



اللَّهُمَّ

Understanding God's Mercy

Part 2

by
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In this paper, the author examines the infiniteness of God's mercy and His aim in creating man as seen in His qualities and actions, in divine sayings, and in the supplications and hadiths of the Ahlul Bayt (a). Part 2 of 8.

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Understanding God's Mercy Part 2

Mohammad Ali Shomali

Abstract

In Part 1 of this series, two major themes were discussed: the infinite mercy of God and its inclusion over everything, and the connection of God's mercy to His essence. Part 2 expands on God's mercy as illustrated in the holy Qur'an. The use and significance of God's attributes, such as al-Rahman, al-Rahim, and Khayr al-Rahimeen, and His concurrent attributes of mercy and power are described with a connection to God's aim in the creation of the universe. God's mercy – the most frequently mentioned attribute in the Qur'an – will be shown to be the reason for creation while bearing in mind it is not a sign of weakness. God is both Merciful and All-powerful.

Names and qualities of God in the Qur'an

Due to our limited understanding, we cannot understand exactly what He is. The Qur'an asserts that no one can describe Him:

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

Your Lord is to be glorified. He is not what people describe, [all] except God's exclusive servants. (37: 159–160)

Imam Ali (a) says in Nahj al-Balaghah that if you ask an ant to describe God the ant would describe Him as a super ant; something like it but much bigger. This is the utmost an ant can think of. We human beings think of God in the same way. We think of something like us but much bigger, much more powerful, though God is not a superman or a super ant or some other super thing. God is completely transcendent, completely different and according to the Qur'an, the only people who can describe Him are those who are purified. Of course, their description is still not perfect though it is acceptable.

Thus, the most reliable way of understanding God's attributes is to refer to His own words i.e. the Qur'an and the words of his purified servants i.e. the Prophet Muhammad (s) and his household (a), whose purity is confirmed in the Qur'an by God Himself (33:33).

According to some surveys, there are about six hundred times in which qualities explicitly related to His mercy are used in the Qur'an and this is apart from those things which imply His mercy, since if we count them too it would be thousands.¹ Therefore, God describes Himself as being merciful almost six hundred times in the Qur'an and then other qualities of God are less frequently described. For example, God's knowledge is emphasized in the Qur'an though it has been used about two hundred times. Attributes such as power and justice all come later.

The names al-Rahman, al-Rahim, Khayr al-Rahimin, Arham al-Rahimin, Dhu'l-Rahmah, and Dhu Rahmat-in Wasi'ah are several of God's names that refer to His mercy, making it the most frequently-mentioned quality of God in the Qur'an.

Al-Rahman

The attribute al-Rahman (the All-merciful) has been used 122 times in the Qur'an along with other attributes and if these are added to the 49 times that are mentioned separately, this characteristic is mentioned a total of 169 times. It should be also noted that al-Rahman is used as an alternate name for Allah. God has two proper nouns in the Qur'an: Allah and al-Rahman. In verse 110 of Chapter Isra, God says:

قُلِ ادْعُوا اللَّهَ أَوْ ادْعُوا الرَّحْمَنَ أَيًّا مَا تَدْعُوا فَلَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ

Say, 'Invoke God or invoke al-Rahman (the All-merciful). Whichever [of His Names] you may invoke, to Him belong the Best Names.

It was disputed at the time of Prophet Muhammad (s) whether it would be permissible to call God 'Allah,' 'al-Rahman,' or another name. In this verse, God gives us a choice of which to call Him; it must be one of the two. This indicates that among all Allah's names, only al-Rahman comes in order next to Allah,

and other names come of a lesser importance and refer to some qualities of God, instead of referring to His entire reality.

As mentioned earlier, sometimes al-Rahman has been used with other qualities or other names. For example, al-Rahman is used with Allah and al-Rahim 114 times in the Qur'an as seen in the verse:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful.

Every chapter in the Quran except for Chapter Nine (Tawbah: Repentance) opens with this phrase. However, because the phrase is used twice in chapter Twenty Seven (Naml: Ant) this phrase is repeated equal to the number of all the chapters in the Qur'an.

