

# UNDERSTANDING GOD'S MERCY

## PART VIII

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**ABSTRACT:** The previous part of these series touched upon the qualities of those who qualify themselves to receive extra mercy from God, namely the patient, the good-doers, the righteous, the repentant, the obedient, and those who migrate and struggle for the sake of God. This last part studies divine mercy as illustrated in the way God rewards. Our happiness in the Hereafter depends on our faith and actions, and we need adequate provisions for the eternal journey ahead. Since it is likely that people tend to exaggerate their few deeds, we may not realize the actual length and duration of this difficult journey. God, out of His vast mercy, assists us in various ways to enable us to obtain sufficient provision. Some characteristics of divine rewarding include: a) rewarding people for good intentions, although not punishing them for bad ones, b) multiplying rewards for good actions, although punishment for bad actions are not multiplied, 3) rewards for recommended deeds as emphasized in hadiths even if the hadiths are not authentic, 4) rewarding the pious according to their best performance and without measure, 5) transformation of sins into good deeds, and 6) forgiving people through intercession and for those who have hope in His forgiveness. In the meantime, people are to maintain a healthy balance between despair and contentment with our actions so as to become hopeful and determined to strive in doing good to tread on the right path towards the infinite God.

Our happiness in the Hereafter depends on our faith, actions, and the qualities we have earned as a result of those actions in this world. We have an eternal journey ahead of us and we need sufficient provisions for it. The longer your journey is, the more provision you need. So we cannot decide whether our provision is sufficient or not unless we know the distance we are going to travel. Thus, we can only understand whether our actions provide us with enough provision for our journey if we understand how long this journey will last. Since we do not have a good understanding of its length and duration, it is likely that we may regard our few actions as sufficient, that we have accumulated enough provision: we have so many prayers (*salāt*), fasts (*sawm*), visits to holy people (*ziyārah*), pilgrimages (*hajj*), and offered abundant charity (*sadaqah*). However, those who have a proper understanding of the distance and of the challenges faced think differently. Imam Ali (a) - with all his sincere worships and great services for Islam - when he looked at this journey and his actions, said:

آه من قلة الزاد و بعد السفر و وحشة الطريق<sup>1</sup>

Alas! The provision is so little, the journey is so far-extending, and the path is so lonely.

Imam Ali (a) felt concerned when he remembered his little provision on the one hand and the far journey to be made in loneliness on the other. This is a journey that everyone is obliged to make for himself. Though a person may have companions, everyone will carry his own burden. The Qur'an repeatedly says, "...no bearer shall bear another's burden." In another verse, we read:

*Say, 'Shall I seek a Lord other than God, while He is the Lord of all things'? No soul does evil except against itself, and no bearer shall bear another's burden; then to your Lord will be your return, whereat He will inform*

<sup>1</sup> *Sharh Nahj al-Balāqah*, Ibn Abi al-Hadid, vol. 18, p. 226.

*you concerning that about which you used to differ.  
(6:164)*

*No bearer shall bear another's burden, and should one heavily burdened call [another] to carry it, nothing of it will be carried, even if he were a near relative. You can only warn those who fear their Lord in secret, and maintain the prayer. Whoever purifies himself, purifies only for his own sake, and to God is the return. (35:18)*

Elsewhere Imam Ali (a) says:

آه مِنْ قَلَّةِ الزَّادِ وَ طُولِ الطَّرِيقِ وَ بُعْدِ السَّفَرِ وَ عَظِيمِ الْمَوْرِدِ<sup>2</sup>

Alas! The provision is so little, the way is so long, the journey is so far, and the place to which we will be exposed is so great.<sup>3</sup>

When Salman al-Farsi died, Imam Ali (a) wrote on his grave:

وفدت على الكريم بغير زاد  
من الحسنات و القلب السليم

فحمل الزاد أقبح كل شيء  
إذا كان الوفود على الكريم<sup>4</sup>

*I have called the generous without any provision of good actions and without having pure heart.*

*Carrying your provision with you is wrong when you are going to be hosted by the generous.*

Thus, knowing that the journey is very difficult, Allah (swt), out of His mercy, helps us in different ways so as to enable us to obtain sufficient

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., vol. 18, p. 224.

<sup>3</sup> This refers to the verses 19:71 & 72: *There is none of you but will come to it: a [matter that is a] decided certainty with your Lord. Then We will deliver those who are Godwary, and leave the wrongdoers in it, fallen on their knees.*

<sup>4</sup> منهاج البراعة في شرح نهج البلاغة و تكملة منهاج البراعة ج 6 ص 63

provision. When we understand the way Allah (swt) rewards, we will simultaneously never despair nor become proud of our actions. This balanced understanding gives abundant hope and determination to do as much good as possible to continue our journey towards the infinite God. Even if we can do one more good action, we should do it, and although we know that our action by itself may not be significant, we would not become hopeless nor lose any opportunity to do a little more, because even minute actions, after they are accepted and grown by God, become significant. It is like when someone tells us that if we put \$1 he will add \$999, the total amounting to \$1000. Although \$1 is not worthy, it is significant to bring it because that was the only way to have \$1000. We have to bring our little contribution, and then God will multiply it, but if we bring zero, even if it is multiplied thousands of times, it will remain zero.

