



## Drinking from the Well-Spring of Mercy

by  
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*Bismi-Llaahi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem*

AL-ḤAMDU-LI-LLĀHI, MUQALIBA-L-QULŪBI WA-L-ABSĀR.  
ALLĀHUMMA THĀBIT QULŪBANA ʿALA SIRĀTIKA-L-QAWĪM,  
WA-JʿALNĀ LI-WAJHIKA MUTTAJIHĪN,  
WA ṢALLI ʿALA-Sh-ShAFĪʿI-L-HABĪB,  
RAḤMATIL-ʿĀLAMĪN,  
WA MANĀRI-L-NAJIYĪN, WA MARSĀ-L-ʿĀRIFĪN

Praise be to Allah, the Turner of the hearts and sight.  
O Allah, fix our hearts on the best of Your ways,  
and make us face You in our way,  
and bestow blessings on the beloved intercessor,  
the mercy of all the worlds,  
the lighthouse of the survivors, the harbor of the knowers.

YĀ MAWJŪDAN ʿINDA-Sh-ShADĀĀʾIDI  
YA KHAFIYYA-L-LUTFI, YĀ LATĪFA-S-SUNʿI  
YĀ HALĪMAN, LĀ YAʾJILUQDI ḤĀJATĪ  
BI-RAḤMATIKA, YĀ ARḤAMA-R-RĀHIMĪN.  
SUBḤĀNAKA ʿALĀ ḤILMIKA BAʿDA ʿILMIK.  
SUBḤĀNAKA ʿALĀ ʿAFWIKA BAʿDA QUDRATIK

O Existent One, O Thou Who are Present in all difficulties.  
O Thou of Hidden Kindness, of Subtle making.  
O Gentle One, Who does not hasten, fulfill my need,  
With Thy Mercy, O most Merciful of the mercifuls.  
Glory be to Thee, on Thy Grace, after Thy Knowledge.  
Glory be to Thee, on Thy forgiveness, after Thy Power.

## **BISMI-LLĀH, AL-HAMDU-LI-LLĀH**

**ALLĀHUMMA ṢALLI WA SALLIM ʿALĀ SAYYIDINĀ MUḤAMMADIN, WA ʿALĀ ĀĀLIHI WA SAḤBIH**

**ASALĀMU ʿALAYKUM WA RAḤMATU-LLĀHI WA BARAKATUH**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The more that I contemplate this subject of mercy, the more I see that it is endless. Since the Mercy of Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaahu*) is endless and present, if we look, we begin to see everything as a Mercy of Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaahu*). 'Typically, our definition of the concept of 'mercy' is limited to 'the willingness to forgive and not to punish.' But what is mercy in Islam? What should mercy be to a Muslim?

With Islam, mercy is given a deeper meaning; it is a concept that plays a vital role in every aspect of the life of every Muslim. Allah's Mercy, which is bestowed on all His creatures, is in everything our eyes see: in the sun that provides light and heat, in the air and water, in the faces before us and in the mirror, in the words we hear, and in the objects of all of our senses.

We should ask ourselves: do I recognize the mercy that touches my life every day? Am I a person who is merciful? In my talk today, I will approach this subject of mercy in several ways: looking at the Mercy of Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaahu*), looking at the example of the mercy of the Prophet (*ṣalla-Llāhu ʿalayhi wa sallam*), and exploring the question of how we can experience and manifest mercy in our own selves.

### **THE MERCY OF ALLAH**

In my life, I have experienced that the Mercy of Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaahu*) takes many forms and has many challenges. Sometimes, it takes courage to live through those experiences and to recognize them as the Mercy of Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaahu*).

But I suggest to you this thinking: since we accept that...

**FA-AYNAMĀ TUWALLŪ FA-ThAMMA WAJHU-LLĀHI.**

**Wheresoever you turn your face, there is the countenance of Allah. (2:115)**

...then we can surmise that each and every Attribute of Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaahu*) is revealed and reflected to us wherever we turn, if we look. It is not a large step then to surmise that everything we see reflected in *dunya* is a Mercy of Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaahu*), or can be taken as a Mercy of Allah.

I will discuss this in more depth a bit later in this talk, but the implications of this are great. First of all, thinking this way, we see Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaahu*) as present and dynamic, responsive to our attention, and systematically harmonious and resonant with our attention.

**WA QĀLA RABBUKUMU UD<sup>c</sup>ŪNĪ ASTAJIB LAKUM.**

**Your Lord says, "Call me—I will answer you." (40:60)**

And...

### FA-DhKURŪNĪ ADhKURKUM.

**Remember Me, and I will remember you... (2:152)**

Also in Surah al-Baqarah:

### WA'IDhĀ SĀLAKA °IBĀDĪ °ANNĪ FA'INNĪ QARĪB...

**And when My servants ask you concerning Me, then verily I am near... (2:186).**

Again and again, we see this point counter-point, request and response, reminding us that the Mercy of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta'ālaa*) is near. Allah's Mercy—ar-Rahmaan—is like the rain or the snow, the air and the light, which is bestowed upon all His creation and creatures, seen in everything we see and everything that sustains us, from the air to the water, to the food and the light that sustains our life, so we can make that life a pursuit for *ma'rifaḥ*, *haqeeqah*.

