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Understanding God's Mercy Part 5

Mohammad Ali Shomali[1]

Abstract

In the previous parts, we discussed the various names and attributes used for God in the Qur'an which refer directly to His mercy. Out of His mercy, which contains various characteristics, God created the world and in particular human beings. We also studied the role of God's mercy in providing arrangements for our survival and convenience on Earth, as well as its role in guiding mankind. In this part, we will continue studying the role of God's mercy in guiding mankind which includes sending books of guidance. God's mercy also provides humankind with different kinds of support in their spiritual life, such as protection from Satan, misguidance, and from the tempting soul.

Divine Guidance

There are two types of divine guidance: general and specific. General Guidance (*al-hidyah al-'ammah*) is the guidance given to all creatures, as everything created in this world receives some type of guidance. When Pharaoh asked Moses and Aaron who their Lord was, his reply was:

قَالَ رَبُّنَا ٱلَّذِىٓ أَعۡطَىٰ كُلَّ شَىۡءٍ خَلۡقَهُۥ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ

He said, 'Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it.' (***20:50***)

Everything in this world knows its role for its continuity in this world. Animals, insects, and plants know how to survive and continue their species. Even electrons know how to move and function because it is God who has guided them:

سَبِّحِ ٱسۡمَ رَبِّكَ ٱلۡأَعۡلَى ٱلَّذِى خَلَقَ فَسَوَّىٰ وَٱلَّذِى قَدَّرَ فَهَدَىٰ

Celebrate the Name of your Lord, the Most Exalted, who created and proportioned, who determined and guided. (***87: 1–3***)

This is very similar to the answer of Moses to Pharaoh. God is the one who has created everything, who has given all appropriate measures and design, and has also guided them.

The Specific Guidance (*al–hidayah al–khassah*) pertains to human beings (and *jinn*s) who have free will and are therefore able to make moral decisions. The Specific Guidance by itself is divided into two: a) the generative (*al–takwiniyyah*), which is through human conscience and intellect, and b) the legislative (*al–tashri'iyyah*) which is through revelation and divine messages communicated to mankind by the prophets. As we will see later, those who benefit from the guidance available to everyone will receive additional guidance from God.

In the previous part, we talked about the Prophet Muhammad and the Prophet Jesus, both appointed by God to be messengers of mercy. In what follows, we will study the Qur'an's offering of divine messages sent through the prophets as a mercy.

Books of Guidance and Mercy

The Qur'an

According to our survey, there are sixteen verses in the Qur'an referring to the Qur'an as sent because of His mercy. For example, God says:

وَلَقَدْ جِئْنَاهُمْ بِكِتَابٍ فَصَّلْنَاهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُون

Certainly We have brought them a Book, which We have elaborated with knowledge, as a guidance and mercy for a people who have faith. (***7:52***)

The Qur'an is not an ambiguous book, nor does it merely give people some general headlines. The Qur'an is an elaborate book and gives all the necessary details we need to know for our happiness. This is because God wanted to give us "guidance and mercy"; thus, the Qur'an is a source of this guidance and a source of mercy for humankind. Elsewhere, God says:

وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ ٱلْقُرْءَانِ مَا هُوَ شِفَآءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا يَزِيدُ ٱلظَّـٰلِمِينَ 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***)

According to this verse, the Qur'an is a healing and mercy for those who follow its instructions and act

upon it. It is a book that can heal our illnesses. Of course, the main source of our illnesses is forgetting God, and the Qur'an as a reminder (*dhikr*) is able to heal that. In the *Supplication of Kumayl*, we pray to God by saying:

يا من اسمه دواء و ذكره شفاء

Oh the one whose name is medicine and His remembrance is healing.[2]

Thus, because forgetting God is an illness, His remembrance is a healing. In any case, the Qur'an is a healing and mercy for all to strive to benefit from. Unfortunately, there are many who deprive themselves from this abundance of mercy and healing. The Qur'an is like a table set by God and everyone is invited to approach and benefit from it; however, those who actually benefit are much less than all human beings who are invited.

