

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S MERCY

PART VII

MOHAMMAD ALI SHOMALI¹

ABSTRACT: In the previous part, we studied the different types of responses to divine mercy. Some types of mercy are available to everyone, but those who show appreciation for it qualify themselves to receive additional blessings. It is noteworthy to mention that withdrawal of mercy from ungrateful people can be a mercy from God because receiving additional blessings requires greater responsibility. For example, if someone borrows money from a bank and shows that he is incapable of properly using it, giving him more would be problematic; instead, it is wiser to withhold offering money for him to remain responsible only for the amount he possesses. This part focuses on the qualities of those who qualify themselves to receive extra mercy from God.

Those who qualify themselves to receive extra mercy from God

1. The patient

As said in the previous part, one of the groups that receive extra mercy enormously and beyond any measure is the patient. In particular, we reflected on verses (2:155-157).

¹ Associate Professor of the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum.

2. *The good-doers*

The other group is the *Muhsinin*, or the people who do good deeds. In Arabic, the word *ihsān*, or 'to do good' derives from *husn*, meaning 'goodness'. Thus, the benefactors of God's mercy are those who do righteous deeds:

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا وَادْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ
اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

And do not cause corruption on the earth after its restoration, and supplicate Him with fear and hope: indeed God's mercy is close to the virtuous. (7:156)

3. *Those who carefully listen to the Qur'an*

Those who listen to the Qur'an when it is recited achieve extra mercy. When the Qur'an is recited, people should not converse with one another, and any on-going talk should be brought to an end. This is to show respect to the Qur'an and to benefit from it as well. God says:

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

When the Qur'an is recited, listen to the Qur'an and be careful! So that you may be given mercy. (7:204)

One must listen to the Qur'an while reflecting on its words instead of merely hearing it. Many times we hear voices without our reflecting on it. While playing the Qur'an in our homes or vehicles, we may make the mistake of conversing with others while doing so. The Qur'an should not be used as a background sound; it is to be carefully reflected upon during recitation. For any justifiable reason that one is not able to listen to the Qur'an, it is recommended to stop the player.

The Qur'an speaks of itself as a source of mercy (*rahmah*); therefore, it is not surprising that those who listen to it qualify themselves for receiving extra mercy from God:

وَنُنزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا يَرْيَدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا
خَسَارًا

We send down in the Qur'an that which is a cure and mercy for the faithful; and it increases the wrongdoers only in loss. (17:82)

One way to benefit from this mercy is to respectfully take heed of it to expose one's heart and mind to the light and guidance of the Qur'an.

4. Those who pray during night receive extra mercy

Those who pray to God after midnight and before dawn (*fajr*) receive extra mercy:

أَمْ مَنْ هُوَ قَانِتٌ آتَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُو رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ
قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو
الْأَلْبَابِ

Is he who supplicates in the watches of the night, prostrating and standing, apprehensive of the Hereafter and expecting the mercy of his Lord ? . . . Say, 'Are those who know equal to those who do not know '? Only those who possess intellect take admonition. (39:9)

Allah compares two groups of people: one group is those who worship during the night and is concerned about the affairs of the Hereafter

while expecting to receive God's mercy. The second group is not mentioned. But by comparison we realize that it consists of the people who are negligent and sinfully spend most of their time in the night. It is clear that those who remember God during the day and do good deeds and then in the night which is the time for rest they find their rest in worshipping God, asking for forgiveness, and reciting the Qur'an would not be treated equal to those who fail to do so.

5. *The righteous*

The other group who deserves more mercy from God are the righteous (*sālihīn*). God says in Surah *Al-Anbiyā'*, 75:

وَأَدْخَلْنَاهُ فِي رَحْمَتِنَا إِنَّهُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

And We admitted him [Lot] into Our mercy. Indeed he was one of the righteous.

According to his verse, Prophet Lot did not just receive a special mercy from God; rather, he was put into His mercy because he was one of the righteous. A righteous person can be expected to be treated the same: he is placed amidst the ocean of God's mercy.