But Allah's Mercy also comes as ar-Raheem, directed individually to us, to and through the human being who exhibits mercy, knowledge, truth, humility and generosity.

We are reminded every day, every time we open Qur'an, every time we pray, every time we say: **“Bismi-Llaah ar-Rahmaan, ar-Raheem”** of the importance and universality of Allah's Mercy. An entire chapter in the Qur'an is named after this Divine Attribute: ar-Rahmaan or The Most Gracious. These are all continuous reminders of Allah's endless Mercy and great Bounties, along with many 'aayaat in Qur'an that assure us that whoever commits a sin will be forgiven if he repents:

**...KATABA RABBUKUM °ALĀ NAFSIHI-R-RAHMATA ANNAHU MAN °AMILA MIÑKUM SŪ'AM BIJAḤĀLATIÑ ThUMMA TĀBA MIM BA°DIHI WA ASLAḤA FA-ANNAHU GHAFŪRUR-RAḤĪM.**

**...Allah has written Mercy upon Himself, so that whoever of you does evil in ignorance and repents afterwards and corrects [their behavior], then Allah is Ever-Forgiving—Singularly Compassionate. (6:54)**

This verse is affirmed by a *hadith qudsi* where Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta'ālaa*) says: **“My mercy prevails over My wrath.”**

### MERCY AND JUSTICE

So why is the concept of mercy so emphasized in Islam? Why is this attribute emphasized over peace, justice, love? Hopefully, today we will begin to understand the importance and universality of this attribute.

The previous lecture in this series was on justice. While there is no doubt of the place of 'rule of law' and justice in an Islamic society, we also know that justice in Islam is always within the context of mercy and compassion. In

Qur'an there are 28 references to 'a-d-l' (justice), while there are 234 references to 'gh-f-r' (forgiving/forgiveness). Why is this? The answer can be found in this *hadith*:

**The purpose of justice is to give a person what is due to him. Mercy goes a step further, and it gives a person something more than what is due to him.** (Sunan of Abu-Dawood – 1592)

As this *hadith* says, in the quality of mercy there is something more; there is a choice, an opportunity to be grateful, an interactive process, a window of remembrance. Mercy strengthens the relationships in a community, fosters love and generosity, develops character.

Indeed, sometimes justice and mercy may appear to be in conflict. There can be a danger in showing mercy. If used too often or in the wrong circumstances, it can actually undermine its own expression as a reflection of the Divine Mercy in the human being. Certainly, it has been shown that pardoning crimes can embolden criminals. Mercy as an excuse (excusing hypocrisy or dishonesty) undermines society. Making excuses and having them accepted or acceptable may be a human trait, but it does not engender mercy, nor should it, unless there is repentance.

But that is looking at a human system, a system that cannot measure sincerity or humility, cannot account for generosity or faith. While human beings created systems that are flawed and influenced by selfishness, greed, jealousy, fear, doubt, suspicion, chauvinism, nationalism, etc., the Divine System is totally fair, just and merciful.

Justice is required because a good and functioning society requires the justice. As long as people trust that justice will be done, they will better be able to trust one another. Mercy, however, is also required because mercy is the dominant expression of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) and an affirmation of the believer. It is the fount of hope and the affirmation of positive response to our self-awareness, our supplication, and our need for humble submission. The remission of moral debts may embolden sin, but it may also embolden virtue by giving people a second chance.

The real challenge for the noble person lies in knowing when to show mercy and when to show strict justice. The key in navigating through the dangerous waters is found in one's ability to achieve a state, a station of selflessness that allows us not to impose preference or ego on the situation or person; yet, the foundation of all decisions and communications lies in *rahmat*.

Mercy walks hand in hand with *tawbah*/repentance. Sincere *tawbah* is the key that opens the window so the breezes of mercy waft into the room and soothe the anxiety, fear and doubts of the one who is repenting. Repentance activates the forces of justice and mercy, and lays the foundation for real and lasting faith and love, the result of which is inner and often outer freedom – but more about that in months to come.

Hazrat 'Umar was heard to say, **“Anyone who does not show mercy will not be shown mercy. Anyone who does not forgive will not be forgiven. Anyone who does not turn in repentance will not be turned to nor will he be protected or guarded.”**

## THE PROPHET AS A MERCY

The life and example of the Prophet Muhammad (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) is an example of how mercy and justice should be side by side in the community. His actions reflect that noble character of one who has become free in the presence of Divine Love, of one in whom repentance and forgiveness rushes through the veins, like the life-blood itself. His character is the perfect epitome of a character filled to overflowing with mercy, and at the same time, he is the manifestation of Allah's Mercy to us.

Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'alaah*) says in Surah al-Anbiyaa about the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*):

## WA MĀ ARSALNĀKA ILLĀ RAHMATAL-LI-L-<sup>C</sup>ĀLAMĪN.

We have not sent thee save as a mercy to the worlds (21:107).

