

O Allāh, Relieve Every Deeply Anguished One

اَللّٰهُمَّ فَرِّجْ عَن كُلِّ مَكْرُوْبٍ

Meaning of ‘Makrūb’

Makrūb is an object noun whose origin is the verbal noun ‘*karb*’ meaning ‘deep anguish.’ ‘Allāmah Tabṭatabāʾī in his *al-Mʿzẓn* quotes Raghīb Isfahānī, the famous lexicographer of Qurʾānic words, as saying1:

اَلْكَرْبُ الْغَمُّ الشَّدِيدُ.

“Karb means deep anguish.”

The word Karbalāʾ, for example, is a composition of ‘intense grief’ (*karb*) and ‘trial’ (*balāʾ*)

Therefore, in short, ‘*makrūb*’ is one who suffers deep sorrow and anguish.

The Source of Anguish

In this verse we are humbly asking Allāh (swt) to lift the state of deep anguish from all ‘the deeply anguished and sorrowful.’ And whosoever seeks the relief of the anguished also seeks the elimination of the causes that create anguish. We should, however, realize that the sources of anguish vary with different people and different circumstances. Those who enjoy the proximity of Allāh, despite having no grief for loss of the world and its pleasures:

﴿ أَلَا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴾

“Surely, the friends of Allah neither fear nor grieve.” [Holy Qur’an, 10:62]

experience deep anguish for the disbelievers due to the consequences they would have to face in future:

﴿ فَلَا تَذْهَبْ نَفْسُكَ عَلَيْهِمْ حَسْرَاتٍ ﴾

“...And therefore do not consume yourself for them due to grief [of their unbelief]...” [Holy Qur’an, 35:8]

ʿAyatullah Khumayni in his well-known Forty Traditions (*Chehl Hadith*) says: “...whoever perceives the greatness and glory of the Lord to a greater extent and knows the sacred station of God Almighty more than others, suffers more and is tormented to a greater extent by the sins of the creatures and their offences against the Lord’s sanctity. Also, one who has a greater love and compassion for the creatures of God is tormented to a greater extent by their crooked and wretched condition and ways. And, of course, the Seal of the Prophets (s) was more perfect in all these stations and higher than all the prophets and the *awliya*’ (those near to God) in respect of his degree of excellence and perfection. Hence, his torment and suffering was greater than that of any one of them...”

Sometimes the source of grief is different. For example, with regard to Prophet Ayyub (as) we say the following² in one of the supplications of the Holy month of Ramadan:

يَا مُلَيِّنَ الْحَدِيدِ لِدَاؤُودَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ! يَا كَاشِفَ الْكُرْبِ الْعِظَامِ عَنْ أَيُّوبَ عَلَيْهِ
السَّلَامُ!

“O Softner of Iron for Dawūd, upon whom be peace. O Reliever of great sorrows from Ayyub, upon whom be peace.”

This indicates that Prophet Ayyub (as) had suffered major calamities during his lifetime. Perhaps the following tradition explains this better:

ʿAlī ibn Ibrāhīm, in a long tradition, narrates on the authority of Abū Basīr that Imām al-Sādiq (as) said: “...Then his [Prophet Ayyub (as)’s] whole body, except his intellect and his eyes, was subjected to the disease. Then Iblis blew upon it and it became a single wound extending from his head to feet. He (Job) remained for a period in that condition, praising and thanking God, until his body became infested

with worms. Whenever a worm fell off his body, he would put it back, saying to it, “Return to your place, from where God created you.” And it began to stench until his townsfolk expelled him from his town and his food came from the garbage thrown outside the town.”³

With regard to Prophet Nūḥ (as) also, ‘intense grief’ has been mentioned. Look at the following verse:

﴿وَنُوحًا إِذْ نَادَىٰ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَاسْتَجَبْنَا لَهُ فَنَجَّيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ مِنَ الْكَرْبِ الْعَظِيمِ﴾

“And Nūḥ, when he cried aforetime, so We answered him, and delivered him and his followers from the great anguish.” [Holy Qur’ān, 21:76]

Exegetes of the Qur’ān have different interpretations for the source of this grief. Some like Tabarsī in his Majma‘ al-Bayān surmise that it refers to the disturbance of his people, whereas Mawlā Kāshānī says that it may refer to both that and to the great flood.