It should be noted that whenever God gives us a blessing such as the Qur'an, the Prophet (s), the *Ahlul Bayt* (a), a good teacher, a friend, a good spouse, or good children, we are held responsible, and if we do not appreciate them and benefit from them, we will end up in a worse situation compared to those who have not been given those blessings. This is why the pagans in Mecca before the advent of Islam are less responsible than those who remained pagan after the Prophet was sent to guide them. It is certain that on the Day of Judgment, God will not treat them the same. Another example can be found in the story of the disciples of Jesus (a). They asked Jesus to request his Lord to send down a table with lots of food and Jesus (a) prayed:

قَالَ عِيسَى ٱبۡنُ مَرۡيَمَ ٱللَّهُمَّ رَبَّنَآ أَنزِلۡ عَلَيۡنَا مَآئِدَةً مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ تَكُونُ لَنَا عِيدًا لِّأَوَّلِنَا

وَءَاخِرِنَا وَءَايَةً مِّنكَ وَٱرۡزُقۡنَا وَأَنتَ خَيۡرُ ٱلرَّٰزِقِينَ

Said Jesus son of Mary, 'O God! Our Lord! Send down to us a table from the sky, to be a festival for us for the first ones and the last ones among us and as a sign from You, and provide for us; for You are the best of providers.' (***5:114***)

They wanted the table not only to enjoy the food, but to witness a sign of God's love and support for them, and this in turn is expected to increase their confidence. In response to Jesus' prayer, God the Almighty said:

قَالَ ٱللَّهُ إِنِّى مُنَزِّلُهَا عَلَيۡكُمۡ فَمَن يَكۡفُرۡ بَعۡدُ مِنكُمۡ فَإِنِّىٓ أُعَذِّبُهُۥ عَذَابًا لَّآ أُعَذِّبُهُۥٓ أَحَدًا

مِّنَ ٱلۡعَٰلَمِينَ

God said, 'I will indeed send it down to you. But should any of you disbelieve after this, I will indeed punish him with a punishment such as I do not punish anyone in all creation.' (***5:115***)

Thus, when God gives you a blessing, He expects more of you, and this is very rational. Therefore, those who are given the gift of the Qur'an and do not listen to it or practice it, the Qur'an "increases the wrongdoers only in loss" (17:82). Their situation becomes worse not because the Qur'an is harmful; rather, it is because they have disobeyed.

Another verse that confirms the Qur'an being originated from God's mercy reads as follows:

وَيَوۡمَ نَبۡعَثُ فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٖ شَهِيدًا عَلَيۡهِم مِّنۡ أَنفُسِهِمۡۖ وَجِئۡنَا بِكَ شَهِيدًا عَلَىٰ هَٰٓؤُلَآءِ

وَنَزَّلۡنَا عَلَيۡكَ ٱلۡكِتَٰبَ تِبۡيَٰنٗا لِّكُلِّ شَيۡءٖ وَهُدٗى وَرَحۡمَةٗ وَبُشۡرَىٰ لِلۡمُسۡلِمِينَ

The day We raise in every nation a witness against them from among themselves, We shall bring you as a witness against these. We have sent down the Book to you as a clarification of all things and as a guidance and mercy and good news for the Muslims. (***16:89***)

This verse refers to a Qur'anic principle which implies that on the Day of Judgment, God will call from every nation and generation a witness from them that will bear witness about their belief and conduct. The verses then refer to the revelation of the Qur'an as an explanation for everything that human beings need to know for their happiness, as a guidance, mercy, and glad tidings for those who submit themselves to God's will.

Another verse regarding merciful nature of the Qur'an is the following:

وَإِنَّهُۥ لَهُدٗى وَرَحۡمَةٞ لِّلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ

...and it is indeed a guidance and mercy for the faithful. (***27:77***)

So far we have mentioned only four verses in this regard and there are twelve more which portray the Qur'an as a book of mercy.[3]

Thus, it is established that the Qur'an is a mercy from God for us. Therefore, if there are moments in which you want to receive God's mercy and there is no one to show it, you can hold the Qur'an and embrace it. What can be better than holding a mercy from God in your hand? God says:

وَٱعۡتَصِمُواْ بِحَبۡلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعاً

Hold fast, all together, to God's cord (***3:103***)

This "cord" certainly includes the Qur'an, as seen in some versions of the Hadith of *Thaqalayn*, where the Prophet Muhammad (s) introduced the Qur'an as rope extended between the heaven and the earth.[4]

The Torah

According to the Qur'an, five verses point to the Torah as a source that was also sent as a mercy from God, one of which states:

ثُمَّ ءَاتَيۡنَا مُوسَى ٱلۡكِتَـٰبَ تَمَامًا عَلَى ٱلَّذِىٓ أَحۡسَنَ وَتَفۡصِيلاً لِّكُلِّ شَىۡءٍ وَهُدًى

وَرَحۡمَةً لَّعَلَّهُم بِلِقَآءِ رَبِّهِمۡ يُؤۡمِنُون

Then We gave Moses the Book, completing [***Our blessing***] ***on him who is virtuous, and as an elaboration of all things, and as a guidance and mercy, so that they may believe in the encounter with their Lord.*** (***6:154***)

Elsewhere, the Qur'an says:

وَلَمَّا سَكَتَ عَن مُّوسَى ٱلۡغَضَبُ أَخَذَ ٱلۡأَلۡوَاحَ وَفِى نُسۡخَتِهَا هُدًى وَرَحۡمَةٌ لِّلَّذِينَ هُمۡ

لِرَبِّهِمۡ يَرۡهَبُون

And when Moses' indignation abated, he picked up the tablets whose inscriptions contained guidance and mercy for those who are in awe of their Lord. (***7:154***)

When Moses received the tablets and returned to his people only to find them worshiping the idol, he was infuriated and dropped the tablets. After he calmed himself, he gathered the tablets. In those tablets, there was guidance and mercy for the God-fearing.

In yet another verse, the Qur'an regards the Book of Moses as a mercy:

وَمِن قَبۡلِهِ كِتَـٰبُ مُوسَىٰٓ إِمَامًا وَرَحۡمَةً وَهَـٰذَا كِتَـٰبٌ مُّصَدِّقٌ لِّسَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لِّيُنذِرَ ٱلَّذِينَ

ظَلَمُواْ وَبُشۡرَىٰ لِلۡمُحۡسِنِينَ

Yet before it the Book of Moses was a guide and a mercy, and this is a Book which confirms it, in the Arabic language, to warn those who do wrong, and is a [bearer of] good news for the virtuous. (***46:12***)

Thus, according to the above three verses of the Qur'an, the Torah was also book of guidance and mercy.5

The message of Noah

It can be understood from the Qur'an that the message given to the Prophet Noah (a) also involved mercy from God:

قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ أَرَءَيۡتُمۡ إِن كُنتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٖ مِّن رَّبِّي وَءَاتَىٰنِي رَحۡمَةٗ مِّنۡ عِندِهِۦ فَعُمِّيَتۡ

عَلَيۡكُمۡ أَنُلۡزِمُكُمُوهَا وَأَنتُمۡ لَهَا كَٰرِهُونَ

He said, 'O my people! Tell me, should I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord, and He has granted me His own mercy though it should be invisible to you shall we force it upon you while you are averse to it. (***11:28***)

Thus, the signs which were given to Noah (a), including the miracles he performed and the revelation he received, embodied divine mercy.

The message of Salih

The Qur'an refers to a similar point made by the Prophet *Salih* (a) whereby he said:

قَالَ يَٰقَوۡمِ أَرَءَيۡتُمۡ إِن كُنتُ عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٖ مِّن رَّبِّي وَءَاتَىٰنِي مِنۡهُ رَحۡمَةٗ فَمَن يَنصُرُنِي مِنَ ٱللَّهِ إِنۡ

عَصَيۡتُهُۥ فَمَا تَزِيدُونَنِي غَيۡرَ تَخۡسِيرٖ

He said, 'O my people! Tell me, should I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord, and He has granted me His own mercy, who will protect me from God should I disobey Him? For then you will increase me in nothing but loss. (***11:63***)

Thus, this mercy refers to divine miracles which were given to *Salih* (a) or to the divine message he had

received.

God Legislates out of His Mercy

The Qur'anic account of divine mercy offers the details of religion i.e. the rulings of the *Shari'ah*, which originate from divine mercy:

يَـٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ لَا تَأۡكُلُوٓاْ أَمۡوَٰلَكُم بَيۡنَكُم بِٱلۡبَـٰطِلِ إِلَّآ أَن تَكُونَ تِجَـٰرَةً عَن تَرَاضٖ مِّنكُمۡ وَلَا

تَقۡتُلُوٓاْ أَنفُسَكُمۡ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمۡ رَحِيمًا

O you who have faith! Do not eat up your wealth among yourselves unrightfully, but it should be trade by mutual consent. And do not kill yourselves. Indeed God is most merciful to you. (***4:29***)

As indicated in this verse, the reason committing suicide is a prohibited act is because God is merciful and kind to you. A mother who sees that her child hurting or injuring himself reprimands him against doing so because she loves him. Similarly, God says to the person who is committing suicide and no longer loves to exist that He still loves him and wants him to be there.