### *Characteristics of divine rewarding*

1. God's reward is comprehensive in the sense that no good action will be neglected, even if it is very little. In many verses, the Qur'an indicates that all that you do would be taken into account. Of course, everything good that we do comes from Him, because I and all else at my disposal belong to Him and therefore I do not deserve any reward from Him; still, He assures me that I will be rewarded:

أَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

*Allah never wastes (ignores) the reward of the believers. (3:171)*

إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُصْلِحِينَ

*The people who are righteous, we don't waste their reward. (7:170)*

In many verses, Allah (swt) asks us not to worry as to whether His reward will be wated or forgotten. Since He knows we tend to quickly doubt, and perhaps subconsciously about all that we are promised even by someone like God, He constantly reassures us. Although we may not be able see His reward right now, this would not make the reality different. When you are sure about something e.g. because a truthful person has informed you about it or an intellectual argument has led to it you should not let your acquaintance with sensual objects make you doubt.

2. His reward is tremendous. In several places, the Qur'an says:

نَعْمَ (فَيَعْم) أَجْرُ الْعَامِلِينَ

*How excellent is the reward of the workers [of righteousness]! (3:136; 29:58; 39:74)*

3. Several verses in the Qur'an mention God's reward as *karim*, meaning 'generous' or 'noble':

فَبَشِّرْهُ بِمَغْفِرَةٍ وَأَجْرٍ كَرِيمٍ

*You can only warn someone who follows the Reminder and fears the All-beneficent in secret; so give him the good news of forgiveness and a noble reward. (36:11)<sup>5</sup>*

4. His reward is 'azim, or 'great':

لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا مِنْهُمْ وَاتَّقُوا أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ

*Those who responded to God and the Apostle [even] after they had been wounded — for those of them who*

<sup>5</sup> See also verses 33:44; 57:11; 57:18.

*have been virtuous and Godwary there shall be a great reward. (3:172)<sup>6</sup>*

5. His reward is also *kabir*, or ‘big/mighty’:

لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ

*...excepting those who are patient and do righteous deeds. For such there will be forgiveness and a great reward. (11:11)<sup>7</sup>*

6. His reward is *hasan*, or ‘good’:

لَهُمْ أَجْرًا حَسَنًا

*...[a Book] upright, to warn of a severe punishment from Him, and to give good news to the faithful who do righteous deeds, that there shall be for them a good reward, to abide in it forever (18:2 & 3)<sup>8</sup>*

7. His reward is enduring and everlasting:

لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ

*As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, there will be an everlasting reward for them. (41:8)<sup>9</sup>*

8. His reward is ready and prepared:

أَعَدَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا

<sup>6</sup> See also verses 3:179; 4: 40, 67, 74, 95, 114, 146 & 162; 5:9 & 28; 9:22; 33: 29 & 35; 48: 10 & 29; 49:3; 64:15.

<sup>7</sup> See also verses 17:9; 35:7; 57:7; 67:12.

<sup>8</sup> See also verses 48:16

<sup>9</sup> See also verses 68:3; 84:25; 95:6.

*And remember what is recited in your homes of the signs of God and wisdom. Indeed God is all-attentive, all-aware. (33:34)*

This is similar to parents promising their child a bicycle as a reward for a good exam score; until he succeeds and the parents actually buy him the bicycle, he is apprehensive as to whether his parents will keep their promise or if they have enough money. But another way to eliminate that worry is to buy the bicycle beforehand, and place it in the house to motivate the child to study well to achieve a high score. Likewise, Allah (s) prepares our reward ahead of time, and it awaits us:

أَعَدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

*And hasten towards your Lord's forgiveness and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the Godwary (3:133).<sup>10</sup>*

Heaven is ready and already created although it is not fixed. It is not until after the Day of Judgment that these rewards would be permanent. So, heaven is there and the reward of the good people is there.

***Allah (swt) rewards people for their good intentions and does not punish the bad ones***

Allah (s) rewards for good intentions, although He does not punish for bad ones. Although the one who intends to disobey Allah (swt) still deserves some kind of punishment, Allah (swt) would not punish him as long as one has not performed prohibited acts (*harām*). This is a general rule, though there might be exceptions.

Regarding good intentions, say you make your way to help a needy person by giving him money or food; when you reach the person's

<sup>10</sup> See also 57:21.

house only to find that he or she has already been given sustenance and would not accept your offer. Though you leave without giving anything, because of your good intention, Allah (swt) rewards you.

Or you want to go to the mosque for the much-rewarded congregational prayer (*Salāt al-Jamā'ah*) and the moment you arrive, the leader of the prayer (*Imam*) is not present. Again, Allah (swt) will reward you because of your intention. The same goes for a person who fervently desires to go for the hajj pilgrimage yet cannot afford it. Because of your good intention, Allah (swt) rewards you.

Having good intentions before any action is vital for spiritual development. People should strive to have great intentions such as going the extra mile to help others by being compassionate and considerate towards them. Making such intentions along with doing as much as you can to complete the task will earn you rewards for the rest.