According to the school of the Ahlul Bayt (a), the inclusion of this phrase at the beginning of a chapter means it is considered a part of it. Otherwise it would mean that it was not part of the chapters and was revealed once and people found it interesting, or the prophet said it was nice and it should be put at the beginning of each chapter. According to the school of the Ahlul Bayt (a) this verse was revealed with each chapter apart from chapter Tawbah. This shows its significance; God revealed it 114 times to emphasize the message. In a narration from Imam Sadiq (a), this phrase is introduced as the greatest verse of the Qur'an (a'zam ayat) which unfortunately Satan has managed to steal from the people and that is when they do not start the recitation of the second chapter of each prayer with it.

In any case, this phrase alone shows that among all the different qualities and names of God which are more than a thousand, He has preferred to be described in this way: al-Rahman al-Rahim. He could have used many other attributes, e.g. 'the Most-forgiving, the All-powerful' but His mercy exceeds other attributes as they are the closest to His reality. It should be noted that even at the beginning of Chapter Nine where stress on God's mercy may not serve the purpose of warning the pagans, God has not been pleased to introduce Himself in a different way by mentioning names other than al-Rahman al-Rahim. This suggests that God either introduces Himself as God who is al-Rahman al-Rahim or prefers not to say anything.

The Chapter al-Fatihah (The Opening), a chapter so important that Muslims cannot implore God without its recitation in each of the five daily prayers, is not only the beginning of the Qur'an but in a sense a summary of it.² In such a short chapter God wants to give us a summary of all that we need for our life: a summary of Islam and a summary of the Qur'an. It begins like this:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

In the Name of God, the All-beneficent, the All-merciful. All praise belongs to God, Lord of all

the intelligent inhabitants of the world, the All- beneficent, the All-merciful.

Whenever there is a shortage of space one normally tries not to repeat things. However, in such a short passage, it is so important that God feels it necessary to repeat the phrase 'the All- beneficent, the All-merciful' because if one does not remember that He is the most merciful, then he or she cannot properly understand the way He exercises His Lordship in this world and the hereafter. Thus, in this chapter, God first mentions His mercy twice and then talks about His lordship in this world. He again mentions His mercy twice and then talks about His kingdom in hereafter. So before and between reminding us of His lordship in this world and His kingdom in the hereafter, Allah (swt) reminds us of His mercy.

Al-Rahman and al-Rahim are seen together in other chapters as well, such as Chapter Fussilat (41), verse 2, Chapter Baqarah (2), verse 163 and Chapter Hashr (59), verse 22. It is also mentioned with al-Musta'an (the one whose assistance is sought) (29:112). In Chapter Naba' (78), verse 37, God uses al-Rahman with Rabb, the Lord:

رَبِّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا الرَّحْمَنُ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطَابًا

The Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between heavens and earth who is al-Rahman.

Thus, everything in this world began with His mercy. The creation and its continuity, and the hereafter depend on it. Chapter Hamd by itself is a great evidence of the significance of the mercy of God.

Al-Rahim

The next name is al-Rahim (or simply Rahim). This is mentioned 227 times in the Qur'an. This has been used for God 226 times and for the Prophet Muhammad (s) once. In Arabic, Rahim and al-Rahman are both adjectives and derived from the same root: rahmah. Thus the question arises: What is the difference between al-Rahman and Rahim?

Using the Qur'an and narrations as their source, Muslim scholars assure us that al-Rahman is used as an adjective and a proper noun for God. When used as an adjective, it refers to mercy that is all-embracing that is: believers, unbelievers, human beings, and nonhuman beings in this world and in the hereafter. Rahim, however, indicates the special mercy of God for those who are good.

In this way, we understand that God has two types of mercy: one that embraces everything and everyone, even those who are wrongdoers, and an exclusive mercy reserved for the faithful people depending on their merits and qualities. Thus, people who are good and bad are not equal though they both receive mercy from God because without His mercy, nothing can exist.

Normally the phrase " بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ " is translated to "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful" or "the All- beneficent the All-merciful." However, since these two attributes are derived

from the same root, for the sake of accuracy, we can translate it to: “In the name of God, the All-merciful, the Most-merciful.” To be even more accurate, we can also say “In the name of God who has mercy for everything and has a special mercy for the good people.”