Another example is the ruling of *li'an*, or the testimony of ***"those who accuse their wives, but have no witnesses except themselves"*** (***24:6***). The ruling is made in such a way that no innocent person would be punished. Then God adds:

وَلَوۡلَا فَضۡلُ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيۡكُمۡ وَرَحۡمَتُهُۥ وَأَنَّ ٱللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ حَكِيمٌ

Were it not for God's grace and His mercy upon you, and that God is All-clement, all-Wise... (***24:10***)

God helps and supports us out of His mercy

Another aspect of divine mercy is that it supports us. In what follows, we will refer to some of the ways in which this support is provided as a protection from Satan, misguidance, and the tempting soul.

Protection from Satan

Satan can be considered as an enemy of God, although he cannot do any real harm to God; he simply puts much effort into misguiding human beings. Indeed, in the beginning, he was a fervent worshipper of God. His condemnation to everlasting punishment began with God's ordering him to prostrate before Adam:

قَالَ يَا إِبْلِيسُ مَا لَكَ أَلَّا تَكُونَ مَعَ السَّاجِدِينَ قَالَ لَمْ أَكُن لِأَسْجُدَ لِبَشَرٍ خَلَقْتَهُ مِّن صَلْصَالٍ مِنْ

حَمَإٍ مَّسْنُونٍ قَالَ فَاخْرُجْ مِنْهَا فَإِنَّكَ رَجِيمٌ وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكَ اللَّعْنَةَ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ قَالَ رَبِّ فَأَنظِرْ

إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ قَالَ فَإِنَّكَ مِنَ الْمُنظَرِينَ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ الْوَقْتِ الْمَعْلُومِ قَالَ رَبِّ بِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأُزَيِّنَنَّ

لَهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمُ الْمُخْلَصِين

He said, 'O Iblis! What kept you from being among those who have prostrated?' Said he, 'I will not prostrate before a human whom You have created out of a dry clay [***drawn***] ***from an aging mud.' He said, 'Begone hence, for you are indeed an outcast, and indeed the curse shall lie on you until the Day of Retribution.' He said, 'My Lord! Respite me till the day they will be resurrected.' Said He, 'You are indeed among the reprieved until the day of the known time.' He said, 'My Lord! As You have consigned me to perversity, I will surely glamorize*** [***evil***] ***for them on the earth, and I will surely pervert them, except Your exclusive servants among them.'*** (***15:32–40***)

Satan refused to prostrate as a result of his arrogance; thus, the Qur'an introduces him as our manifest enemy:

أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَن لَّا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ وَأَنِ اعْبُدُونِي هَٰذَا صِرَاطٌ

مُّسْتَقِيمٌ وَلَقَدْ أَضَلَّ مِنكُمْ جِبِلًّا كَثِيرًا أَفَلَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْقِلُون

'Did I not exhort you, O children of Adam, saying, "Do not worship Satan. He is indeed your manifest enemy. Worship Me. That is a straight path"? Certainly he has led astray many of your generations. Did you not use to apply reason? (***36:60–62***)

So our covenant with God is not to serve our manifest enemy who does his utmost to harm us; rather, it is to serve Him who only asks us to do what serves our real interests. Any rational person would certainly agree with observing such a covenant.

Satan has various skills, means, and tools to deceive us. He is an enemy who does not surrender and is not easily defeated. Of course, Satan has no authority or power to force people to follow him. His main tactic is to create confusion and whisper evil temptations. Those who trust God and follow their God-given reason and religious instructions would find that Satan's plans are not that powerful: "*Indeed the*

stratagems of Satan are always flimsy" (4:76). If we find it hard to resist against Satan, it is mainly because we help him against ourselves by forgetting our Lord and heeding to Satan's suggestions and temptations. If we decide to steer clear of Satan and his powers, his efforts are futile. But when we help him against ourselves, then he becomes powerful, as expected from any enemy.

