God’s Mercy is Infinite

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God’s mercy has no limit and does not accept any restriction. The only restriction is in our understanding and therefore we may not be able to grasp all aspects of His mercy. His mercy is all-embracing and all-inclusive; nothing falls out of it. In a beautiful supplication which is recommended to be recited after each daily prayer, we say:

اللهم إن مغفرتک ارجي من عملي

O Allah! Your forgiveness gives me hope more than my actions.

However, we need to keep in mind that performing good actions is pertinent. Merely having faith is not enough. Imam Ali (a) said:

لاتکن ممن یرجو الآخره بغیر العمل

Do not be like him who hopes for (bliss in) the next life without action.

In order to achieve a good status in the hereafter, one should perform good deeds. But the question is: is it a person’s deeds that will be the main factor in saving him and raising him to higher levels in heaven, or is it Allah’s forgiveness that does so?

As we will see later, it is by His generous reward that our little actions become very significant. This is why we say: “Your forgiveness gives me more hope than my actions.” For example, imagine there is a student who is about to take a difficult exam. Although he has studied a lot, he knows that if his teacher marks his paper without leniency he will fail. Despite all his effort, the subject is too difficult for him to learn all there is to know about it.

Then we say to God:

و إن رحمتک اوسع من ذنبي

O Allah! Indeed Your mercy is greater than my sins.

Here the supplicant confesses before Allah that he has committed great and major sins. But how do sins become great? When a person commits a sin he is, in fact, disobeying the Lord of the heavens, the Lord of the earth, and the Lord of whatever is between them.

Therefore, even a slight disobedience of such a grand Lord is great. This is not because this person is significant or that his disobedience harms Allah, but the fact that he dared to disobey

such a Lord is by itself a mistake and a great sin. Therefore, from one perspective it can be said that there are no minor sins.

However, when comparing the sins with each other, there will be major and minor sins. In any case, though our sins are very large, we have hope in Allah's mercy, which is greater.

Then we say:

اللهم إن لم اكن اهلا ان ابلغ رحمتک فرحمتک اهل ان تبلغني و تسعني

O Allah! If I am not qualified to reach your mercy, Your mercy is able to reach and embrace me.

It is not that the person who hopes for Allah's mercy is qualified for it. But it is His mercy that is qualified to come and embrace us. Why is it so?

لانها وسعت كل شئ

Because Your mercy has embraced everything.

As Allah says in the Qur'an:

وَ رَحْمَتي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْء

My mercy has encompassed everything. (7: 156)

You cannot imagine anything not benefiting from His mercy; otherwise, nothing could have come to existence, and even if so, nothing could have survived. Even the fact that Satan is able to continue his life is due to Allah's mercy. When Satan insisted on his wrong behaviour and was cursed, he requested God to be given time until the day of Resurrection:

قَالَ رَبّ فَأَنظِرْنِي إِلىَ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ

My Lord. Respite me until the day they will be resurrected (15:36)

Allah replied:

قَالَ فَإِنَّكَ مِنَ الْمُنظَرِينَ إِلىَ يَوْمِ الْوَقْتِ الْمَعْلُوم

You are indeed among the reprieved until the day of the known time. (15:37-38)

Thus, Satan has been given a chance to survive. Of course, this will not continue, as he requested, up to the Day of Resurrection. It will be up to "the day of the known time." There will be a time before the Day of Resurrection when Satan will be stopped. In any case, even Satan benefits from Allah's mercy. God is even merciful to those who do not believe in Him or dare to fight against Him.

The Aim of creating Human Beings

As we will see later, studying divine attributes and actions and studying the creation of man, guiding him by sending His messages through prophets, and His generous rewards makes it very clear that everything is based on His mercy. Indeed, the entire story of creation can be summarized in a few sentences: The Most merciful God wanted to show His mercy. Therefore, He created this world. He gave His mercy to human beings so that they would become His vicegerents on earth and become a means of His mercy. However, many human beings unfortunately failed. They did not represent Him who is the Most merciful. Instead, many human beings represented the enemy of God. These are the devils from among humans who instead of being vicegerents of God, they choose to follow and work for Satan.

Nevertheless, even if a single person actually becomes the vicegerent of the Most merciful God, this world would be very valuable and worthy of being created. One perfect man overweighs and is much greater than millions of immoral people. Imagine a university in which thousands of students can study, but due to some wrong choices the students make, such as laziness, only one Avicenna or Aristotle has graduated.