How can he, a person, be sent as “a mercy”? There are many answers to this question. One of the answers lies in this: Islam is founded on the life of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*). The Prophet of Allah said:

**I was not sent except to complete the best of manners.**

Hence the link between *akhlaaq* and mercy, between character and the virtues manifest in day-to-day life. There is nothing static about any virtue or attribute of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*) as it reflects moment to moment in the *dhaahir*, and as it revivifies our heart and soul in the *baatin*.

We all strive to emulate the manners and character of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*). By filling the Prophet’s character with mercy, Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*) has filled the lives of every *mu’min* with mercy. Not only this, but acting with good character and following the example of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) is a way to appeal to the Mercy of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*). As Allah sent the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) as a mercy to all creatures with no exception, His Fayd (the overflowing light of mercy and love) showers each of us with that grace in so many forms and iterations. As Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*) says in the Surah at-Tawbah:

## LAQAD JĀĀ’AKUM RASŪLUM-MIN AŅFUSIKUM <sup>C</sup>AZĪZUN <sup>C</sup>ALAYHI MĀ <sup>C</sup>ANITTUM HARĪSUN <sup>C</sup>ALAYKUM BI-L-MU’MINĪNA RA’ŪFUR-RAHĪM.

**There has come to you a messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is what you suffer; full of concern for you, to the believers kind and singularly compassionate (RA’ŪFUR-RAHĪM).**  
(9:128)

How did the Prophet’s Mercy manifest: as kindness, gentleness, compassion, as good character.

*As for the Prophet’s mercy towards children, he was once leading the prayer and his grandsons, Al-Hasan and Al-Husayn, were still young boys playing and climbing over his back, so in the fear of hurting them if he should stand, the Prophet prolonged his prostration. Another time, the Prophet performed his prayer while carrying Umamah, his granddaughter.*

This kindness of the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) was not only bestowed on his own children, but also extended to children playing on the street. As soon as they saw the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*), they would run to him, and he would receive them all with a warm smile and open arms.

Even during prayer the Prophet’s innate kindness was clear, as he once said: “[It happens that] I start the prayer intending to prolong it, but on hearing the cries of a child, I shorten the prayer because I know that the cries of the child will incite its mother’s passions.” (Al-Bukhari)

**Once a man saw the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) kissing his grandson. He was astonished at the Prophet’s leniency and said, “I have ten children but I have never kissed any one of them.” The Prophet replied, “He who does not show mercy, no mercy would be shown to him.”** (Al-Bukhari)

Whether dealing with adults or children, orphans or his own family, he was a merciful human being. When Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta’alaa*) mentions orphans in the Qur’an, He says:

## FA-AMMĀ-L-YATĪMA FA-LĀ TAQHAR.

Therefore, treat not the orphans with harshness. (al-Duha 93:9)

The Prophet's treatment of orphans reflects this, for he said:

**“I and the person who looks after an orphan and provides for him will be in Paradise like this,” putting his index and middle fingers together.**

Why is this particularly relevant to the subject of mercy? Because mercy is not obligatory, as for example, it is obligatory to provide for our own children. But if we provide for the orphan, it is an example of looking beyond ourselves, giving more than we have to give, and this is a manifestation of the Mercy and Love of Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaaa*). Similarly, to act with justice is incumbent upon us, but to act with mercy is better. In that subtle difference is the essence of what we strive for as believers.

There are countless examples of the Mercy of Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaaa*) as manifest in the character of the Prophet (*ḡalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*). I will share a few more with you today. For example, and this is certainly relevant to Muslims today, mercy should be extended to both family and enemies in times of war and in peace. The Prophet Muhammad (*ḡalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) used to urge his companions to maintain family ties with relatives who were still disbelievers by calling on them and giving them gifts. This is stated in the Surah at-Tawbah, where Allah (*Subḥānahu wa ʿālaaa*) says:

**WA'IN AḤADUM-MINA-L-MUSHRIKĪNA ISTAJĀRAKA FA-AJIRHU ḤATTĀ YASMA<sup>ʿ</sup>A  
KALĀMA-LLĀHI THUMMA ABLIGHHU MA'MANAHU DhĀLIKA BI'ANNAHUM  
QAWMUL-LĀ YA<sup>ʿ</sup>LAMŪN.**

**And if those who set up partners alongside Allah seek your protection, then protect him, that he may hear the Words of Allah, then deliver him to his place of safety. (9:6)**

The Prophet's examples regarding captives were strictly followed by his Companions. In one of the stories about a battle, a captive reported that he was placed with a Muslim family after being captured. Whenever they had their meals, they used to give him preference by offering him bread while they would eat only dates.