***Allah (swt) multiplies rewards for good actions; the punishment for bad actions are not multiplied***

If someone is going to be punished for sinning, his penalty would be equal to the sin committed. There is one penalty for every prohibited act (*harām*). One *harām* act leads to one punishment, and two *harāms* lead to two punishments. However, Allah rewards for good actions at least ten times more:

مَنْ جَاءَ بِالْحَسَنَةِ فَلَهُ عَشْرُ أَمْثَالِهَا وَمَنْ جَاءَ بِالسَّيِّئَةِ فَلَا يُجْزَى إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

*Whoever brings a good deed, he shall have ten like it, and whoever brings an evil deed, he shall be recompensed only with the like of it, and they shall not be dealt with unjustly. (6:160)*



And His bestowal of rewards does not end there, as multiplying rewards by ten times is the minimum increase:

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلٍ فِي كُلِّ سُنبُلَةٍ  
مِائَةٌ حَبَّةٌ وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

*The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of God is that of a grain which grows seven ears, in every ear a hundred grains. God multiplies for whom He pleases, and God is all-bounteous, all-knowing. (2:261)*

Thus, one good action is similar to one seed that will become seven hundred, and still Allah (swt) may multiply this, as He says, “*God multiplies for whom He pleases.*” This possibly means that seven hundred may become fourteen hundred, and then twenty one hundred.

A hadith in *Mafātih al-Jinan* narrates that if a person asks for forgiveness seventy times each day of the month of *Sha‘bān*, it is similar to asking forgiveness 70,000 times in other months. What is more, God treats the charity (*sadaqah*) given in this month like a baby camel; He is responsible for its development and looks after it. On the Day of Judgment, people will see their *sadaqah* grow into the magnitude of Mount Uhud. Thus, spending a mere pound does not earn you one pound in return from Allah. Allah invests in your one pound to a great degree, perhaps earning you one million pounds in return on the Day of Judgment. And yet our one sin earns us a punishment to the extent of that action.

God’s mercy is manifested even more during the Month of Ramadan. Reciting one verse of the Qur’an is like reciting the entire book. Simply being a believer (*mu’min*) during this month is sufficient to earn some rewards. Your sleeping is rewarded as an act of worship -

and your breathing is rewarded as an act of glorification of Allah (swt) - <sup>11</sup>نَوْمُكُمْ فِيهِ عِبَادَةٌ <sup>12</sup>أَنْفَاسُكُمْ فِيهِ تَسْبِيحٌ.

When it comes to the Night of Measure, or *Laylat al-Qadr*, the way Allah (swt) rewards is beyond belief. In a beautiful hadith from Imam *Baqir* (a) about *Laylat al-Qadr*, a person asked the Imam (a) to explain the notion of this night being better than one thousand months (97:3). The Imam (a) replied:

الْعَمَلُ الصَّالِحُ فِيهَا مِنَ الصَّلَاةِ وَالرَّكَاةِ وَأَنْوَاعِ الْخَيْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنَ الْعَمَلِ فِي أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ  
لَيْسَ<sup>13</sup> فِيهَا لَيْلَةٌ الْقَدْرِ، وَ لَوْلَا مَا يُضَاعَفُ اللَّهُ- تَبَارَكَ وَ تَعَالَى- لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ، مَا  
بَلَغُوا<sup>14</sup>، وَ لَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يُضَاعَفُ لَهُمُ الْحَسَنَاتِ<sup>15</sup>

Whatever good action you do in *Laylat al-Qadr*, whether it is prayer (*salāt*), charity (*zakāt*), or other good deeds, is better than doing the same deed over a period of one thousand months in which there would be no *Laylat al-Qadr*. Had it not been that that Allah, the Blessed and the High, multiplies for the believers, they would never reach a high level. But He multiplies their good actions for them.<sup>15</sup>

Performing a two-rak‘at prayer in *Laylat al-Qadr* is rewarded more than reciting a two-rak‘at prayer every night in one thousand months. Spending one pound in charity in *Laylat al-Qadr* is better than giving one pound every night for one thousand months. Afterwards, Imam *Baqir* said, “Had it not been that that Allah, the Blessed and the High,

<sup>11</sup> *Wasā'il-u Shī'a*, vol. 10 p. 313

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* vol. 10 p. 313

<sup>13</sup> في الفقيه:-/« فيها من الصلاة- إلى - شهر ليس».

<sup>14</sup> في مرآة العقول: « قوله عليه السلام: ما بلغوا، أي غاية الفضل و الثواب».

<sup>15</sup> *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, p. 626, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 20, p. 334

multiplies for the believers, they would have never reached [their perfection or heaven].”<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Allah (swt), who is aware of our neediness and how limited our provision for our eternal journey is, offers golden opportunities to perform our best, and once it is performed, He grows the results. In addition to the general way of multiplying His reward for good actions, He has introduced to us the times, places, and conditions which are especially fertile. In each day, week, and year, there are moments in which the chance of your payer being accepted is more, receiving forgiveness is easier, and His reward is more generous. To mention a few examples of such blessed times, places, and conditions, one may refer to midday (*zawāl* time: when the sun moves from the middle of sky towards the west), the last one third of night (before dawn), the night of Friday (*Jumu'a*), the first and last hours of Friday, the Day of 'Arafah, the middle of *Sha'bān*, *Laylat al-Qadr*, mosques, holy sites like *Masjid al-Harām* in Mecca and *Masjid al-Nabi* in Medina, and after the performance of ritual prayers, especially congregational prayers.