Thus God, out of His mercy, helps us against Satan rather than leaving us without help:

وَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ أَمْرٌ مِّنَ الْأَمْنِ أَوِ الْخَوْفِ أَذَاعُوا بِهِ وَلَوْ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ وَإِلَىٰ أُولِي الْأَمْرِ

مِنْهُمْ لَعَلِمَهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَنبِطُونَهُ مِنْهُمْ وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّـهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَاتَّبَعْتُمُ

الشَّيْطَانَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

When a report of safety or alarm comes to them, they immediately broadcast it; but had they referred it to the Apostle or to those vested with authority among them, those of them who investigate would have ascertained it. And were it not for God's grace upon you and His mercy, you would have surely followed Satan, [***all***] ***except a few.*** (***4:83***)

This verse indicates that when you face an obstacle you are unaware of, it is best to leave it to the Prophet or those vested by God with authority to decide. And were it not because of the grace of God and His mercy, you would have followed Satan except a few. Thus, God assists us in saving us from our enemy when He could have chosen not to. This is similar to parents who advise their child not to trust strangers who could be dangerous, although there are children who persist in following strangers. In the case of God, as far as He is concerned, His love for us is so deep that He wants to hold us back from Satan, to keep us safe from our enemy.

Protection from Misguidance

Another function of divine mercy is to protect believers from those who want to misguide them:

وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّـهِ عَلَيْكَ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَهَمَّت طَّائِفَةٌ مِّنْهُمْ أَن يُضِلُّوكَ وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ إِلَّا أَنفُسَهُمْ

وَمَا يَضُرُّونَكَ مِن شَيْءٍ وَأَنزَلَ اللَّـهُ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَعَلَّمَكَ مَا لَمْ تَكُن تَعْلَمُ

وَكَانَ فَضْلُ اللَّـهِ عَلَيْكَ عَظِيمًا

Were it not for God's grace and His mercy on you, a group of them were bent on leading you astray; but they do not mislead anyone except themselves, and they cannot do you any harm. God has sent down to you the Book and wisdom, and He has taught you what you did not know, and great is God's grace upon you. (***4:113***)

Were it not for God's grace and mercy, a group of mischief-makers would have done their best to misguide the believers. Sometimes God protects them against the enemies' plots by causing them to forget the believers or by changing their minds.

Protection from the Tempting Soul

God's mercy also protects us from the temptation of our lower self (*al- nafs al-ammarah*). We read in the story of Prophet Joseph (a) that Zulaykha or Joseph (a) said:

وَمَا أُبَرِّئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي إِنَّ رَبِّي غَفُورٌ رَّحِيم

Yet I do not absolve my [***own carnal***] ***soul, for the*** [***carnal***] ***soul indeed prompts*** [***men***] ***to evil, except inasmuch as my Lord has mercy. Indeed my Lord is all- forgiving, all-merciful.'*** (***12:53***)

Whether this was said by Joseph (a) or *Zulaykha*, it means that I do not say that I am a pure person and do not do anything wrong.6 Why? Because the human soul commands one to commit corrupt actions; thus, as a human being, there is such a tendency in me towards lower desires, towards ignoble actions. If I am left to myself, I would not be able to guarantee that I do not commit immoral actions. Of course, this does not mean that everyone is doomed to being bad or sinful. Those who receive God's mercy can be safe from those temptations and remain pure.

Note: If someone is left without God's mercy, one can expect every immoral action to be enacted by him. Such people may commit actions animals do not commit. This is the condition of being cursed (*mal'un*) which is referred to in the Qur'an as those who are far from divine mercy. For example, the Qur'an says that the People of Saturday (*ashab al-Sabt*) who had disregarded the divine ban on economic activities on Saturday were cursed (4:47) and were eventually transformed into apes as a result:

قُلْ هَلْ أُنَبِّئُكُم بِشَرٍّ مِّن ذَٰلِكَ مَثُوبَةً عِندَ اللَّـهِ مَن لَّعَنَهُ اللَّـهُ وَغَضِبَ عَلَيْهِ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهُمُ

الْقِرَدَةَ وَالْخَنَازِيرَ وَعَبَدَ الطَّاغُوتَ أُولَـٰئِكَ شَرٌّ مَّكَانًا وَأَضَلُّ عَن سَوَاءِ السَّبِيل