Isn't it still better to have this university and give people opportunities to develop and flourish and to have at least one Avicenna or Aristotle? As far as Allah is concerned, everyone can become a good person. He has given everyone this opportunity without any limit.

Therefore, the existence of people who are lazy or do not want to be good does not mean that the university has to come to an end. The same fact applies to schools, mosques, and other education systems. More importantly, it applies to the entire story of creation.

Undoubtedly there have been many who have become the vicegerents of God. Throughout history, there have been thousands of people who achieved this position. There have been at least one hundred and twenty four thousand Prophets. This is in addition to the infallible successors or holy people who have followed them.

In any case, God wants all mankind to be channels of His mercy to others, and has given them sufficient means and talents to do so. This not only includes people, but also animals, plants or indeed everything that exists, including water, air, and soil.

One important way of becoming merciful is to better understand divine mercy and all that He has done for us. According to a divine saying (hadith-e Qudsi) which has been narrated in many sources and from different Imams, such as Imam Baqir (a), Imam Reza (a), and Imam Asqari (a), God set up a propagation strategy for Moses. For example, Imam Baqir (a) says that God told Moses:

قال الله عز و جل: يا موسي. احبني و احببني الي خلقي

Allah says: Oh Moses! Love me and make my people love me.

I believe this can be adopted as a general policy in our life. If a person is able to love Allah and make other people love Him, he will attain all that is good. We should constantly evaluate our performance and progress in this regard. People should evaluate how much they love Allah and how much they have made their children, colleagues, neighbours, relatives, and friends love Allah.

The success of any person can be judged by this evaluation. The best people are those who love Allah the most and are able to make others feel the same way. Moses replied:

قال يا رب إنک تعلم أنه ليس شئ احب الي منک فکيف لي بقلوب العباد

My Lord. You know that there is no one more beloved to me than you. However, [tell me] how can I make your love the greatest thing in hearts of Your servants?

Moses knew that as far as he was concerned, he loved Allah more than anyone else. Therefore, what he needed to ask was how to do this with other people. This was his challenge. Of course, for most people even the first part, that is, how to love Allah, may be a challenge. But for Moses, the challenge was the second piece of advice. At this point Allah told him:

ذکرهم نعمايي و آلايي

Remind My servants of My favours and My blessings for them.

In this way, God taught Moses that he did not need to do anything but to tell people about the good things that Allah has done for them. God wanted Moses to remind people of all the blessings they have received from Him.

This is a point which is normally neglected in people's relationships with one another. For example, suppose a teenager approaches you and tells you that his parents do not like him. What would you tell him?

Would you not tell him that from the first day he was born and even before that his parents always cared for him? You would basically try to remind him of all the things they have done for him: how his parents supported him, fed him, clothed him, and gave him attention, a good education, and love. If you succeed, he will then feel very sorry. He will tell you that he thought he grew up all by himself.

Thus, Allah told Moses to remind people of the good things He does for them. Explaining why He wants Moses to do so, He says:

فإنهم لايذکرون مني الا حسنا

Because they do not remember from Me except good.

God does not harm people and nothing bad has ever come to them from Him. In a supplication which has been taught by Imam Sadiq (a) and recommended to be recited after the daily prayers in the month of Rajab, we say to Allah:

يا من ارجوه لكل خير و آمن سخطه عند كل شر

O the one in whom I can hope for all goodness and I am safe from His anger at every evil.

If one wants to gain something good, he ought to put his hope in Allah. There is no limit in His favour, power, or knowledge. Furthermore, there is no one besides Him. When He is a very kind and generous supplier that can supply you with everything and there is no supplier other than Him, it is irrational to look for someone else.

He is the supplier who supplies everything and there is no other supplier. Any claim of having a supplier who is someone besides Him is false. Everything that people have comes from God. Hence, we shall not go to others and shall have hope only in Him for all that is good.

On the other hand, if anything bad happens to us it should be known that it is not due to a personal problem that Allah has with us. It does not mean that He is angry with us or that He does not love us. Suppose you have a very kind and merciful teacher who loves you very much and has taught you all that you know.