Khayr al-Rahimin

In verses 23:109 and 23:118, God is described as Khayr al-Rahimin. For example, God says:

وَقُلْ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ وَارْحَمْ وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

Say, ‘My Lord, forgive and have mercy, and You are the Best of those who are merciful.’ (23:118)

You may consider, for example, mothers being merciful though none of them can be compared to God, whose mercy precedes the mercy of everyone. If you consider the most merciful mother in the world compared to God’s mercy, her characteristic is likened to that of a drop compared to an ocean.

You may have heard the story of a person during the time of Prophet Moses (a) who had a very old mother and was fed up with her. At the end, he decided to get rid of her by taking her to a mountain and leaving her there so that she could not go back. Despite all the mercy and the attention he had received from his mother he did that to her. While he was leaving the mountain it was getting dark. God informed Prophet Moses (a) about that lady and told him to visit her. As Prophet Moses (a) approached the mother, he heard her imploring, “Oh God! It is dark while my son is returning home. Please protect him from running into a problem.” A mother who was treated badly by her son still prayed for her son to be safe instead of cursing him. Then God informed Prophet Moses (a) that His love for His servants is much greater than the love of this mother for her son.

Therefore, we should never think that if God punishes wrongdoers because of His wrath or desires to satisfy His anger to get revenge. No! Even His punishment originates from His mercy. Indeed, it is not God who is responsible for our punishment. It is us who wrong ourselves. God’s mercy is much more than anyone else’s.

In another narration, fatherly love has been compared to the love of God. Prophet Jacob (a) had twelve sons and as a Prophet, he knew that he had to show his love equally to his sons. However, in his heart, Jacob had an exceptional love for Joseph, for Joseph was special. Joseph was not just a son. He was a chosen servant of God. Jacob did not love him just as a son. He loved Joseph so much that when Joseph was taken away from him he became blind. The Qur’an says:

وَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا أَسْفَىٰ عَلَىٰ يُوسُفَ وَأَبْيَضَّتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ قَالُوا تَاللَّهِ تَفْتَأُ تَذَكُرُ يُوسُفَ حَتَّىٰ تَكُونَ حَرَضًا أَوْ تَكُونَ مِنَ الْهَالِكِينَ قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَشْكُو بَثِّي وَحُزْنِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

And he turned away from them and said, ‘Alas for Joseph!’ His eyes had turned white with grief, and he choked with suppressed agony. They said, ‘By God! You will go on remembering Joseph until you wreck your health or perish.’ He said, ‘I complain of my anguish and grief only to God. I know from God what you do not know.’ (12:84–86)

Being a prophet of God, Jacob had great patience and when informed by the Joseph’s brothers that the wolf had killed him he said he would have “a beautiful patience.” But still he was in so much pain that his body could not tolerate it and he became blind. The narration says that the love of God for His servants is seventy times more than the love of Jacob. It should be noted that seventy here is not meant to be a mere number. In Arabic, the number seven and seventy are used often to indicate abundance. So you cannot compare His mercy to anyone else’s mercy even if it is a father like Jacob. That is why God says in the Qur’an:

وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الرَّاحِمِينَ...

“You are the best of those who are merciful (23: 118).”

Arham al-Rahimin

In four other verses God says that He is Arham al-Rahimin which means the most merciful among all the merciful. So not only is He the best of the merciful, He is the most merciful. For example, the Qur’an says:

قَالَ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِإِخِي وَأَدْخِلْنَا فِي رَحْمَتِكَ ۖ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

He 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)

وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَى رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

And Job, when he called out to his Lord, ‘Indeed distress has befallen me, and You are the Most merciful of the merciful.’ (21:83)

Reflecting on these two names i.e. the Best of the merciful and the Most merciful of the merciful, we realize that with respect to mercy, to be better requires to exhibit more mercy. This is not the case about some other qualities or acts. For example, we cannot say that the best mother is the one who is more mother or who has more children or that the best writers is necessarily the one who writes more.