***Allah (swt) rewards those who perform actions which are recommended in some hadiths, even if the hadiths are unauthentic***

The rule of compromise regarding the sources that indicate recommended actions (*Qā'idah al-Tasāmuh Fi Adillah al-Sunan*) in the science of Principles of Jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*) implies that if someone receives a hadith in which divine reward is promised for performing a given action and acts upon that hadith, he will be given the same reward, even if that hadith is not authentic. The ground for this rule is a set of hadiths from Prophet Muhamamd (s) and Imams (a) one of which reads:

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<sup>16</sup> *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 7, p. 626, *Al-Mizan*, vol. 20, p. 334

مَنْ بَلَغَهُ شَيْءٌ مِنَ الثَّوَابِ عَلَى (شَيْءٍ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ) فَعَمِلَهُ كَانَ لَهُ أَجْرُ ذَلِكَ (وَ إِنْ كَانَ  
رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ص لَمْ يَقُلْهُ)

Whoever receives some narration about a reward for performing a good action and he actually performs that action in order to get that reward, he will be given that reward even if that narration was not said by the Messenger of God.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, if you hear or read a hadith that, for example, recommends a certain prayer in the *Laylat al-Qadr* because it earns a special reward and a person actually reads the prayer, he or she would be given that reward even if that hadith was mistaken or forged. Of course, the narration and the recommended action must be in themselves reasonable and in compliance with the Qur'an, established sunnah, and reason.<sup>18</sup>

Allah's generosity is very apparent. When you hear of a good act of worship that you think is reasonable and pleasing to Allah and you perform it, Allah (swt) would accept it and reward you for it even if it was not in reality what He had prescribed for you through His Messenger. Allah (swt) accepts this because you did it for His sake. It is similar to a person who assumes you are thirsty when you are actually not and as a result brings you water; though you did not need it, you still thank him. Of course, you may not treat him like the one who brings you water when you really want it. However, Allah (swt) rewards such people equally. Allah (swt) means to tell us that since our intention was to do something good, He will reward us as a result given His kindness and generosity.

<sup>17</sup> *Wasā'il al-Shi'a*, vol. 1, p. 80 & vol. 30, p. 246. There is a chapter about this issue in vol. 1, pp. 8-82 which has ten hadiths.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, everyone has to be careful, not to accept everything, because there are many superstitions or ideas that make no sense which are clearly far from truth and no one should act upon such narrations.

***Allah (swt) rewards the pious according to their best performance***

Another aspect of Allah's generous reward system is that He takes the best action for those who are pious, that is, those who have faith and do righteous deeds, as a measure by which He rewards all other instances of the same type of action that they have had in their life:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً وَ لَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

*Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should he be faithful, —We shall revive him with a good life and pay them their reward by the best of what they used to do. (16:97)*

According to this verse, Allah (swt) gives those who have faith and righteous deeds a pleasant life (*al-hayāt al-tayyibah*) and will be rewarded according to the best of their actions. If you have reached this level of piety, Allah (swt) looks at all their deeds such as the thousands of *salāts* they may have performed during their lives, chooses the best one, and then rewards all their *salāts* accordingly. There might be only one special *salāt* in which you were focused, pure, and connected to Allah (s), and yet Allah (swt) makes that one the criterion by which He rewards all your *salāts*. If one act of charity was the best, He will reward all your charitable actions similarly.

This should also motivate us to be very careful about our actions. Some people may take advantage of this and regard their very good action - such as one good *salāt* in the past - as sufficient for Allah to reward all of their future *salat* thus so; they no longer need to worry about the quality of their *salāt*. However, this is a wrong approach. Indeed, if someone thinks this way, this reveals that he is not one of the pious

who have been given the pleasant life (*al-hayāt al-tayyibah*). Those who qualify for it continuously try to improve. They are hardly pleased with their acts of worship, and even if they feel one of them was good, they try to improve with the next one. They constantly raise their standards, especially because they know that improving the next performance can improve all their actions of the same type. For example, Allah observes the extent to which a person is conscious and careful to improve his prayers, and with every improved performance, He takes it as a measure by which He would reward all of his prayers.

***Allah (swt) rewards the patient without measure***

According to the Qur'an, there are people whom Allah (swt) rewards them without measure, which is evidently much more than giving a multiplied reward:

إِنَّمَا يُؤَفِّي الصَّابِرُونَ أَجْرَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ

*Say, [God declares:] 'O My servants who have faith! Be wary of your Lord. For those who do good in this world there will be a good [reward], and God's earth is vast. Indeed the patient will be paid in full their reward without measure.'* (39:10)<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> This is about rewarding. There are also verses that promise unlimited provision or sustenance for certain people. The Qur'an says:

*In houses God has allowed to be raised and wherein His Name is celebrated, He is glorified therein, morning and evening, by men whom neither trading nor bargaining distracts from the remembrance of God, and the maintenance of prayer and the giving of zakat. They are fearful of a day wherein the heart and the sight will be transformed, so that God may reward them for the best of what they have done, and enhance them out of His grace, and God provides for whomever He wishes without measure.* (24:36-38)