Say, 'Shall I inform you concerning something worse than that as a requital from God? Those whom God has cursed and with whom He is wrathful, and turned some of whom into apes and

swine, and worshippers of the Rebel! Such are in a worse situation, and more astray from the right way. (***5:60***)[7]

The Qur'an points to additional results of being far from God's mercy, such as becoming deaf, blind, and hard-hearted:

أُولَـٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّـهُ فَأَصَمَّهُمْ وَأَعْمَىٰ أَبْصَارَهُم

They are the ones whom God has cursed, so He made them deaf, and blinded their sight. (***47:23***)

فَبِمَا نَقْضِهِم مِّيثَاقَهُمْ لَعَنَّاهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا قُلُوبَهُمْ قَاسِيَةً يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَن مَّوَاضِعِهِ وَنَسُوا

حَظًّا مِّمَّا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ وَلَا تَزَالُ تَطَّلِعُ عَلَىٰ خَائِنَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْهُمْ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ

وَاصْفَحْ إِنَّ اللَّـهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِين

Then, because of their breaking their covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard: they pervert words from their meanings, and have forgotten a part of what they were reminded. You will not cease to learn of some of their treachery, excepting a few of them. Yet excuse them and forbear. Indeed God loves the virtuous. (***5:13***)

Unlike the People of Saturday, such people still remain in the form and shape of human beings, but because they are cursed and their hearts are made hard as a result, in addition to being made blind and deaf, they may act like animals and commit brutal actions. This explains the barbaric acts committed by the enemies of Imam *Husayn* (a) on the Day of 'ashura and this continued even after their victory.[8]

It is God's mercy that can prevents us from going astray, as pointed out earlier (12:53). Without His mercy we are indeed weak, which means His mercy is a source of strength against temptations. We are encouraged to continuously supplicate to God to assist us in keeping our souls pure, as taught by Imam Sajjad (a) in *Al-Sahifah al- Sajjadiyyah*:

فان نفسی هالکه او تعصمها

My soul is going to be destroyed unless you save it.[9]

God's Mercy Purifies the Soul

One of the functions of God's mercy is that it aids us in our spiritual struggle and purification of the soul:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ وَمَن يَتَّبِعْ خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَإِنَّهُ يَأْمُرُ

بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنكَرِ وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّـهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ مَا زَكَىٰ مِنكُم مِّنْ أَحَدٍ أَبَدًا وَلَـٰكِنَّ

اللَّـهَ يُزَكِّي مَن يَشَاءُ وَاللَّـهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيم

***O you who have faith! Do not follow in Satan's steps. Whoever follows in Satan's steps* [*should know that*] *he indeed prompts* [*you to commit*] *indecent acts and wrong. Were it not for God's grace and His mercy upon you, not one of you would ever be pure. But God purifies whomever He wishes, and God is all-hearing, all- knowing.* (*24:21*)**

Were it not because of His grace and mercy no one would be able to become pure. Therefore, if anyone in this world has been able to become pure like the Prophets as well as the pious and holy people, it is not merely because of their efforts; their efforts brought them God's mercy and then God's mercy completed the job. We are to strive although we are not the ones who complete the job. Our own existence and guidance depend on God, and added to that, when we move towards Him, He approaches and supports us.

God's Mercy Prevents People from Despair

People naturally face external or internal problems during their lives. For a believer, his main challenges start from within. A believer is never pleased with himself and constantly finds it difficult to be pleased with his performance as he desires to commit as many good deeds as possible and refrain from any type of wrongdoing. When he looks carefully, he realizes that there actually exists no external obstacle; the problem was due to his own weaknesses and lack of determination.

As a result, it is possible for a believer to be very disappointed in himself and lose heart. He thinks that he has committed many flaws and there is nothing in his performance that can give him hope, so this feeling of despair may occur. In an address to the Prophet Muhammad (s), God says:

قُلۡ يَـٰعِبَادِىَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسۡرَفُواْ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمۡ لَا تَقۡنَطُواْ مِن رَّحۡمَةِ ٱللَّهِ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَغۡفِرُ ٱلذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ

هُوَ ٱلۡغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ

***Say* [*that God declares,*] *'O My servants who have committed excesses against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of God. Indeed God will forgive all sins. Indeed He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.* (*39:53*)**

God asks the Prophet (s) to tell His servants that they should not despair of His mercy even if they have not been just with themselves and have harmed themselves by committing sinful deeds. Then God says that truly He forgives all (and not just some of) the sins. If one thinks that there is no chance for restoration and one has broken all the ties with God, this verse informs us that there is always a chance for those who return to Him sincerely.