6. *Those who ask for forgiveness*

Those who ask forgiveness from God are expected to receive extra mercy:

إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِي يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا ءَامَنَّا فَاعْفُرْ لَنَا وَارْحَمْنَا وَ أَنْتَ
خَيْرُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

Allah praises a group of his servants who say: our Lord! We have believed in you, please forgive us and

treat us with mercy and you are the best of the merciful. (23:109)

If their prayer and request for forgiveness and mercy did not produce results, Allah would not have mentioned this in the Qur'an. If this prayer was void, Allah would not have praised them for making this prayer. Thus, we are to believe that such prayers indeed produce results; therefore, it is wise to learn these prayers and recite them in our *qunūt*² or on any other occasion. Other verses in the Qur'an also refer to the recommendation of asking for forgiveness:

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لِمَ تَسْتَعْجِلُونَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ قَبْلَ الْحَسَنَةِ لَوْلَا تَسْتَغْفِرُونَ اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

He [Sālih] said, 'O My people! Why do you press for evil sooner than for good? Why do you not plead to God for forgiveness so that you may receive His mercy?'(27:46)

قَالَ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَ لِأَخِي وَ أَدْخِلْنَا فِي رَحْمَتِكَ وَ أَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

He [Moses] said, 'My Lord, forgive me and my brother, and admit us into Your mercy, for You are the most merciful of the merciful. (7:151)³

7. Those for whom the angels pray

There are people who receive extra mercy from Allah because the angels pray for them. In addition to the general prayer of angels for believers which is seen in verses such as 40:7, the Qur'an refers to

² Raising our hands in supplication during the obligatory prayers.

³ See also: 2:286, 7:23; 149; 155 and 23:118.

particular cases in which angels have prayed to Allah to send His mercy to certain people. For example, when the angels gave Prophet Abraham (a) the good tidings of having a child, his wife was shocked because he was elderly and she was barren. The angels said:

قَالُوا أَتَعْجَبِينَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ رَحِمَتُ اللَّهِ وَ بَرَكَاتُهُ عَلَيْكُمْ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ إِنَّهُ
حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ

They said, 'Are you amazed at God's dispensation? God's mercy and His blessings be upon you, members of the household. Indeed He is all-laudable, all-glorious.' (11:73)

The phrase “*God's mercy and blessings be upon you*” can be a statement, but it is more likely to be a prayer saying, “Peace and mercy be upon you!” Thus, when there is a good household, that is, when the father and mother are good, pious people with good children, there is great chance the angels will pray for this household; the angels will supplicate, asking God to give the family more mercy and to treat them with more favour.

8. *Those who migrate and struggle for the sake of God*

Another group of people who are expected to receive extra mercy are those who migrate and struggle for the sake of God:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَ الَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَ جَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَرْجُونَ
رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ وَ اللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

Indeed those who have become faithful and those who have migrated and waged jihad in the way of God — it

is they who expect God's mercy, and God is all-forgiving, all-merciful. (2:218)

Another verse is Surah *Al-Tawbah*, 20-21:

الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَ هَاجَرُوا وَ جَاهَدُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَ أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَكْبَرُ
 دَرَجَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ - يُبَشِّرُهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنْهُ وَ رِضْوَانٍ
 وَ جَنَّاتٍ لَهُمْ فِيهَا نَعِيمٌ مُّقِيمٌ

Those who have believed and migrated, and waged jihad in the way of God with their possessions and persons have a greater rank near God, and it is they who are the triumphant. Their Lord gives them the good news of His mercy and [His] pleasure, and for them there will be gardens with lasting bliss, to remain in them forever. With God indeed is a great reward. (9:20-22)

Migration can be applicable today; it's not reserved for those who migrated from Mecca to Medina. Perhaps it can be applied to any migrant who leaves his residence for Allah's sake, for those migrate to protect their faith, to practice it, or to do charitable work. Thus, anyone who moves from his original place of upbringing to another place for the sake of Allah is called a *muhājir*.

Jihād means to struggle for the sake of Allah. This can be in education, agriculture, or medicine. It may also involve exercise of legitimate force to defend one's property, family, or nation depending on the circumstances and on what is required for the well-being of one's household, nation, or all humanity. Working hard in order to earn enough money to spend on one's family is considered in narrations as an example of *jihad*. Imam Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

الْكَاذُ عَلَى عِيَالِهِ كَالْمُجَاهِدِ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

Whoever strives for earning a living for his family is tantamount to a warrior who fights for the sake of God.⁴

A determined teacher working to educate people is an example of *jihād*. A farmer toiling for the sake of Allah to provide people with food is *jihād*. One who defends his or her country is also *jihad*. Therefore, *jihād* is a very broad notion that includes any struggle for the sake of God.