Some sources of grief, however, spring from weakness of faith and a deep attachment to the world: because a person does not have the luxuries of life that others seem to enjoy, you may find him suffering grief. Those who commit suicide due to intense grief and sorrow do so due to lack of patience or even an ‘aim’ in life. Hence, every *makrūb* is not the same.

The supplicant therefore should bear in mind the different causes of sorrow and anguish and sincerely pray to Allāh to eliminate them accordingly. For example, with regard to one who is distressed due to lack of the additional pleasures of the world, one must pray that he is emancipated from the love of the world. The person who is in a state of utter poverty should pray that his needs are covered so that he may engage in his daily affairs and devotion with peace of mind; the one who suffers a cancerous ailment should yearn for his relief from it, so that he may live in peace and derive the utmost benefit of doing good in life and thereby build his Hereafter.

Remembering the Anguished of Today

To keep abreast with the contemporary history of the world may seem to be insignificant for some: what can I do, for example, if others are dying of starvation in Afghanistan? I have no means to attend to them and thus it makes no difference whether I know about their awful state or not.

Clearly, such thinking stems from a narrow outlook. The human being enjoys a disposition that yearns for the salvation of every other human being. Therefore indifference is an alien concept to his nature. ‘Not being able to help the oppressed’ does not necessitate indifference on our part.

Firstly, our natural conscience would like to know the situation of those of our brethren who are suffering throughout the world.

Secondly, if we are materially unable, Almighty Allāh has opened the door of prayer for us. Through prayers for the destitute, things can really change.

Thirdly, there are so many things that we can do together to crush the power of the world arrogance, but we do not realize the same. Our businessmen who import goods from countries like Israel and buy them at relatively low costs, can stop such transactions, so that they may not indirectly take part in killing the innocent Palestinians. Many of us indirectly promote the commodities that the world arrogance produces. If we were to boycott such products, these groups would never be as materially prosperous as they are. Today, if the Arab leaders were to wake up and stop bowing in front of the world arrogance, a great transformation can take place.

Individual Responsibility

But what is my duty as an individual when I recite this verse of the radiant supplication? Most of us enjoy a certain limit of power and can play an effective role accordingly. Therefore let us measure the power that we have at our disposal, and practically take steps to relieve those anguished and distressed people that we can support. For we are not obliged to do what is beyond our capacity. The Holy Qur'ān [al-Baqara – 2:286] says:

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا

“Allāh does not oblige a soul save to the extent of its capacity...”

Thus if I can support a particular family and remove it from the state of sorrow, I should do so. If I am the president of a certain society, and can remove the sorrow of those who are disturbed by the ‘disorganization of the social setup’ I should do so by organization. The list goes on. The extensions are identified according to the power every supplicant has. Otherwise, uttering this radiant verse of the supplication would mean nothing but the mere movement one’s tongue, or the expression of one’s hypocrisy; may Allāh save us from such ignominy!

Instilling Happiness in the Hearts of Believers

Removing anguish from the heart of a believer and instilling happiness in him is one of the significant subjects that our books of tradition have extensively covered. Following are traditions worthy of reflection:

1. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported⁴ to have said:

مَنْ سَرَّ مُؤْمِنًا فَقَدْ سَرَّنِي، وَمَنْ سَرَّنِي فَقَدْ سَرَّ اللَّهَ.

“Whoever makes a believer happy has indeed made me happy; and whosoever has made me happy has indeed made Allah happy.”

2. The Holy Prophet (s) is reported⁵ to have said:

إِنَّ فِي الْجَنَّةِ دَارًا يُقَالُ لَهَا دَارُ الْفَرَحِ، لَا يَدْخُلُهَا إِلَّا مَنْ فَرَّحَ يَتَامَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ.

“Surely, there is a place in Paradise called ‘the House of Joy’; none would enter therein save one who made the believers among the orphans happy.”

Recommended States of Anguish

Some states of anguish are highly recommended. They can be gateways toward prosperity and peace. True repentance and regret is one such state:

Imam ‘Alī (as) is reported⁶ to have said:

سُرُورُ الْمُؤْمِنِ بِطَاعَةِ رَبِّهِ، وَحُزْنُهُ عَلَى ذَنْبِهِ.