*Worldly life has been glamorized for the faithless, and they ridicule the faithful. But those who are Godwary shall be above them on the Day of Resurrection, and God provides for whomever He wishes without any reckoning.* (2:212)

Here, the promised reward is not ten times more, or 1000 times more, or one million times more. *It is without measure.*

### ***Allah (swt) is most forgiving***

In addition to His generous rewards, Allah (swt) deals with sins or people with mercy and kindness. He assures the sinners that if they sincerely regret and repent, He will forgive them. When people go to the plane of 'Arafāt on the day of Arafah, all their sins will be forgiven, and by the time they leave 'Arafāt to go to Mash'ar al-Harām they must not have any doubt about the forgiveness of their sins. It has been narrated that Allah (swt) frees one million people from the hellfire each and every day in the month of Ramadan at the time of breaking the fast. On the night and day of Friday, Allah (swt) frees one million people during each hour. In the night and day at the end of the month, Allah (swt) frees people equal to whatever He has given during the month.

### ***Different types of forgiveness***

Upon reflection on the Qur'anic verses on forgiveness of sins by God, divine forgiveness can be classified into four types:

- a. ***Simple forgiveness*** - verses that refer simply to divine forgiveness such as the following:

*Indeed God does not forgive that any partner should be ascribed to Him, but He forgives anything besides that to whomever He wishes. And whoever ascribes partners to*

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The above verses, indicate that God provides for whomever He wishes without measure. Although these verses do not explicitly introduce those God wishes to provide without measure, the following verse clearly suggests that those are the believers who do righteous deeds:

*Whoever commits a misdeed shall not be requited except with its like, but whoever acts righteously, whether male or female, should he be faithful — such shall enter paradise, provided therein without measure. (40:40)*

*God has indeed fabricated [a lie] in great sinfulness.  
(4:48 & 4:116)*

*Whoever commits evil or wrongs himself and then pleads  
God for forgiveness, will find God all-forgiving, al-  
merciful. (4:110)*

- b. **Covering the sin** - Sometimes not only the sin is forgiven, but it is also covered by Allah (swt). Thus, on the Day of Judgment, no one would be able to find out the sin which this person had committed because it has been covered. This is preferable to people reading your record of the deeds and discovering your wrongdoings, even though they are forgiven. For example, the Qur'an says:

إِنْ تُبْدُوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَبِعَمَّا هِيَ وَإِنْ تُخْفُوهَا وَتُؤْتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ وَيُكَفِّرُ  
عَنْكُمْ مِّنْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ

*If you disclose your charities, that is well, but if you hide  
them and give them to the poor, that is better for you,  
and it will atone for some of your misdeeds, and God is  
well aware of what you do. (2:271)<sup>20</sup>*

- c. **Wiping out sins** - According to Islamic sources, Allah (swt) may wipe out the sins and bad actions of certain people. This seems to be a kind of forgiveness which is more than simple forgiveness or even forgiveness with covering and hiding the sins, because here the sins are totally wiped out with no trace of them remaining. This is like an error in someone's writing that might be underlined and then forgiven by the teacher or might be forgiven and tippexed by the teacher. The advantage of the latter is that the corrected error would not be known by others and the one who has been forgiven would not be reminded of his sin. However, there is a worry that

<sup>20</sup> See also 4:31; 8:28; 29:7; 39:35; 64:9; 65:5.



this cover may be removed and the sins under it might be disclosed. Even when there is a cover, such as when correction liquid is put on the errors, it indicates that there was problem before. Thus a more powerful form of forgiveness is to entirely wipe out the error. For example, Imam Sadiq (s) is quoted as saying:

للجمعة حقا واجبا فإياك أن تضيع أو تقصر في شيء من عبادة الله تعالى و التقرب  
إليه بالعمل الصالح و ترك المحارم كلها فإن الله تعالى يضاعف فيه الحسنات و  
يمحو فيه السيئات و يرفع فيه الدرجات و ليلته مثل يومه فإن استطعت أن تحييها  
بالدعاء و الصلاة فافعل فإن الله تعالى يضاعف فيها الحسنات و يمحو السيئات و  
إن الله واسع كريم

Friday has an obligatory right. Be careful not to miss it or to do little in worshipping Allah (swt) and getting closer to Him through righteous deeds and refraining from all sins. Truly, Allah (swt) multiplies good actions and wipes out the sins on this day, and ranks will be elevated. Its night is like its day. If you are able to revive it by supplicating and saying prayer, do so, because Allah (swt) multiplies in it good deeds and wipes out the bad deeds. Truly Allah is All-bounteous, Generous.<sup>21</sup>

We also read in a hadith from Imam Baqir (a):

التَّائِبُ مِنَ الذَّنْبِ كَمَنْ لَا ذَنْبَ لَهُ

The one who [sincerely] repents is like the one who has never done any sin.<sup>22</sup>

d. **Transformation of sins into good deeds** - According to the Qur'an and hadith, not only does Allah (swt) forgives the sins of

<sup>21</sup> *Al-Tawhid*, p. 167; *Al-Da'awāt*, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> *Al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, p. 435, *Bihār Al-Anwār*, vol. 6, p. 21/41 & vol. 90, p. 281.