According to the above verses, those who have faith and those who migrate and struggle for the sake of God are expected to receive special mercy from God, and any shortcomings committed in the past are to be forgiven.

9. *The obedient*

Those who obey Allah and His Prophet are expected to receive more mercy:

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَيُدْخِلُهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ ذَلِكَ هُوَ
الْفَوْزُ الْمُبِينُ

As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, their Lord will admit them into His mercy. That is the manifest success! (45:30)

وَأَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

⁴ *Al-Kāfir*, V.5, P.88, H.1, V.9, P.566, H.8436 & *Man Lā Yahdhuruhul-Faqih*, V.3, P.168, H.3631

And obey God and the Apostle so that you may be granted [His] mercy. (3:132)

The obedient includes those who enjoin the good, prohibit the evil, say their prayers, and give alms:

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ
عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ
أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

But the faithful, men and women, are guardians of one another: they bid what is right and forbid what is wrong and maintain the prayer, give the zakat, and obey God and His Apostle. It is they to whom God will soon grant His mercy. Indeed God is All-mighty, All-wise. (9:71)

Believing men and women are guardians for each other. As a result, they have the right to enjoin one other to do well and to stop and refrain from committing misdeeds. Whatever happens to one believer is linked to the other; thus, it is expected that believers readily accept constructive criticism and admonition without thinking that not a single person holds the right to meddle in their business. Of course, the conditions for practicing this are mentioned in the field of Islamic law, or *fiqh*. For example, if I see, my brother eating something poisonous, am I not responsible? Thus, how can I not feel responsible when I see he is, say, listening to prohibited (*harām*) music, that is, music fit for corrupted gatherings? Certainly I am responsible. This is different from prying into others' business. Though you do not want to do so, when we see someone doing something wrong, we are responsible for telling that person in a wise and decent manner that works best to stop the action.

In any case, the above verse indicates that if you enjoin the good and prohibit the bad, say your prayers, give alms, and generally obey Allah and the Prophet, you would soon receive the mercy of Allah.

A similar indication is seen in the following verse:

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاطِيعُوا الرِّسُولَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

Maintain the prayer and give the zakat, and obey the Apostle so that you may receive [God's] mercy. (24:56)

To be obedient means to have *taqwā*, that is, to be God-wary and protect yourself. It comes from the root “*wa-qa-ya*” which means ‘to save’ or ‘to protect’ yourself from doing that which is bad and harmful, that which causes Allah’s displeasure. *Taqwā* is a kind of immunity from all germs and pollutions. In addition to the verses about obedience to God, there are verses which indicate that *taqwā* leads to additional mercy:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَآمِنُوا بِرَسُولِهِ يُؤْتِكُمْ كِفْلَيْنِ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ وَ
يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ نُورًا تَمْشُونَ بِهِ وَ يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

O you who have faith! Be wary of God and have faith in His Apostle. He will grant you a double share of His mercy and give you a light to walk by, and forgive you, and God is all-forgiving, all-merciful; (57:28)

وَكَتُبْ لَنَا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ إِنَّا هُدْنَا إِلَيْكَ قَالَ عَذَابِي
أُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ أَشَاءُ وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَسَأَكْتُبُهَا لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ
وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِآيَاتِنَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

And appoint goodness for us in this world and the Hereafter, for indeed we have come back to You '. Said He, 'I visit My punishment on whomever I wish, but My mercy embraces all things. Soon I shall appoint it for those who are Godwary and give the zakat and those who believe in Our signs (7:156)

وَهَذَا كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مُبَارَكٌ فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

And this Book that We have sent down is a blessed one; so follow it, and be Godwary so that you may receive [His] mercy. (6:155)

In addition to extra mercy, God gives those have *taqwā* the ability to easily discern right from wrong:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَتَّقُوا اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ فُرْقَانًا وَيُكَفِّرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ

O you who have faith! If you are wary of God, He shall appoint a criterion for you, and absolve you of your misdeeds, and forgive you, for God is dispenser of a great grace. (8:29)