With such a teacher, you will know that if you get into any trouble it is not because your teacher has a personal problem with you. Normally when people get good marks they consider it the result of their own effort, but when they receive a bad mark, they fail to take responsibility and blame it on their teacher.

The same fact applies in our relationship with Allah. At times when we find ourselves successful in our life, such as having a good spouse, children, education, or a successful business, we believe it to be an outcome of our own efforts. However, if we face a problem, we may relate it to Allah and perhaps blame Him for it. Yet the truth is the opposite. The Qur'an states this point clearly:

مَّا أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ اللَّهِ وَ مَا أَصَابَكَ مِن سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِن نَّفْسِكَ

Whatever good happens for you is from God and whatever bad occurs for you is from yourself. (4:79)

Similar to the example about the student who owed the teacher his good mark, everyone is dependent on Allah for every good that happens to him. Like the student whose job was to appreciate the efforts made by his teacher and to do some work, everyone has to do the same

in his relation with Allah.

In our example, if there was any failure, it was obvious that it was the student's fault. The same is true with Allah. Thus, we have to feel safe and know that Allah is not after us to punish or to cause problems.

يا من يؤتي الكثير بالقليل

O the One who gives a lot for the little that we do.

There is no chance of thinking that Allah might give a person less than what he has done. Furthermore, He gives people a lot for the little things they do. The rewards are to an extent that everyone should be fully satisfied. Indeed, everyone will feel embarrassed when they compare what has been given to them to what they have done. And Allah's mercy does not end here. We realise that He takes it a step further when we say:

يا من يؤتي من سأله

O the One who gives to one who asks Him.

Not only does Allah give people a lot for little that they do, He also gives them when they have just asked for it. He gives to those who simply ask Him. However, His mercy does not stop even at this point. We also say:

يا من يؤتي من لم يسئله و من لم يعرفه

O the One who gives to one who does not ask Him and does not know Him.

This refers to the third stage whereby God gives to people even though they have not asked Him and have not known Him.

Suppose there is shortage of jobs and income in a city. Those in charge should be careful to make food available for all people by subsidizing the cost. For example, they can give people packs of food for only one pound.

This would satisfy the people, since for just one pound they have received the food they need. After a while, if people run out of money, some will not hesitate to continue asking for food. Those responsible for food distribution will accept and give them a pack of food for free. However, there are some people who, due to some reason, will not ask for food. If the ones in charge are merciful, they will find them and offer them food. They will do this because they do not want them to die. If people do not come and ask for help, we should go after them.

Allah gives a lot to people because of the little good things they have done. He also gives them a lot for their requests. However, there are many people who do not ask Him and do not even

know Him. Still, Allah does not prevent them from His mercy and continues to give them from His blessings.

Indeed, in some cases, God may give worldly blessings to the unbelievers more than He gives the believers, because this world is the only thing that they are interested in. According to the Qur'an, had it not been for some believers possibly doubting the truthfulness of their faith, God would have given so much to the unbelievers that they could have made the ceiling of their houses out of gold or silver.

:The Qur'an beautifully states

وَ مَنْ أَرَادَ الاَخِرَةَ وَ سَعَى لهَا سَعْيَهَا وَ هُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُوْلَئكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُم مَّشْكُورًا

Whoever desires the Hereafter and strives for it with an endeavour worthy of it, should he be (faithful, the endeavour of such will be well-appreciated. (17:19

One of the names of Allah is shakur (the Most Thankful).

It is really important to reflect on the thankfulness of God. For example, one interesting point is that Allah thanks those who do good deeds and work for their hereafter without benefiting from their actions. They are simply recipients of His mercy.

And yet He thanks them and appreciates their acts. This is for the people who work for the hereafter. However, Allah says that even people who work for the life of this world are also .included in His mercy. He does so by helping them achieve what they want

مَّن كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْعَاجِلَةَ عَجَّلْنَا لَهُ فِيهَا

(Whoever desires this transitory life, We expedite for him therein. (17:18

كلاًّ نُّمِدُّ هَؤُلَاءِ وَ هَؤُلَاءِ مِنْ عَطَاءِ رَبِّكَ وَ مَا كَانَ عَطَاءُ رَبِّكَ محَظُورًا

To these and to those - to all We extend the bounty of your Lord, and the bounty of your Lord is not confined. (17:20)

This is like when one supports his children although they might not even like him. Of course, he does not support them in immoral acts; rather, he supports them in the way that they can achieve their good goals while telling them that they are responsible for what they do and are obliged to do good deeds.

