disorder. However, it may become problematic when a person can no longer distinguish between voluntary kindness and actions performed primarily to avoid disapproval.

[36] Jacqueline Nesi, Sophia Choukas-Bradley, and Mitchell J. Prinstein, "Transformation of Adolescent Peer Relations in the Social Media Context: Part 1—A Theoretical Framework and Application to Dyadic Peer Relationships," *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 21 (2018): 267–294, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-018-0261-x.

The distinction is important because not every act of accommodation, sacrifice, or concern for others constitutes *people pleasing*. A person may assist another, yield in a disagreement, or prioritise another person's need as a conscious and morally responsible choice. Such actions may reflect *iḥsān*, compassion, solidarity, or *īthār*. The ethical issue arises when the action is no longer grounded in moral awareness and voluntary responsibility, but becomes controlled by persistent fear of rejection, dependence on external validation, or an inability to recognise legitimate personal limits.[37]

The concept of *self-boundaries* is useful for describing this condition. In psychological literature, self-boundaries refer to a person's capacity to distinguish their own needs, emotions, responsibilities, and decisions from those of other people.[38] A weakened sense of boundaries may make an individual more likely to accept demands that exceed their capacity, take responsibility for other people's emotions, or regard refusal as a moral failure. Studies of *people pleasing* among students have identified a relationship between weak self-boundaries and the tendency to prioritise others at the expense of personal needs.[39]

QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 does not use the language of self-boundaries. Nevertheless, the phrase *wa lā tansa naṣībaka min al-dunyā* establishes that an individual's legitimate worldly share should not be disregarded. In the ethical framework developed in this study, this phrase supports the recognition that personal needs, responsibilities, and capacity remain morally relevant. It does not justify selfishness or indifference toward others. Rather, it prevents the reduction of ethical conduct to a single demand for self-sacrifice. A person cannot fulfil social responsibilities adequately when basic personal responsibilities are persistently ignored.

The command *wa aḥsin kamā aḥsana Allāhu ilayk* further clarifies that kindness remains an essential ethical obligation. The Qur'anic response to *people pleasing* is therefore not withdrawal from social care, emotional detachment, or the rejection of generosity. Instead, it calls for a form of goodness that is conscious, responsible, and

[37]Robert F. Bornstein and Mary A. Languirand, *Healthy Dependency: Leaning on Others Without Losing Yourself* (New York: Newmarket Press, 2003).

[38] Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992).

[39] Farras Raisa Zalika and Athia Tamyizatun Nisa, "The Relationship between Self Boundaries and People Pleaser Behavior in Islamic Guidance and Counseling Students at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta," *Jurnal Ilmu dan Teknik Dakwah* 12, no. 2 (2024): 15–25, https://jurnal.uin-antasari.ac.id/index.php/alhiwar/article/view/14355.

proportionate. *Iḥsān* is directed by gratitude to God and moral responsibility toward others; it is not defined by the need to secure approval or prevent every possible conflict.[40]

This distinction may be clarified through three related categories:

Category	Primary Motivation	Position of Personal Needs	Ethical Character
Iḥsān	Moral and spiritual responsibility	Recognised and properly ordered	Morally excellent action
Īthār	Conscious preference for another's need in a particular situation	May involve sacrifice but does not erase fundamental responsibility	Morally valuable when proportionate
People pleasing	Fear of rejection, conflict avoidance, or need for approval	Frequently subordinated to external expectations	Ethically problematic when persistent and self-eroding

Source: Developed by the author based on the Qur'anic ethical framework elaborated in this article; Bornstein and Languirand (2003); Cloud and Townsend (1992); and Zalika and Nisa (2024)

The distinction between *iḥsān* and *people pleasing* rests primarily on orientation and proportionality. *Iḥsān* is a form of morally excellent conduct that emerges from awareness of God, gratitude, and responsibility. It may involve sacrifice, but such sacrifice is undertaken consciously and remains accountable to wider ethical obligations.[41] *People pleasing*, by contrast, is more likely to be driven by the need to maintain acceptance or avoid disapproval. The outward action may look similar in both cases, but its motivation and effect on the individual's capacity for responsible action differ substantially.

A similar distinction applies to *īthār*. In Islamic ethics, *īthār* refers to giving priority to another person's need over one's own in a particular situation, as illustrated in QS. al-Ḥashr [59]: 9. Such conduct may express generosity and social concern. However, it should not be equated with the continuous disappearance of personal agency or the systematic neglect of essential needs. Ethical sacrifice is not identical with an inability to refuse, nor does it require an individual to accept every request or expectation. A person may choose to give priority to another without abandoning responsibility for their own health, dependents, obligations, or moral judgment.

[40] M. Quraish Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," in *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 10 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 402.

[41] M. Quraish Shihab, "Surah Al-Qashash," in *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 10 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 402.

Through this distinction, QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 offers an ethical basis for assessing *people pleasing*. The command to seek the hereafter places action within a moral orientation that exceeds the pursuit of social approval. The recognition of one's worldly share affirms that personal needs and responsibilities cannot be ignored. The command to do good requires social concern and moral responsiveness. Finally, the prohibition of *fasād* warns against the misuse of capacities and relationships in ways that generate harm or disorder.