Dhu'l-Rahmah and Dhu Rahmat-in Wasi'ah

On two occasions, God is described in the Qur'an as Dhu'l- Rahmah meaning the Possessor or the Dispenser of mercy:

وَرَبُّكَ الْغَنِيُّ ذُو الرَّحْمَةِ ۚ إِنَّ يَشَاءُ يُدْهِبْكُمْ وَيَسْتَخْلِفْ مِنْ بَعْدِكُمْ مَا يَشَاءُ كَمَا أَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ قَوْمٍ آخَرِينَ

Your Lord is the All-sufficient Possessor of mercy. If He wishes, He will take you away, and make whomever He wishes succeed you, just as He produced you from the descendants of another people. (6: 133)

وَرَبُّكَ الْغَفُورُ ذُو الرَّحْمَةِ ۚ لَوْ يُوَازِحُهُمْ بِمَا كَسَبُوا لَعَجَّلَ لَهُمُ الْعَذَابَ ۚ بَلْ لَهُمْ مَوْعِدٌ لَنْ يَجِدُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ مَوْئِلًا

Your Lord is the All-forgiving Possessor of mercy. Were He to take them to task because of what they have committed, He would have surely hastened their punishment. But they have a tryst, [when] they will not find a refuge besides Him. (18:58)

Also God is described once in the Qur'an as Dhul Rahmat-in Wasi'ah meaning 'the Possessor the Dispenser of an all- embracing mercy'. The Qur'an says:

فَإِنْ كَذَّبُوكَ فَقُلْ رَبُّكُمْ ذُو رَحْمَةٍ وَاسِعَةٍ وَلَا يُرَدُّ بَأْسُهُ عَنِ الْقَوْمِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ

But if they deny you, say, 'Your Lord is Possessor of an all-embracing mercy, but His punishment will not be averted from the guilty lot.' (6: 147)

God's mercy as His aim of creation

In the Qur'an, God mentions His purpose for creating the universe. These reasons can be described in a hierarchical order:

To worship and to know Him

The Qur'an says:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

And I have not created jinns or human beings except to worship me. I do not want from them any sustenance or to feed Me. (51:57)

He does not want to be worshipped in the manner in which people used to worship idols. They used to offer sacrifices or food to their gods. God is not in need of our worship. “To worship Me” means “to be able to know Me” and eventually “get close to Me” as Imam Sadiq (a) quotes Imam Husayn (a) as saying:

أبي عبدالله ع قال: خرج الحسين بن علي على أصحابه فقال: إن الله عز وجل ما خل العباد الا ليعرفوه، فإذا عرفوه عبده، فإذا عبوه استغنوا بعبادته عن عبادة من سواه

Truly God the Almighty has not created His servants except to know Him so when they know Him they will worship Him. When they worship Him they will not need to worship anyone else. (Al-Mizan, vol. 18, p. 390)

Elsewhere, the Qur’an mentions the fact that God has created the world to know Him:

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا

God is the one who has created seven skies and seven earths and whatever is happening between them so that you know two things: He is able to do everything and His knowledge encompasses everything. (65: 12)

In this verse, God’s knowledge and power are mentioned together. To be able to be the Lord of universe, God needs power and knowledge. If He is not both knowledgeable and powerful, He cannot run the world.

To give and show His mercy

The Qur’an illustrates a very beautiful point regarding giving mercy. God created the universe because He wants to give mercy:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ * إِلَّا مَن رَّحِمَ رَبُّكَ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ

Had your Lord wished He would have made mankind one community; but they continue to differ. Except those on whom your Lord has mercy and that is why He created them and the word of your Lord has been fulfilled: ‘I will surely fill hell with jinn and humans, all together.’ (11: 118–119)

People often dispute and waste their time and energy arguing with each other except for those who have received mercy from God. These people have realized the truth and do not dispute over it. They simply

commit themselves to the truth and if we all did the same, there would be no need to dispute as God says that He has created us in order to give us mercy.

Suppose you are a good teacher and you love your job and do not want to merely teach people who come to you and ask you to teach them. You would go and find people and offer them your knowledge. You would try to find students even if they were not interested in learning. You would say that you wanted to teach them not to gain anything but because you love to teach. Or suppose you are a good, responsible doctor who loves your job and does not merely work for money. You would seek out people who are ill even either because they do not realize it themselves, they feel shy to approach you, or they do not have the money to pay you. None of these would matter to you. You would continue to find them because you want to offer them your help. Again, imagine you are a wealthy and generous person who wants to help. You would not wait for people to come and beg you. You seek out people who are in need and offer your help.