Hence, Allah gives to those who have done little good, those who ask Him, those who do not even ask, and more importantly, those who do not even know Him. Now we understand this

:part of the supplication recommended for the month of Rajab, that reads

يا من يؤتي من سأله يا من يؤتي من لم يسئله و من لم يعرفه تحننا منه و رحمه

O He who gives to one who asks Him. O He who gives to one who does not ask Him and does not know Him out of His affection and mercy.

:Continuing the supplication, we say

أعطني بمسئلتي إياک جميع خيرالدنيا و جميع خير الآخره واصرف عني بمسئلتي إياک جميع شر الدنيا و شر الآخره

Give me, for my request to You, all the good of this world and all the good of the Hereafter. Keep away from me, for my request to You, all the evil of this world and all the evil of the Hereafter.

At this point a question arises: How can one expect this? Asking Allah all the good of this world and the Hereafter and removing all the bad in this world and the hereafter may seem too :much and too ambitious. The answer comes as follows

فإنه غير منقوص ما أعطيت

For indeed it is not diminishing what is given by You.

It should not be thought that this request is too much. When Allah gives something it does not reduce anything from Him. According to our standard it is too much, but for Allah it is nothing. Unlike when a person gives money to someone and his money is reduced, when Allah gives it does not decrease what He has. This is like when you teach something to your friend, not only do you not lose your knowledge, but your knowledge may even grow. Knowing this, we ask :Allah

و زدني من فضلک

Please give me more out of your favour.

This part of the supplication is extremely amazing. After asking Allah to give all the good things in this life and in the hereafter and to keep away all that is bad in both worlds, we still ask Him to give us more. Perhaps this is because there may be things that we have never thought about and therefore could not have actually asked for.

We ask Allah not to restrict His bounty to our expectations. We ask Allah to give us whatever He has to give and not only what we need or ask for. This is like what the Qur’an describes

about the people of heaven. They will be given what they like, what they want, and even more:

وَ فيها ما تَشْتَهيهِ الْأَنْفُسُ وَ تَلَذُّ الْأَعْيُنُ

(and therein will be whatever the souls desire and eyes delight in… (43:71

لَهُمْ ما يَشاؤُنَ فيها وَ لَدَيْنا مَزيدٌ

There they will have whatever they wish, and with Us there is yet more. (50:35)

When a person desires something it means that he has understood it first. We know that our understanding is limited. Thus, even if we desire that which we know of, there are still more unknown things that exist. God gives to the people of heaven whatever they wish as well as that which is unknown to them.

Assume you have a three year old child. You tell him to ask you whatever he wants. What would he ask you? It will not be more than what older people normally consider insignificant: a few chocolates, biscuits, or some toys, since these are all he can think of. A three year old child will never ask for a house or some money for his higher education fees.

We are like that child to Allah.

Our wishes are very little to what He has. He does not restrict His bounty to our request. In heaven, when everyone asks for all that he wants, Allah makes it known that He still has more. There are things that only Allah knows. How can we understand the pleasure that the Prophet Muhammad (s) had while performing his prayers?

The greatest pleasures we have in life are very little compared to the pleasure the Prophet experienced. Sometimes when we feel satisfied with our prayer, and we think that the Prophet's (s) prayer must be similar but a bit better. We cannot understand more than that. Only the Prophet (s) himself can understand that. There are many things available that we have never thought about.

In heaven, people can have things similar to what they had in this world. For example, if they want an apple, fig or olive, they can have them. Of course, they would be of heavenly quality. The Qur'an says:

وَ بَشِّرِ الَّذينَ آمَنُوا وَ عَمِلُوا الصَّالِحاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْري مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهارُ كُلَّما رُزِقُوا مِنْها مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقاً قالُوا هذَا الَّذي رُزِقْنا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَ أُتُوا بِهِ مُتَشابِهاً وَ لَهُمْ فيها أَزْواجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَ هُمْ فيها خالِدُون

And give good news to those who have faith and do righteous deeds, that for them shall be gardens with streams running in them: whenever they are provided with its fruit for nourishment, they will say, 'This is what we were provided before,' and they were given

something resembling it. In it there will be chaste mates for them, and they will remain in it forever. (2:25)