When the Prophet (*ḡalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) victoriously entered Makkah after defeating the Quraish, he approached them and asked, **“How do you expect me to treat you?”** They replied, **“You are a noble brother and the son of a noble brother! We expect nothing but goodness from you.”** Then the Prophet announced, **“I speak to you in the same words as Yusuf (the Prophet Joseph) spoke unto his brothers: ‘No reproach on you this day. God will forgive you. He is the Most Merciful of the Merciful (Yusuf 12:92).’ Go, for verily you are free.”**

On that day, when tolerance and forgiveness were least expected, the Prophet (*ḡalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) set an example of mercy and forgiveness by releasing all the captives without ransom, and forgiving them for their persecution and brutal torture of the Muslims.

The Prophet's example of mercy was even extended to the animals. For instance, when the Prophet (*ḡalla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) saw a donkey with a branded face, he said,

**Have you not heard that I have cursed anyone who brands an animal on its face or who hits it on its face? (Muslim)**

And the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) even forbade that knives should be sharpened in front of animals before slaughtering, and the slaughtering of one animal in front of another was prohibited. Saying:

**Allah calls for mercy in everything, so be merciful when you kill and when you slaughter: sharpen your blade to relieve its pain.** (Al-Bukhari)

Do we follow this example of thoughtfulness and mercy in everything? If Islam is as merciful as in these examples, then why, today do we see the opposite: merciless killing, merciless bigotry and religious persecution, Muslim against Muslim?

When the Prophet Muhammad (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) conquered Makkah, not a single drop of blood was shed. Almost every prisoner was forgiven in the end. Even Hind, the woman who had chewed the liver of the Prophet’s beloved uncle, Hazrat Hamza, on the battlefield was forgiven by the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) when she asked for mercy. The Prophet’s example of forgiveness of even his greatest enemies is the Divine Example of Mercy.

**LAQAD KĀNA LAKUM FĪ RASŪLI-LLĀHI USWATUN ḤASANATUL-LIMĀN KĀNA YARJŪ ALLĀHA WA-L-YAWMA-L-’ĀKHĪRA WA DHAKARA-LLĀHA KATHĪRĀ.**

**Truly, in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example for the one who hopes for Allah and the Final Day and who remembers Allah abundantly.** (33:21)

## MANFIESTING MERCY IN OUR LIVES

So far, I have spoken about Allah’s (*Subḥaanahu wa ta‘aalaa*) Mercy toward us, and I have given many examples of the Prophet’s Mercy, but now I want to address the question of how to make this practical. How do we manifest mercy in our own lives? In a *hadith*, the Prophet Muhammad (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) revealed that:

**Allah created mercy with a hundred parts, one of which was sent down upon the jinn and human beings and other living creatures. It is out of this one part that they love each other, show kindness to one another, and even the animals treat their offspring with affection. Allah has reserved the remaining ninety-nine parts for his true worshippers on the Day of Judgment.**

As we can see from this *hadith*, Allah’s (*Subḥaanahu wa ta‘aalaa*) Mercy is infinitely greater than our ability to be merciful, but it is that same quality of mercy that brings love and kindness, generosity and affection into our lives. Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta‘aalaa*) says in a *hadith qudsi* about the people who have generosity and mercy: **“They prefer others above themselves even though poverty is their portion.”** And the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) said,

**The generous are close to Allah Most High, close to people, close to Paradise, far from the fire, while the miserly are far from Allah Most High, far from people, far from Paradise, and close to the fire. Allah loves the generous ignorant person more than the miserly worshiper.**

The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) is not talking about material generosity only, but also generosity in patience, in love, in service. The true essence of generosity lies in reflecting on the Mercy of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta‘aalaa*). A generous person is also a merciful person, and a merciful person is a just person – a person who has no difficulty in giving to others, in preferring others over their own self.

A person who gives away a portion of what they have and keeps a portion for themselves is generous. A person who gives most of it away and saves very little for themselves is munificent. A person who gives with heart-felt generosity, who gives away all but a minimum of what they have, who prefers others before themselves is someone who trusts in the Mercy of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa ta‘aalaa*) to provide for them.

*There is a story that a man from Mambij, which is near Aleppo, Syria, met a man from Medina. He said, "A man from your city named Al Haqq Ibn Abidun Mutalib came to us and made us rich."*

*The man from Medina said, "How can this be? He came to you with nothing but a hair shirt on his back. I know him." The man from Mambij replied, "He didn't enrich us with money. He taught us generosity. We started to give to one another until all of us grew rich."*

And there is another story of the Sufi master an-Nuri that exemplifies the connection between mercy and generosity.

*There was a time in Baghdad when one of the people slandered the Sufis before the Khalif. The Khalif, believing the slander, ordered the Sufis to be beheaded. A number of Sufis were rounded up and lined up, and they put out the leather mats to cut their heads off. An-Nuri, who was among the people to be executed, stepped forward.*

*The executioner said, "Do you know what you are stepping forward for?" He said, "Yes."*

*"Well, why are you in such a rush?"*

*He replied, "I would rather my companions live for one more moment than I do." The executioner was very confused and went to the Khalif and told him this. The Khalif sent the Sufis over to the judge. The judge asked a lot of legal questions of an-Nuri, and he answered them, saying the following: "Allah has servants who, when they stand, they stand for the sake of Allah. And when they speak, they speak for the sake of Allah."*

*He said this and other things that made the judge weep, and he sent the following note to the Khalif: "If these folk are heretics, then there is not a single faithful Muslim on the face of the earth."*

This is mercy in its true sense. This is generosity. This is truth. This is justice with the heart of mercy. Let us think about how we live our lives, and how we manipulate things around us, how we manipulate situations so that we are never asked to display the kind of courage that we hear in this story. Yet, we know that Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) has placed in the heart of every one of us these qualities of justice and mercy, and with mercy comes generosity and, lest we forget, gratitude. It takes great courage and moral character to live these values.