God created us not because we deserved to be created. When one does not exist he does not deserve anything. We did not have any right upon Him to claim that He must create us. But He does not only look at what we deserve. He is able to give and He is the most merciful. Hence, He creates opportunities to show generosity and He created us because He is so merciful and generous. If God had not created us, there could be no explanation why. And that would not be because we deserved; rather, it would be because we do not expect a God like Him with such merciful nature, with such generosity, with such power, and with such knowledge to not create. Like a good doctor who does not go to offer his treatment, a good teacher who does not go to offer teaching. This is strange but if they do what they are supposed to do it is not strange. Thus, if God had not created us, you were not able to challenge Him but we would be surprised as to why He had not created. So He had created us.

Imam Sadiq (a) was asked by Abu Basir about the meaning of the verse 11:118–119 and Imam replied:

خَلَقَهُمْ لِيَفْعَلُوا مَا يَسْتَوْجِبُوا بِهِ رَحْمَتَهُ فَيَرْحَمَهُمْ

God created man so that they do something to deserve His mercy and then He would give them His mercy. (Al-Tawhid by Saduq, p. 404)

Thus, God wanted to give opportunity to people to do good deeds so that they would deserve extra mercy from Him.

God's concurrent attributes of mercy and power

The Qur'an mentions that along with God's mercy, He has the power to carry out all that He wants. Some people are merciful as long as they do not have power; yet when they have power they are no longer merciful. Indeed, one of the ways to test one's loyalty is to see what he will do when he becomes

rich or powerful. As long as someone is poor or weak, he may be friendly but when he gets established he may forget. God is both merciful and powerful. His power does not change Him and He is not merciful because of weakness. In thirteen verses of the Qur'an, God describes Himself as being both All-mighty (al- 'Aziz) and All-merciful (al-Rahim). For example, we read:

وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الرَّحِيمُ

And truly your Lord is the All-mighty, the All-merciful. (26:9, 68, 104, 122, 140, 159, 175 & 191)

In modern Arabic, 'aziz means dear, but it originally means someone who is strong and undefeatable resulting in his dearness and honorableness. Here the emphasis is on the fact that God is able to carry out what He wants. When He wants to give you mercy, no one can stop Him. He is able to give you mercy in all circumstances, whether people like it or not. In the same chapter, God says:

وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الْعَزِيزِ الرَّحِيمِ

And put your trust in the All-mighty, the All-merciful (26:217)

If one wants to trust someone, he or she needs to know whether or not that person is helpful and capable. We cannot trust the powerless to carry out what we want. In addition, if he has power without love and mercy there is no point in trusting him. He is not going to do anything for me. However, God is both powerful and merciful and this gives us every reason to put our trust in Him. This is why the Qur'an stresses on the fact that those who want to trust anyone must put their trust in God. For example, Prophet Jacob is quoted as saying:

وَقَالَ يَا بَنِيَّ لَا تَدْخُلُوا مِنْ بَابٍ وَاحِدٍ وَادْخُلُوا مِنْ أَبْوَابٍ مُتَفَرِّقَةٍ ۚ وَمَا أُغْنِي عَنْكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ إِنَّ الْحُكْمَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ ۚ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ ۚ وَعَلَيْهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ

***And he said, 'My sons, do not enter by one gate, but enter by separate gates, though I cannot avail you anything against God. Sovereignty belongs only to God. In Him I have put my trust; and in Him let all the trusting put their trust.'* (12:67)**

See also the verses 14:12 and 39:38. The Qur'an defines the believers as those who trust God:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِرَ اللَّهُ وَجِلَّتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُهُ زَادَتْهُمْ إِيمَانًا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ

The faithful are only those whose hearts tremble [with awe] when God is mentioned, and when His signs are recited to them, their faith increases, and who put their trust in their Lord (8:2)

Naturally, people do not trust those whom they have had a negative experience with, such as showing avarice, betrayal, or standing idly by when in need of help. However, none of these characteristics is correct about God. He protects and loves you with His power and knowledge. There is no reason why we should not trust Him, especially when we remember what He has already done for us:

“And why should we not put our trust in God, seeing that He has guided us in our ways? Surely, we will put up patiently with whatever torment you may inflict upon us, and in God let all the trusting put their trust. (14:12)”

As mentioned earlier, nothing hinders God’s bequest of mercy:

مَا يَفْتَحِ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ رَحْمَةٍ فَلَا مُمْسِكَ لَهَا وَمَا يُمْسِكُ فَلَا مُرْسِلَ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

Whatever mercy God unfolds for the people, no one can withhold it; and whatever He withholds no one can release it after Him, and He is the All- mighty, the All-wise. (35:2)

God has full control. When God wanted to support Moses, Pharaoh, with the all the power that he had, could not prevent Moses from being born or being killed while Moses was growing up. When Moses was not even able to defend himself, God supported him and defeated Pharaoh, who contributed to his own defeat through his own actions. Needless to say, this is repetitive throughout history: emperors, kings, or tyrants are the cause of their own defeat when God wants to overthrow them as a result of their wrong actions. God does not need to stand against them and fight.