those who repent, but He may also transform their bad deeds into good ones:

إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ حَسَنَاتٍ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

*Excepting those who repent, attain faith, and act righteously. For such, God will replace their misdeeds with good deeds, and God is all-forgiving, all-merciful. (He wipes out the sins) and in each place writes down a good action. (25:70)*

This is much more than forgiving sins and wiping them out. In this way, Allah (swt) actually replaces their sins with good actions and rewards them for these good sins. Not only will they not be punished for their sins, but they will be able to recover at least part of their loss. Certainly everyone who does not harvest good in his life is in loss, even if he does not do anything sinful. This is similar to a student who returns his exam papers while it is blank. Interestingly, it can be understood from a saying of Imam Sajjad (a) that good deeds which are replaced with bad actions might still be multiplied like the good actions of the pious. Imam Sajjād (a) addresses Allah (swt) in one of his supplications:

يَا مُبَدِّلَ السَّيِّئَاتِ بِأَضْعَافِهَا مِنَ الْحَسَنَاتِ

O He who changes evil deeds into manifold good deeds!<sup>23</sup>

Not only does He replace good actions with bad actions, but He changes bad actions into manifold good actions. For example, one who has spent one pound sinfully after repentance and receiving this type of treatment from Allah (swt), he would receive rewards for spending

<sup>23</sup> *Al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyyah*, Supplication Twenty-Four.

several points in good purposes in the record of his deeds on the Day of Judgement.

Reflecting on a) the types of people who would be forgiven, b) the types of people who would have their sins covered, c) those who have sins that have been wiped out, and d) those who would see their sins changed into a manifold of good actions, it might be inferred that if someone who has sincerely committed sins regrets and decides not to repeat them, his sins will be forgiven. As far as Allah (swt) is concerned, there is no doubt about this. The repentant's comprehension would increase resulting in the strength of his regret. He feels ashamed because although his sins are forgiven, he continues to ponder over his condition on the Day of Judgment, when he will stand in front of Allah (swt) and the witnesses as his sins are being read to him. Although they will finally be forgiven, he would worry about his honor and tell himself, "It is disgraceful and shameful to me that before God's forgiveness is announced, my sins will be read in the presence of the Prophet, Imams, and the general public." For such people, Allah hides or even erases their bad deeds.

As his understanding increases knowing that Allah (swt) has forgiven him and has promised to preserve his honour, what about the time and opportunities he wasted? He could have taken many provisions during those years for his eternal journey. For such people, Allah (swt) transforms their bad actions to good ones to prevent them worrying too much about their provision. But there is still a chance to develop their understanding and think that it is great that their bad actions have been changed into good actions, although we are still losing because those with good actions have been multiplied at least ten times, but our newly given good actions are not multiplied. It might be for such people that Allah (swt) changes their bad deeds into multiplied good actions.

Thus, depending on the increase of your understanding, He gives you more. Of course, this is the author's humble view about one possibility in explaining the different ways of divine forgiveness. Although this makes sense, it is not to be taken as a proof. So depending on your understanding and on your worries, Allah (swt) would help you, and this is another dimension of His mercy and generosity.

***Allah (swt) does not punish anyone for another person's bad action, but He may forgive a sinner for another person's good action***

Another aspect of divine mercy is that sometimes Allah (s) forgives someone for the sake of another person. For example, the Qur'an says:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاتَّبَعَتْهُمْ ذُرِّيَّتُهُمْ بِإِيمَانٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَمَا أَلَتْنَاهُمْ مِنْ عَمَلِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ بِمَا كَسَبَ رَهِينٌ

*The faithful and their descendants who followed them in faith —We will make their descendants join them, and We will not stint anything from [the reward of] their deeds. Every man is a hostage to what he has earned. (52:21)*

For pious parents who have children who are believers, although not too pious or do not possess enough good deeds to enable all of them to assemble in heaven. However, Allah (swt) is so kind that He spends from the rewards of the pious parents on their children without any reduction of rewards in the parent's account. It is not that Allah (swt) reduces the ten good actions of a believer and gives five to the parents and five to his or her child to elevate them. Rather, He would upgrade the child without reducing the good actions and the corresponding rewards of the parents. Commenting on the above verse, Imam Sadiq (a) said:

فَصَرَتِ الْأَبْنَاءُ عَنْ عَمَلِ الْأَبَاءِ فَأَلْحَقُوا الْأَبْنََاءَ بِالْأَبَاءِ لِتَقَرَّ بِذَلِكَ أَعْيُنُهُمْ

Sometimes children's actions fall short of the actions of their fathers, but the children will be allowed to join them to delight their parents.<sup>24</sup>

Ibn Abbas narrates from Prophet Muhammad (s):

إذا دخل الرجل الجنة سال عن ابويه و زوجته و ولده، فيقال له انهم لم يبلغوا درجتك و عملك، فيقول رب قد عملت لى و لهم فيؤمر بالحاقهم به

When a man enters heaven, he will ask about his parents, wife, and children. He might be told that they have not reached your rank and deeds. He will say, "My Lord! Whatever I did, it was for myself and for them." At this point, God will command to let them join him.<sup>25</sup>

The Qur'an also informs us about the prayer of the angels for believers:

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ  
آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ وَقِهِمْ عَذَابَ  
الْجَحِيمِ رَبَّنَا وَأَدْخِلْهُمْ جَنَّاتِ عَدْنٍ الَّتِي وَعَدْتَهُمْ وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ  
وُذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ وَقِهِمُ السَّيِّئَاتِ وَمَنْ تَقِ السَّيِّئَاتِ يَوْمَئِذٍ فَقَدْ رَحِمْتَهُ  
وَذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

*Those who bear the Throne, and those around it, celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him, and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful: 'Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge. So forgive those who repent and follow Your*

<sup>24</sup> Al- Kāfī, vol. 3, p. 249, Al-Tawhid, p. 394.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Mizān, vol. 19, p. 16, cited from Al-Durr al-Manthur by Jalal al-Din Suyuti.

*way and save them from the punishment of hell. Our Lord! Admit them into the Gardens of Eden, which You have promised them, along with whoever is righteous among their forebears, their spouses and their descendants. Indeed You are the All-mighty, the All-wise. Save them from the ills; and whomever You save from the ills that day, You will have had mercy upon him, and that is the great success.’ (40:7-9)*

Commenting on the above verses, Allamah Tabataba’i maintains that they refer to two groups of the believers: One consists of those who are complete (*al-kāmilūn*) in their faith and practice; the other refers to some of the relatives of the first group who are lower in their rank, since their faith and practice are incomplete. The angels request Allah (swt) to forgive the former and give them the heaven that He had promised them. They also request Him to let the latter join the former to save them from evils.<sup>26</sup>

It does not seem plausible to think that Allah (swt) would let these great angels down by rejecting their requests. Indeed, it is Allah (swt) Himself who inspired them to pray to Him in this way. Similarly, Allah asks Prophet Muhammad to ask forgiveness for the people.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See *Al-Mizān*, vol. 17, p. 310. The original Arabic text is as follows:

و يظهر منه أن الطائفة الأولى هم الكاملون في الإيمان و العمل على ما هو مقتضى حقيقة معنى قولهم: «لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَ اتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ» فذكروهم و سألوه أن يغفر لهم و ينجز لهم ما وعدهم من جنات عدن، و الطائفة الثانية دون هؤلاء في المنزلة ممن لم يستكمل الإيمان و العمل من ناقص الإيمان و مستضعف و سيئ العمل من منسوبي الطائفة الأولى فذكروهم و سألوه تعالى أن يلحقهم بالطائفة الأولى الكاملين في جناتهم و يقيهم السيئات فالآية في معنى قوله تعالى: «وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَ اتَّبَعَتْهُمْ ذُرِّيَّتُهُمْ بِإِيمَانٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَ مَا أَلْتَنَاهُمْ مِنْ عَمَلِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ» الطور:- 21 غير أن الآية التي نحن فيها أوسع و أشمل لشمولها الآباء و الأزواج بخلاف آية سورة الطور، و المأخوذ فيها الصلوح و هو أعم من الإيمان المأخوذ في آية الطور.

<sup>27</sup> “It is by God’s mercy that you are gentle to them; and had you been harsh and hardhearted, surely they would have scattered from around you. So excuse them, and plead for forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs, and once you are resolved, put your trust in God. Indeed God loves those who trust in Him. (3:159)

**Allah (swt) forgives through intercession**

Allah (swt) forgives the major sins of those who please to Him through intercession (*shafā'ah*). The Qur'an says:

*Intercession is of no avail with Him except for those whom He permits. When fear is lifted from their hearts, they say, 'What did your Lord say?' They say, 'The truth, and He is the All-exalted, the All-great.'* (34:23)

*Every soul is hostage to what it has earned, except the People of the Right Hand. [They will be] in gardens, questioning concerning the guilty: 'What drew you into Hell?' They will answer, 'We were not among those who prayed. Nor did we feed the poor. We used to gossip along with the gossipers, and we used to deny the Day of Retribution, until death came to us.' So the intercession of the intercessors will not avail them.* (74:38-48)

Commenting on this verse, Allamah Tabataba'i argues that the sinful people are either qualified to receive intercession so that they can be forgiven or they disqualify themselves for receiving intercession and therefore will remain hostage to their sins and will suffer in hell. Allamah also refers to a well-known hadith of Prophet Muhammad (s) in which he is quoted as saying:

ادَّخَرْتُ شَفَاعَتِي لِأَهْلِ الْكِبَائِرِ مِنْ أُمَّتِي

I have reserved my intercession for those from my nation who have committed major sins.<sup>28</sup>

Those who will be given the right to intercede are also certainly pleasing Him. The Qur'an says:

<sup>28</sup> *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 8, pp. 30 & 62.





“My Lord! This was not what I had expected from you.” Allah, the Almighty (*jalla jalāluhu*), will ask him: “What did you expect from Me?” He would reply: “My Lord! My expectation from You was that You would forgive my sins and settle [enter] me Your heaven.” At that point, Allah will say: “My angels! By My dignity, My bounties, My trials and My High position, he has never had in his life a good opinion about Me. Had he had done so I would not have frightened him by [sending him towards] hell. Accept his lie and allow him to enter heaven!”