How do we find that courage within ourselves, the courage to act with mercy, with selfless generosity? We should begin by asking ourselves, "What do we want from this brief life? Shouldn't we want to be the kind of person that we hear about in these stories?"

One of the many ways that Allah's Mercy (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) comes to us and through us is through the generosity and kindness that we show one another. This is a beautiful and simple starting place. Even the smallest act of generosity, of *sadaqah*, is accepted.

*Abu Fudah used to buy his goods from neighborhood merchants. Someone said to him, "You can buy the same things cheaper if you came to our neighborhood." He replied, "These merchants have settled in our neighborhood in hope of serving our needs. So I buy from them, even though their price may be a little higher."*

There are so many examples of this kind of simple generosity. There is another story about one *shaykh* who was in the outhouse.

*He calls out to one of his mureeds to take the shirt from off his back and go give it to so and so person, as he was in need of it. When he was asked, "Could you wait until you were out of the outhouse to give that order?" He said, "I don't trust myself that I might not change my mind in the interim."*

Generosity has to do with seizing the moment for munificence, *sadaqah*, seizing the thought in the moment the first impulse. In the same way, Allah's Mercy (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) comes to us in a moment. You may pray and pray and

ask for something for years and years, and then, in one nano-second, Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*) grants it to you in His Mercy. As He says in this *hadith qudsi*:

**O son of Adam, if your sins were to reach the clouds of the sky and then you would seek My Forgiveness, I would forgive you. O son of Adam, if you were to come to Me with sins that are close to filling the earth and then you would meet Me without ascribing any partners with Me, I would certainly bring to you forgiveness close to filling it.**

## MERCY IN SADAQAH

How do we make ourselves worthy of the Mercy of Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*)? How do we open our hearts to the ever-present flow of mercy? We begin with our acts, with bringing mercy into our own lives, with giving *sadaqah*, affirming contentment, being compassionate and serviceful. All these are ways of taking every opportunity to see Allah's Mercy (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*) and act with Allah's Mercy in life. As we are reminded in a *hadith*:

**The merciful are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Show mercy to those on earth, and He Who is in heaven will show mercy unto you.** (As-Suyuti)

When I mention “giving *sadaqah*” as way to manifest mercy in our lives, I mean it in the broadest definition, the way in which the Messenger (*salla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) described it when he said:

***Sadaqah* is prescribed for every person every day that the sun rises. To administer justice between two people is *sadaqah*. To assist a man upon his mount is *sadaqah*. To place his luggage on the animal is *sadaqah*. To remove harm from the road is *sadaqah*. A good work is *sadaqah*. Every step take toward prayer is *sadaqah*.**

The doors to this *sadaqah*, he said, are *takbeer, allaahu akbar; subhāna-Llaah; al hamduli-Llaah; la illaha illa Llaah; astaghfiru-Llaah*; enjoining good and forbidding evil; removing thorns and stones from the path; guiding the blind; listening to the deaf and dumb until you understand them; guiding a person to his object of need if you know where it is; hurrying with the strength of your legs to one who is in sorrow and who is appealing for help; supporting the weak with the strength of your arms. These are all doors to *sadaqah*. If only we could remember that during the day. Your smile for your brother is *sadaqah*. This is all *sadaqah*.

We recognize this kind of giving when we see it and it brings out those same qualities in us. Why do we like it when we go into a store and someone assists us? If you go to Best Buy and ask where something is, they walk you to it instead of saying “Oh, it's over on aisle 13.” We like that. Why do we like that? Because it's *sadaqah*; we recognize it, and it brings out that same quality in us.

The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu ʿalayhi wa sallam*) said: **“A Muslim does not plant or sow anything from which a person, an animal, or anything else eats, but it is considered a *sadaqah* from him.”** Every seed you plant is a *sadaqah*, even the ones that the deer or the groundhog come and eat. The fact that the groundhog ate it is *sadaqah*.

How is this connected to mercy? Because if you planted that seed for your family and the groundhog ate it, you have the right to be upset; but if you choose to think of it as *sadaqah*, then you are choosing to act with mercy, to act with generosity, with compassion toward that animal. With some things, like justice or zakat, there is no choice; these things are obligatory on every person. But with mercy and with *sadaqah*, there is a choice; and that element of choice is what makes it sweet and a dear to Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*).