Furqān is something by which you can distinguish between right and wrong. This is the power of *taqwā*. The *Mutaqqi*, or one who has *taqwa*, can quickly decipher between good and bad, as opposed to those who take time to make decisions:

ان الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ

When those who are Godwary are touched by a visitation of Satan, they remember [God and, behold, they perceive. (7:201)]⁵

God also gives special type of knowledge to those who have taqwā:

اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَ يُعَلِّمَكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

Be wary of God and God shall teach you, and God has knowledge of all things. (2:282)

Thus, we can draw a conclusion that the believer's good actions qualifies him to receive more mercy. The good deeds can include asking forgiveness, saying night prayer (*salāt al-layl*), giving alms, and enjoining the good and prohibiting the evil (*al-amr bi'l-ma'rūf*). The different types of the above-mentioned verses make it very clear that the people who have faith and piety and do righteous deeds are expected to be given more mercy by God.

Note I: According to the Qur'an, believers should advise each other to be merciful, and God praises those who do so:

ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَ تَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَ تَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ

...while being one of those who have faith and who enjoin one another to patience, and enjoin one another to compassion. (90:17)

Believers advise each other to be patient and merciful. If one forgets to be patient and merciful, the other should advise him and remind him when he forgets. Elsewhere the Qur'an emphasises the need for advising each other to observe the truth and be patient:

⁵ The "light to walk by" (57:28) which is given to the pious people helps them to better understand and therefore helps in making better decision and performing better actions.

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَ تَوَاصَوْا
بِالْحَقِّ وَ تَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

Indeed man is at a loss, except those who have faith and do righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to [follow] the truth, and enjoin one another to patience. (103:2)

Hence, the believers should advise each other to observe mercy, truth, and patience.

Note II: According to the Qur'an, God has put mercy in the hearts of husband and wife and in the hearts of the followers of Jesus (a):

وَ مِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَ جَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ
مَوَدَّةً وَ رَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

And of His signs is that He created for you mates from your own selves that you may take comfort in them, and He ordained affection and mercy between you. There are indeed signs in that for a people who reflect. (30:21)

ثُمَّ فَفَّيْنَا عَلَى آثَارِهِمْ بِرُسُلِنَا وَ فَفَّيْنَا بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ وَ آتَيْنَاهُ الْإِنْجِيلَ وَ
جَعَلْنَا فِي قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ رَأْفَةً وَ رَحْمَةً

Then We followed them up with Our apostles and We followed [them] with Jesus son of Mary, and We gave him the Evangel, and We put in the hearts of those who followed him kindness and mercy... (57:27)

When two people get married, God puts affection and mercy in their hearts for each other. Affection may need to be reciprocated, but mercy is unconditional, and one party may show mercy to the other without receiving anything in return, such as serving a sick spouse who is unable to do anything for the other.

Similarly God has put in affection and mercy in the hearts of those who followed Jesus. This can be only the word of God because Prophet Muhammad (s) brought a new religion and invited others to believe in his message, though he still acknowledges the merits of another faith community. The Qur'an also appreciates the good work of Christian priests and monks:

وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَوَدَّةً لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ مِنْهُمْ قِسِيِينَ وَرُهَبَانًا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

...and surely you will find the nearest of them in affection to the faithful to be those who say 'We are Christians.' That is because there are priests and monks among them, and because they are not arrogant. (5:82)

Some may expect that the Qur'an must not speak in favour of the clerics of a rival religion, but this is not the way the Qur'an approaches the issue. The Qur'an acknowledges the good works that monks and priests do. It also praises those Christians' humbleness. This must be a divine word.

The Qur'an also refers to the tendency towards monastic life among them which was not asked by God, but they themselves started it in order to please God, and afterwards some failed to observe its

requirements.⁶ Perhaps there have always been good monks, but you also find that over history, especially in the Medieval Ages, some monks who were supposed to renunciate worldly pleasure themselves were involved in misuse of power and accumulating of wealth. Of course, the Qur'an does not generalise this; it excludes some (57:27) and adds that their intention was initially good.

⁶... *But as for monasticism, they innovated it - We had not prescribed it for them - only seeking God's pleasure. Yet they did not observe it with due observance. So We gave to the faithful among them their [due] reward, but many of them are transgressors. (57:27)*