One of the major sins is to despair of the mercy of God (*al-ya's-u min rawhillah*). To say 'God will never forgive me' is by itself a great sin and according to many hadiths it is worse than many other great sins. Those who think that God will never forgive them become a prey for Satan. Satan can easily deceive those who are hopeless and misguide them for the rest of their lives, but those who have hope for forgiveness and improvement will escape from Satan and try to return to His Lord. The best way to remain hopeful is to remember and reflect on God's infinite mercy.

In his book *Tadhkirat al-Muttaqin*, Ayatollah Bahari Hamedani, a great mystic, refers to Satan's twofold policy whereby Satan, by emphasizing on God's mercy, encourages people to commit sins and after they have committed them, Satan attempts to halt people from repenting by whispering that it is too late and you will never be forgiven, so at least enjoy your worldly life. Ayatollah Bahari advises that we adopt a counter policy.

Before committing any sin, one should review the verses of the Qur'an on the painful punishment for the sinful in the Hereafter and believe that one may not be able to repent, but if for any reason one happens to commit sins, one should review the verses of the Qur'an on God's mercy and forgiveness and rest assured that God will forgive those who sincerely repent.

Conclusion

God's mercy in guiding mankind includes sending the Torah and the Qur'an, books which provide the necessary details for our happiness, as well as giving messages of guidance from Prophets Noah and *Salih*.

In this account of divine mercy, God provides rulings that stem from His mercy, such as reprimanding people from committing suicide as God loves His creatures to live on happily without despairing from His mercy. God's mercy also provides humankind with different kinds of support in their spiritual life, such as protection from misguidance, the tempting soul, and Satan.

Along with this support, He prevents people from despair, as His mercy is greater than people's sins. In the upcoming articles, we will explore the different types and levels of divine forgiveness and understand how God may even transform one's corrupt deeds into good ones.

1. Associate Professor of the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum.
2. Qummi, Sheikh Abbas, Mafatih al-Jinan.
3. The other 12 are as follows: 6:157; 7:63 & 203; 10:57 & 58; 12:111; 16:64; 28:86; 29:51; 31:3; 44:6; 45:20.
4. For example, one may refer to the following hadiths:

a) Sunan of Tirmidhi, vol. 5, p. 329:

"I leave among you two precious things, which if you hold on to you will not go astray after me and one of them is greater than the other: the Book of God which is like a rope extended between the heaven and the earth, and my household. These two things will not separate from each other until they reach me near the fountain on the Day of Judgement. Look and be careful how you treat them after me."

b) Musnad of Ahmad, Musnad al-Ansar, vol. 5, p. 182:

"I leave two successors: first the Book of God which is like a rope extended between heaven and the earth and second my household. They will not separate from each other until they come to me near the fountain [of Kawthar]."

5. The other two verses are as follows: 11:17; 28:43.
6. According to Tafsir-e Nemuneh, vol. 9, pp. 434 & 435, this was said by Zulaykha. According to Al-Mizan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, Vol. 11, p. 199, this was said by Joseph (a).
7. See also 2:65; 7:166.
8. The most striking and tragic event throughout the history of Islam was the event of Karbala which occurred on the Day of 'ashura (that is, the 10th of the month of Muharram) in 61 AH In that day Imam Husayn, the only remaining grandson of the Prophet, and tens (at least 72) of his relatives and companions were brutally martyred, and Imam Ali b. Husayn and the ladies and children of the Prophet's family were taken as captives.

The main reason for this tragic event was that Imam Husayn refused to pay allegiance to Yazid, the self-proclaimed Caliph. A very well-known Sunni Historian, Mohammad b. Jarir Tabari in his Taarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk, Tabari narrates from Imam Husayn, "O people, whoever witnesses an unjust ruler permitting those acts prohibited by God breaking Divine covenants, acts against the Sunnah of the Prophet and treats people sinfully and with enmity so does not protest against him with his words or acts God will certainly treat him in the same way as he has treated that oppressor." (vol. 3, p. 307)

9. Supplication of Makarim al-Akhlaq

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