Because of their actions, God takes further wisdom and understanding away from them, and then they destroy themselves. This is a general pattern. Anyone who no longer deserves God’s gift of understanding and wisdom ends up destroying himself. This can happen to individuals, communities, and civilizations. Remarkably, in the life of Moses, God made his enemy serve Moses, and in the palace of Pharaoh, Moses received all the care and attention he needed, more that his parents could offer him. This has not only happened to Moses, however. It applies to all those who work for the sake of God, who in turn helps and supports them:

وَلَيْنَ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ قُلْ أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَنِيَ اللَّهُ بِضُرٍّ هَلْ هُنَّ كَاشِفَاتُ ضُرِّهِ أَوْ أَرَادَنِي بِرَحْمَةٍ هَلْ هُنَّ مُمْسِكَاتُ رَحْمَتِهِ قُلْ حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ يَتَوَكَّلُ الْمُتَوَكِّلُونَ

If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will surely say ‘God [for they knew God] was the creator although they used to worship idols. Say, ‘Have you considered what you invoke besides God? Should God desire some distress for me, can they remove the distress visited by Him? Or should He desire some mercy for me, can they withhold His mercy?’ Say, ‘God is sufficient for me. In Him let all the trusting put their trust.’ (39:38)

In Chapter al-Ahzab, to further illustrate God's mercy and protection, we read:

قُلْ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَعْصِمُكُم مِّنَ اللَّهِ إِنْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ سُوءًا أَوْ أَرَادَ بِكُمْ رَحْمَةً وَلَا يَجِدُونَ لَهُمْ مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا

Who is it that can protect you from God should He desire to cause you ill, or desire to grant you mercy? They will not find for themselves any protector or helper besides God. (33: 17)

God is telling us that He is very merciful and at the same time His mercy is not because of His weakness. Indeed, He is very strong. He can give us mercy or stop giving us mercy. No one can force or stop Him. But in the end He wants to give us mercy. If one does not want to accept His mercy, it would be his problem. However, as far as God is concerned, He gives. And He has created us to give. He says that He did not have any other reason to create us but to show us mercy. He is merciful while having full control and power.

1. See Shomali, Mohammad Ali and Hedarpoor, Mahnaz, "Image of God in the Qur'an" in God: Existence and Attributes, edited by M.A. Shomali, London: 2008, the Islamic Centre of England.

2. According to many authentic hadiths, there can be no daily prayer without recitation of the Chapter One. For example, we read in some hadiths: "لا صلوة إلا بفتح الكتاب" Explaining rulings concerning recitation of the Qur'anic Chapters in prayer, Ayatollah Khomeini in his Tahrir al-Wasilah, vol. 1, p. 147 writes as follows:

Problem #1. It is obligatory to recite Surat al-Fatihah (Chapter 1 of the Qur'an) and some other complete Surah after it in the first and second Rak'ats of the obligatory (daily) prayers. A person is allowed to give up the recitation of the second Surah in certain circumstances. Rather, it is obligatory in case of the time being short for the prayer, or there being fear or the like which are among the necessary cases...

Problem #2. It is obligatory to recite Surat al-Hamd in the supererogatory prayers like the obligatory (daily) prayers, in the sense that it is a condition for their validity. As regards the recitation of the second Surah (in supererogatory) prayers, it is not obligatory in any of them, except when a prayer has become obligatory due to some other reason such as a vow or the like. Of course, in case of some of the supererogatory prayers in which some particular Surahs have been mentioned, recitation of those particular Surahs shall be a condition for the fulfilment of the vow, but it must be known that their recitation is a condition for the fulfilment of the vow, but not as a religious obligation, or for their validity.

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