“The happiness of a believer is in his obedience and his grief is due to his sin.”

In fact, repentance is a fundamental condition from among the six conditions of *istighfār* enumerated by Imam ‘Alī (as) in *Nahju’l Balāgha*. Imam (as) says:

...أَوَّلُهَا النَّدَمُ عَلَى مَا مَضَى...

“The first [condition of *istighfār*] is regret about the past [misdeeds].”

The Holy Qur’ān [3: 135] says:

وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً أَوْ ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ذَكَرُوا اللَّهَ فَاسْتَغْفَرُوا لِذُنُوبِهِمْ

وَمَنْ يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ...؟

“And those when they commit an indecency or oppress themselves, remember Allāh and seek forgiveness of their sins; and who can forgive a sin save Allāh?”

In his *Tafsīr al-Sīfī*, Mawlā Fayd Kāshānī in the exegesis of this verse narrates⁷ the following incident:

[Observing brevity here we would not mention all the details of the incident, but try to mention the salient points only.]

Once during the time of the Holy Prophet (s) a youth called Bahlī came in the presence of the Holy Prophet (s) while intensely weeping. The Holy Prophet (s) asked him why he was weeping, and he said that he had committed very great sins, such that if Allāh (swt) were to punish him for only some of them, he would enter the Hell Fire. Then the Holy Prophet (s) asks him some questions and the youth answers the Prophet (s). At one point the conversation reaches a climax and the Holy Prophet (s) asks the youth: ‘Is there anyone save The Very Great who would forgive the very great sin? The youth says: ‘No, I swear by Allāh.’ Then the Holy Prophet (s) asks him to inform him one of his sins. The youth then narrates his story as follows:

I used to dig graves for seven years; I would remove the dead, and disrobe them. Once it so happened that a lady from the Ansār died. After she was carried to her grave and buried, her family left the place; then the night came to pass. I neared her grave, dug it, and removed her out; thereafter I unshrouded her and left her naked near the grave; and started to leave. Suddenly, Satan came in my mind and began attracting me to her. By this, I returned back and lacking self-control committed the vile deed with her. Then I took off leaving her in that state. Suddenly I heard a voice from behind which said: O youth, woe be upon you from the Judge of the Day of Judgment, the day when He shall make me and you stand in the naked state that you left me among the dead, and took me out from my grave and removed my shroud from me and left me to stand in the state of impurity... So woe be upon you. Narrating this, the youth said: Therefore I do not think that I shall ever smell the scent of Paradise.

Hearing all this the Prophet (s) said: Be away from me O sinner; I am afraid I would burn by your Fire; how near are you from the Fire! The youth then left the noble presence of the Holy Prophet (s) and went to Medina where he took some provisions and left for one of its mountains; there he tied his hands onto his neck and started supplicating and seeking forgiveness and weeping and repenting. He did this for forty days and nights. It is said that the animals around him also wept for him. When forty days and nights were over, he raised his hands towards the sky and cried: ‘O Allāh, what have you done about my wish? If you have accepted my supplication and forgiven my fault then inform the Holy Prophet (s) through revelation about the same; and if not, then quickly send down a fire that would burn me, or a punishment in this world that would vanquish me, and emancipate me from humiliation of the Day of

Resurrection. Upon this, Almighty Allﷻh sends the abovementioned verse [3: 135].

After the revelation of this verse, the Holy Prophet (s) goes to the place where the youth was weeping in forgiveness. [The sad scenario makes one really weep. We have omitted it here to observe brevity]. The Holy Prophet (s) nears the youth and tells him: “I give you glad tidings [from Allﷻh] you are a freed slave of Allﷻh from the fire

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1. al-Ma‘zīn, v. 7, pg. 134
 2. Iqbāl al-A‘mal, v. 1, pg. 364
 3. Narrated by ‘Uyātullāh Khumaynī in his 40 traditions
 4. Ma‘zīn al-Hikma, v. 2., pg. 1291, 8465
 5. Ibid., v. 2., pg. 1291, tr. 8460
 6. Ibid., v. 2, pg. 1291, tr. 8455
 7. Tafsīr al-Sūfī, v. 1, pp. 382–384

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