The relevance of the verse, therefore, is not that it labels *people pleasing* as *fasād* in a direct exegetical sense. Such an equation would exceed the textual and interpretive evidence. The relevance lies in the ethical principle that actions must be evaluated in relation to their orientation, capacity, consequences, and effect on the proper ordering of responsibilities. When kindness becomes consistently detached from personal capacity, moral agency, and legitimate responsibilities, it no longer fully reflects the proportionate ethical conduct implied by *tawāzun*.

Accordingly, *tawāzun* provides a constructive alternative to two opposite tendencies. On the one hand, it rejects self-centred individualism that disregards social responsibility. On the other hand, it rejects an uncritical idealisation of self-sacrifice that treats the continual neglect of personal needs as moral virtue. The principle calls instead for ethically responsible kindness: kindness that remains directed toward God, responsive to others, attentive to legitimate personal needs, and restrained from actions that cause continuing harm or imbalance.

Conclusion

This study shows that QS. al-Qashash [28]: 77 contains an integrated ethical framework consisting of orientation toward the hereafter, recognition of one's legitimate share in worldly life, the obligation of *iḥsān*, and the prohibition of *fasād*. From this structure, *tawāzun* can be understood as a principle of proportional balance between spiritual purpose, personal needs, social responsibility, and moral restraint. In relation to *people pleasing*, the verse does not address it directly but provides ethical criteria to distinguish responsible kindness from behavior driven by fear of rejection, dependence on approval, or neglect of personal obligations. Thus, *iḥsān* and *īthār* do not justify the loss of personal capacity or moral agency. This study proposes *tawāzun* as a Qur'anic ethical framework for evaluating the limits of kindness in contemporary social relations.

However, this research is limited to textual analysis; further empirical studies are needed to explore its application in psychological and social contexts.

Bibliography

Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad. *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. Vol. 3. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.

Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad. *Mīzān al-'Amal*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.

Almaany. "أحسن." Accessed Mei 30, 2026. https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/حسن/.

Almaany. "ابتغى." Accessed Mei 30, 2026. https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/ابتغى/.

Almaany. "الفساد." Accessed Mei 30, 2026. https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/الفساد/.

Almaany. "تبغ." Accessed Mei 30, 2026. https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/يغي/.

Almaany. "تنسى." Accessed Mei 30, 2026. https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/نسي/.

Almaany. "نصيب." Accessed Mei 30, 2026. https://www.almaany.com/ar/dict/ar-ar/نصيب/.

Al-Qaraḍāwī, Yūsuf. *Fiqh al-Wasaṭiyyah al-Islāmiyyah*. Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2009.

Al-Qurṭubī, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*. Edited by Aḥmad al-Bardūnī and Ibrāhīm Aṭfayyish. 20 vols. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964.

Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*. Edited by 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī. 26 vols. Cairo: Dār Hajr, 2001.

Al-Wāḥidī, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Aḥmad. *Asbāb al-Nuzūl: The Occasions of Revelation of the Qur'an*. Translated by Mokrane Guezzou. Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2008.

Az-Zuḥaylī, Wahbah. "QS. Al-Qashash: 77." In *Tafsir Al-Munir*, edited by Abdul Hayyie al-Kattani et al., vol. 10. Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2013.

Bornstein, Robert F., and Mary A. Languirand. *Healthy Dependency: Leaning on Others Without Losing Yourself*. New York: Newmarket Press, 2003.

Cloud, Henry, and John Townsend. *Boundaries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992.

Hamka. *Tafsir Al-Azhar*. Vol. 7. Singapore: Pustaka Nasional Pte Ltd, 2019.

Ibn Kathīr, Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar. *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir*. Edited by Hartono. Vol. 6.3. Jakarta: Pustaka Imam asy-Syafi'i, 2004.

Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad ibn Mukarram. *Lisān al-'Arab*. 15 vols. Beirut, 1985. https://archive.org/details/01_20210525_20210525_0314/.

Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic Principle of Wasatiyyah*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Nesi, Jacqueline, Sophia Choukas-Bradley, and Mitchell J. Prinstein. "Transformation of Adolescent Peer Relations in the Social Media Context: Part 1—A Theoretical Framework and Application to Dyadic Peer Relationships." *Clinical Child and*

Family Psychology Review 21 (2018): 267–294. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-018-0261-x.

Shihab, M. Quraish. "Surah Al-Qashash." In *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 10, 402. Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002.

Watson, David, and Ronald Friend. "Measurement of Social-Evaluative Anxiety." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 33, no. 4 (1969): 448–457. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0027806.

Zalika, Farras Raisa, and Athia Tamyizatun Nisa. "The Relationship between Self Boundaries and People Pleaser Behavior in Islamic Guidance and Counseling Students at UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta." *Al-Hiwar: Jurnal Ilmu dan Teknik Dakwah* 12, no. 2 (2024): 15–25. https://doi.org/10.18592/alhiwar.v12i2.14355.