Then Imam Sadiq (a) said: “No servant of Allah forms a good opinion about Allah except that he would find Allah treating him as he thought and no servant of Allah forms a bad opinion about Allah except that he would find Allah treating him as he thought. This is what can be understood from the verse: *“And that was your (evil) thought which you entertained about your Lord that has tumbled you down into perdition, so are you become of the lost ones.”*<sup>30</sup>

This is His mercy and generosity and this is why when Imam Sajjād (a) was told about Hasan al-Basri’s statement: “It is not a wonder how some people are destroyed; it is a wonder how anyone can be saved,” The Imam said: “I say, ‘It is not a wonder how some are saved. It is a wonder how some are destroyed despite Allah’s inclusive mercy’.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, those who go to hell are those who have disqualified themselves and eventually would not benefit from His great mercy. They are

<sup>30</sup> *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 7, p. 287. There is a chapter on what will become manifest on the Day of Judgement from His mercy. The above hadith is the third hadith of this chapter. All the nine hadiths in this chapter worth reflection for better understanding divine mercy and some of the ideas discussed above like forgiving the sins, erasing sins from one’s record of deeds and transformation of sins into good deeds.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* vol. 75, p. 154. The hadith is as follows:

قِيلَ لَهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ إِنَّ الْحَسَنَ الْبَصْرِيَّ قَالَ لَيْسَ الْعَجَبُ مِمَّنْ هَلَكَ كَيْفَ هَلَكَ وَ إِنَّمَا الْعَجَبُ مِمَّنْ نَجَا  
كَيْفَ نَجَا فَقَالَ ع أَنَا أَقُولُ لَيْسَ الْعَجَبُ مِمَّنْ نَجَا كَيْفَ نَجَا وَ أَمَا الْعَجَبُ مِمَّنْ هَلَكَ كَيْفَ هَلَكَ مَعَ  
سَعَةِ رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ

condemned to hell, and indeed hell will suffer from them. You might have experienced that sometimes you have to deal with some people who hurt you like fire or even more severely; fire burns your skin, but these people burn your heart, mind and everything that you have. Perhaps this is why they can become the fuel for the fire of hell (2:24; 3:10; 66:6) which can burn even one's heart (104:6 & 7). So, what keeps fire of hell igniting seems to be only such people.

**Final remark:** Although this world and the Day of Judgement are all manifestations of His great mercy, it will only be in heaven that His mercy can become manifest in the best possible way, since there is no barrier or restriction involved. This world is too limited without a chance to have everything: heaven has limitless. Whatever you want God will give you (39:34; 42:22) and even more (50:35). With our limited understand and our desire for petty things in comparison to His vast generosity, God does not merely give us what we want: He first gives whatever you desire and then offers you the extra rewards He has prepared and kept hidden as a surprise:

فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُمْ مِّنْ قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

*No one knows what has been kept hidden for them of comfort as a reward for what they used to do. (32:17)*

May Allah (swt) enable us to better understand and benefit more from His mercy, and may we receive more of it and become the channel for His mercy to reach people. Allah looks for agents to spread His mercy. Who is ready to become His agent? If you become his agent, He gives you so abundantly that His mercy will overflow from you to others, like Prophet Mohammad (s) (3:159; 21:107). May Allah (swt) forgive all our sins and mistakes and may He (swt) continually keep us on the right path.

### ***Conclusion***

In this series of eight papers, we studied some aspects of the Islamic understanding of God's mercy. We studied different names and qualities of God and demonstrated that those which relate to His mercy are by far the most emphasized ones. Then we studied some of the characteristics of divine mercy and argued that His mercy is the reason for creating the world. Out of His mercy, God has created us and all that we need for our survival and convenience and provided us with Prophets and divine messages for guidance. We also referred to the different types of mercy God has provided mankind in order to be able to successfully tread the right path. Some people appreciate and some do not. Those who do not appreciate deprive themselves from further mercy; those who appreciate God will give them extra and additional mercy. Finally, we studied how God treats people with His mercy on the Day of Judgment with respect to the generous reward in which He will demonstrate His vast forgiveness.

Thus, several aspects of God's mercy were touched upon in these series: 1) divine mercy as that which plays a central role in Islamic spirituality and morality, 2) the implications of Allah's attributes, such as *al-Rahmān* and *al-Rahim*, as well as His coexisting attributes of mercy and power with a connection to Allah's objective in His creation, 3) attributes such as His generosity, forgiveness, and kindness with further descriptions of His mercy connected to His knowledge and richness, 4) God's mercy in making various arrangements for our survival and convenience on Earth, such as creating the stars, maintaining the sky, and delivering us from misfortunes; and God's mercy in human guidance as He sent humankind messengers with the impeccable qualities of empathy and gentleness, 5) God's arrangement for different kinds of support in people's spiritual life, such as protection from Satan, misguidance, and from the tempting soul, 6) the different types and levels of divine forgiveness, how God may even

transform one's immoral deeds into good ones, people's response to divine mercy, and additional mercy for the patient, 7) the people who qualify themselves to receive extra mercy from God, some of the qualities being the patient, the good-doers, the righteous, the repentant, the obedient, and those who migrate and struggle for the sake of God, and 8) God's forgiveness and generous reward.