Mercy is a quality you can feel with your heart. It comes from the heart and it speaks to the heart. If you confront someone who is miserly, your heart becomes constricted. But when you go to someone who is generous, your heart opens up and you feel embarrassed, or humbled. We should be humbled when we think about how much is given to us, how everything that comes to us is from the Mercy of Allah (*Subhānahu wa taʿālaa*).

*Abdullah Jafar once went to inspect his property in the countryside. On his way he stopped at a date palm grove where a slave boy was working. When food was brought to the boy, a dog came from outside the garden and approached the boy. The boy gave it a piece of bread, and it ate it. Then he threw a second and third one.*

*Abdullah Jafar said, "How much food do you get every day?"*

*He said, "Just what you've seen."*

*Jafar said, "Why did you prefer the dog over yourself?"*

*And the boy responded, "This is not an area dogs usually frequent. He must have come from a long way. So I didn't want to turn it away."*

*Abdullah Jafar asked him, "How will you manage without food?"*

*He said, "I will persevere throughout the rest of the day."*

*Abdullah exclaimed, "I have been reproached for being too generous, however this boy is more generous than I am!" So he purchased the whole date palm grove, slave and all, and he manumitted the boy and gave him all that property.*

So you see how, through generosity, Allah's Mercy (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) was bestowed on every character in this story: from the dog to the wealthy man. You see, once you begin to look, there is no end to this mercy.

When we feel that ignorance and darkness prevails, it is important to look for opportunities to bring light and mercy into our lives, as the man in this story did—bringing light and love into his life and the life of the slave boy through his generosity and humility. If we look for the mercy in our lives, then we can be content with everything we have and don't have, because we know it's all a Mercy from Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*); indeed, it is the presence of ar-Raḥeem .

## **RESPONDING TO MERCY WITH MODESTY AND HUMILITY**

*A man one day went to visit a friend. When he knocked on the door, the friend said, "Why have you come?" The man said, "Because of a 400 dirham debt I am saddled with." The friend went inside, weighed out 400 dirhams, and brought them out to him. He returned inside in tears. His wife asked him, "Why did you give the money to him, if giving to him was so hard to you that it brought you to tears?" He said, "That's not why I'm crying. I'm weeping because I was unable to perceive his needs that he had to reveal them to me and ask me." Ash-Shakir said, "Whenever anyone of you is in need, let him deliver it to me in writing, because I hate to see humiliation or need on anyone's face."*

The humility and generosity of the man in this story puts us all to shame. Of course, we all experience fear, anxiety and need; we even vicariously experience it. Your stomach starts to quiver; your breath changes. You don't know what is in your mind, but Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) is merciful. He gives us this as a way we have to share the trials and tribulations of another human being. We can't wrap selfishness around it. Even though we might want to grieve or to weep or to sleep, we have to find the capacity, the strength to share that struggle with our brother or sister, and thus share in Allah's Mercy.

Many of our most important opportunities to give, to be merciful come to us without our asking for them. They come to us perhaps in ways that we wish they wouldn't. But it is what we do with those opportunities that is most important. The more that we put our own desires aside and share and give to others, the more we do that, the more at peace we will be with what Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) has given us and with what we have chosen. What we have chosen, we have to live with. So Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) takes what we have chosen and makes it an opportunity for us.

*It was related that Al Sari al Saqati left his house on an Eid day, and he encountered a man who was of very high rank and importance in the town. He only gave a cursory greeting to him. He was told by someone, "That's a very important man." He*

said, "Yes, I know that. I recognized him. However, in hadith it is said: 'When two Muslims meet, 100 Divine Blessings are divided between them, of which 90 go to the more cheerful one.' So I wanted him to receive the larger portion of the blessings."

When we hear these stories, the question we have to ask ourselves is how do I get there? How do I get to a place where I am consistently and correctly putting others before myself, always looking for the opportunity to give, to be the conduit for Allah's Mercy?

## ARROGANCE: THE GREATEST BLOCK TO MERCY

How do we act in consistently with humility? How do we remove and pry arrogance from our hearts? If there is one thing that acts as a block to Allah's Mercy (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*), it is arrogance. The arrogant person does not see the Mercy of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*); they see their own actions. They do not see the needs of others; they see their own needs. They see themselves as entitled. That feeling of entitlement is like building a dam inside our self against the flow of the Mercy of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*). What sweetness can there be in Allah's Mercy or forgiveness, when we expect it and feel we deserve it? Only humility and gratitude open the doors to Allah's Mercy.

We have to also ask ourselves are we really doing everything we could be doing? Are we praying as beautiful a prayer as we could pray? Are we asking with humility in our hearts, with as much humility as we possibly could ask? Have we pushed ourselves to the limit in our piety, in our trust of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*)? Are we ashamed of ourselves to some degree? Do we say, "I could have done better. I could be doing better. My *du'aas* could be better. My effort could be better. My prayer could be more." Then a prayer to follow that: "O Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*), help me to make it so."

At times we are all tired; we all have problems that assail us and have wants and needs to address. We want our children and our family to be healthy. We want there to be security in our lives; we want to be respected and loved, and we want our loved ones to be happy. These wants are all fine, but how much of our days, our lives, our hearts are wrapped up in these wants, without the accompanying trust and faith in Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*)?

