

THE NAMES OF GOD (PART 2 OF 3): THE MOST MERCIFUL

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In the name of God (Allah), the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

This article begins in the same way Muslims begin with many undertakings. Before commencing even the most mundane tasks of life, eating, drinking, dressing, or bathing, a Muslim will turn his efforts into worship by mentioning the name of God. He (God) is the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful, His mercy encompasses all things, and is the source of all the compassion and mercy that exist. God says to us in the Quran, “**My Mercy embraces all things...**” (Quran 7:156)

From the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, we know that when God decreed the creation He said, “**...and My Mercy overcomes My Wrath.**” (*Saheeh Bukhari and Muslim*) What exactly is mercy? The dictionary defines it as disposition to be kind and forgiving, and the feeling that motivates compassion.^[1] The Arabic term for mercy is *rahmah* and two of the most important names of God derive from this root word. *Ar Rahman* – the Most Gracious and *Ar Raheem* – the Most Merciful. The Mercy of God is that ethereal quality that embodies gentleness, piety, care, consideration, love and forgiveness. When these qualities are observable in this world, they are a mere reflection of God’s mercy towards his creation.

Prophet Muhammad informed us that God is more merciful to His creatures than a mother is to her child, (*Saheeh Bukhari and Muslim*) and in fact, the Arabic word for womb, *raheem*, is derived from the same root word as mercy *-rahmah*. It is significant that there is a unique connection between God’s mercy and the womb. God nurtures and shelters us, just as the womb nurtures and shelters the unborn child.

Prophet Muhammad explained the quality of mercy to his companions, telling them God has one hundred parts of mercy, and has sent down one part to be shared amongst the creation. This is why people are compassionate and kind towards one another and wild animals treat their offspring with gentleness. However, God withheld the other 99 parts to be bestowed upon the believers on the Day of Judgement. (*Saheeh Muslim*)

All of creation shows love and compassion towards one another with just this one portion of mercy. Humans give willingly to the poor and needy, families support and

love one another, and animals protect their young. Mercy and compassion generally take into account the need to alleviate suffering and to spread kindness and joy. Even though this world sometimes appears to be a dark and gloomy place, the Mercy of God can be seen and felt by those who ponder and reflect. The rain falls, the sun shines, a child reaches for her father's hand and the kitten snuggles into the protective warmth of its mother. God's mercy is strong and visible all around us, yet on the Day of Judgement He will complete this mercy by adding the final 99 parts and bestowing mercy, love and compassion upon those believers who did righteous deeds and tried to please God in all their affairs. This concept is awe inspiring; the mercy of God knows no bounds.

As a sign of God's infinite mercy towards mankind, He sent Prophets and Messengers to guide us and help us to remain on His straight path leading to eternal Paradise. God said He did not send Prophet Muhammad to the whole of mankind, except as a mercy.

***“And We have sent you (O Muhammad) not but as a mercy for the all that exists.”
(Quran 21:107)***

Prophet Muhammad was the embodiment of mercy; he showed compassion to those around him, his family, orphans, friends and strangers. God spoke to him saying:

“And by the Mercy of God, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh hearted, they would have broken away from about you; so pass over (their faults), and ask (God's) Forgiveness for them; and consult them in the affairs.” (Quran 3:159)

Prophet Muhammad could often be heard invoking God's Mercy on the believers, and Muslims greet each other by saying *Assalamu alaikum wa Rahmatullah* (May God's Peace and Mercy be upon you.) Mercy and all it involves is a very important concept in Islam because from it stem generosity, respect, tolerance and forgiveness, all qualities that a Muslim is expected to cultivate in this life.

As frail human beings we often feel lost and alone in a world that seems bereft of mercy and it is in those times that we need to turn to God and seek His Mercy and Forgiveness. When we turn to Him in true submission His tranquillity descends upon us and we are able to feel the quality of His mercy and see it manifest in the world around us.

The hand that reaches out to you in the darkness is a reflection of God's mercy, so too is the kind word from a stranger, the rain that falls on parched earth and the laughter in the eyes of a child. God's mercy is the source of all that is good, gentle, or pious. God has enabled us to understand some measure of His Magnificence by revealing His Most Beautiful Names to us, He has several that indicate His Mercy and we are encouraged to call upon Him by these names.

Al-Rahman (the Most Gracious), *al-Raheem* (the Most Merciful), *al-Barr* (the Source of Goodness), *al-Kareem* (the Most Generous), *al-Jawaad* (the Generous), *al-Ra'oof* (the Compassionate), *al-Wahhaab* (the Bestower).

“And (all) the Most Beautiful Names belong to God so call on Him by them...” (Quran 7:180)

We can call upon Him by these names when we feel the need to give thanks for the countless blessings God has bestowed upon us, or in our hour of need. We crave for the Mercy of God most keenly when we are in need of comfort and security. When the transience of this world appears to have rendered us powerless, the Most Powerful (God) will always, and forever cover us with His Mercy and He asks in return, only that we believe in Him and worship Him alone.

Footnotes:

[1] Princeton Wordnet.

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