Thus, with respect to some of the blessings, such as fruits, people would say that they are similar to what they have had before. But there are also things in heaven that no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard, and no heart has ever thought of. There are things that Allah has kept hidden as a surprise for the righteous. For example, with respect to those who perform the Night Prayer (sala-t al-layl), the Qur'an says:

فَلا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ ما أُخْفِيَ لَهُمْ مِنْ قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزاءً بِما كانُوا يَعْمَلُون

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

There is another version of the conversation between Allah and Moses which has an extra ending after asking Moses to remind people of His bounties so that they love Him. According to this detailed version, Imam Askari (a) narrates from Imam Sajjad (a) that God told Moses:

فَلَأَنْ تَرُدَّ آبِقاً عَنْ بَابِي أَوْ ضَالًا عَنْ فِنَائِي أَفْضَلُ لَكَ مِنْ عِبَادَةِ [مِائَةِ] سَنَةٍ بِصِيَامِ نَهَارِهَا وَ قِيَامِ لَيْلِهَا

If you bring back to Me a servant of Mine who has escaped from Me or someone who has lost his way it is better for you than one hundred years of worship while you fast every day and worship every night.

Allah does not need anyone, but still, out of His mercy, He does not want even a single person to go astray. Then Moses asked:

وَ مَنْ هَذَا الْعَبْدُ الْآبِقُ مِنْكَ

Oh, Allah! Who is this servant who has escaped?

Allah replied:

الْعَاصِي الْمُتَمَرِّدُ

The one who disobeys Me and does not listen to Me.

Allah wants the sinners to repent and go back to Him.

In a divine saying, we read:

لو علم المدبرون كيف اشتياقي بهم لماتوا شوقا

If the people who have turned their back on Me knew how much I love them to come back they

would have died out of joy.

It can be understood from this narration that whenever a person has a problem in his relation with Allah we have to try to reconcile them. Allah has given us the authority to invite them to go back to Him. We should never make the separation between a servant and Allah greater by telling him that you are hopeless and have no chance of returning to Him. Unfortunately, some people do this.

If someone has a little problem they make it worse. Normally this happens due to a sense of pride in one's good actions and an underestimation of the good qualities and actions the other person may have.

Everyone should try to encourage people to go back to Allah and think that they ultimately may be better than him in the sight of God. No one should be pleased with himself, for the one who is a good person and close to Allah today might end up being a vile person and far from Allah.

:Then Moses asked

فَمَنِ الضَّالُّ عَنْ فِنَائِكَ

Who is the one who has lost his way towards You?

:God replied

الْجَاهِلُ بِإِمَامِ زَمَانِهِ تُعَرِّفُهُ وَ الْغَائِبُ عَنْهُ بَعْدَ مَا عَرَفَهُ والْجَاهِلُ بِشَرِيعَةِ دِينِهِ تُعَرِّفُهُ شَرِيعَتَهُ وَ مَا يَعْبُدُ بِهِ رَبَّهُ وَ يَتَوَصَّلُ بِهِ إِلَى مَرْضَاتِهِ

The one who does not know the Imam of his age, introduce his Imam to him. And to the one who knew the Imam of his age, but missed him. And to the one who does not know the rules and regulations (law) of his own religion, teach him those rules and regulations and the actions by which he can worship his Lord and seek His pleasure.

Therefore, everyone should try to introduce the people to the divinely appointed leader of their age. This is much more significant than introducing someone to his missing father or mother.

Everyone should also try to help people in learning their religion and religious duties. Thus, the right policy in any discussion about God is to help people further understand and remember His bounties and to love Him more. If, for any reason, their relation with God has suffered, they are to be encouraged to return to Him.

It is not right to cause separation between people and God or to describe God in a way that frightens people. Sometimes when people talk to their children in order to make them perform certain religious practices, they use intimidating language and logic.

For example, they warn their children that if they do not pray or observe hijab, God will send

them to hell. Upon hearing this from his or her parents, the children may start thinking of God as someone who would get angry very easily and rushes to severely punish people.

It seems that this is not an appropriate attitude. Instead, parents should generate love and gratitude for Allah in the hearts of their children so that the children can feel obliged and be willing to joyfully do something to please Him.