We pray for these things, and if our prayers are not answered, we ask ourselves, "Is it because our prayers are not good enough? Or is it because Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) does not hear them?" knowing, *inshaa'a-Llaah*, full well that Allah is present, is all Hearing, All Seeing, All Knowing. Is our Islam truly trusting and surrendered? Where do we leave room for the Mercy of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) in this equation?

We think of it as a one-to-one linear equation: I pray for this and Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) will give me that. But we live in a quantum universe; we live in a universe of majesty and wonder, a universe filled with mercy in every second, every ray of sun, every drop of rain, a universe of miracles, and unexpected events that are spontaneous within and outside of our physical reality.

Maybe our prayers are being answered. Our job is not to question Allah's Mercy (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*), but to question ourselves, "What is it that I am not doing, or seeing or understanding?" Not because I am not getting the result I expected or desired, but what is it I could be doing with this opportunity to do more, to give more?

It's like the old question: what would you do to help a drowning person? Would you jump into the river? Would you call out for help? Would you walk by and pretend you didn't see them drowning? Courage is a very important thing. It takes no courage to be selfish, but it takes a lot of courage to be a good human being, a humble human being. It takes courage to give with selfless generosity.

The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) said, "He who has an atom's worth of pride in his heart will NOT enter Jannah." What does that mean? That we are all lost? The answer is that only humility allows us to enter into Jannah. None of us are entitled to Jannah just because we are alive or Muslim or pious. None of us will enter, except by the Mercy of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*). This applies not only to the doorway into Paradise, but also to the 'jannah' of the day-to-day: the *jannah* of being at peace, of tranquility, of kindness, the purity that one finds in that state of tranquility and goodness. Think of it as a moment-to-moment statement.

Very simply put, to open the door to mercy cultivate humility. The door to humility is opened with the acknowledgement that any accomplishment you ever made in your entire life is nothing compared to the Mercy and Grace of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*). Any good deed we ever performed doesn't compare with what Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*) has blessed us with. Since we don't have control over so much (though we think we do), we could not have done all those things, even the good things, without the Mercy of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*).

Think of it this way, when you give money to an impoverished person, he doesn't pretend he earned the money. He doesn't pretend he is rich. Why? He knows his state. He knows what was earned and what was given. We are all poor and in need of Allah's Mercy and Goodness. Nothing we have could we have gotten without His Mercy, and everything we have could be taken away in blink of an eye by His Mercy.

The key to remembering this and remembering Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*) is to look above and beyond ourselves to the example of people who have achieved what we strive to achieve, and to model our behavior, our values, our process and our vision on theirs.

A Sufi recounted, "On a very cold day, I came to visit Bisbar bin Harith, and he had no clothes on him and sat trembling from the cold. I told him, "Abu Nas! On a day like this, people put on extra clothing. Why do you have so little clothing on you?" And he answered, "I remember the poor and their plight, and since I have nothing to bestow on them, I decided to keep their company and endure in the cold."

That is one way of keeping company, one way of remembering who and what "I am or can be," by making our physical state a means to affirm a higher spiritual state. Here one is being a true *shabeed*. Witnessing means seeing that Mercy of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*), seeing the blessings of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*). Being a *shabeed* is being a witness to the Wonders and Beauties and Mercy of Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*), even at the direst times.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me remind you of where I began today. It is obvious that the Islamic concept of mercy is holistic and stresses the interconnectedness of all of creation with the Creator. Mercy starts with Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*) and is bestowed by Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*) on every living creature. Animals and humans alike show each other mercy, to live harmoniously with one another; and in turn, by showing this mercy, they themselves are shown even more mercy from Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*). This vision of Mercy in Islam encourages the breaking down of barriers between peoples and is the underlying foundation upon which both life and civilization are built.

Allah's Names (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*) are equal in reality, but not equal in applicability in a given circumstance. By this I mean that there is a subtle message in the attributes and their expression based on the realities of day-to-day life of the individual. Those who actively seek mercy, forgiveness, patience, or who are themselves compassionate and persevering, tolerant and patient, kind and loving differ from the person who never considers these qualities or traits of character as important, or who does not foster and incubate them in a conscious and selfless way.

Visualize a society where no one ever showed or experienced mercy. It would be one which is stifling, restrictive, and would appear to be lacking in the basic principle of kindness. It would feel and be inhumane. We need to understand that mercy isn't a matter of being kind or nice (although such qualities may lead one to be more likely to show mercy); mercy isn't the same thing as sympathy or pity. What mercy entails is that something more than justice be done; mercy entails generosity, humility, and forgiveness.

If a convicted criminal repents and throws him/herself on the 'mercy of the court' in an act of submission, it may be considered that she/he is asking that the punishment be less than what is really due. When we beg Allah (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*) for mercy, we are asking that Allah's punishment be less than what is justified, or that Allah's bounty be more than what we actually deserve.

But we should reflect on the subtleties of Allah's Mercy (*Subḥaanahu wa taʿaalaa*). Justice isn't the opposite of mercy. If we adopt the virtue, character, ethics and *akblaag* exemplified by the Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) and *awliyyaa* in the stories and *hadiith* I gave today, we would find that mercy is everywhere in our lives. It intervenes and softens, or

ameliorates the absoluteness of justice in the outer and the sometimes harsh realities of life, opening the door for the always existent force of mercy, love and peace.

This is the subtlety of Sufism, the character and the force that urges a *mureed* to becoming *muraad*, a force within, unnamed but aggregated from the attributes and the balance of those attributes at any given moment. Certainly, everything in the outer life of the seeker is affected by more than one Attribute of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) at any given moment. Can there be justice without truth, or love without forgiveness, or mercy without compassion? No; hence, the dynamic of the ever existent, inter-dependent presence of the Qualities of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*). Just as air is independent of but necessary to our life, so too, these *Sifaat* of Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'ala*) are self-existent but inextricably linked to our existence and survival.

## CLOSING DU<sup>C</sup>AA

The Prophet (*salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam*) prayed:

**O Allah! Grant me love of You, and to love those who love You, and to love whatever brings me nearer to You. O Allah, make Your Love more precious to me than cool water is for the thirsty.**

**WA-LLAHU LAHU-L-HAQQI WA HUWA YAHDIS-SABĪL.  
HASBUNA-LLAHU WAHDAHU WA NI<sup>C</sup>MA-L-WAKĪL.  
WA ṢALLI <sup>C</sup>ALAA SAYYIDINĀ MUḤAMMADIN WA AHLI WA SAḤBIHI AJMA<sup>C</sup>ĪN.  
WAL-HAMDU LI-LLĀHI RABBIL-<sup>C</sup>ĀLAMĪN.**

Truth belongs to Allah; it is He who shows the way.  
Allah, alone, suffices us, and what a fine guardian is He!  
Blessings upon our Master Muhammad  
and his family and companions altogether  
and praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

*Bismi-Llaabi-r-Rahmaani-r-Raheem*

In the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful

Allah, the most Merciful of all who have mercy, understands and knows what is in our hearts even before we feel. But He has still encouraged us to ask Him for anything and everything through *du'aa* or supplication.

The Prophet Muhammad said that *du'aa* is the essence of worship (Tirmidhi). In the same collection of Hadith, he also said that Allah is angry with those who do not ask Him for anything. Peace and blessings be upon the Prophet.

O Allah! Have mercy on me in the name of the great Qur'an.  
Make it for me a guide and light, and guidance and mercy.

O Allah! Make me remember that of it which I have forgotten,  
Make me know of it, that which I have become ignorant of,  
And make me recite it in the hours of the night and day,  
And make it an argument for me, O Sustainer of all the worlds.

O Allah! Set right my faith which is the safeguard of all my affairs,  
And set right for me my world affairs wherein is my living,  
And set right for me my Hereafter on which depends my After Life,  
And make my life a source of abundance of every good,  
And make my death a source of protection for me, protecting me from every evil.

O Allah! Make the best part of my life the end of it,  
And the last of my deeds the best one,  
And the best of my days, the day I meet You.

O Allah! I ask of You the best whilst living,  
And ask for a good death,  
And not a shameful or embarrassing return.

O Allah! I ask You for the best affair,  
The best supplication, the best success, the best knowledge,  
The best deed, the best reward, the best life, and the best death.

Keep me upright. Make my scale heavy.  
Confirm my faith. Raise high my status [in the Hereafter].  
Accept my salah, and forgive my sins.  
I ask You for high positions in Paradise,

O Allah! I ask You obligation of Your Mercy,  
And determination of Your Forgiveness,  
And the peace of every sin,  
And the booty of every reward,  
And winning Paradise,  
And surviving from Hell.

O Allah! Make the result of all our affairs good,  
And deliver us from the disgrace of this world and the torment of the Hereafter.

O Allah! Distribute amongst us the heedfulness necessary  
to come between us and the commission of wrong against You,  
The obedience necessary for us to gain admission into Paradise,  
And the unswerving faith necessary to minimize for us the tribulations in this world.

O Allah! Allow us to enjoy our hearing, our sight and our strength for as long as we live.  
And make enjoyment our heir (so that the people that we have befitted could pray for us),  
and place our vengeance on those that have wronged us.  
And give us victory over our enemies, and try us not in our faith.  
Neither make this world our greatest concern nor the extent of our knowledge,  
Nor give power over us to those who would oppress us.

O Allah! Leave no sins of ours in this assembly unforgiven,  
Nor any grief without being relieved,  
Nor any debt without being paid,  
Nor any difficulty in this life or the Hereafter without being facilitated.

O the most Merciful of all that is Merciful!  
Our Lord! Give us the good of this world and the Hereafter,  
And save us from the torment of the fire.

Oh Allah! Send peace and salutation upon Muhammad (salla-Llaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) and his companions and those that follow him. AMIN!

May Allah (*Subhaanahu wa ta'aalaa*) forgive any errors I have made and be merciful to me and to you.

